

"The Authentic Disciple" // Matthew 7:15-23 // Series: The Sermon on the Mount

By: Cameron Waterworth

Introduction

Open Bibles to Matthew 7:15-23

- **Illus.** Fake watches, purses in NYC
 - The reality is that no matter how much they might do to pass off the knock-off as the original –
 - ***It will never be an authentic piece because it wasn't created by the brand whose name it claimed.***
- There are several ways that we know the authentic pieces from the fakes –
 - Maybe there are some characteristics that we can look for so that, with a closer inspection, *we can see the differences.*
 - But here's one glaring red flag that probably takes the cake – ***That is the person selling them.***
- I hate to burst your bubble on that Rolex you think you got from a random guy on the street in New York –

- But I don't think Rolex depends on Joe from NYC to sell their watches out of a cardboard box.
 - Setting aside your excitement for a moment – ***you have to realize how goofy that sounds.***

Transition

- In the same way, I'd suggest to you today that our text teaches us what it means to both recognize and become ***authentic disciples*** –
 - As Jesus concludes the SotM, he instills this idea in us that there are many frauds who claim to know him –
 - ***So, we have to be wise both in how we are become authentic disciples, but also in who we let influence us because there are many frauds who deceive themselves & others.***

Read Matthew 7:15-23

- As Jesus teaches us about who is the authentic disciple, he gives us two warnings:
 - ***Not to be deceived by the frauds*** – the false teachers who claim to know Him.

- ***But also, to not deceive ourselves*** – by thinking we ourselves are authentic disciples when we are actually frauds.

Roadmap:

- Two warnings:
 - The Deceiver
 - The Deceived
- Three truths:
 - Wisdom & discernment are critical for our souls
 - Character always reveals itself
 - Authentic discipleship comes from the heart

Exposition // Matthew 6:19-24

WARNING #1 – THE DECEIVER (v.15-20)

- **v.15** starts out saying, "*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.*"
 - The first thing we are called to see is that false teachers exist.
 - That might sound a little simplistic, but being aware that there is a real

and present threat of danger changes the way that we live.

- **Illus.** "step over these things" prank
 - Because they expected hurdles to be there, ***they were careful.***
 - In the same way, I think it's important that at the conclusion of this great SotM – one of the marquee warnings Jesus gives us is to ***be careful and to expect that there will be those who try to lead us astray.***
- **v.15** heightens this: "*be careful of those who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.*"
 - Interestingly, it seems like Jesus might be making a reference to some common moral imagery (Aesop) by using the example of the wolf and sheep.
 - He takes this idea and retrofits his warning into place: ***there will be those among you who look as you do but are not the same inwardly.***
 - *How do we lookout for these false teachers and how do we know it when we see them?*

- **v.16** Jesus tells how we are able to **detect these false teachers**: “You will recognize them by their fruits.”
 - Whether you recognize it or not, here’s why that might surprise you:
 - **Rather than focusing on what the false teacher might say**, Jesus tells us to watch out for **how they live**.
- He doesn’t give us a guide to understanding why their teaching might be heretical –
 - **He tells us to pay attention to how their lives might betray the seemingly true things they speak** –
 - That means that **false teachers, according to Jesus, might be people who say seemingly true things, but who can’t be trusted for their hypocrisy**.
- Here’s the thing: we aren’t talking about just broken pastors or the struggles with sin that is present in all of our lives –
 - **If that were the case, you should all log off right now because I betray what I say frequently. I’m a sinner**.
 - Rather, the people we are to be watchful for are those who have a

pattern of life of **rejecting the truth they claim with how they live**.

- Jesus warns us about these people –
 - **Showing us that we need to be careful who we let influence us – because...**
 - **Not everyone who claims to be of Christ is living the way of Jesus or teaching you to do the same**.
- So, Jesus tells us that we need to do some **“fruit inspection”** (McKnight).
 - **v.17** tells us plainly “Healthy trees bear good fruit. Diseased trees bear bad fruit.”
 - **We can’t pretend we are something that we aren’t. If we see in someone who claims to know Jesus but their lives say otherwise** –
 - We are called by Jesus to be watchful of these people.
- **Here’s why: our lives are a reflection of our character** (McKnight)
 - **There is nothing present in our lives nor in the lives of other people that isn’t a direct reflection of our hearts**.
 - **We act, and only act, according to WHO WE ARE inwardly**.
- **Illus.** spouse cheating – “just a mistake”

- We listen to that now and can recognize how foolish that sounds –
 - ***Of course, it isn't that simple! There is clearly a heart issue beneath what is happening.***
- The same is true for when we evaluate sin in our own lives:
 - ***How foolish would it be to look at patterns of sin in our lives and not think there is serious a problem?***
 - No, we recognize that we have to, before God, be honest about where we are and recognize something has gone haywire in our hearts.
- *That's why we understand the importance of paying attention to what happens in our hearts.*
 - **Proverbs 4:23** *"Guard your heart, for from it flow the springs of life"*
 - **We don't accept things at face value; everything aspect of our lives is a matter of the heart.**
- ____ So, why should we think any different about the hearts and lives of others?
 - If it's foolish for us, ***how foolish would it be for us to look past clear red flags in other people –***

- ***And not only give them a seat at the table, but trust what they have to say?***
- Friends, this is where wisdom gets into some of the thorny places in our lives –
 - Because the way of wisdom Jesus calls us to demands we be discerning.
 - ***As discerning and aware as we should be of our own hearts, we have to be discerning and aware of the hearts of others.***
 - So, how do we do this well?

So, how do we put this into practice?

- First, ***stop and evaluate:***
 - What we listen to
 - Who we listen to
- #2, ***graciously aware and mercifully critical.***
 - Here's what I mean by that: the way of wisdom is what Jesus says in **Matthew 10:16**, *"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."*
 - We shouldn't go looking for problems or hoping to catch someone tripping up –

- That probably reveals some heart issues of our own.
- But we have to be wise enough to spot these warning signals –
 - ***And do what it takes to remain grounded in the way of Christ.***
- However, Jesus tells us that this heart-level deceitfulness – *having a life that betrays what we claim* – isn't just an external threat.
 - In fact, ***perhaps the greater issue in being an authentic disciple is that we can deceive ourselves***–
 - Therefore, the second warning...

WARNING #2 – THE DECEIVED

- As we study and meditate on Jesus warning against false teachers –
 - ***We should first recognize that this warning isn't far away from us...***
 - In fact, *we should probably be aware of areas of our life we show the same kind of hypocrisy.*
- Because, no matter how we arrive there – whether it is someone leading us astray, or just the workings of our own inner person –

- ***The danger exist that we can deceive ourselves that we know Christ when we, in fact, do not.***
 - That our hearts can be far from him even if we claim otherwise.
- If you look at **v.21-23**, you'll see an interesting pattern emerge –
 - *On this picture of the final day of judgment, when Jesus separates the sheep (his followers) from the goats –*
 - ***There are many goats who thought themselves to be sheep.***
- WHY? Because they were deceived by themselves that what they did was sufficient.
 - **Their emphasis was on what they had done and accomplished.** Look at the repetition of the “*in your name*” statements from **v.21-23**.
 - They believed that what was mere behavior modification – i.e. *doing a bunch of good works* – was enough.
 - ***But like the false teachers, these are the people who might have done or said many good things for God, but never actually knew Him.***

- Just as we studied earlier about false teachers, there are many who deceive themselves –
 - ***Who, even though they claim to be of Christ, their hearts are actually far from Him.***
 - And this is where this becomes not an idea for the clouds – *we have to pay attention to our own hearts* –
- Because, *just like false teachers, inauthentic disciples can look a lot like disciples* –
 - We can deceive ourselves by becoming “obedient” to Jesus, doing a bunch of things “in his name” –
 - ***While not actually being obedient to Him in our hearts and lives.***
- So, as we pay attention to how false teachers might be frauds in disguise – being watchful for how they might lead us astray.
 - *We need to, first and foremost, be watchful over ourselves.*
 - ***This passage should be convicting for us! We should be aware of how there is far more hypocrisy in our own lives than we’d care to admit.***
- & here’s where this picture of final judgment ties back to the whole of the SotM –
 - ***All along, we’ve seen that the type of obedience that Jesus is calling us to is one of whole-self-devotion.***
 - And because of that, we’ve seen this “ethic of obedience” established over and over:
 - ***To first and foremost, follow Him. That’s a sufficient ethic for responding to the gospel.***
- But, we’ve uncovered this strong correlation that obedience takes wisdom & discernment –
 - Because there are many things taking place in our hearts and lives that we might not, at first, see.
 - ***But Jesus teaches us a way of examining the inner person and he invites us to be honest about that inner person and learn to walk in a way of repentance.***
- When we see this picture of final judgment in **Matthew 7** I think it sometimes sits differently with us than it should.
 - **When we think of judgment scenes like this, our first instinct is often fear** –
 - *To start thinking through the lens of self-preservation. We question if our*

obedience was good enough or our devotion to Christ strong enough. We begin rationalizing that we won't be found among the goats for "X" reasons.

- ***What I would suggest to you is that this isn't the purpose of what Jesus says here –***
 - It *IS* a call to think critically and carefully about our hearts and lives, don't get me wrong, but pictures of "future judgment" in the Bible aren't meant to frighten us about the past, nor are they meant to be a "mysterious future".
 - ***___ They're meant to call us to obedience in the present.***
- When we see this picture of future judgment, *it should be something that informs our lives in the here and now.*
 - ***It teaches us to walk in repentance and obedience to Christ in the present –***
 - ***Recognizing that there are many things – the false teacher or the false self – that can deceive us and lead us astray.***
- This is a warning to be grounded in the way of life that Jesus calls us to –

- ***To genuinely consider whether we ourselves are authentic disciples or whether we are frauds –***
 - And the gracious invitation of Christ is to, wherever we are, be learning to walk in a way of greater obedience to Him today than we were yesterday.
 - ***To push past the deceitfulness of the false self, and find the true self oriented towards Christ.***

Application: How do we do this?

- Two aspects I think we can ask ourselves:
 - ***Do I have moral integrity?***
 - Does my heart actually reflect the actions that I do "in His name"?
 - ***Do I have external consistency?***
 - Is my life a reflection of where my heart is/should be?
- As we probe beneath the surface, we will see areas of our lives where we are far from Jesus
 - ***But the way of wisdom is to not ignore, but learn to walk in repentance of these things and set our lives towards Christ.***

- *That is what it means to be an authentic disciple and not a fraud.*

Application

OBSERVATION # 1 – WISDOM & DISCERNMENT ARE CRITICAL FOR OUR SOULS

- Wisdom and discernment *will keep us from false teachers.*
 - The early Jewish philosopher, Philo, described false teachers like a “violent wind” who could pick up and carry people in the way.
 - If we aren’t careful, watchful and aware, *false teaching can carry us away into paths of danger just like this violent wind.*
- If we want to stay on the way of Christ, it will take wisdom to discern –
 - Not only what we take in and hear, but who gets a voice to say it.
 - *And instead surround ourselves with teachers who ground us in the truth of Christ – the way that leads to life.*

- Secondly, wisdom and discernment *will keep us from the false self.*
 - **Proverbs 14:12** tells us “there is a way that seems right to man, but in the end, it kills him.”
 - *Our hearts are primed to buy into all sorts of lies. If we aren’t careful, we can be easily swayed by what is ultimately destructive.*
- Instead, Jesus calls us to *think and live wisely.*
 - To examine our hearts and lives and see where we are actually far from God –
 - And to not build our lives on the sinking sand of dishonesty with ourselves – *but to instead be honest before God with our hearts and learn to walk in the way of repentance that leads to life.*

OBSERVATION # 2 – CHARACTER ALWAYS REVEALS ITSELF

- If this passage tells us one thing, *it is that we cannot hide from what is in our hearts.*
 - That’s why Jesus tells us that we can spot the false teachers by their fruit.

- ***Because life can't grow from a heart that is dead.***
 - ***If our hearts are far from God, we cannot expect that our lives will not show the same consistency.***
- Here's why this is an important truth for us to consider: ***we can't hide behind a false self.***
 - In the end, everything will come to light.
 - ***When Christ returns the difference between the inauthentic disciple and the authentic disciple will be a matter of eternal consequence.***
 - There will be those who were content in claiming to know Him and those who truly did.
- God's work of grace is to not conceal what we have done, but to ***expose us*** –
 - To show us where we have not honored God with our lives –
 - ***And to teach us the way of finding life in Him.***

OBSERVATION #3 – AUTHENTIC DISCIPLESHIP COMES FROM THE HEART

- ***That's why the invitation of the gospel is the invitation to do the hard work of heart work –***
 - To never accept the things, we see in our lives or in the lives of others at face value
 - ***But to instead be wise, discerning what is good and what is not.***
- Rather than having a lifestyle of “doing a bunch of good things” –
 - ***Learning to have a lifestyle of repenting and learning to walk in Christ.***
 - That is the firm foundation of wisdom that Christ is calling us to.

INVITATION

- There are false teachers and the false self that want to deceive us from the way of life –
 - ***But the gospel is that Jesus came to expose the sin that was in our life –***
 - ***Not that we would be held to account, but that we might find forgiveness and life through Him.***
- ***And in this radical grace, he teaches us the way of flourishing – and that begins with wisdom; creating a new heart and teaching us an integrity of life that matches it.***