Beware of False Prophets

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 March 2025

Preacher: Cedric Moss

[0:00] Our scripture reading is taken from Deuteronomy chapter 13 verses 1 to 5 and Matthew chapter 7 verses 15 to 20.

! Deuteronomy 13. If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, let us go after other gods which you have not known and let us serve them, you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams.
For the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.
You shall walk after the Lord your God and bear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice. And you shall serve him and hold fast to him.
But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death because he has taught rebellion against the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery to make you leave the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk.
[1:23] So you shall purge the evil from your midst. Matthew chapter 7 verses 15 to 20.

Matthew chapter 7 verses 15 to 20.
Matthew chapter 8 verses 15 to 20.
Matthew chapter 8 verses 15 to 20.
hair. And it was so eye-catching that it was difficult not to stare at it. It was full, it was long, and she had this very unusual kind of tint in it. And she was giving a talk at an event that we attended.
[3:27] And I must say, as I listened to this woman, I could not help but keep looking at her hair and asking myself, is that a hair or is that a wig? And so we got home and had this discussion whether this woman was wearing a wig or that was her hair. And Alexei was convinced that it was a wig. Daniel was convinced it was her hair. And I was just confused. I had no idea what it was. And the more they talked about it, the more confused I became. And I actually saw this woman a few times after that.

And I was so wondering, is this this woman's hair? Or is that a wig or a weave that she is actually wearing?
And I still don't know. Was that? No, no, no. I did not ask. I wasn't that bold to ask. But I still don't know. I still am not really convinced whether that was her real hair or not her real hair.
But this morning, I think we should all be grateful that although we could be deceived about whether a woman's hair is her hair, the Lord has not left us in the dark about knowing a true prophet from a false prophet.
He didn't leave that to chance. He instructed us in His Word about how we can recognize false prophets. And that's the section of the Sermon on the Mount that we come to this morning as we work our way through the Sermon on the Mount and as we are coming to the close of it.
[5:19] We've actually come to what I would consider the most sobering section of the Sermon on the Mount. And the reason it's sobering is that Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount with three warnings.

Three very sober warnings. The first warning is about false prophets. And interestingly, He follows up with that and He talks about false conversions.
People who believe they're saved and they're not saved. And then He talks about false foundations. People who are living their lives and building their lives but they're building on the wrong foundation. And these are sober warnings because in each case, Jesus issues the catastrophe that comes from all of these three false situations that He talks about.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-08 18:55:47

False prophets, false conversions and false foundations. This morning, our attention is going to be directed to what Jesus has to say about false prophets and then over the next two weeks, we'll consider the other two false conversions and false foundations.
[6:35] Let's take a moment to pray and ask the Lord to speak to our hearts. Father, would you speak to our hearts this morning? Lord, you know where each one of us is.

Lord, you know those of us who have already fallen prey to false prophets. Those of us who are prone to fall prey to false prophets.
And we ask that you would speak to us, Lord. Lord, may we not be among those who cannot detect whether someone speaking in your name supposedly is truly doing that.
And so, would you help us now, Lord? Would you help me, Father, to be faithful to your word? And Lord, use your word for the profit of all of our souls.
Especially, pray, Lord, for those who do not know you. they don't know you in the pardon of their sins. Would you especially speak to their hearts this morning?
[7:43] And would you work in their lives by the power of your Holy Spirit? We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Notice in verse 15 that Jesus begins his first warning with the word beware.

And whenever we see beware, it's calling our attention to something that is dangerous. For example, if you are walking and there are high power lines nearby, there will be a sign that says beware high power lines.
Or maybe you go to someone's home with bad dogs and there will be a sign that says beware of the dogs. We are faced with a lot of warnings throughout life and sometimes we don't heed them. Sometimes we figure we understand the danger and we don't pay attention to the warnings. Brothers and sisters, this is one occasion where we must not do that.
This is where we must listen to the Lord Jesus who cannot lie and who does not cry wolf but who warns us beware of false prophets.
[9:01] words. In these six verses Jesus gives us a very sobering warning and here's how I would summarize it. Not everyone who claims to speak for God or who seems to speak for God speaks for God.

That's the sober warning that Jesus gives us. Jesus tells us that not everyone who claims to speak for God who seems to speak for God is actually speaking for God.
And Jesus says that although those who do this will appear to be harmless he said they are ravenous wolves. And he said you need to beware of them.
He says beware of false prophets. But brothers and sisters as dangerous as false prophets are we need not be fearful about falling prey to them if we take seriously these words of Jesus and we take them to heart.
If we do that we will be protected against falling prey to false prophets. And so this morning what I want to do in our remaining time is I want us to consider four important truths about false prophets that if we take to heart we will be protected against them.
[10:37] The first truth is this false prophets are real false prophets are real false prophets exist and so he says in the very opening verse 15 beware of false prophets false and the mere fact that he does that is to tell us they're real this is no idle warning from the Lord Jesus and so we would be wise to pay attention to what he says.

So who are these false prophets prophets that Jesus tells us to be we're about. Some people think that false prophets are those who predict the future and it doesn't come to pass.
Hurricane season is coming up pretty soon and a lot of prophets will come out of the woodworks and once they see the forecast they will begin to tell us we live in Hurricane Alley a lot of islands and there's a good chance that a hurricane will hit us almost every hurricane season.
But some people measure false prophets by those who say something is going to come to pass but it doesn't come to pass that's a false prophet. It's not that simple.
It's not that simple. And the reason it's not that simple is because of the first passage that was read this morning. The first passage that was read this morning was from Deuteronomy 13 verses 1 to 5.
[12:21] And in that passage Moses told the children of Israel that there are those prophets who can say that something is going to come to pass and it does come to pass.

And we see examples of this in life and in scripture. And Moses says that's not enough. That is not enough because someone says this is going to happen and it happens to say okay that's a true prophet.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-08 18:55:47

Moses says this one more task. He says if this person is leading you astray to not worship the true and the living God don't listen to that person.
He says that person is to be purged from your midst. That person is to be destroyed from your midst because that person is contrary to God. Seeming to speak for God but not speaking for God.
And so the issue about whether they could predict the future accurately or not is not a sufficient measurement about what a true prophet really is.
[13:30] And so the first thing we should see from these words of Jesus is that Jesus is using this word prophet in a broad sense. Not just about predicting the future and being right or not.

It is those who stand and proclaim to be speaking on God's behalf. And so this is a broad meaning and it would include all preachers, all those who stand before people.
And what they are saying is I am standing on God's behalf. And friends it is no light thing to know the God of scripture and to presumptuously stand before any group of people and say I am speaking on behalf of God.
He is a God who has struck people down who have taken him to be an idol. And so Jesus is using prophet in a broad sense and it would be anyone who claims to be speaking God's word to God's people people on God's behalf.
And here's the reality. False prophets will abound until the Lord returns. They will always be with us and we need to be able to recognize them.
[14:56] Jesus says that we can and we need to be able to do so. So that's the first truth that we must take to heart. False prophets are real.

Not fable, not fiction, they are real. And friends, if we don't take this to heart, we are already at risk. Let's take it to heart.
They are real. The second truth about false prophets we find in these verses, we find it actually in the latter part of verse 15. False prophets are dangerous.
False prophets, are dangerous. And it's not just that false prophets are bad. They are bad. But false prophets are dangerous and Jesus tells us why they're dangerous at the end of verse 15.
Look again at what he says. He says, they come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves, and so they appear harmless, but they are very harmful.
[16:04] sheep's clothing. So this reference to sheep's clothing points to, it's a cultural reference in Jesus' day.

One of the things that shepherds did in that day to show themselves a shepherd is they wore a garment that was of the wool of the sheep. sheep. And so when Jesus says they come in sheep's clothing, it was that they presented themselves pretending to be shepherds who would protect the sheep and not destroy the sheep, protect the sheep from the wolves.
But Jesus said they themselves are wolves. They have all the upper trappings of being a shepherd, being one who cares for the sheep. And he says, but within who they are, they are ferocious wolves who will destroy the sheep.
And this poses a difficulty for us. And the difficulty is that the false shepherd, the false prophet, is not easily detected by initial or casual observation.
You can't just tell it by an initial or casual observation. It takes more than just that superficial approach. And so why are they actually dangerous?
[17:40] Well, the danger that they pose to us, it's not such a physical danger, it's a spiritual danger. They can bring harm to our very soul.

They put our spiritual lives at risk. In 2 Timothy 2, 17 to 18, the Apostle Paul talks about two false prophets, Hymenius and Philetus.
He called them by name. And he identified the error that they were teaching. They were teaching that the resurrection had already happened and they were destroying the faith of many people.
One of the ways we can detect false prophets is false prophets would lead the sheep astray and they would do so by pointing them to the broad way.
We looked at this last time. In verses 13 to 14 where Jesus says, enter by the narrow gate for the gate that is wide and the way that is easy leads to destruction and many are they that enter that way.
[18:54] For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to light and those who find it are few. Many false prophets point gullible people to the broad gate and the easy way, both of which will lead to destruction.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-08 18:55:47

And again, it is no wonder that Jesus moves from talking about false prophets to talk about false assurance, talk about false conversions, those who believe they are converted and are not.
And the clear implication is that they have come under false teaching, they have come under false prophets. Now, wouldn't it be sad if Jesus ended right at this point and only said to us, beware of false prophets.
If he did that, then we would all have to try to figure out how are we to beware of false prophets. But he doesn't do that. He goes on and what he tells us is that false prophets are recognizable.
And this is my third point. Notice what he says again in verses 16 to 18. He says, you will recognize them by their fruits.
[20:15] Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? So every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.

A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. And then look at what he says in verse 20. Thus, you will recognize them by their fruits.
notice that two times, in two verses, verses 16 and 20, Jesus says, we will recognize false prophets by their fruits.
In other words, by evaluating the fruit of the life and the ministry of those who claim to be speaking on God's behalf, we're able to identify whether a person is a true or a false.
prophet. Jesus uses two illustrations. He talks about whether it's possible to get grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles.
[21:30] And then verses 17 and 18, he makes a conclusion about good trees bearing good fruit and bad trees bearing bad fruit. The disciples of Jesus understood fully what he was saying to them because it was a very real experience that they had living in that part of the world.

Listen to a quote from D.A. Carson that explains why Jesus uses these two illustrations. He writes, in Jesus' day, everyone knew that the buckthorn had little black berries which could be mistaken for grapes.
fruits and that there was a thistle whose flower from a distance might be mistaken for a fig. But no one would confuse the buckthorn and the grape once he started to use the fruit to make some wine. No one would be taken in by thistle flowers when it came to eating figs for supper. The point is that from a distance, things may not be so clear, but as we come close, as we inspect the fruit that we are partaking of, then we are able to determine and discern exactly what it is we're dealing with.
And so the whole idea is that we are to be able to see up close. false. And here's one of the first practical realities about knowing false shepherds and recognizing those who are true or not.
[23:11] The Lord Jesus never intended that those who speak for him be distant from the people to whom they speak. I say that's one of the biggest issues that many people face.

they watch someone on television, listen to someone on some podcast whose life they cannot see, whose life they do not know.
And they are not able to see what flows out of that person's life because they are at a distance. And everything from a distance is a bit hazy. The Lord Jesus intended that there would be proximity between those who speak for him and the people to whom they speak.
Of all the different metaphors that Jesus could use to talk about those who would care for his people, the one that we have that is very prominent is shepherd.
And one of the things that shepherds do is shepherds get close to the sheep. Shepherds put their hands on the sheep. Shepherds would run their fingers through the wool of the sheep. They would know the condition of their flock.
[24:23] And when we translate that into our own lives, there needs to be proximity, brothers and sisters, not distance. The Lord did not give superstars to the church.

The Lord did not give elites to the church to lead the church. He gave shepherds. He gave those who would be near, who would know the sheep.
Lord Jesus speaks about his people in such a tender way. He says, my sheep know my voice, and they follow me. So what is the fruit of a person's life who claims to be representing God?
Over the centuries, many church leaders have wrestled with this question. Some say the fruit is conduct. Others say the fruit is the doctrine, the teachings that they espouse.
And I think the best answer which we find in scripture is it's not one or the other, it is actually both.
And so in 1 Timothy 4, 16, in the New International Version, this is what it says.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-08 18:55:47

[25:42] Paul says to Timothy, watch your life and doctrine closely. persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

It's a really profound instruction that Paul gave to Timothy. He said, Timothy, watch your life and watch your doctrine.
If you do that, you will save yourself and those who hear you. The opposite is true. If a minister is careless with his life, careless with his doctrine, sloppy with his life, sloppy with his doctrine, he can very well be deceived on his way to hell and those who follow him will follow hard behind him.
And so if a man is claiming to be representing God and speaking God's word on God's behalf to God's people, we should ask questions like does his life exhibit the fruit of the spirit?
Does it show Christ's likeness? Does his life bear the fruit of love and patience and kindness and goodness and self-control?
[27:02] people. But again, it's not only his life, it's also his doctrine. And this puts a responsibility on us.

Because we cannot evaluate the doctrine of a person if we ourselves don't know what is sound doctrine. That's the only way to be in a position to say that's unsound and that is sound.
We ourselves must be people of the book, must be people who understand what is sound and what is unsound. Kent Hughes is a retired pastor, very godly man, had many decades of very fruitful ministry.
And he offers four doctrinal tests to help us to evaluate the doctrine of those who claim to speak on God's behalf.
And here's what he writes. First he says, a false prophet avoids preaching on such things as holiness, righteousness, justice, and the wrath of God.
[28:22] They preach on God's love, but not on God's wrath. They preach on God's forgiveness, holiness, but not on God's holiness. The second thing he writes is, he avoids preaching on the doctrine of final judgment or distorts it.

Third he writes, he fails to emphasize the fallenness and depravity of mankind. death. And then fourth he writes, the false prophet de-emphasizes the substitutionary death and atonement of Christ.
He might refer to Christ's death on the cross, but he reduces it to principles of life. And not so much that your sin and my sin required that death that Christ died.
That our sin was so bad and so hideous that nothing else could atone for our sins than the death that Jesus died, the manner of the death, the extent of his suffering.
That's what our sins deserve. God. But you know, one of the things as I thought about this, you know what I believe?
[29:53] He must not be a lover of money. He must have a life that is free of greed. And it is one of the greatest indicators of false profits.

false. And the question is, why is it that there are people who can be glaringly failing on this qualification for those who are qualified to address God's people, to care for God's people?
Why is it that so many their lives are devoid of the virtue that they should have? Not being a lover of money, not being a greedy person, person, and yet they have some of the biggest platforms in the world.
How is that? Why is that? I'll tell you why that is. It is that way because we have not taken seriously the sin of the love of money and greed.
We're not taking it seriously. Sadly, many in God's house, many who are among those who profess to belong to Jesus themselves are infected by the love of money.
[31:15] Themselves are infected by materialism. Themselves are infected by greed. And therefore, in the lives of those who say they speak on God's behalf, they give it a pass.

We allow it to pass. Brothers and Sisters, I will tell you, you show me a man who is claiming to speak on God's behalf and who loves money and who is a greedy person, I will show you a false prophet.
Some are so enthralled with themselves. They must have a this and must have a that, must have a bigger this and a bigger that.
And there are people, oh, that's the man of God, he needs to have that. He can't be in the airport with everybody else, he needs a jet. He can't drive a used car, he needs a new car every year.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-08 18:55:47

No, brothers and sisters, those are signs of false prophets. And if we will take to heart what scripture tells us about those who qualify to stand and speak on God's behalf to God's people, we will protect ourselves from such people.
[32:33] And I frankly think that one of the biggest reasons that so many among God's people are filled with greed and the love of money and materialism is that is what they're being infected by, by those they sit under.

Because there's so many who go that way, there's great comfort in believing that you must have all. J.C. Riler, deceased Anglican bishop from the UK, this is what he writes, sound doctrine and holy living are marks of true prophets.
Sound doctrine and holy living are marks of true prophets. brothers and sisters, sisters, one of my greatest concerns for us is that we can be undiscerning.
And we think it's okay to turn the television on and listen to someone who may speak eloquently, may have a big name, may attract a great crowd.
We listen to their programs, read their books. And brothers and sisters, we know nothing of their lives.
[34:10] And we can be so enthralled with what they have to say that we don't even have the ability to discern what they're saying. Again, the Lord never intended that for us. He intended that there would be shepherds who would be near to His people, whose lives would be open to them, that they're able to evaluate it.

And that's the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus, for three years, lived with His disciples. And even Judas, after betraying the Lord Jesus, Judas knew that the Lord was innocent.
Judas said, I have betrayed innocent blood. Jesus had nothing to hide. He lived an open life before His disciples, before the Pharisees, before them all.
And they could find no fault in Him. Brothers and sisters, one of the worst things we could do is place a premium on charisma over character.
Again, I invite you to go back and look at those qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, and what you will find is that there's no premium on charisma.
[35:35] The bulk of the qualifications on character. There's only one really on ability, the ability to teach.

all the others are on character. And so I encourage us, brothers and sisters, let us not be spiritually promiscuous. The church is filled with people who are spiritually promiscuous.
They jump in bed with every kind of doctrine without discernment. They must be discerning. They must be those who are discreet.
and who think. Some of you are probably wondering why all the heavy talk. Because this is a concern, brothers and sisters. This is the first warning the Lord Jesus gives us as he concludes the Sermon on the Mount.
So in this warning from Jesus, we learn that false prophets are real, false prophets are dangerous, false prophets are recognizable and fourth, finally and briefly, we learn that false prophets are doomed.
[36:54] False prophets are doomed. Jesus makes this point in verse 19. Look again at what he says. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Now think about that statement. is that true literally that every single tree in the entire world that doesn't bear good fruit is cut down?
We know that not to be true. Some of us may have trees in our yard that don't bear fruit at all, much less bad fruit, and we don't cut it down.
But Jesus is not talking about literal trees. Jesus is talking about the tree of false prophets. And he says, every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.
This is the sober end of false prophets. And this is the act of a merciful and just God who will do this.
[38:03] And it helps us to see how seriously the Lord takes false prophets false prophets will be finally judged and finally destroyed.

No mistake made. It will be a perfect judgment from a perfect judge, the Lord himself. I have no doubt this morning that some of you would have a difficult time believing that some of the people that you hold up and listen to are false prophets and will succumb to this end.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-08 18:55:47

because for whatever reason you find them helpful to you this way or that way or you like them, you like their personality, you like something about them, that doesn't give them a pass.
If they are false prophets, this is the end of them. This is their final outcome. And so why then would we want to cozy up to someone like that? Why then would we want to lend our heir to someone like that?
Why would we want to put our souls at spiritual risk with someone like that? In Deuteronomy 18, 15, Moses told the children of Israel, as he said to the children of Israel, the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me.
[39:50] Among you from your brothers, it is to him you shall listen. Friends, Jesus is that prophet that Moses referred to.

He is the one who is greater than Moses. He is the true Moses. He's the ultimate Moses. He is the one who has brought the everlasting covenant, the new covenant, to the people of God.
And he is the one who speaks this warning to us about false prophets. He's the ultimate true prophet. He's the true Moses. And he warns us against false prophets.
prophets. Perhaps you're here this morning or you're listening online and you have not yet come to trust this prophet who speaks.
This prophet who is so concerned about the sheep that he takes the time to warn the sheep. And he is the prophet that Moses points to. He says, listen to him.
[41:04] Maybe you have not turned your heart to listen to him. I said to you this morning, listen to him. Listen to him that it may go well with your soul.

Come to him. He says, come to me. All who labor and have you laid in it, I will give you rest. I give you rest for your soul. He says, come to me and all those who come to me.
I will never turn you away. All those who come to him, he will abundantly pardon.
And they will be reconciled to God. They will have peace with God. If they were to die, they would be absent from their bodies and present with the Lord.
That is the one who speaks from these words in the Sermon on the Mount. And those of us who have heard him, those who have trusted in him, let's rejoice that God has been merciful to us to open our hearts and that we are safe in the arms of that ultimate prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ himself.
[42:28] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, would you help us to take to heart these words of the Lord Jesus.

Help us to beware of false prophets. Help us to be discerning and be willing to evaluate the fruit of their lives and their doctrine.
Lord, I pray for those who have given air to false prophets and may even be doing so now. Would you bring conviction, Lord?
Help them to see both the disobedience and the danger of exposing their souls to such ravenous wolves.
And I do pray, Lord, that as we take these things to heart, that we will be protected and guarded against false prophets, even as they abound day by day all around us.
[43:43] We pray that we will have airs to only hear the voice of the good shepherd and to follow wherever he leads. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-08 18:55:47