

Readings

Scripture

¹⁵ "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits."
- Matthew 7:15-20 (English Standard Version)

Reflection

I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.
- Acts 20:29-31 (English Standard Version)

In such times as these, Jesus requires his disciples to distinguish between appearance and reality, between themselves and pseudo-Christians. They will then rise above all inquisitive examination of others, but they will need a sincere determination to recognize the verdict of God when it comes. At any moment the nominal Christians may be separated from the real ones. We may even find that we are nominal Christians ourselves. Here is a challenge to closer fellowship with Jesus and to a more loyal discipleship. The bad tree is cut down and cast into the fire. All its display of finery proves ultimately to be of no avail.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (p. 192-193)

Sermon Outline

In Sheep's Clothing
Matthew 7:15-20

And His Disciples Came to Him
Brad Anderson

Because false prophets are near, Jesus calls his disciples to be on guard...
(Matthew 7:15; Acts 20:29-31)

How is the church to distinguish a true prophet from a false prophet?

Initially, they look very similar... (Matthew 7:15)

Eventually, their fruit reveals them... (Matthew 7:16-20)

Reflection Questions (taken in part from the Serendipity Study Bible for Groups)

- What is the best disguise you have ever seen? What was the purpose of the disguise? Why did it work, or not?
- How do the warnings in Matthew 7:15-20 relate to the gates described in Matthew 7:13-14? What are some of the "good fruits" Jesus is looking for? Is evaluating a person's fruit contradicting the mandate not to judge found in Matthew 7:1? Why or why not?
- Why are false prophets so dangerous?
- In what way are false prophets deceptive? How does Jesus instruct his disciples to tell the difference between the true and the false? How is this aspect of Jesus' teaching to be applied in your own situation?
- Why is the church especially vulnerable at this time in history to the lure of the false prophet?