

WOLVES IN WOOL Matthew 7:15-23

INTRODUCTION:

“The Man From U.N.C.L.E.” with Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin, “I Spy” starring Bill Cosby and Robert Culp, “Get Smart” featuring Maxwell Smart and Agent 99 and “The Avengers” about John Stead and Mrs. Peale - - these were popular television shows about spies from the mid to late 1960s. Prior to the spy shows, cowboy shows had dominated primetime but with the popularity of the James Bond movies, television followed with the secret agent genre.

My favorite of all the spy shows was “Mission Impossible”. The program followed an elite covert unit as they carried out assignments subject to official denial should they fail. Almost always, in the course of the show, the Mission Impossible cast would put on elaborate disguises so they could work undercover to complete their project.

Satan is the master of disguises. Scripture says he even masquerades as an angel of light. And did you know that he has been working undercover in the church for as long as there has been a church? In Matthew 7:15-23, Jesus warned us about our enemy and his agents.

OUTLINE:

I. THE DANGER OF THE WOLVES (7:15a)

“Watch out for false prophets.”

Jesus wanted his disciples to know that there were and would always be “false prophets”. A prophet is one who is a spokesperson for God. A false prophet is anyone who fraudulently claims to speak for God. Jesus warned us to beware of false prophets: people who fraudulently, fallaciously and deceitfully claim to speak for God when, in reality, they do not.

Was Jesus right? Have there been false prophets? Well consider these facts. Scholars report that there are between 3000 and 5000 cults with over 25,000,000 members...in the United States, alone. More if you include the rest of the world.

In II Corinthians 11:3-4, Paul wrote,

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.* ⁴ *For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.*

That might be a good test for a cult or for other wolves in wool. They preach a different Jesus, a different spirit and a different gospel than that which is revealed in Scripture.

For example, do you remember the Reverend Sun Myung Moon? Moon founded the Seoul, Korea based Unification Church in the 1950s. His followers are often derogatorily called "Moonies".

Moon was jailed for tax evasion back in the '80s and, to be perfectly honest with you, I'd kind of forgotten about him. I thought maybe he had died or that, because of his imprisonment, he had been discredited and that his church had disintegrated. But then yesterday, the 88-year-old Moon was back in the news because he and an entourage of over a dozen of his followers were involved in a helicopter crash on a mountainside south of Seoul.

Moon's so-called Unification Church holds to doctrines that are a mixture of Christian, Confucian and traditional Korean values. Moon's followers believe he came into the world to complete the work of Jesus Christ.

But even beyond that, in March of 2004, Moon hosted over 300 people including about a dozen United States Senators and Congressmen in a ceremony in the Dirksen Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C.

Illinois Representative Danny K. Davis wore white gloves and carried a pillow holding an ornate crown that was placed on Moon's head. The Korean-born businessman and religious leader then delivered a long speech saying he was "sent to Earth . . . to save the world's six billion people. . . . Emperors, kings and presidents . . . have declared to all Heaven and Earth that Reverend Sun Myung Moon is none other than humanity's Savior, Messiah, Returning Lord and True Parent." In addition to claiming to be the Messiah, Moon said his teachings have helped Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin be "reborn as new persons."

- Clearly, since Moon is proclaiming that he, himself, is the Messiah, he is preaching a different Jesus than the one that Paul preached.
- In the theology of the Unification Church, there is no Holy Spirit. He believes and teaches that the term "Holy Spirit" simply refers to "God's redemptive activity." That is, it is just a figure of speech, there is no actual Holy Spirit.
- As to the gospel Moon preaches, according to Moons' theology, man's ultimate destiny is to be married and have a perfect family. However, this cannot currently be accomplished because Jesus failed to bring about full salvation. It is Moon's job to succeed where Jesus failed and to complete the task of making it possible for people to be saved. It's kind of ironic, though, that Moon says he will help the world find

salvation through marriage and a perfect family since has has been married at least three times – perhaps even more.

But remember, the Unification Church is only one of 3,000 to 5,000 cults in the United States. And perhaps even more insidious than the cults are those within the church who pretend to speak for God but who give a message that is not consistent with the message or Scripture.

Within traditional churches, there are those who preach a Jesus that is different from the Jesus that Paul preached. Sometimes that is a Jesus who would never judge anyone harshly or condemn any sin. Some people, purporting to speak for God, promote a Jesus who is inoffensive and non-confrontational: more of a mascot than a Master.

Paul said some offer a different Holy Spirit than the one the Corinthians had received. Often, it is a Holy Spirit who does parlor tricks and party games to amaze and entertain.

And Paul wrote about a different gospel. Instead of the gospel that admits we are all sinners, that accepts Jesus as savior and acknowledges him as Lord, they may offer a “gospel” of trying harder. Or they may offer a “gospel” of universalism that teaches that hell is a figure of speech and that, in the end, everyone will be saved no matter who they are or what their relationship with Jesus.

People who preach a different Jesus, a different Holy Spirit or a different Gospel than the one in the Bible are false prophets. And Jesus warned us about them.

II. THE DECEPTION OF THE WOLVES (7:15b)

“They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”

Part of what Jesus warned us about with reference to these false prophets is that, although they come dressed as sheep, they are really wolves. Their deception is deliberate. They want to look like God’s flock. They want to be accepted as sheep of the Good Shepherd. That’s part of the reason they call themselves churches and try to conceal the significant doctrinal differences they teach.

One of these so-called churches teaches that Jesus is really one of literally thousands of gods; that he is a brother to Satan; that he was a polygamist who was married to, among others, Mary and Martha of Bethany and that he (Jesus) is the son of Adam, who is considered to be God. With all this false teaching about who Jesus is, you’d think they would be denounced as a cult. But they’ve attained respectability by calling themselves a church, by having a really famous choir and a really

good national newspaper. But do not be deceived by the disguise: they preach a Jesus so different from the one of the Bible that they've had to invent another book as a companion to the Bible to justify their teachings.

Another rather well known group preaches a Jesus who they say was the personification of the Archangel Michael. They say Jesus came to earth, died, rose again and went to heaven to live with God and then came back in 1914 to Brooklyn, NY and founded something he called the Watchtower Society. Now people, that is decidedly NOT the Jesus that Paul preached and that Scripture reveals.

But these and so many more false prophets try to cloak their doctrines in the mantle of respectability so that the unsuspecting will hear words that sound familiar and traditional and accept them without recognizing that their message is not true.

III. THE DETECTION OF THE WOLVES (7:16-20)

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

Well, since the wolves often wear wool, how can you recognize them and thus avoid them? Jesus tells us. He says, look at their deeds. If they don't act like sheep, they aren't sheep. If they ravage the flock, they are wolves.

Over the years, many who have claimed to speak for God have ravaged the sheep and fleeced the flock.

- Some false prophets have used religion as a cover for sexually abusing women and children.
- Some have used religion as a way of manipulating and controlling people.
- Some have used religion as a means to great personal financial gain. (For example, at one time, Sun Myung Moon gave his fourteen children a monthly allowance of between \$40,000 and \$50,000 EACH! Clearly, he had not been a “not-for-profit prophet”.)

Jesus said that if you want to know what kind of a tree you have, check out the fruit. And if you want to know what kind of a prophet you are hearing, look at the evidence of the life. If those who are products of a person's work don't look like Jesus, live like Jesus and talk like Jesus, then the work is probably not the work of Jesus.

Here's the principle: the fruit of Calvary's tree was and is a life sacrificed to God. Check the fruit and you'll know the tree.

IV. THE DESTINY OF THE WOLVES (7:21-23)

“²¹ Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 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 perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

It is a scary thing to realize that not everyone who says to Jesus, “Lord, Lord” will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. And not everyone who has done work for the Lord will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus said that on the day of judgment, many will say to him, “*Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?*” Lord, Lord, I went to church most every week. Lord, Lord, I was baptized during a revival in the 1970s. Lord, Lord, I taught Sunday School. Lord, Lord, I was an elder. Lord, Lord, I was a preacher for over 40 years. Lord, Lord, I tithed, I sang specials, I came to workdays, I delivered Meals-on-Wheels... Lord, Lord, I did lots of things for you.

But Jesus said that will not get any of us into heaven. The only thing that counts is if we have done the will of his Father who is in heaven. And the will of his Father is that we accept Jesus as our savior and we submit to him as our Lord.

CONCLUSION:

Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned about the danger of focusing on what we do instead of who we are. It is possible for people who've done a lot of work for the Lord to still be lost if they were doing the works **for** God but not the works **of** God. It is actually possible to spend a lifetime in church and eternity in hell. The difference boils down to authenticity: are you a sheep through and through or are you something else on the inside? Have you invited the Lord to change you from the inside out?

INVITATION: #657 – “*Cleanse Me*”