

By Hook or crook The expression sometimes used in relation to the Jews, is explained this way, in ~~Old~~ times, pagans were not permitted to cut trees, but had permission to secure for heating & cooking such limbs as they could reach by a hook or a crook. The hook was a pruning hook, the crook, a shepherd's crook, FALSE PROPHETS
Matthew 7:15

S.N. Mar 28, 7/ P.M. W.X.R.I.

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Carlyle once said, "Can there be a more horrible object in existence than an eloquent man not speaking the truth?"

This is especially true in the realm of religion.

A man may change a road sign on the highway and cause you a great deal of inconvenience.

He may label poison as cough syrup and take your life.

A man may offer religious truth which may lead you to your eternal doom.

There is little wonder that Jesus in the closing section of the sermon on the mount warns against false prophets.

A prophet now is one who proposes to speak for the Lord. But if his words are not based upon God's words, Jesus calls him a false prophet.

Jesus here emphasizes one thing - the importance of entering in at the straight gate and walking along the narrow way, and here is a great invitation.

But there are special dangers which confront us. He shows us how to recognize them

and having recognized them, how to deal with them. Here are three lessons in a row.

There are two ways, the straight and the narrow. There are two trees - that which

bears good fruit and that which bears bad fruit. There are two houses,
two builders, one built upon the rock and the other built upon the sand.

So our Lord goes on repeating and emphasizing the great fact of
 judgment which He began in the first part of this chapter, and He is coming down
 to the absolute finality of judgment and He is telling us why we should enter
 in at the straight gate, and He is telling us the reason is that the other ~~gate~~
gate is broad and leads to destruction and the final judgment of the ungodly is
 here revealed. Now Jesus knew how dull we are and how slow we are and how ready
 to think about things that we are in coming to the reality. Some churches
 years ago used to have the ten commandments painted on the wall because people
 had a tendency to forget the commandments.

Now, He is going to remind us two great warnings. One is going to be
 the false prophets, and He is going to remind us of the danger of those who will
 be dressed in sheep's clothing. Those who will be standing outside the straight
gate. And here is the danger of listening to false prophets - they are always
there, they are always present, and they are just outside the straight gate.
 Now, Jesus is going to try to get you not to listen to them.

Now, the big question is about these false prophets, who are they
 and how are they to be recognized today? Now, this is not really a very simple

Why worry - Peter Marshall - "Mother to 4 yr. old Eat your dinner or God will not love you, Be sure Displeased - after supper had Thunder Storm - The 4 yr. old got under the bed - said "What a ³ fuss to make over 3 little Pusses".

Why worry about false prophets -

or who lectures, or who is religious leader, but he is a wolf inside. He is

not preaching the essence of the gospel. A wolf as Armstrong said, is a wolf

inside. Now, there may not be anything wrong with him as he stands around the

sheep, but his nature will come out, and he will lead the lambs to slaughter.

Therefore, this message is very timely as Jesus gives this special warning.

What are these false prophets? There are two schools of thinking

as to who Jesus might have been referring to here.

First of all, there were those who felt that He was teaching in

reference to the ones who issued false doctrine. You shall know them by their

fruits. You shall know them by the kind of doctrines which they teach.

Now, the second group or idea which has been set forth as an interpretation

of this that they will be known by the life they live, by the kind of

people they are. This is a test by which you will detect and unmask these

hypocrites.

Now perhaps both of these suggestions are correct. There are many

who follow the matter of doctrine and there are many who follow the matter of

living. But a combination of these would be correct because if our teaching is

right, then our lives will be right. But on the other hand, there are some people

who seem to have correct teaching, but whose lives do not match up with their

teaching. But in the last analysis, both of these have some right and perhaps both have some wrong. But most people who have any religious or spiritual discernment can detect a heretic. I mean by that a man who may be preaching in a pulpit, if he seems doubtful about the being of God or the deity of Jesus Christ or the miracles in the Bible, it is easy to detect that.

Now this is the picture of the sheep's clothing. He suggests here a real difficulty about this kind of false prophet is at first you never imagine that he is such. He is so subtle. Now Peter put it in the second chapter of his second epistle, these people he says crept in unawares. They look like the right people. They have sheep's clothing on. No one suspects anything ~~false~~ false about them. They seem to be a part of the kingdom. And yet Peter said these were false prophets. They crept in unawares.

Now the false prophet is a man who comes to us and who at first has the appearance of being everything that could be desired. He is nice, he is pleasing, he is pleasant, he appears to be thoroughly Christian. He even seems to say the right things. His teachings in general sound all right. He talks about God. He talks about Jesus Christ. He seems to be saying everything that a Christian should say.

He is obviously in sheep's clothing, and his way of living seems to

correspond so you do not suspect that there is anything wrong at all. There is

nothing on the surface that would cause you to suspicion otherwise. And as time goes along, you may discover that he is wrong both in his teachings and both in his type of life. These two things are always linked together. Our Lord says you are going to know them by their fruits. The teachings and the life can never be separated.

In other words, the momentum that carries the train along the track continues long after the drive has shut off the steam or the power on the locomotive.

The tidal wave moves onward long after it has left the attraction of the moon. The same thing happens in the matter of a false prophet. He moves along with this momentum and little by little, the revelation comes forth.

Now Jesus said for a good reason that we ought to have this caution in Verse 15 because he is pretentious, and he is very fair. He does not wear a rough garment to deceive us, and men today may by their dress or their garb or their long flowing robes be something else other than what they represent.

Satan, you will remember, in 2 Cor. 11:13 and 14 turns himself into an angel of light. And he becomes an enemy.

Now, under this design they are very malicious, for inwardly they are raving wolves. Every hypocrite is a goat in sheep's clothing. Now he is not a sheep, but he is a worst enemy the sheep has. He comes to tear, to devour, and to

scatter the sheep.

Paul calls them greivous wolves, Acts. 20:29.

Now, what is wrong with their teaching? If we are going to discover just what is wrong with their teaching as we have ~~we~~ tried to describe for you these people, I think we would say that there is no straight gate in it and there is no narrow way in it. As far as it goes, it does not include this. The teaching is falseness. Therefore, it is detected by what it does not say rather than by what it does say. It's a very subtle situation.

Now, any man, any Christian, can detect the man who says outrageously wrong things. You can see through the man who is unfair and uncharitable in what he does and in what he says.

We have somehow got hold of the idea that error is only that which is outrageously wrong. But the false prophet is a man who does not emphasize the right things.
One Preacher - Sermon Christ is coming in 2 yrs & That Night led his church to launch a 10 yr. Bldg. Program.

Now, this is the only way to understand the picture of the false prophet. The false prophet is a man who has no straight gate and no narrow way in his gospel as these two verses we considered last Sunday night. He has nothing which is offensive to the natural man. He pleases all people. He is in sheep's clothing. He presents a nice comfortable and comforting message. He pleases every-body. He is never persecuted for his preaching. He is praised by liberals and

modernists. But there is no straight gate.

Now, what do I mean by the straight gate and narrow way? What do we really mean when there is nothing offensive in his preaching? Well, you remember Peter in the second chapter of the second epistle. He said there were false prophets also among the people of the Children of Israel in the Old Testament. Even as there shall be false teachers among you, so you must go back to the Old Testament and read what it says about the false prophets, because the type does not change. They were always there, and every time a true prophet like Jeremiah or someone else came along, the false prophet would always be there to question him and to resist him, to denounce him and to ridicule him.

But what were they like? Well, they were described by saying they had healed the hurt by saying "Peace, peace" when there is no peace. The false prophet was always giving false comfort. As you listen to him, he always gives you an impression that there is not very much wrong. He admits of course that there may be a little. He is not fool enough to say that there is nothing wrong. But he says, "Peace, peace." Don't listen to a man like Jeremiah. He is narrow-minded. Don't listen to him. It's all right. Everything is going to be fine in the nation. Now this is the terrifying truth about religious people in that day and now. My people like to have it so because it never disturbs, it never makes you feel

and that he was to persuade Ahab not to go forth into battle.

Now to show you how a true prophet is treated, in Verse 24,

Zedekiah came over and smote ~~Micajah~~ Micaiah on the cheek, because of the spirit in which he spoke. And God's prophet was carried back, and they said Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction until I come in peace. And the prophets told him that said, If you return in peace at all, then the Lord has not spoken by me. And the story goes on that the king went out against the true prophesy of this man and followed the false prophets. And in Verse 34 it says that the king who had disguised himself in the battle was smote between the joints, between the harness, his armor in his back. He was mortally wounded. And they carried him back and he died, and his blood filled the chariot, and the dogs came and licked his blood out of the chariot. And they washed his armor according to the word of the Lord which was spoken by the prophet. Now this is a sample of a false prophets ~~of~~ and of the true prophet of God.

Now these false prophets get into the church even. They are termites in the house of God. They have infiltrated - false teachers occupy some of the most important posts. I think from the evidence we see that some of them are in the colleges, universities, and even the seminaries. And this is painfully plain,

because their theological convictions show false teaching exists in major
and minor denominations. It seems none are exempt because termites breed more
 termites.

Paul says for the time will come when they will not endure sound
doctrine, but after their own lusts will they heap to themselves teachers having
itching ears, and they will turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be
 turned unto fables. 2 Tim. 4:3-4. The churches will grow progressively weaker
as long as this problem is not solved and as long as we continue to have false
 teachers in our midst. There must first be some kind of revival of true religion
 among us and among genuine believers that will lead us to be on our knees in
 intercession. There must be a reformation in that we shall be willing to pay the
price because during the dark ages the Bible was kept from the people with tragic
results. Where the Bible is known and obeyed, we find more true personal religion.
 The Godly family is the family that gives the scripture top place.

But Satan still opposes and still comes with the question, Gen. 3:1.
Yea, hath God said? He asks this in every generation? Let not this sneering
 criticism and outright opposition and other devices defer you from reading and
studying, believing and obeying God's word. The Bible is the most up-to-date
book there is. In the book of Proverbs alone there is enough truth to answer every
young person's questions and also his problems. In the book of ~~RaixRaix~~ Psalms you

First of all, they make little to do about judgment. The false prophet rarely talks about this. He'd rather talk a great deal about the love of God and emphasize this as the glorious truth, and he conceals all the other truth but he never emphasizes really the final judgment and the eternal destiny of the lost.

Jesus describes these false prophets as those who wear sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are raving wolves. They do not preach on the judgment.

Second, they fail to preach on the sinfulness of sin. They talk very little about the inability of man to do anything about his own salvation. If they really believe in sin at all, they do not emphasize its vile nature. That is, sin is not so serious, and so they do not like to talk about sin. We talk about only individuals. It ~~xx~~ does not talk about the fallen nature to say that a man is totally fallen, lost and depraved. It does not like to talk about mankind in sin. All men that come short of the glory of God have sinned, and the exceeding sinfulness of sin as you find it in the New Testament the false prophet will not emphasize. No, to them a man is not dead in trespasses and sin. He does not like that. He does not see that necessity of doing that. What I am emphasizing here is that the man who is false does not say these things so that an innocent believer listening to him may assume that he believes them. But do they believe these things? The answer is that obviously they do not.

Third, they leave out the atonement, the substitutionary death of our Lord Jesus Christ. The false prophet may talk about Jesus, may talk about the cross as a vital question, and he may have some ~~xx~~ view about the death or the cross. But does he ~~xxx~~ realize that Christ died on the cross because it is the only way of removing man's sin? That he was crucified as a substitute for him? Does he believe that He is the only Son of God set forth for the propitiation of our sins? Now merely talk about Christ and to talk about the cross is not enough.

We have to present this atonement. And that is the way to test a false prophet. A false prophet does not say these things. He talks around the cross. He is not a stumbling block to the Jew. It's not foolishness to the Greeks. He makes it a beautiful thing. He makes it a wonderful philosophy of love and that's about it.

Fourth, he leaves out repentance. In other words, there is no narrow gate, but it is a wide gate leading to salvation, very broad, the way that leads to heaven. You need not to feel very much about your own sinfulness and ~~xx~~ your own heart. You just decide that you are going to rush along with the crowd, put your name down, make a decision. How unlike the Puritans of old which led men to be terrified at the judgment of God. And to have agony sometimes for days, for weeks, and for months.

John Bunyan tells us that in his ~~xxxx~~ "Grace Abounding" that he agonized for 18 months ~~xx~~ over the matter of repentance in his life. To realize that you are guilty, a vile sinner in the presence of God, that you deserve the wrath, the punishment of God, that you are hell-bound, and then to renounce the world whatever it costs, to deny yourself, and to take up the cross and go after Jesus. The false prophet does not put it like that. He simply says, "Peace, peace" when there is no peace.

In the fifth place, the false prophet has very little to say about the matter of a holy life. He is not very interested in the matter of practicing what he preaches. That is why I began this message by saying that he had very little interest in the straight gate and walking the narrow way. He may commence his sermon without carrying it out. He may pick out certain sins about which people are not guilty of and they think other people are. Now this is where the Pharisees come in today. And we may think that we are holy because we do not love the world or lust after the flesh, or have the lust of the eye or the pride of life, but this seems to be one of the sins of this day.

How are we going to identify these false prophets? Paul describes them by warning the elders at Ephesus, For I know this that after my departure shall greivous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock also for your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. Acts 20:29 - 30. The greivous wolves here are non-Christians, ~~persecuting~~ persecuting the church. But the false prophets mentioned by Jesus correspond ~~with~~ more likely to those among your own selves, speaking perverse things, drawing the sheep away. And this is the church's great danger today. The greatest tragedy to befall modern Christianity has taken root in some of their scholars in Germany and other parts of the world where men have clipped with scissors, clipped ~~xx~~ out first one part of the Bible and then another until they have a skeleton left. The result

is that we cast a shadow over every page in the Bible when we cut out something about the diety of Christ, or the virgin birth or the miracles or the atonement, or the bodily resurrection, we then go into the realm of superstition. Today the Bible and its teachings stand on a substantial foundation. You do not have to sacrifice your faith at the altar of reason. Many false prophets persist, some with sound intellectualism. They substitute the reason of man for the revelation of God. But now intellect does not qualify one to be a true prophet of God. Indeed, it may make him a dangerous wolf in sheep's clothing.

For you take some liberal theology today and you discover that it was put forth before by false prophets based upon some Greek philosophy which may sound very modern indeed. But there have been efforts to discount the glorious person and work of Christ. This was the work of gnostics back in the first and second ~~centuries~~ centuries. And to deny the saving power of Jesus is like the ancient Jews and Greeks who regarded the cross as a stumbling block and foolishness, 1 Cor. 1:23. There are those who would cast a shadow over the resurrection. And there is sophisticated learning. These false prophets Paul says in 1 Cor. 1:19-21 For it is written I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. For after what is the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom knew not g God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching the things preached to save them that believed.

How are we going to identify these false prophets? Now I have suggested to you some of the things that they will leave out, and Jesus is going to tell us later on that we can tell them by their fruits. I think there are three or four simple tests that we might put concerning the teachings of these people.

1/ First of all, beware of the prophet whose message makes little or no reference to the teachings of the Bible. Now the man who comes along and gives you a nice essay and it is not based upon "Thus saith the Lord" - some preachers and some teachers do not even bother to take a text. They may use some text, but the more they preach, the ~~farther~~ farther they get away from the text. And so it becomes just a philosophical discourse.

2/ Beware of the prophet who quotes scripture out of context. Now there are some men who will cite scripture. The devil on occasions quoted scripture. But he does so in making it mean the opposite from what it ~~was~~ was meant to mean. Sometimes people use a proof text that are not legitimate. You will do well to follow the people of Berea when they heard Paul preach Christ. Acts 17:11. They received the word with readiness of mind and they searched the scriptures whether those things were so. The great need of our day is expository preaching where we go from verse to verse, chapter to chapter, and book to book. Now in this way, we

may not scratch itching ears, but we will feed hungry hearts. 2 Tim. 4:3.

3- We need to in the third place beware of the prophet who accepts
some of the Bible as scripture and rejects or ignores the rest. Paul in 2 Tim. 3:16
 says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine,
for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

We find that God is in revelation as the book goes along. In the book
 of John as well as in Genesis. The God who is in Genesis is the God who is in
John. Here is a revelation of God.

4- Beware of the prophet who gives to Jesus Christ other than the most
exalted position in God's revelation. When the prophet makes Jesus only a
man, the greatest of men, or when he makes out that Jesus's teachings or words are
just the most sublime, ~~xxxx~~ remember that Jesus said that when the Spirit is come,
He will guide you into all truth. He shall glorify me, for He shall receive of mine
and shall show it unto you. The most glorious word in the Bible is that we magnify
Jesus Christ. For in Him dwelleth permanently and constantly all the essence of deity,
 the very state of being God in bodily form. Col. 2:9 It has so weakened our
 religious faith and frustrated our ~~efforts~~ efforts when we have listened too often
 to the trumpet give an uncertain sound. Be sure that the sound is ~~true~~ true because
 men do not gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles.

False prophets may offer an easy type of life.

They will not tell you to examine your own soul, but you just must look to Jesus and never look at yourself.

They discourage what the Bible encourages us to do. To examine ourself, to prove our own selves. They dislike the process of self examination, and the mortification of sin as taught by the Puritans. Jonathan Edwards and John Fletcher especially had twelve questions that he himself every night before he retired to go to bed would examine his own life. Now the false prophet would not believe in this because it would make him uncomfortable. He wants an easy salvation and an easy life. He knows nothing about Paul's feelings that a man must fight the good fight of faith. That within the tabernacle there was groaning because it was burdened, and that he was ~~wrestling~~ wrestling against the flesh and the blood and the principalities and the powers.

Now we do not like this kind of teaching against ~~false~~ false prophets today. We are living in a day when people say, As long as a man claims to be a Christian at all, well, that makes us brothers.

But still Jesus says, Beware of false prophets. These ~~are~~ awful warnings of our Lord are here in the New Testament. And these unconscious hypocrites - it is not that they are not nice and pleasing. They are. But in

a sense they are in great danger. And their way leads to destruction.

I wonder why the church has become so weak and so ineffective. Quite

often even Christians look at literature or poetry or something and they talk

about God in such vain, ~~xxx~~ vague ways. I think ~~xxx~~ the poor quality

man took trip to California - visit a movie set -
 He was disappointed - a lovely St. scene gave the
 appearance of nice homes on each side of the street but
 which were fronts only.
 once through the door you stood amid cheap
 scaffolding -

we need to learn we are not fooling anyone by
 false appearance (cheap looking).

during the last world war there were several accounts
 of men arrested for claiming to be officers when
 they were not.
 False pretence was dangerous to the security of our country.

Frequently we read of men arrested for falsely pretending
 to be physicians - They are a danger to the health of people.
 They have not stood the test -

Label on your garment tells the content of the fibers -
 what if you wore a label telling what kind of Christian
 you are?