

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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First Sunday after Trinity, June 14, 2009

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Hymns: 260, 130: 5-6, 284, 285, 290.

Lessons: Jeremiah 23: 9-40, 2 Timothy 4:1-5. Matthew 7:15-29.

Text: Matthew 7:15-20.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Perhaps you have seen the sign which says “beware of dog”. How do you react when you see such a sign? Do you go up and try to pet the dog? You would be very foolish if you did such a thing, for the dog would probably attack you and bite you. We don’t fool around but we stay away.

Our sermon text warns us *"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves."* The KJV, more familiar to many of us, warns *"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves."*

Why are we to constantly “watch out for false prophets, false teachers”? The Word of God tells us that they are ferocious wolves. We here in Southern Minnesota see fierce wolves only on television or in zoos. We have no first-hand knowledge of what wolves can do. But those who know wolves know how ferocious they can be.

In Romans 16:17 the idea is very much the same: *"I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them."* Today let’s examine Jesus’ warning to

BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS!

- 1. Why? What does it mean to beware?**
- 2. What are they? Who are they? How shall we know them?**
- 3. Never forget the salvation God gives you in Jesus Christ!**

Beware! Be on your guard! Be careful! As part of our preaching, we frequently have warnings against false-teaching churches. Are we being overly concerned about false-teaching churches and false prophets? Does it seem that all we are doing is preaching against other churches? A man once complained that when he was young the only thing that he remembered the pastor of his church preaching against was the church down the street. He thought that the only thing the minister ever preached about was that the other church was doing wrong and was not following the Bible. Well, that’s probably not true. That is what one person remembered. But aren’t there things that we preach about continually? Our very young children shouldn’t ever be wrong when their answer to the question “What did the minister talk about today?” is “God and Jesus”. That should always be the heart of a Christian sermon. Well, to be more specific, the heart of every Christian sermon should be what Jesus, the Son of God, did for you. He died for your sins.

We preach “Thus saith the Lord”. We preach “This is what the Lord says”. In fact the KJV uses the phrase “Thus saith the Lord” about 415 times in 413 different verses.

In our Epistle lesson you heard one place in the New Testament where true prophets of the Lord are told by God to *“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction.”* (2 Timothy 4: 2). Notice that true preachers and servants of God are to *“correct, rebuke and encourage”*. You correct someone who is wrong. You confute, you admonish, you

tell him his fault, you reprove. Paul had just told Timothy a few verses earlier that *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."* 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

Yes, we teach, we admonish, but we must also point out error. We must point out what is wrong. We can't only preach what is right. When we are learning to do something, whether it is learning to be a carpenter or any other tradesman, or to cook a meal, or do schoolwork, or learning any skill, we are taught not only how to do it right, but also certain things we must avoid and watch out for. Children are constantly being told and taught "no". They better learn the meaning of the word "no" pretty early in life, when they are very young. It's often easier to teach infants one word – "NO" – than trying to tell them what to do. That comes when they are older and their vocabulary grows. Life is one constant "Beware" after another. We have to teach our children to "watch out", to "beware" if we are going to teach them how they can live to see another day, and especially if we want to follow what God says in his Word. Even on the roads we have orange and yellow signs and even some black and white signs warning us to "beware".

We read in 1 John 4:4-6: *"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood."* So we must learn both the truth of God's will and the falsehood of other things. And we are to avoid the false, and especially those who teach falsely.

God is so angered by error and by what is false that he commanded his chosen people in the Old Testament to kill and destroy the people of Canaan, the land he had given to them, so that they would not be enticed and sucked in by error and take up the wicked ways of the pagans. But not only did he tell them to avoid the errorists, those in error, he sent someone to save them from all their own errors, their sins, including the sins of not avoiding false teachers. While we don't have such a command to kill errorists today, we are told to watch out for them, to "Beware of False Prophets"

We aren't to sit at their feet. We aren't to pay attention to what they say. How often didn't our parents warn us about something and we did it anyway? They may have said "Don't play with fire" but we did and got burned. They may have said "Don't play with knives" but we did and got cut. They may have said "Don't do this, or don't do that" but we did it anyway and were harmed. Oh, we may have "gotten away with it" but God knew and as a result our consciences have bothered us, perhaps even to this day.

So who are these false prophets we are to avoid? Well, first of all a false prophet is every person who, as a leader, misleads people, whether he is a servant of the Church and a recognized teacher of religion or found in some other walk of life. But it doesn't simply imply that they are found only in the church. And Jesus warns us that they look harmless, like sheep. They don't look like wolves. Remember that the first meaning of the word "prophesy" is to proclaim, to speak forth, to teach or to say. And how many false prophets are there in the world who have no commission of any kind from any religious group? If we name just one human idea, evolution, you would have to agree that there are those who are teaching contrary to God's will in teaching positions in schools for all levels of classes, from elementary classrooms to high school and university classrooms. Unfortunately, they are also teaching in schools and colleges supposedly dedicated to teaching about the Bible and God's Word. All heterodox – that is "false-teaching" – literally "other doctrine" colleges and seminaries who should be teaching people to proclaim God's Word are sometimes teaching everything but God's Word.

False prophets direct people through the wide gate and along the broad road that leads to eternal destruction. So watch out for them! They may not be easy to recognize at first glance. They have a good outward

appearance. Those who claim to teach God's will have learned to conceal their corrupt heart, perhaps with the mask of piety and hiding their false doctrines with biblical speech. Their soul-perverting activity is not devoted to the building of God's Church, to the gathering of his people, nor to the work of guiding souls to God but to leading them away from God, either intentionally or unintentionally. They may make any number of dishonest efforts in gathering followers for themselves. They may even be convinced in their own minds that they are proclaiming God's truth on the basis of the Holy Scriptures. Some will claim special revelations directly from God, forgetting God's warning in the last book of the Bible: ***"I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book."*** Revelation 22:18. There are many varieties and decrees of false prophets. What they all have in common is that they deceive their hearers.

There are several very pointed verses in our Old Testament lesson, such as Jeremiah 23:21: ***"I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message; I did not speak to them, yet they have prophesied."*** And verse 31: ***"Yes," declares the LORD, "I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, 'The LORD declares.'" Surely you know people who give advice, contrary to God's Word. Warnings are found repeatedly in scripture. One such is found in 1 John 4:1: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."***

We are to teach what is correct. We are to test everyone to see if what they are teaching and living is truth from God. We are to look at the fruits of the teachers and prophets. We are to look at their doctrine, their teachings, as well as their works, their lives. Their fruits are primarily their doctrines, not the outward successes they might achieve. One obvious example of a false prophet is one who foretells future events and they don't come true. But a false prophet is also one who adds to God's Word or subtracts from God's Word, or perhaps more importantly twists it. But we can see that only IF we know the scriptures. Twisting or perverting God's Word may be more difficult to recognize. Anyone who teaches anything contrary to God's Word is a false prophet. We need to evaluate everyone's message on the basis of the Holy Scriptures. If the message contradicts what God says, we know who is right and who is wrong. Such things as a denial of creation, a denial of the fall into sin, a denial of what sin is, a denial of the worldwide flood, a denial of Jonah being swallowed by a great fish or a denial of the fact that Jesus was born of virgin mother all are signs of a false teacher. Such things as a denial of Jesus' miracles or a denial that Jesus shed his blood to atone for the sins of the whole world also make one a false prophet.

Some false teachers will not in themselves reject Christ as Savior and thus immediately deprive a person of his eternal salvation, but any teaching that rejects any truth of Scripture undermines the authority of God's Word and really threatens to deprive people of their salvation. So we must heed Jesus' warning. The bad tree is destined for the eternal fires of hell, and false prophets are destined for judgment.

Along with warnings against false teachers, false prophets, we must constantly teach what is correct. And what is the most important part of our teaching and preaching? It is the fact that Jesus Christ was sent to earth to pay the price for your sins so you won't suffer eternally for them. The heart of our teaching is that Jesus Christ came to earth to save sinners, and each of us looks at ourselves as the greatest sinner possible. Trust only in Jesus for salvation. Look only to his Word and to the promises in his word for truth.

Our preaching and teaching must always be "Thus saith the Lord." "This is what the Lord says." That must be the basis and foundation for our preaching. We look out for ourselves, and we are to be the warning for the world, for all those around us. We who claim to have the truth must share it and be the prophet standing on the walls of the city of God, calling all to repentance. Amen.