

Twisted Truth

Matthew 7:15-23

August 27, 2023

By Andrew Ogea

Good morning church family. I pray you are well, that your faith is strong in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you are experiencing true joy that comes from following him. If you would, turn in your Bibles to Matthew 7:15-23.

We are almost finished with our sermon series on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. We have divided his sermon into a few series, and the title of our current series is "Focus on Truth." Do you realize how much we are dependent on truth? Without truth, we would be in big trouble.

Truth is like a mathematical formula - without it we would not be able to solve problems. Truth is like light - without it we could not navigate through darkness. Truth is like love - without it we would be defenseless to fend off evil. Truth is like medicine for the soul - without it we would have no cure for our spiritual disease.

Last week, we studied a vital truth from Jesus's sermon. In Matthew 7, with the crowd listening in, Jesus told his disciples that eternal life is found by entering the narrow gate. Eternal life is a gift of God only for the one who enters the narrow gate of Jesus Christ by faith.

He also taught that beyond the narrow gate of salvation is a narrow road where we work out our salvation. But, it is not an easy road to walk. Daily, we have to take up our cross and follow Jesus down this road. But, if we do, we will grow to be more like Christ every day, and in turn, experience the abundant life that he promises for us.

Now, there is an alternate gate - one that is wide and has a broad road beyond it which leads to destruction. Those who enter this gate put their faith and hope in false gods, good works, and the pursuit of pleasure. They walk the broad road of worldliness and sin which leads to spiritual death.

In John 8, our Lord Jesus, says that everyone who commits sin is a "slave to sin," but if we are his disciples, we know the truth, and the truth sets us free. Without truth, Jesus says we would remain a slave to sin. But, freedom is found through the truth of his Word.

Of course, we know the opposite of truth is a lie, and in the same chapter, John 8, Jesus warns about the Devil and his lies. Jesus says, "When he [the Devil] speaks a lie, he does so from his own nature, because he is the Father of lies. Jesus is the truth and Satan is the Lie. In 2 Corinthians 4:4, we discover that Satan really likes to lie to unbelievers:

2 Cor. 4:4 Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't

**understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.
(NLT)**

And in 2 Corinthians 11:3, we learn that Satan really likes to lie to believers as well. The Apostle writes this to the church in Corinth:

2 Cor. 11:3 But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

So, from these two scriptures, we see that Satan uses his lies to increasingly blind the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the Good News. For those who have heard the Good News and rejected it, he certainly wants to conceal the truth about Jesus so they will remain without a full understanding of the glory of God in Christ.

On the other hand, Satan uses his lies to lead believers astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

So, let's imagine for a moment an unbeliever coming to a crossroad and there is a street sign leading to the narrow gate of salvation. It is Jesus Street. Satan takes that sign, he lies, and he twists it. He makes the way to the narrow gate almost unrecognizable.

He makes it look like a street that no one would want to go down. So, the unbeliever doesn't pay it much mind at all, and goes down another path instead to the wide gate. They may stumble upon Jesus Street again, but if they continue to choose the wide gate, they choose eternity in hell.

However, there are a few that have come to this crossroad before and seen the lies, but instead, they respond with sincere interest and conviction. Even though Satan tried his best to twist the message of Jesus, they didn't just walk away. Instead, they respond to what they can see about Jesus.

As they respond in faith to what little bit of light they are given, the lie unravels and the gospel message becomes clear. Then by believing in the gospel of Jesus (He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life), they enter the Narrow Gate leading to eternal life.

But, Satan's work isn't finished. He may have lost the war for the believer's soul, who now inherits eternal life. However, now he plots to rob the believer of the abundant life that Jesus offers daily. So, daily he stands in the distance, holding up the twisted sign to take us off the course from the narrow path for a while.

How does Satan do this? We know that Satan cannot be everywhere at once. So how can he deceive so many - both unbelievers and believers. Jesus tells us in Matthew 7:15-23

Matt. 7:15 “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

One of Satan’s ploys, as the Father of Lies, is to use servants of disobedience to spread his lies. In verse 15, Jesus calls them false prophets. So a good question to ask is: What is a false prophet? The Greek word that Jesus used is *pseudoprophētēs*.

What is a False Prophet?

False Prophet - *pseudoprophētēs* - a person who claims to speak on behalf of God but has their own agenda.

In other books of the New Testament, some of Jesus’s apostles used the same word, but other apostles used a different label for the same type of person. But, this pseudo person is mentioned in almost every book of the New Testament. The Apostle John writes about them in his epistle:

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 [*pseudoprophētēs*] have gone out into the world.

In one of the Apostle Peter’s letters, he makes reference to false prophets but then links them to a different label - false teachers. 2 Peter 2:1, he writes:

2 Peter 2:1 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers [*pseudodidaskalos*] among you.

In his second letter to the church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul calls them false apostles:

2 Cor. 11:12 And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about.

2 Cor. 11:13 For such people are false apostles [*pseudapostolos*], deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ.

2 Cor. 11:14 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.

2 Cor. 11:15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness.

Did you see that? They are servants of Satan who masquerade as servants of righteousness. The pseudo teacher is the one who spreads erroneous Christian doctrine. The pseudo apostle is the one who falsely claims to be an ambassador of Christ.

The pseudo prophet is the one who acts the part of a divinely inspired prophet, but is a pretend foreteller, who speaks falsehoods under the name of divine prophecies. These servants of Satan are fake, artificial, and counterfeit. They are people who come in the name of God, but do not present the true message of God. They have their own agenda.

Now, it is especially important for Jesus's disciples to hear his warning because they will eventually become his apostles that he sends forth to share his gospel and plant the first churches. Up front, Jesus tells them there will be opposition.

In their letters to the early churches, the apostles confirm the reality of Jesus's warning. They regularly had to deal with people like this. And the apostles warn the church at large that pseudo messengers will continue to be a problem. So Jesus tells us to "Watch Out" for them. But, how will we spot them? He tells us in the next verse:

Matt. 7:16 By their fruit you will recognize them.

Jesus often uses these agricultural illustrations in his teachings. Here, he starts with fruit. "Fruit" means "what is produced." Jesus says you will be able to spot a false prophet by what they produce.

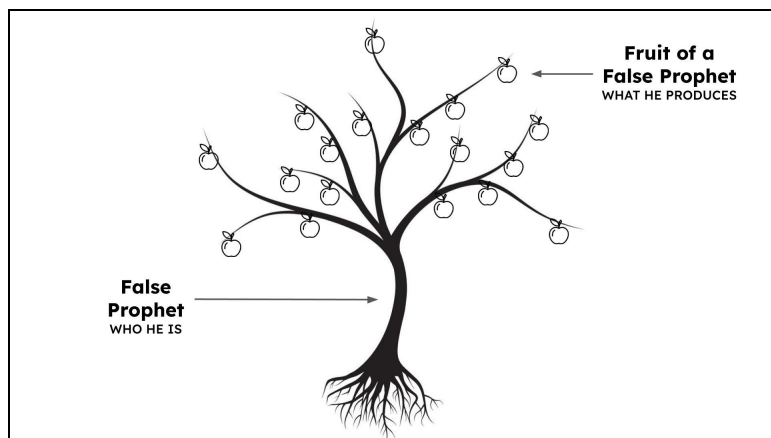
But, Jesus continues the illustration by showing them that it goes deeper than that. The fruit that is produced is directly related to its source which is the tree or the vine itself. In verses 16-20, he continues

Matt. 7:16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?

Matt. 7:17 Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.

Matt. 7:19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

Let's take a look at this picture:



This is a pretty bad looking tree, right?! Jesus tells us that we will recognize a false prophet by his fruit - what he produces, and uses the tree illustration to show us that the false prophet's fruit is bad because the false prophet, the tree, is himself bad. Who he is at his core is bad.

Now we are going to talk more about the reason he is bad in just a bit, but we first need to answer the question: What is the fruit of a false prophet? What exactly does he produce?

For this, I want us to move over to 2 Peter 2. In this chapter, the Apostle Peter, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, devotes an entire chapter to describing the fruit of a False Prophet or Teacher. And in this chapter, we learn that his fruit is threefold:

What is the fruit of a False Prophet/Teacher?

- 1. He Misinforms**
- 2. He Misleads**
- 3. He Misbehaves**

He misinforms by not declaring God's Word. He doesn't teach the true Gospel of Christ. As a result, he misleads others. He directs his hearers to worship other gods, believe a false gospel, and live a life of worldliness.

We will also learn that his fruit is also his misbehavior. His actions show his lack of integrity. So as we read most of this chapter, we'll stop along the way and divide up the fruit into these three categories:

2 Pet. 2:1 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves.

2 Pet. 2:2 Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.

2 Pet. 2:3 In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

So, let's take a look at this chart and see how the fruit from these verses is divided up into the three categories:

THE FRUIT OF A FALSE PROPHET/TEACHER 2 Peter 2		
Misinforms	Misleads	Misbehaves
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☒ Teaches Destructive Heresies ☒ Denies the Sovereign Lord 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☒ To Depraved Conduct ☒ To Shame the Way of Truth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☒ Greedy ☒ Exploits Others

Let's continue in verses 10-14:

2 Pet. 2:10 This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, they are not afraid to heap abuse on celestial beings;

2 Pet. 2:11 yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not heap abuse on such beings when bringing judgment on them from the Lord.

2 Pet. 2:12 But these people blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like animals they too will perish.

2 Pet. 2:13 They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you.

2 Pet. 2:14 With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood!

THE FRUIT OF A FALSE PROPHET/TEACHER		
2 Peter 2		
Misinforms	Misleads	Misbehaves
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🍌 Teaches Destructive Heresies 🍌 Denies the Sovereign Lord 🍌 Shares Fabricated Stories 🍌 Slanders the Supernatural 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🍌 To Depraved Conduct 🍌 To Shame the Way of Truth 🍌 To Live in Error 🍌 To Corruption (The Unstable) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🍌 Greedy 🍌 Exploits Others 🍌 Follows Desires of the Flesh 🍌 Despises Authority 🍌 Bold & Arrogant 🍌 Unreasoning 🍌 Carouses in Broad Daylight 🍌 Revels in Pleasures 🍌 Has Eyes Full of Adultery 🍌 Never Stops Sinning

2 Pet. 2:15 They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness.

2 Pet. 2:16 But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—an animal without speech—who spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet’s madness.

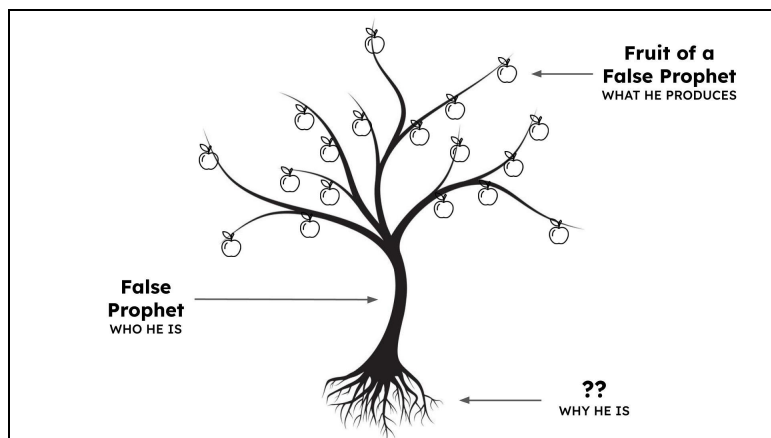
2 Pet. 2:17 These people are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them.

2 Pet. 2:18 For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error.

2 Pet. 2:19 They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for “people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.”

THE FRUIT OF A FALSE PROPHET/TEACHER		
2 Peter 2		
Misinforms	Misleads	Misbehaves
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🍌 Teaches Destructive Heresies 🍌 Denies the Sovereign Lord 🍌 Shares Fabricated Stories 🍌 Slanders the Supernatural 🍌 Mouths empty boastful words 🍌 Appeal to the Fleshly Desires 🍌 Promise Freedom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🍌 To Depraved Conduct 🍌 To Shame the Way of Truth 🍌 To Live in Error 🍌 To Corruption (The Unstable) 🍌 To Slavery to Sin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🍌 Greedy 🍌 Exploits Others 🍌 Follows Desires of the Flesh 🍌 Despises Authority 🍌 Bold & Arrogant 🍌 Unreasoning 🍌 Carouses in Broad Daylight 🍌 Revels in Pleasures 🍌 Has Eyes Full of Adultery 🍌 Never Stops Sinning 🍌 Left the Straight Way 🍌 Slaves of Depravity

So, Jesus says, the false prophet produces this bad fruit. The reason is because he is a bad tree.



2 Peter 2 gives a detailed description of the fruit that is produced. When you think about that list, it makes this tree look even worse than it already does. But, notice at the bottom of this graphic is an important question:

Why is the false prophet a bad tree in the first place? If we go back to the sermon on the Mount, we see that there is a root cause of the bad tree and the bad fruit, but what is it?

Matt. 7:21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

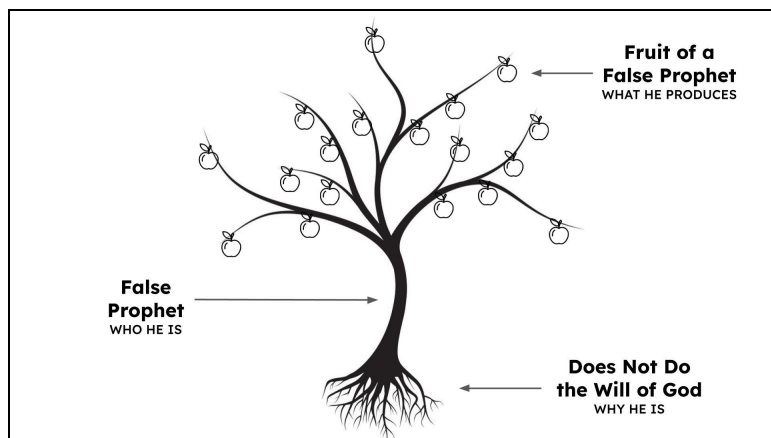
Matt. 7:22 Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’

Matt. 7:23 Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

Jesus says, “Many will say to me on that day.” “On that day” is a reference to the Judgment Day where Jesus will judge those who rejected him, rejected his gospel, and died without ever having faith in him and his atoning work for their sins.

Now, who is Jesus referring to when he says “Many?” I believe he is still talking mainly about false prophets in these verses. The reason is because it is the false prophets who are making their plea before the Lord: “Didn’t I prophesy in your name;” “Drive out demons in your name;” and “Perform many miracles in your name?”

Jesus tells us there are many false prophets he will reject who give these reasons on Judgment Day as to why they think they should be allowed into the kingdom of heaven. But, Jesus says “no,” and the reason he gives is because they did not do “the will of my Father who is in heaven.”



That is why he is a bad tree because he is not rooted in the will of God. Perhaps God would have used them as true prophets if they hadn't missed his will. Have you ever wondered "What is the will of God?" Well, there are two verses that tell directly what God's will is. The first is John 6:38-40:

John 6:38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

John 6:39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

Pay attention, here it is:

John 6:40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."

Now, let's go to that second verse:

1 Thess. 4:3 It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable,

1 Thess. 4:5 not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; 6 and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before.

1 Thess. 4:7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. 8 Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

Do you see how we have come full circle. First, God's will is Believing in Jesus for eternal life (narrow gate). Then, being sanctified to live a holy life (narrow road). The false prophet misses

this. He is not rooted in belief in Christ for salvation. He is not being sanctified to a holy life. Therefore, he produces bad fruit: How he teaches; How he leads; and How he Behaves.

The false prophet's error is that he believed his good works would save him. He says, "Lord, look at what I've done. I prophesied, I drove out demons, I performed miracles." Jesus replies, "Depart from me, you didn't trust in me for salvation."

The sad reality is many people are led astray to the same life of destruction when they follow a false messenger of God and his false message. They don't believe in Jesus for eternal life, and as a result, they do not live a holy life, pursuing purity and sanctification. So, what do we do with this? Jesus tells us:

What is Our Response Today?

"Watch out!"

His warning is to "watch out" for false prophets who come to us in sheep's clothing but on the inside they are ferocious wolves. Jesus says this false messenger of God will look like a sheep at first.

Rarely will they come looking like wolves because they would be spotted quickly. Instead, they come sheep-like, seemingly Christ-like. We will probably encounter someone like this who claims to be a messenger of God, but in reality is a pseudo messenger. But how do we watch out? I want to give you four quick applications.

How do we "Watch Out" for False Prophets?

1. Consume Truth with Consistency

The best way to "watch out" is to consume truth on a consistent basis. Become someone who knows the truth well enough that you can spot a lie. Understand this: no prophecy or teaching ever given to you by someone else supersedes God's Word.

God has revealed his truth to you in His Word. It's your responsibility to know it. We have these Bible Reading Plan Devotionals out at the connect center if you need a place to start.

2. Consume Truth with Context

A common way a false teacher misinforms is by taking verses out of context and twisting them to mean something else. So, if someone shares a verse, go check it out yourself and make sure it is applied correctly by looking at it in context.

For example, the verse "you will know them by their fruit" can be problematic if you apply it to everyone and take it out of the context of a warning for false prophets. It can be dangerous if you start inspecting people's lives and make assumptions about someone's salvation based solely on their sin.

Now, we can make judgments about behavior being sinful, but when we start judging someone's heart, we can take it too far and sin ourselves by judging. Also, if we apply that verse to ourselves when we sin, then we can take it too far and have some real struggles with our own assurance of salvation.

You also can't take this verse out of context and assume that someone who teaches you is a false prophet if they are not perfect. The people who teach you will sin too. The question is how do they respond. A false prophet will be bold and arrogant in his sin. He will keep on sinning. A true teacher will model humility and repentance. So, consume truth in context.

3. Consume Truth with Caution

We need to be very cautious about who and what we let in. You need to be careful about who you let into your house. There will be some who come knocking on your door and claim to teach you Jesus Street, but instead, give you a twisted message of heresy and made up stories.

You also need to be careful about what you consume online or in print. The internet opens the door wide open for all kinds of false prophets or false teachers. I recommend you make sure that any teacher you subscribe to has strong accountability around them

For example: other pastors, staff, lay church leaders, or affiliations with networks or denominations that are theologically sound on the main things. We have that kind of accountability here at Northshore Church. You shouldn't settle for less elsewhere.

4. Consume Truth with Community

And lastly, consume truth with a community of believers. Join a community group. Learn and grow together. Regularly share with others the things you are learning so you can have other godly people to help keep you moving forward in truth.

Don't be afraid to ask questions or caution someone in your group when something sounds off. Watch out for each other. Be iron that sharpens iron. Be your brother or sister's keeper. Encourage others and receive encouragement to pursue sanctification to live a life of holiness.

In closing, I want to ask you some questions to think about. Perhaps you need to pray for someone who has been led astray by false teaching and they are living a life of disobedience, or trusting in something else to save them. Will you respond today by praying for them?

To the person who came here today and you don't identify as a Christ follower: "Which path will you choose?" Jesus Street? Or a lie? It is God's will that you believe in his Son Jesus for eternal life.

He died to forgive your sins. He is the way, the truth, and the life. You can't have a relationship with God unless you believe in him for it. Will you believe in Jesus today for salvation?

What about you my brother or sister in Christ? Have you entered the narrow gate but veered off the narrow path? It is God's will that you be sanctified. Return to the narrow path. It may be difficult, but he promises you will experience his abundant life. Will you return to him today?

Let's pray.