

# Beware Of Wolves Selling Bad Fruit

*A Sermon by Pr. David Johnson*

One of Jesus' most famous discourses is His three-chapter teaching in Matthew called the "Sermon On The Mount." It is an historic composite of various principles impacting the whole of Christian life. In fact, this sermon is so comprehensive, that few human motivations, decisions, or actions are left untouched by Jesus' instruction. Here are some high points:

5:3-12 -The Test Of Christian Character (Beatitudes)

"Ten Commandants" for the Heart

5:13-20 -Be Salt & Light...You're Being Watched

5:21-48 -A Christian's Personal Integrity (Testimony) in Public

6:1-15 -The Importance of Genuine Righteousness and Prayer

6:16-24 -Practicing Authentic Humility in Fasting and Giving

6:25-34 -Faith Begins Where Worry Ends

7:1-12 -Treating Others Rightly Begins By Self-examination

7:13-14 - Achieving Hell Is Easy, Achieving Heaven Is Hard

As you've probably noticed the responsibility of application has fallen squarely on the shoulders of Jesus' listeners; until now. Everything He has taught has been spoken as a challenge for individual self-examination and change. Each person listening to this sermon has had to ask themselves how they felt about the area addressed, or how they were doing in its application. Up to this point, there could be no finger pointing, no blame-shifting.

That is...until chapter 7, verse 15. It's as if Jesus could almost hear the people thinking, "But I'm only doing what I was taught. It's not my fault!" It's so sad to think that the human heart really hasn't changed much since Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve couldn't speak up fast enough in their blame of each other. But in this case, Jesus warns His listeners against both the purveyors of false-teaching, and their own likely failure to produce Godly character. In fact, Jesus was clear about the importance of assessing a person's heart by the fruit of their lives.

**Matt 7:15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn {bushes} nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 "So then, you will know them by their fruits."**

These seem like pretty straightforward instructions:

## 1. Beware of false prophets!

As if knowing which path to take to heaven wasn't confusing enough, and the instruction to keep to the narrow path and the small door hard enough (7:13-14); now we're told we're going to encounter deceivers along the way. Sadly, many people or groups use an appearance of goodness and wholesome activities to cloak personal and manipulative agendas. They master the art of building facades, using the right words or participating in some admirable activities, to appease one group of supporters while actually acting in alliance with the opposition. That is why it is critical that we train ourselves to search out the true nature of the friends we have, and the groups we align ourselves with.

## 2. Scrutinize their fruit (words and behavior).

Watch these self-proclaimed leaders/teachers closely. You'll find discrepancies, if you measure their actions and

words carefully. What does their "fruit" say about who they are, and what they truly believe? Some trees may be covered in beautiful apples, but you may find out they're WAX. Remember, a false-prophet may "come to you," but they're never "sent" from God.

## 3. Not all "fruit" is GOOD fruit

Be careful as you evaluate, "spiritual or religious" talk does not equate to truth. Biblical words aren't necessarily godly instruction. The simple presence of "fruit" does not guarantee that the fruit is authentic or good. Words and actions may prove to be "bad" fruit. Sometimes an apple tree may bear real apples, but they may actually be wormy or crabapples. Not all good works are godly.

## 4. Is the tree destroyed, or are you eating from it?

You've answered the question, "Are this teacher's actions/words real and authentic? Are they in keeping with the Word and will of God?" You've come up with a resounding, NO! Then why are you still listening to them? Why do you still follow them down the broad path to destruction, headed for the wide door to hell? As comfortable as it is to stay and eat, the only end is eternal destruction. Life only comes by leaving the fake fruit of false teachers and pursuing the real fruit of Jesus.

Then Jesus builds to the subtle deception of seemingly authentic disciples:

**Matt 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'**

There's an adage that states, "If it looks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and walks like a duck...it must be a duck." That may be true of ducks, but it's not always true for Christians. Both Moses and Jesus warn us about this painful truth:

**Deut 13:1-4 "If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, <sup>2</sup> and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' <sup>3</sup> you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. <sup>4</sup> You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him..."**

**Matt 24:24 For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.**

The sad reality is that there will be many disappointed people at the judgement who thought their righteous actions, superior service, or supercilious Christian persona would save them. And there will be many more who thought that following those self-proclaimed false-teachers would lead them to glory. But in the end, both will be lost...forever. May we keep our eyes on Christ and His Word alone, following Him down the narrow way, and ultimately through the small gate to glory!