

Beware of false prophets

by Zac Poonen

This sermon delves into the distinction of false prophets as warned by Jesus, emphasizing the importance of recognizing them by their fruits rather than their gifts. It connects the teachings in Matthew 5, 6, and 7 to the Ten Commandments, highlighting the elevated standards set by Jesus for the church. The message underscores the need for obedience to these higher standards, contrasting the broad way of the Old Testament with the narrow way of Christ's teachings.

Scripture: Matthew 7:15, Matthew 5:21, Mark 7:8, Matthew 6:6, Matthew 7:14, Matthew 7:22, Matthew 7:16

Topics: "Discernment of False Prophets", "Obedience to Christ's Teachings"

Description

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Transcript

We were seeing how Jesus warned against false prophets. How can you distinguish a false prophet? If you read the New Testament, the first time the word false prophets comes is in Matthew 7.15. If you read the New Testament, the first time the word false prophets comes is in Matthew 7.15. In the Old Testament, we read about many false prophets. Later on, in the New Testament also, we read about false prophets.

It is good to remember when Jesus spoke about false prophets for the first time. At the end of the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5, 6 and 7, Jesus speaks about false prophets. So, whenever you read something in a big sermon, you must see it being connected to that sermon.

Matthew 5, 6 and 7 is one message. Matthew 5, 6 and 7 is one message. Another long message like that is at the Last Supper in John 14, 15 and 16.

It is good to read all of these together. At the end of that long message, he does a prayer. That is John 17.

When we look at Matthew 5, 6 and 7, this is something similar to the Ten Commandments given in the Old Testament. Before Moses, there were no standards among the Jewish people. But with Moses came the Law and the Ten Commandments.

God said, now you are a nation, you are my people, this must be your standard. Now you are a nation, you are my people, this must be your standard. When we look at the outside world, there are so many standards that God has decided.

This is what God said to the Israelites. They did adultery, worshipped idols, etc. But in your midst, it must be different.

You must not worship idols. You must keep the Sabbath day holy. You must honor your father and mother.

You must not murder, you must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not even desire your neighbor's wife.

Those are the Ten Commandments. And as Israel kept those commandments, they became higher than all the other nations, morally. Then Jesus came.

And Jesus abolished the old covenant. And said, now I am making a new covenant. So, if the standard of the world was down here, Israel with the Ten Commandments was above that.

And Jesus came and established the church with a higher standard than all that. And that is what he taught in Matthew 5, 6, and 7. And that is why in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, he said things like this. And that is why in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, he said things like this.

We read in Matthew 5, 21. That you will not commit murder. It is said in the Old Testament.

In Matthew 5, 22, I say to you, you should not get angry. The New Testament standard is don't get angry. And don't call your brother bad names.

In the Old Testament, the standard was, verse 27, don't commit adultery. But I say to you, don't even lust in your heart after a woman. In verse 28, In the Old Testament, it said, verse 31, if you divorce your wife, make sure you give her a certificate.

But I say to you, you must not divorce at all. Again, verse 33, In the Old Testament, they said, you should not make false vows. That means, you should not swear and then tell a lie.

But I say to you, you must always speak the truth, verse 37. Not only when you put your hand on the Bible, even all the time, you must speak the truth. And in the Old Testament, it said, verse 38, that you must an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

And that you must love your neighbor, verse 43, and hate your enemy. But I say to you, a higher standard, love your enemy also. So, do you see how Matthew 5 is replacing the 10 commandments? And saying, I am raising the standard above the 10 commandments.

When Israel obeyed the 10 commandments, their standard was higher than the nation. When they disobeyed it, God rejected that. Now, today, God, Jesus has raised the standard above even the 10 commandments.

And said, this is the standard for the church. Matthew chapter 5. Now you ask yourself, many of you have been Christians for many years. And you have been in other churches also.

You have heard many preachers. Here in Tuticorin, there is always some type of public meeting with preachers coming and preaching. And in all these years in your life, that you have heard hundreds of sermons.

Have you heard people teach you that you must not get angry? Or that you must not lust with your eyes after a woman? Or that you must speak the truth? That you must love your enemies? Bless those who curse you? There are many more things. Like when you give money, verse 2, don't let even your left hand know, verse 3, what your right hand is doing. That means when you give an offering even to God, nobody must know what you are giving.

How many churches obey that? Somebody comes and brings a bag in front of you, offering bag. Can you obey that verse when you put money into the bag? Everybody who is putting money into an offering bag is disobeying that verse. Because people around him are seeing.

And then in some churches, they give you an envelope and say put your name there. What are these churches doing? They are making you disobey the word of God. But have you understood that? That is why God needed another church.

Where we teach these things. So how do we collect money in our church? We keep a box. You put it there, when nobody is watching you can go and put it.

You can put it in the offering bag. In Bangalore church, the box has been there for 40 years. I don't know who is putting and who is not.

When you don't know who is putting, how do you get honor for putting? We have tried to obey this verse. God is a cheerful giver. How can you give cheerfully when somebody puts a bag in front of you? In some churches, they make you walk down to the front of the box and you have to put it there.

Everybody has to come, you cannot escape. Everybody is disobeying this verse. I am not here to judge them, God is their judge.

I am only saying, this is the standard for the church. Do you think Jesus just said these things not to be obeyed? How many Christians take it seriously? Or he said, when you pray, don't let anybody know about your praying. You must not let anybody know how long you pray or any such thing.

But I hear so many pastors and preachers talking about they spend 2 hours in prayer or 3 hours in prayer. When you hear a preacher say, this morning I had to spend 2 hours in prayer. What is the thing that comes to your mind? Oh, what a holy man.

You know what comes to my mind? Here is a person who is disobeying God's word in Matthew 6, verse 6. Why don't you feel like that? Because you have not taken Matthew 6, 6 seriously. When I hear a man boasting about how long he prays, I don't see him as a holy man even if he says he prayed for 4 hours. I see him as a man who is disobeying God's word in Matthew 6, verse 6. Then Jesus said, when you fast, verse 18, don't let anybody know about it.

Haven't you heard pastors say, I fasted for 7 days or 21 days and so many things like that. And you think, oh, what a wonderful thing. But Jesus said, when you fast, nobody must know about it.

When I hear people boasting about how long they fasted, I think there is a man who is utterly disobedient to God's word. Why don't you think like that? Why do you think, oh, what a holy man. And maybe you also start following such people and talking about your fasting.

Dear brothers and sisters, that is how churches have lowered the standard of God's word and disregarded it. It has become a tradition in some churches for pastors to boast about how much they fast and pray. I think of what Jesus said in Mark chapter 7. Verse 13.

He said it three times. Let me read it all three times. Mark 7, verse 8. You neglect the commandment of God and you hold to your tradition.

What is the commandment of God? Don't let anybody know when you give, when you pray, when you fast. What is the tradition of men? Write your name on the envelope and give the money. Tell people how long you prayed.

Tell people how long you fasted. That is the tradition of men. Jesus says, you neglect the commandment of God and you keep the tradition of men.

And he says it again. Verse 9. You set aside the commandment of God to keep your tradition. And he says it a third time.

Verse 13. You invalidate the word of God by your tradition. When Jesus says three times in the space of one minute, it must be a pretty serious thing.

How many times have you heard anyone preach to you that when you pray or fast or give, nobody must know what you give? I'm just trying to tell you that the things Jesus raised the standard, but that standard is not being preached in most churches. So if people don't hear about it, how will they live with that standard? Supposing God gave Moses the Ten Commandments and he never told anybody about it. Supposing Moses had said, Oh, don't commit adultery.

How can we preach that? People are so weak in this area, they will fall now and then. Don't lust after your neighbor's wife. How can we preach that? People will do it.

But he didn't say that. He said, these are the Ten Commandments God has given you. Now when Jesus raised that standard, it is the responsibility of every servant of God to say, this is the standard which God, Jesus has laid down for the church.

This is the standard which God has laid down for the church. And then he said, Matthew 7, verse 14, this gate for this new life that I've been talking about is very small. The way is very narrow.

That is a broader way. But I am preaching a narrow way. We can compare it to the Old Testament.

Here is a broad way that says don't commit murder. But I am saying a narrow way, don't get angry. Here is a broad way which says don't commit adultery.

But I am showing you a narrow way, don't even lust in your mind. Here is a broad way which says when you put your hand on your Bible, speak the truth. Here is a narrow way which says you must always speak the truth 24 hours a day.

Here is a broad way which says you are permitted to hate your enemy. Here is a narrow way which says you must love your enemies also. Here is a broad way which says when you give some money, it's quite alright if you get a little honor in the church for that.

But here is a narrow way which says when you give money, don't get any honor, don't let anybody know that you gave. Here is a broad way which says when you pray and fast, it's alright to testify about it. Because you will get some honor, people will respect you as a man of God.

But here is a narrow way which says don't tell anybody. God will honor you, why do you want the honor of men? Do you see now the difference between the narrow way and the broad way? And I want to tell you in most churches, they do not preach the narrow way. Am I saying something which is not in the Bible? You know, many times when I preach, people come to me and say, Brother Zach, I didn't even know that was in the Bible, now my eyes are being opened to see it.

How is it I didn't see it after reading it for so many times? The Bible says, these things are hidden from the clever and the intelligent. God reveals it to babes. That means those who come with a humble attitude and say, Lord teach me your word.

And those who are willing to get rid of all the traditions they have got from preachers in all their years. This is the narrow way that leads to life. You know it is a narrow way.

The Old Testament way was much broader. A lot of people who could fit into the Old Testament way can't fit into the narrow way. Why has God made this standard? Because he wants us all to be 100% free from sin.

Because he is a loving father. Let me ask you. Do you want your children to be 100% free from sickness? Supposing your children have got 3 or 4 sicknesses.

And you take it to a doctor. Will you say, doctor if you cure my child of just two of those sicknesses that is enough. One or two sicknesses if they remain it is okay.

No father or mother will be like that. You will say, doctor I want my child to be completely free from sickness. That is how our heavenly father is.

He wants us to be completely free from sin. And then Jesus said, Verse 15 Beware of false prophets. So now that you have heard me say all this, now do you know what a false prophet is? Now that you have heard me say all this, now do you know what a false prophet is? A false prophet is not the one who says Jesus Christ is not God.

A false prophet is the one who says Jesus Christ is God. He died for your sins. He rose again from the dead.

But it is not serious if you get angry. It is not serious if you lust with your eyes. It is not so serious if you tell a few lies.

Do you think that is a false prophet? That is a false prophet Jesus is speaking about. It is not serious if you tell other people how much you pray and how much you fast. It is not serious if you tell other people how much money you gave for God's work.

If you get anxious, that is not a serious thing. If you love money, that is not a serious thing. Do you know how many false prophets there are preaching in Christendom today? When you read a verse, read it in the context of the whole message.

So when you read, beware of false prophets. What is he talking about in the verses before that? What is the purpose of false prophets? You read in the Old Testament, the purpose, the Old Testament false prophets were all sent by the devil. So that God would not be happy with Israel.

There were hundreds of false prophets. The true prophets were the ones who mentioned God's standard. And they were not very popular.

You read all the true prophets in the Old Testament. Their main ministry was to tell Israel, this is the standard of God, not what these false prophets are saying. That is the great need in the church of Jesus Christ today.

And I believe that is one reason God has raised up our churches, so that we can proclaim that standard. Who are the false prophets? Not those who say that some other God is the true God. In the context of these verses, a false prophet is the one who tries to make the narrow way broader.

Every preacher who tries to make the way broader than what Jesus made is a false prophet. And he said, beware of them. How will we discover them? Verse 16, you will know them by their fruits.

Look at the fruit in their life. Don't look at their gifts. You will be deceived if you look at their gifts.

Because some of these false prophets will stand before me one day, verse 22. These false prophets, they will say we prophesied in your name. We cast out demons in your name.

We did miracles in your name. Verse 22, what I will say to these false prophets. It's true, you had all these gifts.

But you have no fruit. There was sin in your secret life. Get away from me.

Just like he said, get away Satan, he will say to these people also, get away from me. So those are the false prophets. Who have gifts.

But don't have fruit. So remember this warning. You will not know them by their gifts, you will know them by their fruit.

I want to say this to all of you. If you look at the gifts a preacher has, you will be deceived. Oh, he heals the sick, he casts out demons.

He preaches so well. Look for the fruit. By their fruits you will know who is a true prophet and who is a false prophet.

We need that word in this time. If you have ears to hear, hear. What the Holy Spirit is saying to all the churches.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father. Help us to hear what you have to say to us.

We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

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