

Living Word Fellowship Church
Sunday, October 11, 2026 (8am service)
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“Beware of Wolves”
Matthew 7:15-23

Introduction:

Today I want to address a vital topic: **RECOGNIZING FALSE TEACHERS**. Because a false teacher is a **predatory wolf disguised as a sheep**, today’s message is titled **“BEWARE OF WOLVES.”**

The book of Matthew presents Jesus as **Messiah of Word and Deed**. Our text is part of the book’s section known as the **“*Sermon on the Mount*.”** Matthew gives an authentic presentation of the teachings of Jesus Christ.

1. The **Sermon on the Mount** is Jesus’ foundational ethical and spiritual lesson. It is His first major discourse after His baptism and temptation in the wilderness and includes some of the most-quoted passages in the gospels — *if not the entire Bible*. It is also one of the longest discourses He gives in any gospel and comprises **Matt. Chapters 5-7**.
2. The **Sermon on the Mount** was given primarily to His disciples, although it was also directed toward the religious crowd --- *Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, priests*, etc. The crowd listened as Jesus introduced the nature of kingdom living. The setting was on the mountainside on the northwestern shores of the Sea of Galilee.

In **Matthew 7:15-23** Jesus warns us of predatory wolves. He exposes their dangers and their teaching. The warning in these verses against **pseudo-prophets** was readily understandable to Jesus’ audience. By the time Matthew was writing his Gospel, the significance of this warning was even more evident in the early church, for they were confronted with **Gnosticism and with the legalists of the circumcision**.¹

¹ Myron S. Augsburger, *The Preacher’s Commentary* (Vol. 24, Matthew). Nelson Publications, 1982, page 94.

In our text, Jesus warns of **predatory wolves** as He continues to establish His teaching as the one way by contrasting it with the claims of other teachers. Three lines of truth emerge from the text: first, predatory wolves are **real** (v.15a), second, predatory wolves are **dangerous** (v.15b), and third, predatory wolves are **identifiable** (vv.16-20).

I. Predatory Wolves are REAL: Matt. 7:15a, “Beware of false prophets.” - Jesus tells His followers what they should do and why.

A. What should we do? “WATCH OUT!” Jesus emphatically warns, “***Beware!***”

Christ says, “***Beware.***” The word “**beware**” (*prosechó*) means to watch out, to be on guard, and to pay attention. The word is emphatic and the warning is clear and strong - **be cautious and very attentive**.

B. Why should we do it? “***Watch out***” because ***false prophets exist***.

Christ states there is a need to take heed because false prophets exist. They are real. Christ is reminding His audience of their present existence. Yet false prophets were nothing new among God’s people:

1. Ever since the catastrophic events in the garden of Eden, God’s truth has been distorted. God gave specific orders to Adam (**Gen. 2:15-21**) which he was to protect, preserve and pass along. However, Satan, the father of lies and of every false preacher denied and distorted God’s truth (**Gen. 3:1-7**).
2. The prophet Moses warned about false prophets and how God’s people could distinguish truth from error (**Deut. 18:20-22**).
3. The prophet Jeremiah also warned God’s people (**Jer. 23:16**).

4. The prophet Ezekiel even criticized and condemned false prophets (Ezek. 22:28) - This verse criticizes and condemns prophets who speak lies and lead people astray, claiming divine authority when they have not received it. The phrase "***plastered them with untempered mortar***" refers to a superficial and ineffective attempt to cover up flaws or issues, particularly in a spiritual or moral context, and thus providing a false sense of security without addressing deeper problems.

Without detailing their teachings, Christ warns His followers that false prophets are **a real and present danger**. Their influence is **like a deadly virus**, keeping people from seeking the true gate and path to heaven (**7:13-14**).

How does the virus of false teaching get into the church? According to Jude, **it creeps in unnoticed**:

→ Jude 4, "***For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of God into lewdness and deny the only LORD God and our Lord Jesus Christ.***" The Greek translated "***crept in unawares***" is a uniquely compounded word meaning to "***sink down in alongside***." What could be more descriptive? We can ill afford to be so consumed in our *TIKTOK*, *Podcast*, and *YouTube* absorption of preachers that we fail to notice the destructive influence it has on our minds, thus opening our church's up to "***every wind of doctrine***." (Eph. 4:11-14).

We must keep our hearts and minds open to the truth of God's Word. Amen!
Predatory wolves are real. But notice second, predatory wolves are dangerous.

II. Predatory Wolves are DANGEROUS: Matt. 7:15b, "*who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.*"

The description of false prophets coming in sheep's clothing but being ravenous wolves is designed to show the danger of their influence. Sheep were a part of life. So were wolves. The idea of a wolf masquerading as a sheep was the height of cunning and deceit. These false prophets are like hungry wolves that

disguise themselves as sheep. By doing so, they pretend to be sheep though they are in fact hungry wolves who have come to prey on sheep.² Jesus states there are two interesting characteristics of the danger posed by false prophets. It is **deceptive** and **destructive**.

A. First, predatory wolves are **deceptive**.

1. Christ says they “***come to you in sheep’s clothing.***” They will look just like the rest of the flock, but that will be their disguise. And when you pull back the disguise, you will see the wolf underneath.
2. In other words, false prophets come appearing as sheep of God, looking like men and women of God, giving the outward appearance of being true believers in Jesus Christ. As such, they appear harmless, innocent, and trustworthy, but have malicious intentions.

False teaching does not always look like heresy. Sometimes it is subtle. It starts with softening truth “*for the sake of love,*” or prioritizing feelings over faithfulness. But the enemy loves that tactic—**because watered-down truth is no truth at all.** **Remember, Satan loves hanging out near the cross.**

B. Second, predatory wolves are **destructive**.

Christ adds, “***but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.***”

1. The term “***ravenous***” (***extremely hungry or insatiable***) indicates their intent to harm and exploit. While outwardly appearing to be innocent sheep, inwardly they are anything but sheep. They are **vicious pretenders who prey** on the immature, unstable, and gullible.
2. Local churches must remain true to the word of God. Any deviation from the true gospel will cause us to break ranks and thereby become easy prey for the wolves who look to capitalize on confusion.

² *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series – Matthew*, by Craig S. Keener. InterVarsity Press, 1997, page 164.

3. In addition, we, individually, must continue to grow spiritually, lest we become unstable and eventually gullible. *The fierce winds of theological heresy strike extremely hard, sweeping the unstable off their feet.*

The church must remember that predatory wolves are real and dangerous. But notice thirdly they are identifiable.

III. Predatory Wolves are **IDENTIFIABLE**: Matt. 7:16-23, "***You will know them by their fruits.....***"

How can we know if a preacher is true or false? There is one revealing mark: **their fruits**. Verses 16-23 deal with the detection of false prophets, for Jesus says, "***You will know them by their fruits.***"

A. A preacher's words alone are not enough (v.16a, "***You will know them by their fruits***")

How can we know if a preacher is true or false? There is one revealing mark: **their fruits**. *What a person consistently produces in their life will reveal what is truly inside them.*

1. A person's "**fruit**" refers to the visible evidence of their character, beliefs, conduct, and influence. Jesus says, "***You will know them by their fruits.***" This phrase means that a person's true character is revealed through the actions of their life, rather than just their words.
2. Their licentious ways and destructive teaching will betray them, for a tree or plant produces fruit according to its character because **good trees bear good fruit, and bad trees bear bad fruit.**

B. A preacher's character counts (vv.16b-23)

Jesus uses metaphors to teach about discerning true followers from false prophets.

1. The core message is that **the true nature of individuals can be identified by their actions and behaviors**— like how a tree is identified by the fruit it bears. Jesus emphasizes the impossibility of an evil tree bearing good fruit (**we never mistake a tree after seeing its fruit**).
2. This principle is based on a simple analogy in horticulture. Grapes do not grow from thorns, nor figs from thistles (v.16, **“Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?”**).

These false prophets claim to have prophesied, exorcised, and affected miracles by Jesus’ name (v.22). Yet the image of the tree and the fruit remind us that wherever the real is practiced, the counterfeit will also appear. As in the natural world, so in the spiritual world, every species brings forth fruit **“after its own kind.”** In Jesus’ day, the thorns bore a small black berry, very much like the grape, and the thistles put forth a flower closely resembling that of a fig tree.³ It was the rich ripe fruit that proved the quality of the tree. **The proof of genuine faith is the fruit of one’s life.**

A preacher can say the right things, appear spiritual, or even claim to speak for God. But Jesus directs attention to what their lives are producing. **We need to be discerning and look at their:**

- ***Character*** — Are they honest, humble, and trustworthy?
- ***Teaching*** — Does what they teach agree with God's Word?
- ***Conduct*** — Does their behavior correspond with their teaching?
- ***Influence*** — What do the lives of those who follow them look like?

Jesus is simply teaching His followers that a prophet’s fruits are to be critically evaluated. The **fruits of his profession** and **fruits of his production** are to be carefully evaluated considering the Word of God. If what he says and what he does, does not line up under the truth of God’s word, he is false, a predatory wolf, a counterfeiter.

God’s Word—not money, notoriety, fame, self-awareness, or even a large membership—is our **standard for truth**. When we hear preaching, we should ask,

³ *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Volume 8, *Matthew, Mark, Luke*) Frank E. Gaebelin, Editor, Zondervan Publishing, 1984, page 191.

“Do these preachers proclaim and live the truth of God’s Word?” If not, they are counterfeiters—predatory wolves. **God’s Word is our standard for truth.**

Conclusion:

Friends, we cannot live in a vacuum. We must be wide-awake, alert, and constantly aware that predatory wolves are **real**, **dangerous**, and **identifiable**. Only then can we be safeguarded against the onslaught of false preaching today. **What can we do now?** How can we be confident of building our lives on **THE ROCK?** (7:24-27) --- **By committing to three guiding principles:**

1. **Acknowledge the existence of false preachers exist:** 2 Peter 2:1, “*But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false prophets among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.*” False preachers come in sheep’s clothing, pretending to be sheep, though they are in fact hungry wolves that have come to prey on weak, immature, gullible, and even haughty sheep. They are both deceptive and destructive, turning the gospel of grace into a gospel of greed.
2. **Aggressively pursue spiritual maturity to ease the threat of false teaching:** Eph. 4:11-14, “*that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.*” We must continue our pursuit of maintaining a strong doctrinal position in our teaching, believing, and behaving. Each member must regularly participate in the preaching and teaching venues provided by our church.
3. **Recognize and respond to the voice of Jesus Christ.** The Bible says Christ’s sheep know His voice, follow Him alone and not the voice of strangers: John 10:4-5, “*And when He brings out His own sheep, He goes before them; and the sheep follow Him for they know His voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.*” These verses highlight the importance of recognizing and responding to Jesus’ teachings and thus **emphasizing our personal intimacy with Christ’s words** (“voice” e.g., Bible) and the development of our spiritual discernment. This is why **personal** and **corporate** Bible study is essential to our spiritual health, and the development of a perceptive listening hear for our Shepherd Jesus’ voice.

I ask you: “***Are you drawn to any movement or teaching that contradicts sound, healthy biblical truth?***” Perhaps you feel something is missing in your life, so you turn to social media platforms and presentations where the preacher’s messages scratch your “***itching ears***” --- **to fulfill personal desires and wishes** (2 Tim. 4:3-4). If so, pray and call on the Lord. Confess it as sin, repent, and turn away from it. God will hear and answer you.

REMEMBER: *Wolves Still Wear Sheep Clothing*