

## Sermon Transcript for July 25, 2021

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

All right, so now we know where we get the whole idea of wolves in sheep's clothing. This comes from one of the messages of Jesus Christ. He's speaking to the people and He is telling them to beware of false prophets. Now, also in Romans, or in the Acts passage, we have Paul warning of the people that he's been teaching for three years, that when he leaves, there are going to be ravenous wolves that are going to come and try to take away and deceive the flock. And then even in Jeremiah, we have Jeremiah lamenting the idea that there are false prophets. Now, Jeremiah had the wonderful distinction, although I'm not sure he would claim it as something that he enjoyed, he had the wonderful distinction of being the one prophet that actually saw his prophecies come to be fulfilled. And Jeremiah is a prophet that preached destruction. He told the nation of Judah that they would be wiped out, that their nation would be destroyed and they would be taken into captivity, and that they would have to live there for 40 years because they had disobeyed God. And they had followed after false idols. And there are plenty of other people who claimed to be prophets, and their message was, "Oh, do what your heart desires, everything is going to be okay. The world is fine, you're fine, God loves you." And the reason they were saying this, because they were looking around, around them and they noticed that Judah was prosperous. Everything was well. Everybody had enough money in their bank. They had work to do. They had food to eat. They had clothing. There was peace in the land. It seemed like outwardly, everything was good. And they thought that, well, if everything is going good, that must mean God is happy with us, and He is pleased, because obviously, if we're doing the right thing, God will bless us with material goods.

Now, we have a temptation to do the very same thing. We have a temptation to think that when life is going well, then God is blessing us. And when life is not going well, when we're struggling, when we have heartache, when we have pain and sorrow, when we lose our jobs, when we get a bad diagnosis, when a loved one dies, when our nation seems to go off the rails, when there's wars and rumors of wars, or anything else, when things don't go well, then we tend to think, well, God isn't pleased. But we can't look to our external circumstances to determine whether or not we are doing God's will. There may be times, in fact, Christ has said, people will persecute us when we preach the Gospel. He calls upon us to take up our cross and follow Him. Now, I don't know about you, but taking up a cross sounds like hard work. And I know what happened at the end of Christ taking up His cross and that wasn't pleasant. And yet, that's what He calls us to consider in our lives. So we need to re-examine and pay attention to what really is the Word of God. And we need to be careful that those that are preaching the Word of God are very clear about what they're saying and that it matches with what God's Word actually says.

Some of you have heard me say this before, and I will say it again. Do not believe a word I say. Don't. Don't trust me. Don't trust what I have to say... unless it conforms to the Word of God, unless what I'm teaching you is faithful to what the Word of God says. It doesn't matter if I'm 90% correct and then 10% I'm off. You're still supposed to call me on the 10% that I'm off. Because if I'm off, I'm a false prophet and you should not listen to me. You should only listen to me when I speak the Word of God, when I conform my message to God's message. Otherwise, well, otherwise, what kind of fruit are we going to produce? If I teach you that you are to just relax and enjoy life because God loves you and you don't need to be worried about anything, then are you going to serve Him well? No. If I fail to tell you the Law of God, if I fail to give, as Paul says, the whole counsel of God, I'm not giving you the truth. The whole counsel of God is frightening at times. The whole counsel of

God says that we all are sinners, that all of us have fallen short of the glory of God, and that the wages of sin is death. So my job is to make it very clear to you that you are headed to death by your own human nature and sinful nature. That not a single one of us, you or me included, are free from the temptations of sin, the devil, and the world, and our own sinful flesh. See, we are called. It's not that anything can take us from salvation, but we can easily walk away from our salvation, if we do not consistently listen to the Word of God, and allow that Word to transform our lives, our thoughts, and our words. Because if we fail to live up to the image that God has of us, we endanger ourselves. Not that we lose our salvation by what we do or don't do. Our salvation is secure in Christ, I need you to understand that. You have been baptized, you have been bought with a price of Christ's blood, and therefore you are His children, and God never, ever forsakes His children.

But I will say, any of you who have been around children know that sometimes children don't do what they're supposed to do. Sometimes children disobey their parents. Sometimes they don't do what is best for them because they want to do something else. What's the stereotypical story? Don't touch the stove, it's hot. Let's just see if that's actually true. And we don't listen because we need to experience it ourselves. See, we are children, when it comes to our relationship with God. And God's Word gives us how to live. The Ten Commandments are a wonderful source of how we are called to live, but it is also a condemnation that shows us very clearly that we have not done it, that we have not lived according to those Ten Commandments. And it is my job, as God's chosen prophet for this congregation, to make it clear to you that you have fallen short of the glory of God.

Now, it's also my responsibility to remind you that I also have fallen short of the glory of God. And if I don't say that... if I'd say, "Follow my example, because I'm perfect. If you just were like me, you'd be okay," I'm a false prophet. I'm a sinner like everybody else. And so when you look for a true teacher of the Word, one of the primary things you need to recognize is that they know that they are sinners like you. And that I, like you, need the Word of God, need the salvation of God, need the forgiveness of my sins as much as you do. That's why I turn my back on you when we do our confession, because you're not confessing your sins to me, you're confessing your sins to God. And you know what I'm doing while you're confessing your sins to God? I'm confessing my own sins. I join you in that confession because I need to hear the grace of God as much as you do. Even if I'm the one that is saying it, it's God's Word for you, but it's also God's Word for me. And that is what a shepherd is called to be, a sinner who points everybody to the whole counsel of God: the Law of God, which condemns us, but also the sweetness of the Gospel, which gives us a hope and a certainty of eternal life.

Not only that, I'm also to encourage you, to exhort you to good works. Are you saved because of Christ's salvation? Absolutely. You are saved, but you are also saved for a purpose. God has brought you into His family because He's got a task for all of us to do. We are called to serve Him, to demonstrate the fruits of the good nurture that He has given to us. When a tree is watered and fertilized, and receives good sunlight, that tree produces fruit automatically. And that's what you and I are called to do as well, to produce fruits of righteousness. We talk about the fruit of the Spirit, first off, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, self-control, and all of that. So those, again, it's the beginning of the fruit. But also to serve each other, to be ready in season and out, to give witness to the hope that we have in Christ Jesus, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds through the Word of God.

So how are you to determine if the man standing here is a false prophet or not? What criteria are you to use to judge me? And not judge me as to whether I'm saved or not saved, but to judge as to whether or not you should listen to me or not. There's two basic ways to go about it. One of them is to look at the passages in 1

Timothy and Titus, where Paul talks specifically about what kind of a man an overseer or pastor should be. He's supposed to be patient. He's supposed to be kindhearted. He's not supposed to be quarrelsome. He's also supposed to not be a lover of money. And he's supposed to be able to teach sound doctrine and refute false doctrine. He's also to raise his children well, and he's to be the husband of one wife, if he's married, amongst other things. So these are proper and appropriate things that you should be examining and looking at me and determining whether or not I'm living up to that standard. And if I'm not, you are responsible to call me out on it. I know that sounds weird, but it's true. I am to exhort you to live a better life and you are to pray for me and exhort to me to live a better life as well. We are called to work together in this, to bear fruit so that others might see our good works and give glory to God. Now, the other way to determine whether or not I am a false prophet or not, and to determine whether or not you should listen to me, is for you to be steeped in the Word of God, in its whole counsel.

In other words, it's very important for you to know what the Word of God says, to be able to check what I say against what the Bible says, and to ensure that I teach nothing other than what the Scriptures say. See, I'm not supposed to be a creative speaker. I'm not supposed to make up wonderful stories for you to be interested in and excited about. That's not my job. I'm not here to entertain you or to make you feel like you've had your money's worth or whatever you might want to say. That is not my job. My job is to proclaim the whole counsel of God, Law and Gospel. Now, the only way you can tell whether I'm teaching the whole counsel of God is if you are studying the whole counsel of God as well. So the first fruit, besides the attitudes that we are given through the Spirit, is that we read the Word of God, that we digest the Word, that we are regularly reading Scripture. Not just me and not just on Sunday morning, but every day, so that the Word of God might seep into our pores, so that we might be strengthened and nourished by that Word, and not deceived by the false prophets. Because even though I'm not a false prophet, there are plenty out there who are seeking to deceive and to devour. Now, do not be afraid. I don't say that so that you might go out there and go, "Oh, I'm afraid of all of these guys." No, in Christ, there's no need to be afraid of false prophets because the Word of God works in us and through us, but we need to hear it regularly. How many times did the Israelites seem to walk away from God and grumble and complain that it didn't seem like God was doing what He was supposed to do? And how much do we emulate them in our own lives?

Just this week, I found myself obsessing about something that's going on in my life, and I can't seem to get it out of my brain. And I've been worrying and fretting about it. And then my wife was kind enough to say, "Aren't you supposed to bring it to the Lord in prayer? Trust in Him and not worry." And I'm like, "Yeah, fine." I hate it when my own words are used against me. But it's not my words, it's the Word of God. And she was the vessel by which I heard It and was convicted that I was not doing what I was supposed to do, that I was not living up to the Word of God. And that's good and right and I'm stronger because of it. And I'm listening to God's Word better because I was admonished. And so a wise man learns when they are shown their error. And when they're shown where they need to try harder. We all have gaps in our understanding of God. We all have gaps in our understanding of what our lives are supposed to be like in Christ. That's why we come every week, to fill in those gaps, to strengthen those words so that we clearly, every day, understand how much God loves us, and forgives us, and desires for us to bear good fruits. Not because we have to, but because we are so thankful of what He has given, that we desire with all of our hearts to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.

May His grace and mercy and peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.