

## Jesus Taught About False Teachers

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children be prepared for the fact that they will suffer persecution as they follow Jesus. People are sinful and want to depend on their own works. As a result, they will persecute those who come to Jesus by faith. In this topic, we are going to see that Jesus warned His disciples that there would be false prophets who would try to deceive them.

Jesus had just finished warning that all people face a choice about the two ways. Jesus then went on to warn about false prophets or teachers who would try to deceive. Matthew 7:15-17 says, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.” The word translated “beware” means *pay attention*. Jesus wanted His disciples to listen closely while He warned them about false prophets. Jesus warned what false teachers will do to try to deceive others.

Jesus said that such individuals will come in sheep’s clothing. Here, we see that such false teachers will try to make themselves appear like they are true shepherds. Ezekiel had earlier warned about the false shepherds of Israel. Ezekiel 34:2-4 says, “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: ‘Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, *but* you do not feed the flock. The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them.’”” We see that Ezekiel warned that the false shepherds of Israel were using the sheep for their own benefit, instead of caring for the sheep.

Jesus said that although false prophets try to look like shepherds they are actually ravenous wolves. The word “ravenous” means *a robber or an extortioner*. In the New Testament, “wolves” was used to describe people who were cruel, greedy and destructive. John 10:12 says, “But a hireling, *he who is* not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them.” In Acts 20:29, Paul told the elders of the church at Ephesus, “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.” In both passages, the goal of these false teachers is to destroy.

Jesus said that the way to recognize false teachers is by their fruit. Jesus said that it is impossible to get good fruit from thorn bushes or thistles. By this statement, Jesus made it clear that it is impossible for false teachers to bear good fruit. The same is true for fruit trees. A good fruit tree will bear good fruit. A bad fruit tree will bear rotten fruit. The fruit of a bad tree may have a beautiful skin on the outside. However, when you cut the fruit open you will find that the fruit is rotten on the inside. 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 points out the fact that the goal of such teachers is always to deceive. Those verses say, “For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.”

Matthew 7:18-20 goes on to say, “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit. Every

tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.” In these verses, we see that a good tree cannot bear bad fruit just as a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. John 15:2 says, “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” In Matthew, Jesus is talking about false teachers. In John, Jesus is the vine and is talking about fruitful Christians. A false teacher bears bad fruit while a person who is not a Christian bears no fruit. The branch that bears no fruit is cut off the vine and burned so those who are not Christians will experience eternal judgment, even if they are not false teachers.

Later, Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees in Matthew 12 and in verses 33-35 said, “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by *its* fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.” Jesus told the Pharisees that the things that they spoke came from their hearts. Because their hearts were evil, they could not speak good things. That is why false teachers will focus on this world and the things of this world rather than the things that are eternal. Many people do not recognize such false teachers because those teachers are focusing on worldly success and even humanitarian acts. Those who bear bad fruit will also experience eternal judgment. That is why Jesus said that we can know false teachers by their fruits because their followers will be focused on earthly gain.

The second thing that we see is that a good tree will always bear good fruit. However, there may be various levels of fruit bearing. John 15:1-7 talks about fruit, more fruit and much fruit. In John 15:2, we see that the Father prunes every branch that bears fruit so that it will bear more fruit. The word translated “prunes” in John 15:2 means *to be cleansed from impurity or guilt*. The only other place this word is used is in Hebrews 10:2 where we read, “For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins.” Those who offered animal sacrifices never had their guilt fully taken away.

In contrast, our sins have been blotted out by the blood of Christ. 1 John 1:9 points out the fact that we can experience cleansing from guilt as well as forgiveness for sin. That freedom makes it possible for our lives to bear more fruit. John 15:5 says, “I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” As we learn to abide in Christ moment-by-moment, our lives will begin to bear much fruit.

Jesus went on to say that false teachers will do many things in the name of Jesus in their efforts to deceive others. Matthew 7:21-23 says, “Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”” Here, we see that Jesus explained why false teachers will be able to deceive many people and lead them away from the truth of the Word of God.

False teachers focus on works and not what it means to do the will of God. The Pharisees had a very strong focus on works. Matthew 23:15 says, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.” We see that the Pharisees worked very hard to get one more person to become a part of the Pharisees. However, each follower that they won they helped to become even more judgmental and evil than themselves. In contrast, true believers will focus on doing the will of God. Christ set the example when He said in John 6:38, “For I

have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”

Jesus went on to talk about some of the other works that false teachers will emphasize. Many will claim to have prophesied in the name of Christ. Just a few weeks before he condemned Jesus to death, the high priest prophesied in John 11:50-51, “‘Nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.’ Now this he did not say on his own *authority*; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation.” He prophesied as the high priest in the name of God while at the same time he also condemned Jesus to death just a few weeks later.

We also see that false teachers claimed to cast out demons in the name of Jesus. Acts 19:13 says, “Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, ‘We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.’” Jesus said that many false teachers would also do wonders in God’s name. This was illustrated in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 which was quoted above. Even the antichrist will do false wonders. 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 says, “The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” Here, we see that the antichrist will do these works through the working of Satan.

False teachers may even deceive themselves but they will be judged along with Satan and all unbelievers because they have never repented of their sin of unbelief and trusted in Jesus. This is why 1 Corinthians 10:21 warns, “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons.” We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that false teachers can be recognized by their fruit. We want to help them understand that an emphasis on worldly rewards instead of eternal rewards is the first sign of a false teacher. May the Lord richly bless you as you equip your children to recognize the fruit of false teachers.