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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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False Prophets, False Professions **Matthew 7:15-23**

I. Forgeries (see last page on Relics)

- A. Millions of dollars spent on forged paintings... reality unspeakably precious
- B. Christ prepares us for judgment day
- C. Calls for decisive action by His hearers
- D. False prophets and false professions

II. False Prophets

A. The Definition

1. Prophet = "Thus says the Lord"

Deuteronomy 18:18, 20 "I will raise up a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him... but a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death."

- a. God's clear source of steady revelation... speaking God's words to His people
- b. False prophet: anyone who says anything in the name of the Lord which God didn't command him to say

2. Israel's long history with false prophets... culminating in the time of Jeremiah

Jeremiah 23:16 "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. They keep saying to those who despise me, "The Lord says: You will have peace." And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts they say, "No harm will come to you." But which of them has stood in the council of the Lord to see or hear his word? Who has listened or heard his word?"

Jeremiah 23:21 “I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message; I did not speak to them, yet they have prophesied.”

3. New Testament counterparts: false teachers

2 Peter 2:1 “But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you.”

- a. prophet has direct revelation from God
- b. teacher explains the existing revelation... the written word of God to the people
- c. false prophets deal in false prophecies... false teachers bring heresy

B. The Danger

vs. 15 “Watch out for false prophets.”

1. Strong word of warning from Jesus
2. WHY? Crucial role of teaching in our spiritual lives

Ephesians 4:11-15 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

John 17:17 “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”

3. False teachers destroy this whole process
4. Paul warned of the danger

Acts 20:29-31 ²⁹ I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰ Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

False teachers are as dangerous to the church as ravenous wolves are to a flock of sheep!!

False doctrine leads to false belief... false belief leads to false practice; both false belief and false practice lead to hell

Galatians 1:8 “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned. As we have already said before, so now I say again: if anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you received, let him be eternally condemned.”

Because of this great danger, Jesus commanded us to watch out vigilantly for false prophets... a deadly plague on the church

C. Their Disguise

vs. 15 “They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”

1. Looks are deceiving... all is not as it appears; learned from their master, Satan himself

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness.”

- a. Satan is no fool... he appears like an angel of light
- b. this means he is deceptively attractive... so also are his servants, the false prophets

2. Deceptive lives

- a. outwardly moral, inwardly corrupt...**SHEEP’S CLOTHING**

Matthew 23:27 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to men as righteous, but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”

- b. false motives

1 Thessalonians 2:5 “You know that we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness.”

D. Their Doctrine... not what they say, but what they don't say

1. Don't openly deny

- ◆ Jesus' deity
- ◆ Substitutionary atonement
- ◆ Depravity and lostness of man
- ◆ Reality and penalty of sin
- ◆ Destiny of hell for all unbelievers
- ◆ Need for repentance and obedience to God
- ◆ Other “uncomfortable truths”

THEY SIMPLY IGNORE THEM!!

2. Keep to positive things... speak much of the love of God, joys of heaven, compassion of the Lord, God's help in everyday life, etc. comfortable truths

3. Jeremiah's false prophets

Jeremiah 6:14 “They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say when there is no peace.”

- a. treating a deep, potentially fatal wound on an outpatient basis
- b. underestimating sin
- c. speaking words of comfort when words of conviction are needed

4. WHY? Because the people want it that way!!

Jeremiah 5:30-31 “A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land; The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way.”

Isaiah 30:9-11 These are rebellious people, deceitful children, children unwilling to listen to the Lord's instruction. They say to the seers, ‘See no more visions!’ And to the prophets, ‘Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy

illusions. Leave this way, get off this path, and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel.”

5. False teachers emphasize earthly material benefits to faith

Modern false teachers on TV, hucksters who constantly focus on money, riches, physical health, etc.

2 Corinthians 2:17 “Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.”

6. False teachers emphasize works righteousness, rather than grace
 - a. like Pharisees in Jesus day... earning salvation through good works
 - b. trumpet every act of righteousness to be seen by men... Matthew 6 destroys this
7. Ultimately, two aspects never found in their teaching:
 - a. Spiritual begging... true humility... brokenness over sin
 - b. Narrow gate

They emphasize human effort over God’s grace

They emphasize human decision over God’s initiative

They live more for this present world than for heaven

They eliminate all uncomfortable doctrines so they can be popular

E. Their Discovery

vs. 16 “By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.”

Jesus wants us to know who they are... He gives us the test of the fruit

1. **Character:** no Beatitudes... tend to be boastful, arrogant, authoritarian

John Calvin: “Nothing is more difficult to counterfeit than virtue.”

2. **Creed:** love of God, but not His holiness... there’s always something they leave out

“Their message is a message of gaps, the greatest gap of which leaves out the truth that saves.”... BUT PAUL WAS SO DIFFERENT...

Acts 20:27 “I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole counsel of God’s will.”

3. **Converts:** they tend to be like them... no Christlike character

False prophets/teachers are discovered by their fruit... we uncover their internal heart character by what their lives produce

F. Their Damnation

vs. 19 “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

Clear teaching from Scripture: unrepentant false teachers are doomed to an eternity in hell

2 Peter 2 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. ² Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. ³ In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping. ⁴ For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment... then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.... ¹³ They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done.... ¹⁷ These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them.

G. Our Duty

vs. 20 “Thus by their fruit you will recognize them.”

1. Recognize false teachers! Expose them! Flee them! Refute them!
2. Become a fruit expert
 - a. inspect their lives
 - b. inspect their doctrines

Acts 17:11 “Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”

3. Become mature through diligent study of the Scriptures so you can refute false teaching
4. Stay close to Christ, your true Shepherd... know His voice well!

John 10:5 “My sheep will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.”

Transition: The test for false prophets is simple... by their fruit you will know them... when Jesus comes into a life, he transforms the heart so it can produce good fruit... everyone who knows Jesus as Lord and Savior does a lifetime of good works

Ephesians 2:10 “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Luther: “We are justified by faith alone, apart from good works; but faith is never alone, apart from good works.”...NOW WE MUST EXAMINE OUR OWN FRUIT!!!

III. False Professions

vs. 21-23 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

- A. Some of the most sobering words Christ ever spoke to us... self-deceit

There may be some people listening to me today who sincerely believe they are Christians, that their sins are forgiven, that they will go to heaven when they die... who are still in their sins and will be horribly shocked on judgment day

- B. The day: Judgment Day; the issue... entering the Kingdom of Heaven

vs. 22 “Many will say to me on that day...”

1. Judgment Day... when carefully constructed facades are stripped away

2. Judgment Day... when spiritual beggars who hungered and thirsted for righteousness enter into heaven because of Christ's death for them
3. Judgment day... when the true thoughts of the heart are revealed for all to see
4. Judgment Day... a day of a horrifying shock for many people

"For many will say to me, Lord, Lord..."

C. Their Profession: **LORD, LORD**

1. Orthodoxy... Jesus IS Lord, and we must say it to be saved

Romans 10:9 "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you will be saved."

No one who refuses to say "Jesus is Lord" will be saved... so this is orthodox doctrine, and absolutely required for salvation!

Philippians 2:10-11 "At the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess, 'Jesus is Lord,' to the glory of God the Father."

2. Zeal... outward passion... they don't just say "Lord" they say "Lord, Lord!!!"

D. Their Resume

1. Amazing good works??
 - ◆ Prophecy in your name
 - ◆ Drive out demons in your name
 - ◆ Perform miracles in your name
2. NOTE: it's a claim... "Many will SAY to me on that day
 - a. don't know if its true or not
 - b. some false prophets have been able to do false miracles

2 Thessalonians 2:9 "The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit signs and wonders..."

1 Corinthians 13:2 “If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.”

E. Their Reality

1. Never truly born again... no heart righteousness
2. Proper doctrine, yes... but so did the demons
3. Real issue is one of obedience to God

vs. 21 “Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father in heaven.”

NOT THOSE WHO SAY BUT THOSE WHO DO!!!

Do you obey God’s commands, or just talk about obeying??

1 John 2:3-6 We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. ⁴ The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

4. They are actually called “Evildoers...”

vs. 23 “Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you; away from me, you evildoers!’”

5. Central issue... not “Did I know Christ,” but “Does Christ know me?”

When the five foolish virgins came, they knocked on the door and the answer was the same “I never knew you”

John 10:14 “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.”

Divine order of salvation:

1) I know you; 2) I change you (i.e. “Make a tree good...”); 3) You know me; 4) You obey me

F. Their Destiny

1. If Christ doesn’t know you on Judgment Day, you will be eternally condemned

Luke 13:27-28 “But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’ There will be weeping there and gnashing of teeth...”

2. The cost of self-delusion is high

IV. Application

1. Make sure you are in the Kingdom of God NOW... don’t be self-deluded

2 Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?

2 Peter 1:10 “Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure.”

2. Know the marks of true Christian faith...

- ◆ Beatitudes
- ◆ Deep knowledge of personal sinfulness
- ◆ Full confidence that Christ’s death is sufficient for your sins
- ◆ Calling on His name
- ◆ Growing in good works and Christlike character

3. False prophets: know the Scripture well enough to refute them... expose them and reject them!

Throughout the history of the church, forgeries have played a significant role... there have been forged documents, which were held to be genuine and which affected the life of the church... one King in the Near East claimed to have had a letter from Jesus Christ himself, written during Christ's life on earth, in which the Lord wrote that He would be unable to come heal the King from an illness, but that He would send one of His disciples to heal him.

One such forgery was the Donation of Constantine, a letter supposedly written by the first Christian emperor of Rome, Constantine, in which the Emperor supposedly gave jurisdiction in the West to the Bishop of Rome. The Roman Catholic church had been using this document for centuries to prove their right to rule Europe, but the Sixteenth-century scholar Lorenzo Valla showed that the writing style and vocabulary proved the document to have come from a much later time than that of Constantine.

However, some of the most spectacular forgeries center around relics... objects which were venerated and worshipped throughout the early and middle history of the Church. Relics could be anything... bits of bones from a martyr, articles of clothing from a saint, drinking cups used by one of the apostles, etc. These items were so valuable, sometimes sold for a king's ransom that they were frequently forged. Many of the relics were said to have miraculous power, especially those which centered around the passion and death of Jesus Christ.

- ◆ **The True Cross of Christ:** Supposedly found by Helena, the mother of Constantine, on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the year 326... she was guided to the spot of the crucifixion by an aged Jewish woman who had inherited traditional knowledge as to its position... after the ground had been dug to a considerable depth, three crosses were found, as well as the superscription which had placed over our Savior's head and the nails which had been driven into His hands and feet... the cross of the Lord was identified when a crippled woman was stretched upon it and she was healed
- ◆ Helena divided up the wood, leaving most of it there where she built a church to commemorate it... some of the wood she sent to Rome, and some to Byzantium, modern Istanbul in Turkey... it is still there and faithful Orthodox Christians can go and kiss it on Good Friday every year
- ◆ In later years, more and more **pieces of the true cross** were found, showing up in every cathedral in Europe... the great Reformer John Calvin wryly commented that there is enough wood from the cross of Christ in the churches in Europe to make a large sailing ship

- ◆ Helena took the **superscription** and gave it to her son, Constantine, and he supposedly sent it to Rome as well... it was lost until 1492, when it was supposedly found by a priest in a vault... the Pope issued a bull stating that this superscription was authentic and a genuine relic
- ◆ The **nails**: were there three or four? Tradition states that Helena threw one of the nails into the sea during a storm and the storm was stilled... the remaining nails eventually were beaten together to form to crown of the King of the Lombards in France