WOLVES IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING  
Message 21 in “Living The Salt Life” Sermon Series  
(A Study of Jesus’ Sermon On The Mount)  
Scripture Text: Matthew 7:15-20 (NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

Please open your Bibles to today's scripture text in Matthew chapter seven. (PAUSE)

If I were to ask you to write down some of the greatest threats that exist in the world today, what would be on your list?

No doubt all of us would have THE THREAT OF A TERRORIST ATTACK on our list. And chances are we would have THE THREAT OF A NUCLEAR ATTACK on the list as well. And maybe some of you might include THE THREAT OF A WEATHER RELATED DISASTER or THE THREAT OF A GLOBAL PANDEMIC like the Sars virus or the new MERS virus.

But as great a threat as all those things are none of them pose as great a threat as the one we are considering into today's message. And that is the threat of FALSE DOCTRINE and THE FALSE PROPHETS who are responsible for spreading those false doctrines.

All of those other threats are extremely dangerous because they have the potential to take so many lives. But from God's perspective something that can take our physical lives doesn't begin to compare to something that can claim our soul.

Let's look at what Jesus says about this “greatest of all threats!”
Matthew 7:15-20 (NKJV)

15 “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?

17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

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

20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

P R A Y E R

As we take a closer look at our scripture there are three thoughts I would have you to consider:

I. THE DANGER OF FALSE PROPHETS (v.15a)
II. THE DECEPTION OF FALSE PROPHETS (v.15a,b)
III. THE DETECTION OF FALSE PROPHETS (vs. 16-20)
First, let's consider ..........

I. THE DANGER OF FALSE PROPHETS (v.15a)

v. 15a “Beware of false prophets.”

1. If someone says to you “BEWARE!” that tells you that you need to be on the alert or be on the lookout for someone or something doesn't it?

   Let's say you go to the beach at the Outer Banks and you see a sign which reads: BEWARE OF RIP CURRENTS that is a stern warning that its probably not a good idea to go swimming in the ocean that day, doesn't it?

   Or let's say you're driving to the Great Smoky Mountains on Interstate 40 and you see one of those electronic signs that reads: BEWARE OF FALLING ROCK AHEAD that doesn't mean kick back and take a little nap does it? No! It means you need to be wide awake and alert for the possibility of a rock slide over the next few miles.

2. Jesus says, “BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS.”

   Even if you don't know anything about the Greek language I think you will easily understand the meaning of the Greek word Jesus uses here for “false prophets.” Its the Greek word pseudoprophezes. Pseudo meaning “fake” or “false” and Prophetes of course meaning prophet. (3)
3. So a “false prophet” is one who presents himself or herself as a **spokesman** of God and pretends to speak a message from God, but in fact is a **deceiver**.

4. Throughout the Bible, God’s people are repeatedly warned to **beware of false prophets and false teachers**.

   In **MARK 13:22,23 (NKJV)** Jesus said, “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. But take heed; see I have told you beforehand.”

5. So when Jesus warns us to **“Beware of false prophets”** He's NOT talking about some “hypothetical situation. He is talking about something that is a very real and present danger!

Secondly, let’s consider..........  

**II. THE DECEPTION OF FALSE PROPHETS (v.15a,b)**

**v.15**  
“**Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.**”

1. This saying of Jesus has become a common phrase we still use today. We often describe someone with ill-intent as “**a wolf in sheep's clothing.**”
ILLUSTRATION: Probably many of you can remember the Warner Bros. Cartoon on Saturday mornings featuring a wolf named Ralph E. Wolf and Sam, the sheepdog.

The cartoon would always begin with Ralph and Sam “clocking in” at the beginning of the work day. And all day long Ralph would try every way imaginable to get in with the sheep. And his favorite way of doing that was to “dress up like one of the sheep. And just about the time it looked like Ralph was going to successfully steal one of the sheep, old Sam the Sheepdog would catch him and beat him to a pulp.” Then at the end of the day Ralph and Sam would “clock out” and go home.

3. “A wolf in sheep's clothing” makes for a funny cartoon, but when it comes to Christianity, “a wolf in sheep’s clothing is no laughing matter!

4. Just imagine a flock of sheep......the most innocent, gentle and naïve creatures on earth......peacefully grazing in a pasture. But there in the midst of sheep is the mortal enemy of the sheep.....the animal that presents the greatest possible danger to them........A WOLF. Somehow he has sneaked into their flock and they are oblivious to his presence because he is dressed up in a skin of “one of their own.” And because he “looks like a sheep” and is making “sounds like a sheep” they are completely unaware that beneath the “sheep's clothing” lies a ravenous wolf ready to fill his belly with their flesh.”
5. A “false prophet” operates in the same manner as a “wolf in sheep's clothing.” He doesn't wear a sign around his neck that says, “FALSE PROPHET.”

A false prophet is going to try to look and sound as much like a Christian as possible. They will often pepper their talk with phrases like “Praise the Lord” and “Hallelujah” and “Glory to God.” They can even quote scripture and speak of Christ and talk about heaven.

A false prophet may be a Sunday School teacher or a Church leader or even a preacher.

But beneath that “glossy spiritual exterior” lies the heart of a ravenous wolf that is out to willfully destroy the work of the Lord.

6. That word “ravenous” is important. Sometimes a preacher or teacher in a Church may say something out of ignorance or lack of understanding that doesn’t line up with the scriptures. They don’t have any malicious intent to deliberately lead anyone astray. They just need to go back and study the scriptures some more. But the goal of a “false prophet” is to willfully and deliberately mislead the sheep for his own selfish gain.

Well if a “false prophet” looks like a Christian and talks like a Christian and acts like a Christian how can we recognize him as a false teacher?
Jesus tells us in VERSES 16-20......

III. THE DETECTION OF FALSE PROPHETS (vs. 16-20)

16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?

17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

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

20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

1. On one hand Jesus has told us it may be difficult to recognize a false prophet because they are “wolves dressed in sheep's clothing.” But now on the other hand Jesus tells us a simple way to recognize “false prophets” and that is CAREFULLY EXAMINE THEIR “FRUITS.”

2. You can recognize a true preacher or a true teacher of God by “his fruit.” The “fruit of the Holy Spirit” will be evident in his life. You will see the fruit of LOVE....JOY....PEACE....PATIENCE.....KINDNESS....GOODNESS.....FAITHFULNESS....GENTleness......and SELF-CONTROL.

That doesn't mean the true preacher is “perfect or sinless” or that he doesn't have an occasional “bad day” or “moments of weakness or failure.” But it does mean on the whole, his life is characterized by “the fruit of the Holy Spirit.”
3. Likewise you can recognize a “false prophet” or a “false teacher” by his fruit.

Let me give you just a few of the characteristics of “a false prophet” that will help you to identify him when you see him.

(1) A False Prophet Will Generally Have A Large **FOLLOWING**.

**II PETER 2:1,2 (NKJV)** “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the LORD who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. (now listen closely......) And MANY will follow their destructive ways.**

False prophets generally have a large following because they tell people what they want to hear rather than telling them the truth. A false prophet does not preach against sin. A false prophet never mentions repentance ......or ......hell......or God's judgment. A false prophet preaches only peace and prosperity. A false prophet assures his followers if they will just think positively and live sincerely everything between them and GOD will be OKAY!

(2) A False Prophet is motivated by **MATERIALISTIC** gain.

**II PETER 2:3 (NKJV)** *By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words.*”

A false prophet is NOT concerned about the souls and eternal welfare of his followers, he is only concerned about padding his own wallet.
A false prophet associates his own material prosperity as evidence God’s blessings are on his ministry. Well if material prosperity is evidence of God’s blessings on a man’s ministry then Jesus Christ was “spiritually bankrupt” because Jesus said of Himself, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head.” (Matthew 8:20)

(3) A false prophet will refuse to acknowledge **JESUS** as the only **WAY** to heaven.

The apostle Paul writes in **Galatians 1:8,9 (NKJV)**

“**But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before so now say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him**

**II John, verses 9-11**

“Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ, does NOT have God. **He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him. For he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.**

Brothers and sisters, be very, very careful what TV preachers you allow into your house through the television. Many of them abstain from teaching that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven. Such a man is a false teacher!
(4) One other notable characteristic is that a false prophet may be able to perform counterfeit MIRACLES.

False prophets have always used “black magic” or “counterfeit miracles” to gain a following. In Exodus 7 we can read the account of Pharaoh’s magicians doing some of the same signs and wonders Moses was doing.

In Acts 19 we read about the “Seven Sons of Sceva” who were performing exorcisms in the name of Jesus.

In Revelation 13:13,14a (NKJV) tells us about the Great False Prophet who will rise up in the days of the Great Tribulation. John tells us.........

“ He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs....”

We are living in a day and time when many people who claim to be Christians are extremely vulnerable to being led astray by “false teachers.” One reason is because of the biblical illiteracy in our Churches. Many professing Christians rarely if everything study the Bible on their own which leaving themselves wide open to deception. Another reason so many are vulnerable to false teachers is because they are looking for “spiritual signs” or “a spiritual experience” or a certain “spiritual feeling.” These are exactly the kinds of people “false teachers” prey upon.

Do you need something in addition to the Bible to validate your faith? If so, then you especially need to BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS!
Chuck Swindoll tells the story about a friend of his who attended a get together in the elegant home of a doctor in the Miami area of Florida.

The doctor's wife served *hors d’oeuvres* consisting of *meat on little crackers*........*with a wedge of imported cheese*........*bacon chips*......*and an olive topped with a sliver of pimento.* She served the morsels on a beautiful silver tray. The *hors d’oeuvres* were “a hit” with the guest who kept coming back for more!

But there was a little secret the guests didn’t know. The doctor’s wife had just graduated from a gourmet culinary school and wanted to put her cooking skills to the ultimate test. She wanted to see if she could dress up something that people wouldn’t normally eat and have them eat it. Imagine the surprised look on the faces of all the guests when they discovered “the meat” on those *hors d’oeuvres* they had been gobbling up was actually gourmet dog food. *(Don’t any of you get any bright ideas about the next fellowship dinner!)*

The point of this true story is this: Make something *look good enough* and *taste good enough* and even the most intelligent among us can be fooled! This is especially true when it comes to religion. This is why JESUS warns us to “*Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.*”

Just because a man looks religious and sounds religious doesn’t mean he’s working for GOD! Listen carefully to what the apostle Paul wrote in *II Corinthians 11:13-15.*

“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! 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.

*(II Corinthians 11:13-15 NKJV)*

“*By their fruits you shall know them .”*