

Sermon Text: **Matthew 7:15 – 23**

Sermon Theme: **Watch Out!**

1. For False Teachers
2. For False Teachings

***"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.***

***"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'***

Maybe something like this has happened to you: You are driving along, suddenly a car pulls out in front of you, and the person sitting next to you yells out, "Watch out!" So you slam on your brakes, and avoid getting in an accident. In our neighborhood this summer, in addition to the sound of children playing outside, you also hear parents yelling out from time to time, "Watch out!", as a vehicle comes driving past our homes. We want our family and friends to be safe, and so we warn them when we see them headed for trouble. In our Gospel Lesson for this weekend, our Lord warns us to be alert for those who would want to hurt us spiritually. "Watch out!", Jesus says to you and me. Watch out for false teachers. Watch out for false teachings.

Before we go any farther, it is important for us to remind ourselves how we are able to recognize false teachers and their false teachings. In order to know if what we are hearing lines up with what the Bible tells us, you and I need to be in the Word ourselves. But, each one of us will humbly confess today that we don't always spend a lot of time reading and studying the Word of our God. The excuses come far too easily for us on why we don't have enough time to be in a Bible study here at Church. We fill up our schedules at home, and push time with God in his Word to the back burner, a burner that doesn't get turned on too often. And what you and I deserve for such a neglect of God's Word is to have him take that Word away from us for good. The end result for you and me would be eternal damnation in hell. But the wonderful Good News of the Gospel is that this sin is among all those for which Jesus lived, suffered and died. Our only Savior won forgiveness of all sins, including the sin of letting things distract us from spending time his Word. The more time you and I spend in our Bibles, the more we hear the Good News of our Savior-God's love for you and me. The more time you and I spend in God's Word, the stronger our faith becomes in Jesus as our one and only Savior. The more time you and I spend in God's Word, the more we hear what our Lord's will is for us in our lives, and the more we are filled with a desire to follow his will. The more time you and I spend in our Bibles, the better equipped we are to recognize, resist and correct false teachers and false teachings.

Now, about false teachers, Jesus says to you and me, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them." In Jesus' day, there were several, different groups of religious leaders, most of whom had strayed away from the true Word of God. The largest of these groups were the Pharisees. To most of the people, the Pharisees looked like very religious people. But, as false teachers, the Pharisees had added hundreds of their own human teachings to the Law that the one true God had given to his people through Moses. If the people examined what they were teaching with the true Word of God, Jesus tells the crowd that is with him that they would see the false teachers for what they truly are: ferocious wolves in sheep's clothing. They are bad trees who are bearing bad fruit.

Today your Savior and mine comes to us and says, "Watch out!" Watch out for the many false teachers that in our world today. Rather than single out a few specific false teachers, my encouragement for you is to listen carefully to what ANY teacher of God's Word is saying. Listen closely to what they are saying, and then measure that up to the Word of God. I am sure that I am able to speak for Pastor Schultz, when I encourage you to test us. What I mean is this: Listen carefully to what both of us say from this pulpit or in the Bible Classes that we teach. If you have a question about something you have heard us say, let's sit down together with our Bibles open, and we will let God's Word be our guide. I am sure that I am able to speak for the teachers in our school, that if your child comes home talking about something that was said in the classroom that doesn't sound like it lines up with the rest of Scripture, schedule a face-to-face meeting with the teacher, so that together you can sit down around the Word of God. All the Called Workers of our congregation, from our Pastors, to our Teachers, to our Staff Minister, to our Bible Class Leaders and Sunday School Teachers, all of us want to be sure that everything we preach and everything we teach is firmly grounded in the Word of our God. Be assured that we take to heart the encouragement that the Apostle Paul gave to Pastor Timothy in the second chapter of his second letter, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

Not only did Jesus tell us to watch out for false teachers, he also warned us to watch out for false teachings. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" Did you notice why these false teachers thought they should be allowed to enter the kingdom of heaven? They pointed to themselves and what they had done. But the Savior's response was clear, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!"

There are many false teachers in our world today proclaiming their false teachings. Here in Matthew chapter 7, the false teaching that Jesus specifically warns you and me to watch out for is the false teaching that you and I can do something to win our forgiveness; the false teaching that says that you and I are able to earn our place in the kingdom of heaven. But, when we test that false teaching in the light of the true Word of God, we hear our Lord say to us in Proverbs 14, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." There is only one way to be sure of the forgiveness of all of our sins. There is only one way to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is the one and only Savior, Jesus, who says in John chapter 14, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Or, as we read in John's first letter, chapter 4, "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

Have you ever had this experience: While you are talking with a friend or co-worker, you tell them that you belong to St. Matthew's, and that St. Matthew's is part of the Wisconsin Synod. When they hear that, they immediately say to you, "Oh! You belong to that strict church!" How do you answer? Allow me to share with you the answer I have given to people who have said this to me. I tell them: "We in the Wisconsin Synod are as strict as the Bible makes us. At the same time, we are as liberal, or as free, as the Bible allows us. As a church body, as a congregation, our one goal is always the same: to listen to the Word of God and let his Word be our guide." That's what our readings from God's Word are encouraging all of us to do this weekend. "Watch out!", Jesus says to you and me. "Watch out for false teachers. Watch out for false teachings." Certainly it is my prayer that God the Holy Spirit continues to keep each one of us, our congregation, and our Wisconsin Synod, ever faithful to all that our Savior-God says to us in his Word! Amen.