

Reading: Matthew 7:13-29

Theme: Watch out for deceivers.

In the verses we read, the Lord Jesus presents to us choices - choice of direction for our lives, choice of influences upon our lives and the choice of foundation for our lives. Each is not a multiple-choice but it is an either/or choice. Last week we saw **the choice of direction for our lives** - the wide gate and the broad road and many are on it; the other choice was the narrow gate and way and few on it. At 1st appearance the broad road seemed so preferable, until we saw the destination it led to - destruction. Sadly, we are all on the broad road to eternal destruction and we need to get off it as soon as possible, to seek and to find the narrow gate and onto the narrow road that leads to eternal life. It is seeking the Lord Jesus as our own Saviour, turning away from our wrong, asking Him to forgive us and going God's way.

It doesn't end there. We must keep on going on in the narrow way because it is the way of God. The Christian life is a most joyful life, but at the same time it also has pitfalls, dangers, trials and troubles - not only those of everyday life, but these may occur because and only because we are Christians. The moment we enter into the narrow road through the narrow gate, then we become a marked man or woman, boy or girl. We are in a war situation with the devil and he will try and hinder us. Realise that no one escapes from Satan's kingdom without him seeking to seemingly recapture, continually spoil and hinder our spiritual progress. The Christian life is one of joy unspeakable and full of glory and at the same time one of battle and hardship, so much so there are times it will make us wonder if it is worth it!

One of the ways the devil will attack us as believers is to attack us subtly by using various influences upon us and so we need to be aware of the **choice of influences upon us** to be able to choose

that which is good, right and beneficial. Jesus in v15-20 warns us of bad influences which means we need to be on our guard and watch out for such in others and also in ourselves! It is so easy for people to appear so right, good and inviting and yet they can be false and deceive us. From v15-20 I want to see 3 things:

1. Woolly Wolves. (v15)

The Lord Jesus warns of false prophets. There we are on the narrow road, or about to enter onto it and Jesus says “*Watch out... Beware of false prophets*”. A prophet was someone whose work was not primarily to **foretell** the future, but to **forthtell** one’s duty in the present - to teach people how they are to live before God. Yet the ones Jesus was speaking of here are false prophets. They teach wrong things and presumably live wrong lives in various ways. False prophets or teachers do not always openly falsify God’s word and ways. They may subtly twist it here and there.

We may feel that we would know a false prophet or teacher and a mile off! Yet would we? If it were that easy, we would not have been told to be on our guard, to watch out, to beware, to apply our critical faculties in a proper and right way to judge them. I have never met a false prophet, false teacher or a heretic with a big sign on them saying “*False prophet*”!

There is a subtlety about them. They appear so fine, so much like the real article, but they are not and on closer inspection you can see why. They are not always recognised immediately or obviously; it may take time for their real nature is to be recognise and they appear as wolves in sheep’s clothing - woolly wolves. The apostle Paul had to warn the Ephesian elders of this - that such ones would rise up **from among their own number** (Acts 20:30-31).

A more tragic situation is that these false prophets, woolly wolves, can feel they are fine, that they are real and fine Christians and that they have true fruits. That is why Jesus sounds note of warning in v21-23 so that we all need to examine ourselves to make sure we are not fooling ourselves!

False prophets who openly say and do wrong are relatively easy to detect. It is those who are close to the truth and yet miss out by a little who are the most dangerous as they can lead people astray a bit at a time, influencing them very slightly away from reliance upon God, His word, the Saviour and the salvation He has provided. With them it is not so much what they say, but often what they do not say. If someone came and pronounced Jesus was their friend, example, teacher, prophet and way of wisdom; it would sound so fine; but why have they not mentioned Jesus is their risen Saviour, their Lord or their God? It could be they deny the deity of Christ, His resurrection.

Many false teachers use the same words as we would, as the Bible does and yet they use it in a way that mean something totally different. We need to watch out what people do not affirm about key doctrines - the word of God, the person of the Lord Jesus, His wondrous conception and birth, His life, death and resurrection; about heaven **and hell**, the sinfulness, the lost state and total helplessness of mankind, of Jesus being the only way to heaven, of the need to repent and be born again and then live a holy life to show the new life of God in them.

Many people will give nodding acceptance at these, but in practice they will deny them and go on to influence, teach others and are therefore false prophets. It doesn't matter our head knowledge or how many facts we know about or from the Bible, because these things can be on the surface, only in our minds but the truth needs

to influence, affect and work out in our lives, actions and motives. It doesn't matter what experiences we have, as there can be false and deceptive experiences that cause us to be content with them and not seek Jesus as our own Saviour so that we are saved, born again.

Some false prophets can be as ferocious wolves, ravenous wolves and just waiting for their chance to feed themselves on the flock of God. Such ones have little care for those in their care, they want for self and selfish ends, for their reputation and name to be built up, even their wealth, pride and pleasure. There is no thought of laying down their lives for the flock, or of being humble. They are proud, wanting the pre-eminence and they may 'lord' it over others who they may feel are lesser Christians.

We are to beware of such ones and not be influenced by them. We are to use our minds, hearts, understanding of God's word and observe them, observe all and see how they live, what motivates and drives them. We can recognise them by what their lives produce:

2. Fuzzy Fruits. (v16-18)

On a road to Whitby in East Yorkshire near Beverly, there are chestnut trees that all have on them both horse chestnut and sweet chestnut flowers! I suspect they were grafted in. I know you can get fruit trees that will give 3 or 4 different varieties of fruit on the same tree stock. As a child I went off with some of my friends and we found an apple tree growing on the old discarded railway line. We each grabbed some and then ate them - or tried to eat them, but they were bitter and sour! We discovered later they were crab-apples and they were bitter enough to make us "crabby". They looked so nice but the proof of the fruit was in the eating.

This is the same with false prophets as their fruit is fuzzy, indistinct, almost like the real thing but not quite so. Jesus pictures grapes not being picked from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles. In like manner, God glorifying fruit does not come from these hypocritical or deceived false prophets. The fruit Christ expects from our lives is that we will be Christ-like. If there is bitterness, resentment, pride, persistent and constant sin, arrogance and disobedience to God's word, then we can be sure it is not of God. We are to recognise the fruit of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:19-26.)

There are obvious fruits - good or bad, but what about those who live good, upright, moral lives and yet have no time for God, Christ or Christianity and say this is the way to go? We do not to take anything away from them as we rightly appreciate their moral lives and their goodness. Yet we and they have to recognise that they are living without God and as moral and as good as they are, they are lost and are on the broad road to destruction. One of the devil's tricks is that he deludes people to be good living, moral and yet they are still going to hell but they presume they are good enough for God in heaven and side-line, ignore God's pronouncement in His word that all have sinned and fall short of His glory - the utter perfect holiness that He has.

False prophets can often show their hand in the way they dismiss those who do not agree on every detail with them - they tend to get their own little group or following and feel there is no way they can benefit from the teaching of someone outside of their little grouping. Such an influence is not good and we are prone to corrupt fruit if we come under such influences.

Often, we can see the outworking of sin in such false teachers. If they're not a Christian, not had a life changing encounter with the

Saviour, if they do not hold to true doctrines and faith, we may expect to see areas of moral and/or doctrinal slackness. Such a one will show a persistence in failing to live according to the narrow way to heaven in which they profess to be walking.

We are, in a right way, to consider and examine their fruit - not a harsh hyper critical way, but to see if the Beatitudes are in evidence in their lives. Are they aware of their need for God for they are poverty struck in spiritual things? Do they mourn, hunger and thirst after God and His righteousness? Are they meek or are they peacemakers? Do they bear up under trials, difficulties and persecution? Do they show the fruit of the Spirit or are they affected by the pride of life, wanting to be thought well of? Are they humble and long to see God glorified even if they and their reputation decreases?

These tests need to be wisely and lovingly applied because false prophets need to be known. We are only to know them, not to harm or burn them as was the case in times past! Realise we are to use the same test to examine our own lives in case we are false prophets as we ourselves could be deluded - we will see more on this and be warned in the following verses.

The Lord Jesus warns of woolly wolves with fuzzy fruits and these are not to influence us. They may appear so appealing, so nice, so desirable and yet they are bad influences and have to be avoided. We are not to be taken in.

3. Fiery Finale. (v19-20)

The Lord Jesus again brings their end destination into focus and we see that the false prophets, with their false fruits have a true and certain end as shown in v19. These ones continue on the broad road to destruction - misguidedly and as we have seen the end of

that broad road is destruction, judgement. Here Jesus uses the picture of the corrupt tree cut down and cast into the fire. On the Day of Judgement all our pretences, all our lives will be exposed to God's all seeing and knowing gaze. Those who have not brought forth the good fruit that comes from the new life Jesus gives, will be cut down and thrown into the fire of hell - eternal judgement and punishment. It is a fiery finale also for the false prophets – no matter what they claim. At that time no excuses, no plea bargaining, no use of religious terms will be of any use and Jesus words in v23 will seal their doom “*I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!*”

If a hard and harsh dictator had said these words of judgement, we might explain it away and ‘comfort’ ourselves that it is of their sour, cruel and hard nature and disposition. Amazingly, these words are taught and said by the Lord Jesus and should therefore alarm us, terrify us as we realise that He who is love, is incarnate God, is God in human flesh, that it is He who warns of this Day of Judgement and does so to cause us to do all we can to avoid such.

These woolly wolves, seems so fine, but one day they will be exposed for what they are. We are to make sure that we are not going to be exposed on that day. We are all religious - as we are here in a church for whatever reason, but even with all our religiousness, we need to make sure we have entered in the narrow gate and we are on the narrow way to heaven and make sure we're not still outside on the broad road - even deceiving ourselves and others that we are on the Christian way.

I pray we would all look at our hearts and lives seriously before God and to see whether we could be a false prophet, even not a Christian and we have false fruits and are heading at this moment to this fiery finale of hell and yet we are blissfully, contentedly

unaware of it. If we not sure, if we are uncertain, then we are to call on God to help us, to search us and to show us our state before Him and as He does that, to also show us the wonderful Saviour He has provided.

Next time we will look again at this whole area of the need to examine ourselves to make sure that we are in the narrow way. Until then I pray God would help us and comfort us if we are His child and know His love and that we would have that growing assurance of such in our lives as we truly examine ourselves with His help. If we are uncertain now or after examining our lives, then talk to someone here either me or someone you know - but realise that God may be disturbing you so that He can lavish on your life the greatest honour and privilege any human being can have in that we trust the Lord Jesus as our own Saviour and are made a child of God, given the life of God and will have an eternal home in heaven – which are some of the most basic benefits of what He does in our life when He does that work in us, but there is so much more to the Christian life than those basics.