

Testing Wolves and Fruit (Matt. 7:15-23)

A Small Group Outline



1. **Praise** (Purpose: To worship God)
 - What are you thankful for this week? (let the group's secretary write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook)
 - Song Service
 - Sing a few songs of praise to God
2. **Pray** (Purpose: To carry each others' burdens and to seek the Lord)
 - What challenges did you have this week? (write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook)
 - Go into a season of prayer
3. **Review** (Purpose: To learn accountability)
 - Tell us how it went with what you promised to do in last week's meeting? (e.g. Who did your share your faith with this past week? Who did you minister to? How did actioning your I WILL STATEMENT go?)
 - Where people have failed to fulfil what they said they would, do not be harsh with them but gently encourage them to try again in the coming week. Give them more support by phoning or joining them in the week.
4. **Give** (Purpose: To be good stewards of our monies)
 - This is the time to return tithes and offerings. If done electronically, kindly ensure that you get the bank account details of your local church from your treasurer. Don't forget to complete an envelope and to send the breakdown to him/her.
5. **Discover** (Purpose: To learn to listen to God, and be obedient to His Word)
 - **Notes for the facilitator**
 - Read *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings (MB)*, pp. 145-147
 - In this passage Jesus gives a warning that false teachers will arise that draw people away from the narrow gate and path.
 - Vs 15: Wolves in sheep's clothing: Those who claim to speak for Jesus, but they are employed by the devil
 - Vs 16: **"Those who truly love the Lord and are fully surrendered to His will need have no fear of being led astray** if they obey the voice of God speaking to their souls day by day through His Word and through the counsels He has given. In the great hour of testing that lies ahead, only those who know the truth and love it will be secure against the deceptions of Satan (Hosea 4:6; 2 Thess. 2:9, 10; 6T 401). Compare Matt. 12:33-35; Luke 6:43-45" (SDA Bible Commentary).
 - **"We are not bidden to prove them [false teachers] by their fair speeches and exalted professions. They are to be judged by the word of God...** What message do these teachers bring? Does it lead you to reverence and fear God? Does it lead you to manifest your love for Him by loyalty to His commandments? If men do not feel the weight of the moral law; if they make light of God's precepts; if they break one of the least of His commandments, and teach men so, they shall be of no esteem in the sight of heaven. We may know that their claims are without foundation. They are doing the very work that originated with the prince of darkness, the enemy of God" (MB 145)
 - Vs 17: Good fruit – the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).
 - Vs 18: A person with character will naturally display that character in good words and deeds
 - The deception is that the wolves **outwardly** look like the sheep, and the bad trees **outwardly** like the good trees. The difference in both cases is what is on the inside.
 - Vs 19: Thrown into the fire: A symbol of the final judgement

- Vs 20: By their fruits: This is a test to distinguish false prophets from true ones. These fruits appear to be a reference to both their teachings, and their lives (i.e. do they live the teachings they proclaim)
- William Barclay suggests 5 fruits of a false teaching (*George Knight*)
 - It consists solely or mainly in the observance of externals
 - It consists primarily of prohibitions
 - It produces an easy religion
 - It divorces religion from life
 - It makes us arrogant and proud of our spiritual superiority
- Vs 21: Lord, Lord: Implies the person is a disciple of Christ; a professed Christian
- Vs 21: Not everyone who **says**... but he who **does**: Faith needs to be accompanied by works (James 2:17)
- **“A mere profession of discipleship is of no value.** The faith in Christ which saves the soul is not what it is represented to be by many. ‘Believe, believe,’ they say, ‘and you need not keep the law.’ But a belief that does not lead to obedience is presumption. The apostle John says, “He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.’ 1 John 2:4. Let none cherish the idea that special providences or miraculous manifestations are to be the proof of the genuineness of their work or of the ideas they advocate. When persons will speak lightly of the word of God, and set their impressions, feelings, and exercises above the divine standard, we may know that they have no light in them” (MB 146).
- **“Obedience is the test of discipleship....** When the doctrine we accept kills sin in the heart, purifies the soul from defilement, bears fruit unto holiness, we may know that it is the truth of God. When benevolence, kindness, tenderheartedness, sympathy, are manifest in our lives; when the joy of right doing is in our hearts; when we exalt Christ, and not self, we may know that our faith is of the right order” (MB 146)
- Vs 22: They are protesting that God’s decision against them is unfair
- Vs 22: Miracles and wonders of themselves don’t provide conclusive evidence that God is with someone; prophets are to be judged not by their miracles, but by their lives (*SDA Bible Commentary*)
- Vs 22: Even though these workers did great things for God, they were not fully surrendered to Him; self was still in charge. The great works they did fed their egos: “Look at all we have done for God”; “look at what superior believers we are” ... (*George Knight, Walking with Jesus on the Mount of Blessing*)
- Vs 23: I never knew you: Or, according to the form of the Greek verb, “I never recognized [or, “became acquainted with”] you. (*SDA Bible Commentary*)
- Vs 23: ‘You workers of iniquity’ / ‘you lawless ones’: These workers refused to conform their lives to God’s laws and standards
- Ways to ensure we are not self-deceived (*George Knight*):
 - **Avoid false doctrines of assurance** – doctrines that merely emphasize justification and grace, without including holy living. The latter obviously does not save a person, but can exclude a person from God’s kingdom
 - **Examine yourself** (cf. 2 Cor 13:5) **in the light of Scripture.** Why do you do the things you do? What are your motives in Christian service?
 - **Get your priorities straight.** Give God ALL your heart. He is not merely looking for the performance of ritual, but for *heart* service (cf. Micah 6:6-8)
- *Read Matt. 7:15-23. Preferably let one person read it. Let everyone then put down their Bibles and get the group to reconstruct the passage in their own words. This teaches the group to be careful in quotation Scripture correctly and to use it as the basis of their discussions.*
- **Discussion Questions** (*use only a few*). *The notes in italics after some of the questions below are for the facilitator, and not to be read out to the group.*
 - How is it possible to be religious and not follow Christ?

- What do you think is the similarity between the metaphors of ‘sheep’ and ‘good trees’?
- What are ways that false prophets get people on their side?
- What do you think are some of the characteristics of false teachings?
- Why would Jesus call people who prophesy in His name, cast out demons in His name, perform many miracles in His name, **lawless**?
- What are the dangers of basing our faith onto the sensational – on miracles and wonders?
- How would you respond to someone who has a word from God for you?
- Many popular evangelists preach that Christians no longer have to keep God’s law? What would be the motivation behind such preaching?
- What are ways to ensure that we don’t get deceived?
- Jesus declares in Matt. 7:23, “I never knew you.” What do you think He means by that?
- **Application Questions** (*select a few depending on your time. One has to be the I WILL STATEMENT*)
 - Do you believe you can easily discern between a true and false teacher? Elaborate.
 - Have you ever ‘followed’ someone whose teachings you later found out to be false, or even slightly off course? What did you do when you found that to be the case?
 - What do you now need to do (or are currently doing) to ensure you don’t hear those fateful words from Jesus, “Depart from me you worker of iniquity.”
 - How would you like to become more discerning and discriminating of the teachings you are exposed to?
 - I WILL STATEMENT: Formulate an I will statement in response to what you have discovered in the Word. Let the group’s secretary also record these in an A4 notebook. Ensure that everyone gets a chance to give their I WILL STATEMENT. You have to be specific. E.g. “I will test spiritual teachers by the Word of God, even though I may like them, or enjoy their preaching style.”

6. Share (*Purpose: To be witnesses of our faith*)

- Do you have anyone you could share today’s lesson with this week? *Be specific.*

7. Closing prayer

Prepared by Shandrell Penniken / Northern Conference