

Escaping Deception

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of sticking to God's word and being watchful and discerning in order to avoid being deceived by Satan and false prophets.

Duration: 25:21

Scripture: Matthew 7:15, Matthew 24:4, 2 Corinthians 11:14-15, 2 Thessalonians 2:10-11, 1 Timothy 4:1, Jude 1:24

Topics: "Discerning Deception", "Spiritual Discernment"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of discerning deception, particularly in the form of false prophets and teachings. It highlights the need to stick to God's word, avoid being swayed by miracles or gifts, and focus on the fruit of the Spirit, such as humility and holiness. The speaker warns against those who seek personal gain, using biblical examples to illustrate the dangers of deception and the significance of valuing the truth of God's word above all else.

Transcript

In one of our earlier studies, we considered the fact that Jesus Christ, when he died on the cross, defeated Satan completely. But he has permitted Satan still to be alive, to be active in the world. Look at all the confusion he's causing in the world.

He was active in Jesus' time as well. But the child of God, who is submitted to God, will not be overcome. He will overcome Satan in whatever way Satan may come.

The Bible speaks about Satan coming as a lion, persecuting, harassing, frightening the Christian. The Christian will overcome Satan when he comes as a lion. The Bible also speaks about Satan coming as a serpent, deceiving, and this is more dangerous.

We may think that persecution is more dangerous, but the history of Christianity teaches that persecution has never killed the church. Persecution has made the church flourish. Like someone has said, the blood of the martyrs becomes the seed of the church.

And throughout 2,000 years of church history, we find that wherever there has been persecution, many people have come to the faith. But when the devil comes as a serpent, deceiving, he has succeeded in destroying many Christians' lives. Now we can ask, why does God allow this? Why does God allow, why did God allow Satan to come inside the Garden of Eden? He didn't come as a lion, terrorizing Adam and

Eve.

He came as a serpent, deceiving, pretending to be Eve's friend. Why didn't God stop Satan from entering that garden? If Satan had been stopped, Adam and Eve would never have gone near that tree. But then they would not have been tested either.

So we learn from Genesis chapter 3 that the reason why God allowed Satan to enter that paradise of the Garden of Eden, if Satan could enter Eden, he can certainly enter your church. Your church is not as pure as Eden. If he could enter there and God permitted it, he will certainly permit Satan to come into your church and try and deceive people.

Why does God do it? For the same reason that he permitted Eve to enter the Garden of Eden, to test man. Man needs to be tested to see whether he will value God in his word or not or whether he will go according to his own reason and cleverness. That's what Eve did.

Eve depended on her own reasoning ability and so fell away. And there are many people today who ignore the word of God and are led astray. Do you know what God was testing with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when he allowed Satan to try and deceive them? Just one simple thing.

Will you trust my word? Will you go strictly according to what I have said or will you use your reason and discuss and argue back and forth with Satan? And we know that they fell. God allowed Satan to try and deceive Jesus Christ, turn these stones into bread, but Jesus would not be deceived into doing something. He just quoted scripture.

He stuck to the written word of God. Adam and Eve did not stick to the written word of God. Jesus stuck to the written word of God three times in the temptation in the wilderness, it's clear.

Now we have a choice of going these two ways. One is the way of Adam and Eve, discussing things back and forth and ignoring God's word or sticking completely to God's word. Even a little thing like I'm not going to turn the stones into bread because the Bible says man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God and God has not told me to turn the stones into bread so I'm not going to do it.

Amazing how exact Jesus was with scripture. If you're exact with scripture, I can give you a written guarantee that you will not be deceived. If you allow the New Testament teaching, the example of Jesus, the teaching of Jesus and the teaching of the epistles, the Holy Spirit's teaching in the epistles to guide you and to be your only guide and you count you accept nothing else outside of that, you will never be deceived.

But if you take things outside of that and say well that sounds reasonable, that sounds okay, I can guarantee you equally that you will be deceived. The Bible says specifically when Jesus was asked by his disciples in Matthew 24, what is the sign of the last days? When will you return? Of course there are many signs Jesus mentioned wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution etc all that but notice what he said number one and what he repeated more than once. The first thing he said was in verse four, see to it that no one deceives you.

Deception is the first thing that he mentioned in relation to the last days and further down he said again, there will be many false Christs and false prophets, verse 24 and do you know what these false prophets are going to do? They will show great signs and wonders in the name of Jesus so as to deceive if possible

even the elect. In other words these signs and wonders are going to be done in such a way that even the elect could be deceived. Now do you know that the elect are God's people? Can you imagine the elect being prone to deception if this man is doing wonders in the name of some other religion or some other God? No, impossible.

Where is the danger of the elect being deceived? Because he comes in the name of Jesus. He's a wolf but he comes in sheep's clothing. Sheep's clothing means evangelical doctrine.

He brings the Bible, he doesn't bring some other holy book, he doesn't use the name of some other God, he uses the name of Jesus but he's a deceiver because the Bible says in 2nd Corinthians 11, Satan comes as an angel of light and his servants come as ministers of righteousness. 2nd Corinthians in chapter 11 and verse 14 and 15, they will talk about righteousness etc but you got to be watchful. They will preach another Jesus, 2nd Corinthians 11 verse 3, offer you another spirit, preach another gospel to lead you astray.

Let me show you another verse in 1 Timothy chapter 4 it says in the last days this holy spirit has specifically said that some will fall away from the faith. Now this is not talking about unbelievers, these are people who have come to the faith and they fall away because they pay attention to deceitful spirits. They pay attention to deceitful spirits, they don't stick to the word of God.

Jesus said in Matthew chapter 7 that in the last day when the day of judgment many will say to him, Matthew 7 verse 22, not one or two, not one or two, not three or four, many, many could mean hundreds. Hundreds of preachers, thousands of preachers perhaps will come to him and say Lord, Lord we prophesied in the name of Jesus, we cast out demons in the name of Jesus, we did miracles in the name of Jesus and the Lord says I will turn to them and declare to them, I never knew you, I never had a personal relationship with you, you lived in sin, depart from me and they're sent to hell. Can you believe that people who did miracles in the name of Jesus are sent to hell finally? Well that all depends on whether you believe the Bible or not.

Jesus said heaven and earth will pass away, my words will not pass away. I'll tell you something, I would rather believe the words of Jesus than your reason or my reason. My understanding and your understanding can be faulty.

There are many things we are deceived by but I will not be deceived because I believe the words of Jesus. I will not accept every man who does a miracle in the name of Jesus. I will not accept every man who prophesies in the name of Jesus.

I will not accept every man who casts out demons in the name of Jesus because of Jesus' warning. What will I look for? What was it that Jesus looked for in these people? That's what I will look for. He looked for holiness.

He says you lived in sin, you never preached against sin, you lived in sin, you practiced sin and you did miracles. I know I'm safe when I seek to fellowship with someone who has the spirit of Christ who leads me away from iniquity and sin because that's what Jesus came to save us from. The other mark he said of a false prophet, notice what it says here in Matthew 7 in the Sermon on the Mount, he spoke about false prophets.

He says beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing with evangelical doctrine but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. Now what does a wolf want when he comes covering himself with the sheep's clothing in the midst of the sheep? What does he want? He hasn't come to bless the sheep. He pretends to be one of them but his aim is to get something for himself.

A wolf comes into the midst of sheep only to get something for himself. You can be pretty sure of that. So what does the wolf want? He wants to bite off whatever he can from the sheep to feed himself.

He's greedy. He's ravenous. He wants to bite off from the sheep as much as he can get from the sheep of the sheep's meat to feed himself.

That's the mark of a false prophet. One mark of a false prophet he said so how shall we detect a false prophet? Not by his doctrine. He may preach the right doctrine.

He may do miracles. He may in Jesus' name. He may cast out demons in Jesus' name.

He may preach in Jesus' name. He may be a very eloquent speaker but you will find in him a greedy desire. Listen carefully.

If you want to identify a false prophet you will find in him a greedy desire to eat up whatever is yours and take it for himself. Primarily your money, your possessions. That is the way, one of the ways to identify a false prophet.

If you only go by doctrine, the sheep's clothing, you'll be deceived. But you got to look underneath that doctrine, underneath that sheep's clothing. What is he after? He is after my money and he quotes scripture to get my money.

He talks about the need. He talks about the laborer being worthy of his hire and you never see Jesus saying such things asking people for their money. There's not a single instance of Jesus asking people to support him or his ministry.

People gave voluntarily, cheerfully. He accepted it. It's true he said the laborer is worthy of his hire but the laborer doesn't have to go around asking people because whose laborer is he? If you work for company A, do you go and ask for your salary from company B? No.

You get your salary from company A and if you don't get it from company A, maybe they forgot to give it to you, you go to the boss in company A and say, hey I worked for you for this month, where's my salary? You can't go to the man on the street and say give me my money. You didn't work for him. If you're a servant of the Lord, whom should you go to for your needs? To man? Then you're a servant of man.

I've been a servant of the Lord for 40 years. I've never gone to a single man for any need of mine, leave alone money, any other need. Because I'm serving the Lord, I go to the one I serve, the master and say, Lord here I've served you but I've never had to go to him.

He always takes care of my need even before I go. He's more faithful than any company A, B or C or X, Y or Z, any company. He's more faithful.

So remember this, beware of ravenous wolves who are eager to bite off what you have. They're not interested in your welfare. They're interested in getting from you what you have.

The other thing Jesus said here is, you will know them, verse 16, by their fruits. You can't get grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles. I'm not impressed by a man's gifts.

People can have the fruit of the spirit and the gift of the spirit but I'm looking for the gifts. No, then I'll be deceived. But if I look for the fruit, I will not be deceived.

If you're looking for the gifts, you'll be deceived. What are you looking for? I'm looking for the fruit, not the gifts. Because Jesus said, you will not know them by their gifts, you'll know them by their fruits.

Later on he speaks about gifts in verse 22. Miracles, prophecy, casting out demons, he says you won't know them by that because those fellows are not even my servants, the Lord says. They're going to hell.

So if you look for gifts, you'll be deceived. Remember this, these are warnings to protect you from deception. If you look for gifts in a man, you'll be deceived.

Look for the fruit. What fruit? The spirit of Christ. Humility, first of all.

See if this man is a humble man. See if this man is drawing you to Christ or drawing you to himself. See if he's got the spirit of Christ which is totally free from the love of money.

Was there an atom of the love of money in Jesus Christ? Not at all. Look for that in a man, you will not be deceived. Do you know in the second century, there's a little writing, one of the earliest Christian writings that has come down to us from the second century.

It's a little booklet called The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles or the Didache, D-I-D-A-C-H-E. The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles and it's a very interesting thing. I don't know who wrote it, but it's certainly come down from those ancient times more than 18, 19 centuries ago.

And one of the things it says there, because those days there were no Bibles, people didn't have Bibles. Only here and there, there were some copies of Paul's writings. Very, very few.

Most churches did not have even an Old Testament and there was a lot of wandering preachers going around claiming to be apostles, claiming to be prophets. And can you imagine what deception was going on in those days, much worse than today when we have a Bible and people are deceived. In those days they didn't have a Bible.

So the apostles gave them a simple rule to protect them, which everybody could get and be protected by. They said, if anyone comes to you and asks you for money for himself, he's a false prophet. If he asks you money for his ministry, he's a false prophet.

No, we don't ask, we ask, yeah, we certainly ask people to give money for the needs of others, but not for ourselves. That is how they protected those people in those days from deception. So listen very carefully when you find ravenous wolves coming with all their gifts.

What are they asking you for money for? Is it in the spirit of 2nd Corinthians in chapter 8 and chapter 9, where they are telling you about other poor people whom they are going to bless and they themselves live very simply? Or is it for them to live in grand style, for them to build big houses, for them to buy expensive vehicles and et cetera, et cetera? Well, those are ravenous wolves. Be careful. Now, in spite of the Lord's warnings, if you still don't pay attention, then you deserve to be deceived, deceived by these false prophets.

There are many, many ways in which the devil seeks to take advantage of God's people. What is God trying to test through all this? Exactly what he tested in Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Will you take my word as it is? Will you take my warnings or will you ignore my warnings and say, I'm okay? In the Bible, we read of people who fell down before the Lord with their head down to the ground and worshipped him.

That is how everybody worshipped the Lord God from Genesis to Revelation. We know in our Indian society what it means to show our feet to somebody. If you show the soles of your feet to someone, you show your sandals or you lift up your feet and show the bottom of the soles of your shoes to someone, it is an insult.

Whereas falling down before a person and bowing down before him with your head to the ground is worship. What do you think of people who fall down with their head down before God? They are worshipping him. What do you think of people who fall backwards and show their feet to God? They are insulting God.

And yet that goes on today with so many preachers claiming to be a manifestation of the power of God and of the Holy Spirit. Does the Holy Spirit make people insult God like that? To show their feet to God? Not at all. It's sinners who fall backward in the presence of Christ.

It's demons who throw people down. I've seen demons throw people down myself. And you read in the Bible about demons throwing people down, but never the Holy Spirit.

Jesus always lifted people up. And if people fell down before the Lord, it was with their head down to worship him, not showing him their feet. I'm just giving you an example of the amount of deception that's going on in the multitudes of Christians who look at all this and say, boy, this is the power of God.

Do you know that there were people like that even in the Acts of the Apostles who were deceived? We read in Acts chapter 8 in Samaria where Philip went to preach, there was a magician called Simon who did great, amazing things before people, all types of magic, astonishing the people with all his magic. And do you know what they called this man in Acts chapter 8 and verse 10? They called this man Simon, the great power of God. That's what they called him.

And they were paying attention to him because he, for a long time, had astonished them with his magic arts. Well, there are followers of Simon today who are also being called the great power of God. Look at that.

How are believers deceived by that? For the simple reason that they won't accept God's word. They see clearly in the Bible that Jesus never pushed anybody down, but they ignore that. They see clearly in the Bible the apostles never pushed anybody down, but they don't care for God's word.

They say, oh, this Simon is the great power of God. Well, if you want to be deceived, you can be deceived. God won't stop you.

He didn't stop Adam and Eve from being deceived. He has not stopped thousands of people from being deceived, millions of people in all these 2,000 years. He's not going to stop you if you ignore the Bible.

God's word is clear. You ignore the example of Jesus. You ignore the example of the apostles.

Then you deserve to be deceived and to be led astray and to ruin your Christianity and your life. Jesus often used to say, he who has ears to hear, let him hear. Teaching us that not everybody has a year to hear the truth.

It's the same thing today. Many people hear these things, and even though it's clear in scripture, the Lord is able to keep us from falling. He doesn't make us fall, Jude 24.

The Lord is able to keep us from falling, it says. Psalm 91 says, a thousand may fall on your side and 10,000 in your right hand, but it won't come near you. God is not in the business of making people fall.

He's in the business of making people stand. He always says, rise up and walk, not fall down and lie there and show me your feet. That's not what he says.

Dear brothers and sisters, don't be deceived in these days. Don't be deceived by these ravenous wolves who are after your money, showing you their magic arts in the name of Jesus, in order to lead you astray. Follow a person who's got the spirit of Christ, who's seeking to lead you to godliness, seeking to lead you to be free from your sin.

That's the thing that will help you in this life and help you in eternity. In the last days, there will be deceiving spirits. People will go from bad to worse.

People will be lovers of money more than lovers of God, it says in 2nd Timothy 3. Let us be careful in the days in which we live, because these are days of tremendous deception. 2nd Thessalonians 2 warns us very clearly that all those who don't receive the love of the truth, 2nd Thessalonians 2 and verse 10 and 11, will be deceived. God himself will allow them to be deceived, because they don't receive the love of the truth.

And it says there that they will be deceived by the false signs and wonders that Satan is going to manifest in verse 9. Yeah, it looks as if some good is being done by some of these things, but the question is, where does it finally lead you? To Christ, to the real Jesus, or to another Jesus? To follow God's word, or to be deceived? May God help you to hear these words and be saved and protected. God bless you.

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