The King’s Sermon – Beware of Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

In this sermon Jesus warned about two gates, two ways, two destinations, and two groups. In this text He warned about false prophets. The context of His warning is critical. False prophets lead people to the wrong gate and into the wrong way. The main reason so many people are on the wrong road and heading toward the wrong destination is because they listened to false teachers and accepted their teachings. John Phillips comments: “False prophets are Satan’s emissaries to lure people along the broad road that leads to destruction” (Exploring the Gospel of Matthew, 128). Not every person who claims to speak for God actually does so. Christ is saying: “Just as there is a misleading gate and a misleading way, there are also misleading preachers and teachers who point to that gate and promote that way. Beware of those who would mislead you.” The Bible is full of warnings about false teachers and their false teachings. The New Testament speaks of false apostles (2 Cor. 11:13); false brethren (2 Cor. 11:26); false Christs (Mt. 24:24); false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1); false witnesses (Mt. 26:60); and false prophets.

1. The DANGER of false teachers

False teachers are not just wrong; they are dangerous. When Jesus spoke these words, there were many sheep and many shepherds. The greatest enemies of sheep were wolves. They would often hunt for stray sheep or sickly members of the flock. But even a full-grown healthy sheep was totally defenseless against wolves. Just as vicious wolves were a constant threat to sheep, even so false teachers have been a serious threat to God's people of all ages. As long as God has had true prophets, Satan has had false ones. We read about false teachers in both the Old and New Testaments. Paul warned the leaders of the church at Ephesus, Acts 20:28-30 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. The Apostle John warned in 1 John 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. He warns again in 2 John 7 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. Scripture tells us that the situation is only going to get worse in the last days, Matthew 24:11 And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. Paul warned Timothy about false teachers in 1 Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly (clearly), that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing (deceiving) spirits and doctrines of demons. 2 Timothy 3:13 But evil men and seducers (deceivers) shall become worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. False teachers are dangerous because of their nature and their number. They teach lies and lead men away from God and His truth.

2. The DECEPTION of false teachers

They are especially dangerous because they are disguised. They seem to represent God and teach the truth. False teachers mix just enough truth to make their teaching acceptable. The story is told of a certain woman who inherited a sizable estate and hired someone to write a book about her family tree. The author did some research and found out that one of her
ancestors had been in prison and eventually was executed in the electric chair. When she learned this, she told the writer to find a way to hide the truth if he could. So the author wrote: “One of her relatives occupied the chair of applied electricity in one of America’s best-known institutions. He was very much attached to his position and literally died while serving there.” False teachers are capable of deceiving many people, Matthew 24:24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders: insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Jesus warned: "It will be hard not to believe the things they say.” A false prophet never says, "I'm here to deceive you. I am the devil's spokesman." Paul warned of the craftiness of false apostles, 2 Corinthians 11:13-14 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Dr. Erwin Lutzer stated: “We have underestimated the ability of Satan’s messengers to position themselves as the Lord’s ministers.”

3. The DETECTION of false teachers

If false teachers are so common, so dangerous, and so deceptive, how is it possible to discover them before it is too late? We must be able to spot the counterfeits. Here are seven ways to discover false teachers:

How to Unmask a False Teacher:

A. Does his teaching match his personal life and character?

Jesus spoke of two kinds of trees and two kinds of fruit (Mt. 7:16-20). He said “by their fruits you shall know them” (vs. 16, 20). Howard Vos offers this analysis: “The question of verse 16 e serves as an introduction to the simile of verses 17-20, which teaches the relationship of the tree to the nature of its fruit. Verse 19 evidently refers to the judgment awaiting false teachers” (Bible Study Commentary: Matthew, 67). We are not called to be judges, but we are required to be fruit-inspectors. Phillips states: “The ultimate test of a false prophet is not the attractiveness of his personality, the persuasiveness of his eloquence, or the size of his following, but his doctrine and the manner of life” (Exploring the Gospel of Matthew, 129). It is important to know as much as possible about the life of a spiritual leader. It is sometimes said that a preacher lives in a glass house. In other words, people are always watching what he says and does. That's as it should be.

B. Does his teaching include predictions?

God gave this guidance to His people Israel: Deuteronomy 18:21-22 And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

C. Does his teaching focus on the whole Bible?

Any Scripture text without a context is a pretext. Beware of a person who claims to have something “new” to share. If it's new, it's not true. Beware of anyone who purports to give some new revelation. The canon of Scripture is complete, and God is not giving any new revelation. Scripture is the sole authority for what we must believe and how we must live.
The abiding principle established in the Reformation is *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone is sufficient).

D. Does his teaching agree with other Scripture?

*Galatians 1:8-9*  
*But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.*  
*As we said before, so say I now again. If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.*  

*Ephesians 4:13-14*  
*Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive*

False teachers don’t teach a lot about the dangers of sin and the depravity of man. They don’t teach much about repentance, forgiveness, or the new birth. They prefer not to talk about judgment and eternal punishment. They do not insist on brokenness over sin and a quest for personal holiness. They have easy answers for small problems. And for all these reasons, false teachers are often very popular and have a large following.

E. Does his teaching glorify Christ or himself?

John the Baptist, a faithful man of God, said: “He (Christ) must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn. 3:30). False teachers usually focus on themselves rather than God and Christ.

F. Does his teaching hold up under close examination?

The Apostle Paul was grateful when his hearers searched the Scriptures to validate his teaching:  
*Acts 17:10-11*  
*And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. If a teacher seems to resent being questioned or challenged, this may be a red flag.*

G. Does his teaching attract and develop godly disciples?

False teachers usually attract false believers. Birds of a feather flock together. In summary, John MacArthur provides these insights: “False prophets talk much about the love of God but nothing about holiness, much about people who are deprived but nothing about those who are depraved, much about God’s universal fatherhood of every human being but nothing about His unique fatherhood only of those who are His children through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, much about what God will give to us but nothing about obedience to Him, much about health and happiness but nothing about holiness and sacrifice. Their message is a message of gaps, the greatest gap of which leaves out the truth that saves. False prophets can also be identified by their converts and followers. They will attract to themselves people who have the same superficial, self-centered, and unscriptural orientation as they do” (*Matthew 1-7, 472*).
Gospel of Matthew
Matthew 7:15-20

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