

Matthew 7:15-23

My ... What Big Teeth You Have!

Before the digital revolution, getting directions was an interesting experience. Compare how men and women gave directions. Stereotypically, men shred road numbers and specific distances whereas women referred to landmarks. Likewise, compare how small towns gave directions. Insiders prefer to reference the countless small, rural towns nearby and will often use road names (as opposed to road numbers).

What mattered the most wasn't *how* one was given directions, but that they were accurate and good. In the previous passage, Jesus used the metaphor of two roads. One road is narrow and leads to blessing while the other road is broad and leads to destruction. He is pleading with the reader to choose the correct path. One of the great impediments to choosing the correct road regards who gives us directions. If we listen to the wrong voices, we'll never get to where we're going.

Now that we are squarely in the concluding remarks of the Sermon on the Mount, we are sensing a change in Jesus's tone. He has been encouraging us to choose the way of the Kingdom of God. He has demonstrated for us how God's Kingdom produces God's blessing. Now, however, he warns the reader. If you want to avoid the wrong path, don't be fooled by wrong teachers.

Jesus begins by warning us to **Beware of Dangerous Wolves** (vs. 15-20). I suspect the worse part of being a mailman or a door-to-door salesman is the dogs. The sign "Beware of Dog" is usually enough to keep people at bay. My parents have a dog that likes to bark at cars and visitors, but strangely not when they are arriving, but when they're leaving. She loves to ride in cars and so when you head toward your car to leave, she goes crazy. She is not the best guard dog.

Regardless, such signs are necessary. They are a warning for everyone who might venture on our property. Jesus does the same here. In verse 13, he invited the reader to "enter," but now he warns the reader to "beware" (vs. 15). As you begin this journey it is important we listen to faithful teachers, not to false ones.

Jesus proceeds to give us 2 metaphors to illustrate his point. First FALSE TEACHERS ARE LIKE WOLVES (vs. 15). In an agrarian culture where sheep are ubiquitous, the metaphor of sheep/wolves would have made much sense. Wolves are the natural predator of sheep. Although wolves are stealthy and strategic, these imaginary wolves are more innovative. They *look* like sheep, *sound* like sheep, and *behave* like sheep. But remove the mask and you'll discover they are not only fraudulent, but deadly.

Secondly, Jesus says FALSE TEACHERS ARE LIKE ROTTEN TREES (vs. 16). The illustration is simple. Apple trees do not produce watermelon nor do rose bushes do not produce Whoppers from Burger King.

Put together, these metaphors encourage us to judge biblical teaching by considering both orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Regarding the former, truth is measured by the Word of God. This should be an obvious point, but given our woeful ignorance of Scripture, few are qualified to measure what they hear with what is true. As a result, many believers, infant in their understanding of the faith, are led astray by dangerous teachers. It is imperative for Christians to be grounded in sound doctrine and biblical truth.

Likewise, teaching should be faithful to orthopraxy. While some wolves are well disguised, their fruit will become evident. Therefore, when teachers begin to justify unrighteousness, read the sign. Beware!

Secondly, Jesus tells us to **Beware of Disguised Works** (vs. 21-23). In this final scene, Jesus shows he is unimpressed with showy acts of religion. Consider the resume of the condemned: they prophecy, exorcise demons, and perform incredible miracles in Christ's name. Regardless, Jesus shows his lack of interest. He is not condemning these acts in of themselves. He will perform them himself as will his Disciples. The problem is that the condemned trust in their religious acts. They tie their redemption to their resume.

What good is prophecy if you hate your neighbor? What good is warring against unclean spirits when we succumb to temptation? What good are miracles if we choose hypocrisy? The world will know we are Christians, not by our conservatism or by our political power or by how loud we scream. The world will know we are Christians by our love which stems from redeemed hearts.

The San Francisco Gate published a humorous article reporting on a woman who nurtured a succulent for two years before realizing it was made out of plastic. "If someone else tried to water my succulent, I would get so defensive," she wrote on Facebook. All along, the plant pretended to be alive, never revealing its true nature.

She did notice the plant didn't grow as expected despite giving it the right amount of water and sunlight. She thought she was doing well since the plant never developed blackened tips or discolored leaves. It was the perfect houseplant. When she went to transplant it from its original container, she expected to find a ball of packed roots in the container, she instead discovered no roots at all.

"Tried my hardest to keep it looking it's best, and it's completely plastic!" she wrote. "How did I not know this. I pull it from the container it's sitting on Styrofoam with sand glued to the top! I feel like these last two years have been a lie."

Admittedly, it is funny to imagine nursing a fake plant for two years. It is tragic to consider a life lived shaped by false gospels and fake religion. Let us follow the way of Christ via the cross. That is the key to the narrow road that leads to blessing.