

We continue our series on Jesus' parables.

I chose this short and rarely talked on one!! What was I thinking??

These verses are the concluding ones of the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus challenged the proud and legalistic religious leaders of the day in his teaching, which probably lasted several days on the hillside near Capernaum.

His words turned everything upside down and challenged the peoples understanding.

The two verses before our reading, talk of the gate to eternal life. The narrow one. Not the easy wide one.

It reminds me of one of my favourite quotes from Harry Potter.

'The time will come when we have to choose between what is right and what is easy'.

Dumbledore Goblet of Fire.

And so, it makes sense that Jesus would want to warn the people of false prophets.

Those who would distract from the best way, the narrow gate, and lead people towards the wrong gate.

False prophets are present throughout Israel's history.

Jeremiah 23, begins with , 'Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture'.

And Jesus taught that false prophets would increase in the last days.

Mtt 24v11...'and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.'

So..What/who are false prophets you may ask me?!

They are the popular leaders who tell people what they want to hear.

Such as -God wants to make you rich!

Do what your desires tell you! There is no such thing as hell or sin!

False prophets pretend to be shepherds who care for the flock but are actually endangering it because they do not teach the word of God.

They often appear godly and know the scriptures well, but so did the devil, who quoted scripture when tempting Jesus in the wilderness.

And Eve in the garden of Eden, 'did God really say...?'Genesis 3

In Jesus' time shepherds wore clothing that came from the sheep they cared for.

The Old Testament prophets wore simple and uncomfortable, rough long robes to indicate they had given up the comforts of the day for the cause of God.

They looked the part.

Today, they could even be ministers and leaders in the church, who are seen as inspired and authentic members of Christ's flock but who are satisfying their own desires and extending their power and influence. The badge of office does not guarantee a ministry that is good for the soul.

There is discordance between their profession and their practice. Minimising Christ and glorifying themselves.

They are wolves in sheep's clothing.

How do we recognise authenticity and those who cunningly dress themselves as authentic?

Thankfully Jesus went on to speak about the good and bad trees.
By their fruit we shall recognise them.

In scripture fruit often means character.

And we have the benefit of Paul's wonderful teaching on the fruit of the spirit.

Galatians 5 v 21,22

'The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.'

Fruit is the product of the inner life.

We would do well to look at a person's character, teaching and influence.

We must check and test the teachings from scripture.

We need to be discerning without being judgemental or we risk exalting ourselves.

And we need to become mature and protect ourselves by deeply studying and knowing God's word.

If we want to know about a person's character we look at the consistent fruit of their lives.

We also need to be aware that people are watching us and the fruit we produce to see if it's consistent with our profession to be followers of Christ.

Are we walking the talk?

This is all quite scary but

Let's not forget what we have at our disposal!!

The armour of God (Ephesians 6); The Holy Spirit our guide, and a God who hears our prayers and wants to care for us, protect and comfort us.

We are not alone. And as we mature and our relationship with God grows we can trust that He is in communication with us if we open our eyes, ears, and hearts.

Let us pray

Father, please help us to stick to the narrow path. To not be easily distracted and taken in by those who would lead us astray. Grant us the gift of discernment and the faith to bear the fruit you need us to produce, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. Amen.

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