

## **Bible Readings**

### **Deuteronomy 18:14-22**

#### **The Prophet**

<sup>14</sup> The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do so. <sup>15</sup> The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. <sup>16</sup> For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die."

<sup>17</sup> The LORD said to me: "What they say is good. <sup>18</sup> I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. <sup>19</sup> I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name. <sup>20</sup> But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death."

<sup>21</sup> You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?" <sup>22</sup> If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed.

### **Matthew 7:15-20**

<sup>15</sup> "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. <sup>16</sup> By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

## Intro/Context/Assumptions

- In our passage this morning from **Matthew 7:15-20** [Please turn there now]
  - Jesus speaks about the **peril of false prophets**
- We should **define** what a **prophet** is before we go any further

### [PowerPoint 1-Prophet]

*A person, moved by the Spirit of God to solemnly declare God's Words received by Divine inspiration - especially concerning future events, and in particular such as relate to the cause and kingdom of God and to human salvation.*

- We know that there were **prophets in the Old Testament** who gave **messages from God to His people** and also foretold the future - especially that Jesus, the Messiah, would come
- We also know that in the **New Testament there were prophets** - who gave **new revelations of truth from God** and also predicted the future. These **New Testament prophets** in the main **helped lay the foundation of the early Christian Church.**
- So, are there prophets today?
- When it comes to prophets today; we need to be very careful - because we already have the **completed revelation from God** in the Bible - we know that **salvation comes through Jesus** - and the prophets have **already had their part in building the foundation of the early church.**
- We also need to remember what **Hebrews 1:1-2** says:

**In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>2</sup> but **in these last days** he has **spoken to us by his Son,** whom he appointed heir of all things,**

So, God now speaks to us through His Son - who is of course the Word made flesh.

Can God give someone in our day - a message to deliver to someone else?

**Absolutely!**

Does God reveal truth to someone in a supernatural way and enable that person to deliver that message to others? Absolutely!

Does God reveal His truth to those who preach or teach His Word.

**Absolutely!**

So, in these ways - we still have prophets today.

### [PowerPoint 2-Assumptions Heading]

- As Jesus speaks about false prophets here
- There are a **couple of assumptions** we can make

### [PowerPoint 2a-Assumption #1]

- **Assumption #1** - Given that Jesus said last week (vv13-14) there were 2 **ways to live** - the **wide gate** to the **wide way** leading to **destruction** which many take - and the **narrow gate** to the **narrow way** leading to **eternal life**

in Heaven which few take - the assumption is that there are people who can lead others down the wrong path - by false teaching - just like the Scribes and Pharisees were teaching people to keep the letter of the law and not the spirit and heart of the law. This means it's fair to include false teachers as well as false prophets - as we look at this passage - this morning

[PowerPoint 2b-Assumption #2]

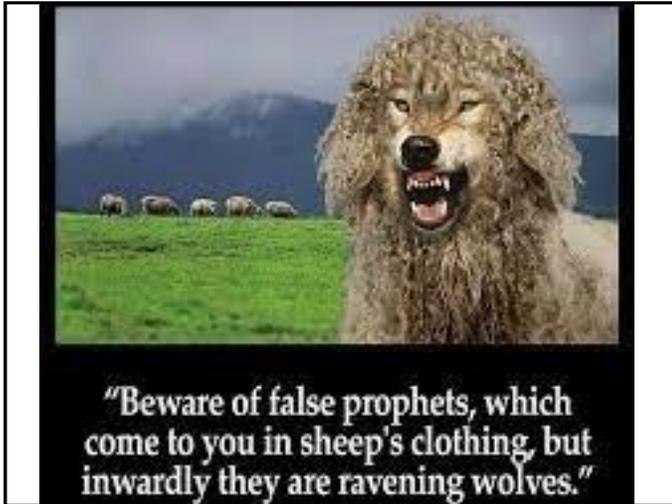
- **Assumption #2** - if Jesus is warning against false prophets - we can **assume that there will be false prophets or teachers**. We wouldn't put a sign on our garden gate "***Beware of the dog***" - if we don't have a dog! Jesus seemed to have regarded the Scribes and Pharisees as false teachers as later on in Matthew (23) He called them "**Blind Guides**" (v16, 24) and He said "**you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness**" (v23) - Not only that **Jesus predicted in Matt 24:11 - that even in our day, in the last days, that "many false prophets will appear and deceive many people"**.

[PowerPoint 2c-Assumption #3]

- Assumption #3 - by telling us there are false prophets - there is the **assumption that there is a clear objective standard of truth which the false prophets have deviated from** - and that truth is **God's Word!**
- Now that we have noted these assumptions, we can look at **Jesus' warning** more precisely - see v15

## Warning (Matthew 7:15)

[PowerPoint 3-Warning]



- **15** "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.
- From this metaphor - we can see that **false prophets** are **dangerous** (because they are described as wolves) and they are **deceptive** (because the wolf pretends to be a sheep)
- In Jesus' time, the **wolves** were the **natural enemy of sheep** - and the **sheep** were **utterly defenceless** against them
- A **good shepherd** (as Jesus teaches in John 10) will **always** be on the **lookout** for wolves in order to **protect his sheep** - whereas a paid labourer (who doesn't own the sheep and therefore doesn't really care about them) - the **paid labourer** would **abandon the sheep** at the sight of a wolf and **run away** leaving the **wolf** to attack the **flock** and to scatter it.
- **In the same way** - we as Jesus' flock (sheep) are **at the mercy of** either good pastors who are like good shepherds (who **teach the truth to the**

flock) or we're at the mercy of false prophets who are like wolves (who come in an attack the flock with false teaching and divide the flock) or we're at the mercy of bad pastors (who do nothing to protect the flock and abandon the flock to false teaching)

- What sort of things are these **false prophets or teachers** going to teach the flock - in our day?
- Here's a few examples
  - False prophets or teachers - can **give the wrong idea about salvation** - they say we are **saved and go to Heaven by the good things we do** - but the **Bible says we are saved by our faith** (Eph 2:8) by **believing Jesus died for our sins to be forgiven - and that He rose again so we can have eternal life in Heaven**
  - False prophets or teachers- can teach if we follow Jesus - **we will be blessed with wealth and prosperity** - a new job, a new car, lots of money - our lives will be so prosperous if we follow Jesus - **whereas Jesus says - there will be a cost in following Jesus** (Luke 14:25-33) - and that **we may have to suffer trials and persecutions for His sake** (Mark 10:30)
  - False prophets or teachers - can water down the Gospel - **"God loves you"** (Yes, He does - but He also wants us to love Him) or they say **"God wants us to be happy"** (no He doesn't - He wants us to belief Him and obey Him)

- False prophets or teachers - present a social Gospel - "God wants us to feed the hungry" - but that's not the Gospel - The Gospel is the good news that Jesus died for our sins to be forgiven, He was buried, He rose again for eternal life to be given to those who believe. That's the Gospel - feeding the hungry is our response to the Gospel - not the Gospel itself. The problem with just teaching the social gospel is people may feed and help the needy but they haven't ever got the basics right - that it's by their faith they are saved - not by what they do!
- False Prophets or teachers - can teach "God is love" (which is true) - "therefore there is no place like Hell" (which is not true)
- False Prophets or teachers - can teach God understands our sin - when in fact God understands we sin but doesn't like our sinful behaviour and wants everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9)
- False Prophets or teachers - can teach Jesus is coming back next week - whereas the Bible teaches Jesus is coming back - but no one knows the day or the hour - not even angels in heaven, nor the Son - only the Father (Mark 13:32)
- As we can see some of those false teachings may seem attractive - even plausible
- A con-man doesn't have a sign on his forehead saying "I am a con-man" - a false teacher doesn't have a sign on their forehead saying "I am a false teacher"

To help us identify false teachers - thankfully Jesus gave us some tests we can apply

To do this - Jesus switches from the metaphor of wolves being mistaken for sheep - to trees which will be recognized by the fruit they produce - that's in verses 16 to 20

### Tests (Matthew 7:16-20)

[PowerPoint 4-Tests Heading]

Jesus is saying when it comes to recognizing false prophets it's like examining the fruit that a tree produces.

When we look at a tree growing - initially we might not be able to tell what sort of tree it is and whether it is a tree that will produce fruit - unless you're an expert on what their leaves look like - so we have to wait and see.

[PowerPoint 4a-Wait and see]

1. So, 1<sup>st</sup> test, is **wait and see what fruit appears** - That's what Jesus is saying in v16. As time passes it will become obvious whether the fruit on the tree is grapes or figs - or whether the tree is actually just a thornbush or thistles. In the same way a false prophet is like a tree - if what they say is false - it will become obvious in time whether what they said was true. That's what our Old Testament reading from Deut 18:22 says: If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that

is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously

**We will recognize a false prophet by the fruit they produce - but it can take time**

[PowerPoint 4b-What fruit]

2. The second test, is **what kind of fruit the tree produces** - Jesus says in v17 - **good trees bear good fruit and bad trees bear bad fruit** - so in this test we can look closely at the prophet themselves

[PowerPoint 4c-character and conduct]

a. 1st - we can look at their **character and conduct** - we can ask ourselves is this teacher Christlike? Do we see in this prophet or teacher, a Christlike character - do we see: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control - if we do, we have reason to believe the prophet is true and not false. On the other hand, if we see acts of the flesh, especially: hatred, anger, impurity, jealousy and self-indulgence - then we can be justified in suspecting the prophet or teacher is false, no matter how convincing their teaching might sound.

We also need to remember that a **person's heart is revealed by the words they speak** - as Jesus Himself says in **Matt 12:34-35** - **For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.** <sup>35</sup>**A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him**

[PowerPoint 4d-teaching]

b. 2<sup>nd</sup> - we can look at their **teaching** - As we look at the prophet or teacher's teaching - we need to be checking what they teach lines up with what the Bible says (1 John 2:26; 4:6).

If God were to speak through a person today, it must be in 100% complete agreement with what God has already said in the Bible. God does not contradict Himself.

As 1 John 4:1 instructs us, "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

And 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21 says, "Do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good."

So, whether it is a "word from the Lord" or a "supposed prophecy" or "some teaching", our response should be the same. Compare what is said to what the Word of God says. If it contradicts the Bible, throw it out. If it agrees with the Bible, pray for wisdom and discernment as to how to apply the message - to our life (2 Timothy 3:16-17; James 1:5).

We can also ask ourselves - what does this prophet or teacher say about Jesus? Do they see Jesus Christ and His work of redemption as of the utmost importance? Beware of anyone who denies that Jesus is equal with God, or who downplays Jesus' sacrificial death, or who rejects Jesus' humanity. As 1 John 2:22 says, a liar is anyone who says that Jesus isn't truly

Christ. Anyone who says this is an enemy of Christ and rejects both the Father and the Son

We can also ask ourselves - does this teacher preach the gospel? The **gospel is defined** as the **good news** concerning Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

No one, not even a great preacher, has the right to change the Gospel message that God gave us. As Gal 1:9 says "If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned"

#### [PowerPoint 4e-seeking glory]

- c. 3<sup>rd</sup> - We can see if they are seeking to give glory to God - or if they are seeking their own glory - As **Jesus Himself** said in John 7:18: **Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.**

And as the Apostle Paul reminds us: **So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31)**

#### [PowerPoint 4f-effect of teaching]

- d. 4<sup>th</sup> - We can check the effect of their teaching on others. The **Apostle Paul warned Timothy about false teaching** - Paul said false teaching can spread like gangrene (2 Tim 2:17); it can destroy the faith of others (2 Tim 2:18);

it promotes ungodliness (2 Tim 2:16); and causes bitter divisions (1 Tim 6:4-5; 2 Tim 2:23; Titus 1:11; 3:9) whereas true teaching produces faith, love and godliness (1 Tim 1:4-5; 4:7; 6:3; 2 Tim 3:16-17; Titus 1:1)

### Challenge

So, we've seen the warning Jesus has given about false prophets or teachers  
And the tests we can apply to check for false teaching

I just want to leave us with a challenge - this morning

How are we going to know whether something we're told is true or false?

Obviously, time will tell - but also God has given us His Word - The Bible

So, my challenge for us this morning - is to encourage us to spend more time reading, studying and mediating on God's Word - so we grow in our knowledge of God and of His Son, Jesus - and grow in knowledge of His Word.

If you're not already in a Growth Group, I encourage you to join a group [times and locations are listed in the Bulletin] - it's a great way to grow spiritually and gain spiritual discernment.

God's Word is our instruction manual for life - but we need to read it - to know the instructions.

Let's pray...