

## THE EARLY PARABLES OF JESUS

### Message 6

Passage: Matthew 7:13-14

Words: 6079

INTRO: In our last message we considered the parable of the broad and narrow road and we interpreted its meaning like this. The gates are the gates of the city of destruction, or what the NT calls the world. This is where all are born. And in life a few find the narrow gate which opens up to a pathway that leads out of this city. Its destination is life, eternal life. The broad road is false Christianity. Those who encourage others to enter here are false prophets and they use the Bible and promise eternal life.

So those on the broad road are such as Catholics and Mormons and a host of other isms. My wife and I lived not far from a Mormon couple many years ago. And they invited us in for a meal. They spoke of their family devotions. They had another couple there from the church and they spoke of the moving of the Holy Spirit in church that week.

Another time a friend and I went to meet a man whose wife had left him. My friend worked with him and said this man was becoming a Mormon and we should go visit him. His wife had left him and he was there with his children. Well, we had a number of interesting evenings there. He usually invited some higher up Mormon elders as well. And we would not pray with them when they prayed and we told them why. They were greatly agitated about this.

And one day one of the elders said, "I will prove to you that we pray to the same God as you do. Come look." Well, he showed us a beautiful garden outside. He said this couple had not been able to grow a garden. They had prayed over the garden and there it was, just beautiful. Then he said, "This man's wife was addicted to cigarettes. A while ago when she came home we cast out the demon of smoking and she no longer smokes." And then he sat down, folded his arms and said, "There, does that not prove we serve the same God as you do?"

So I said, "Well, give me some time to find a passage of Scripture." He said, "Sure, no problem." And they patiently waited. And I got to Matthew 7:21-22 and it says:

21 *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*

22 *"Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'*

23 *"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"*

My friend was watching him as I read and he said he thought that elder would get up and hit me. I propose the broad road is made up of all those who profess to be believers and are not. That includes all those in protestant and evangelical churches who are not truly saved as well.

So we come to the application of our text. The Lord has said, "Enter by the narrow gate." And now He says, "Beware of false prophets." The Lord Himself makes this application in verse 15-23.

#### D. The Application

##### 1. Beware of false prophets - Lloyd Jones (15)

Intro: Now for the rest of this message I want to do something I very seldom do. I want to read an extended portion from D. Martyn Lloyd Jones. You may get from this, an interest to listen to him. He was born in 1899 and died in 1981. He lived in a time when he saw an amazing shift in church life. Listen as I read what he has to say:

*Our Lord, then, reminds us again of these things, first of all by putting before us two special warnings. The first is this one about the false prophets. 'Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.' The picture which we should hold in our minds is something like this. Here we are, as it were, standing outside this strait gate. We have heard the Sermon, we have listened to the exhortation, and we are considering what to do about it.*

Let me insert this here. I would see this as here we are in the city of destruction. And we are before the narrow gate and we are considering what to do about it.

*'Now,' says our Lord in effect, 'at that point one of the things you have to beware of most especially is the danger of listening to false prophets. They are always there, they are always present, just outside that strait gate. That is their favourite stand. If you start listening to them you are entirely undone, because they will persuade you not to enter in at the strait gate and not to walk in the narrow way. They will try to dissuade you from listening to what I am saying.' So there is always the danger of the false prophet who comes with his particular subtle temptation.*

Jones will now give us the two main views as to who these false prophets are and we go on:

*The question that immediately arises for us is, What are these false prophets? Who are they, and how are they to be recognized? This is not as simple a question as it would appear to be. Its interpretation is one that is full of interest, indeed fascination. There have been two main schools of thought with regard to this statement about the false prophets, and some of the great names in the history of the Church are to be found on each side. **The first is the school which says that this is a reference only to the teaching of the false prophets.** 'Ye shall know them by their fruits', says our Lord, and the fruit, we are told, refers to teaching and doctrine, and to that alone. There are those who would confine the interpretation of the meaning of false prophets solely to that. Protestant expositors belonging to this group have generally thought of the Church of Rome as the supreme illustration of this.*

*The other group, however, disagrees entirely. **It says that this reference to the false prophets really has nothing at all to do with teaching, that it is purely a question of the kind of life that these people live.** A well-known expositor like Dr. Alexander*

MacLaren, for instance, says this: 'It is not a test to detect heretics, but rather to unmask hypocrites, and especially unconscious hypocrites.' His argument is, and there are many who follow him, that it has nothing to do with the teaching. **The whole difficulty concerning these people is that their teaching is right, but their lives are wrong, and that they are not conscious that they are hypocrites.**

Here is how I would interpret that. The one school of thought points to the outward appearance of these prophets. That is, what they teach. And their teaching is very slick but false. The other school says, no, it is the lives of these false prophets that you have to watch. Their teaching is right, but their wrong shows up in how they live. We go on with his words:

*There are, then, these two schools of thought, and obviously we have to face their different ways of explaining and expounding this statement. In the last analysis it does not matter very much which of the two we believe. Indeed, I suggest that they are both right and both wrong, and that the error is to say that the true exposition is either the one or the other. This is not to be guilty of compromise; but simply a way of saying that one cannot satisfactorily explain and expound this statement except by including the two elements. You cannot say that it is only a matter of teaching, and that it is a reference to heretical teaching only, for the reason that it is not really very difficult to detect such teaching. Most people who have any modicum of discrimination can detect a heretic.*

*If a man came into a pulpit and seemed to be doubtful about the being of God, and denied the deity of Christ and the miracles, you would say that he was a heretic. There is not much difficulty about that, or anything very subtle about it. And yet, you notice, our Lord's picture suggests that there is a difficulty, and that there is something subtle about this. You notice the very terms in which He puts it, this picture of the sheep's clothing. He suggests that the real difficulty about this kind*

*of false prophet is that at first you never imagine that he is such. The whole thing is extremely subtle, so much so that God's people can be misled by it. You notice how Peter puts it in the second chapter of his second Epistle. These people, he says, 'creep in unawares'. They look like the right people; they have sheep's clothing on, and no-one suspects anything false. Now the Bible, in the Old Testament and in the New, always brings out that characteristic of the false prophet. It is his subtlety that really constitutes the danger. Any true exposition of this teaching, therefore, must give due weight to that particular element. For this reason, then, we cannot accept it as being merely a warning about heretics and their teaching.*

So Jones is saying that if some false religion like Islam or Buddhism came along, those who have listened to Christ's message in the Sermon on the Mount would easily see that their teaching was wrong. But the teaching of these false prophets is subtle. It sounds like Jesus' teaching, but it is false. So you have to watch the teaching. We go on with the quote:

*But the same thing applies to the other side. It is obviously not something outrageous in conduct. There again everybody could recognize it, and it would not be subtle, or constitute a difficulty. The picture we need to have in our minds, therefore, should rather be this. The false prophet is a man who comes to us, and who at first has the appearance of being everything that could be desired. He is nice and pleasing and pleasant; he appears to be thoroughly Christian, and seems to say the right things. His teaching in general is quite all right and he uses many terms that should be used and employed by a true Christian teacher. He talks about God, he talks about Jesus Christ, he talks about the cross, **he emphasizes the love of God**, he seems to be saying everything that a Christian should say. He is obviously in sheep's clothing, and his way of living seems to correspond.*

So you do not suspect that there is anything wrong at all; there is nothing that at once attracts your attention or arouses your suspicion, nothing glaringly wrong. What then can be wrong, or may be wrong, with such a person? My suggestion is that finally this person may be wrong both in his teaching and in his type of life for, as we shall see, these two things are always indissolubly linked together. Our Lord puts it by saying, 'Ye shall know them by their fruits.' The teaching and the life can never be separated, and where there is wrong teaching in any shape or form it always leads to a wrong type of life in some respect.

So Lloyd Jones is saying both the teaching and the life of the false prophet must be watched. We go on with his teaching. He says:

How then can we describe these people? What is wrong with their teaching? The most convenient way of answering this is to say that there is no 'strait gate' in it, there is no 'narrow way' in it. As far as it goes it is all right, but it does not include this. **It is a teaching, the falseness of which is to be detected by what it does not say rather than by what it does say.** And it is just at this point that we realize the subtlety of the situation. As we have already seen, any Christian can detect the man who says outrageously wrong things; but is it unfair or uncharitable to say that the vast majority of Christians today do not seem to be able to detect the man who seems to say the right things but leaves out vital things? We have somehow got hold of the idea that error is only that which is outrageously wrong; and we do not seem to understand that the most dangerous person of all is the one who does not emphasize the right things.

That is the only way to understand rightly this picture of the false prophets. The false prophet is a man who has no 'strait gate' or 'narrow way' in his gospel. He has nothing which is offensive to the natural man; he pleases all. He is in 'sheep's clothing', so attractive, so pleasant, so nice to look at. He has such a nice and comfortable and comforting message.

*He pleases everybody and everybody speaks well of him. He is never persecuted for his preaching, he is never criticized severely. He is praised by the Liberals and Modernists, he is praised by the Evangelicals, he is praised by everybody. He is all things to all men in that sense; there is no 'strait gate' about him, there is no 'narrow way' in his message, there is none of 'the offence of the cross'.*

So Jones is saying that the problem with the false teacher is that there is no narrow gate. If I am right that the narrow gate refers to repentance and confession of sin, then according to the false prophet you can enter the narrow gate without those. We go on with the quote:

*If that is the description of the false prophet in general, let us put this question: What do we mean exactly by this 'strait gate' and 'narrow way'? What do we mean by saying that there is nothing offensive in his preaching? We can best answer this in terms of an Old Testament quotation. You remember how Peter argues in the second chapter of his second Epistle. He says, 'There were false prophets also among the people (the children of Israel in the Old Testament), even as there shall be false teachers among you.' So we must go back to the Old Testament and read what it says about the false prophets, because the type does not change. They were always there, and every time a true prophet like Jeremiah or someone else came along, the false prophets were always there to question him, and to resist him, and to denounce and ridicule him. But what were they like?*

*This is how they are described: 'They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly (or lightly), saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.' The false prophet is always a very comforting preacher. As you listen to him he always gives you the impression that there is not very much wrong. He admits, of course, that there is a little; he is not fool enough to say that there is nothing wrong. But he says that all is well and will be well.*

'Peace, peace,' he says. 'Don't listen to a man like Jeremiah,' he cries; 'he is narrow-minded, he is a heresy hunter, he is non-co-operative. Don't listen to him, it is all right.' 'Peace, peace.' Healing 'the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.' And, as the Old Testament adds devastatingly and with such terrifying truth about religious people then and now, 'my people like to have it so'. Because it never disturbs and never makes you feel uncomfortable. You carry on as you are, you are all right, you do not have to worry about the strait gate and the narrow way, or this particular doctrine true or that. 'Peace, peace.' Very comforting, very reassuring always is the false prophet in his sheep's clothing; always harmless and nice, always, invariably, attractive.

In what way does this show itself in practice? I suggest that it does so generally by an almost entire absence of doctrine as a whole in its message. It always talks vaguely and generally; it never gets down to particularizing about doctrine. It does not like doctrinal preaching; it is always so vague. But someone may ask: 'What do you mean by this particularizing about doctrine, and where do the strait gate and the narrow way come in?' The answer is that the false prophet very rarely tells you anything about the holiness, the righteousness, the justice, and the wrath of God. He always preaches about the love of God, but those other things he does not mention. He never makes anyone tremble as he thinks of this holy and august Being with whom we all have to do.

He does not say that he does not believe these truths. No; that is not the difficulty. The difficulty with him is that he says nothing about them. He just does not mention them at all. **He generally emphasizes one truth about God only, and that is love.** He does not mention the other truths that are equally prominent in the Scriptures; and that is where the danger lies. He does not say things that are obviously wrong, but he refrains from saying things that are obviously right and true. And that is why he is a



*false prophet. To conceal the truth is as reprehensible and as damnable as to proclaim an utter heresy; and that is why the effect of such teaching is that of a 'ravening wolf'. It is so pleasing, but it can lead men to destruction because it has never confronted them with the holiness and the righteousness and the justice and the wrath of God.*

*Another doctrine which the false prophet never emphasizes is that of the final judgment and the eternal destiny of the lost. There has not been much preaching about the Last Judgment in the last fifty or sixty years, and very little preaching about hell and the 'everlasting destruction' of the wicked. No, the false prophets do not like teaching such as you have in the second Epistle of Peter. They have tried to deny its authenticity because it does not fit in with their doctrine. They say that such a chapter should not be in the Bible. It is so strong, it is so blasting; and yet there it is. And it is not an isolated case. There are others. Read the Epistle of Jude, read the so-called gentle apostle of love, the apostle John, in his first Epistle, and you will find the same thing. But it is here also in this Sermon on the Mount. It comes out of the mouth of our Lord Himself. It is He who talks about the false prophets in sheep's clothing that are ravening wolves; it is He who describes them as rotten, evil trees. He deals with the judgment in exactly the same way as did Paul when he preached to Felix and Drusilla of 'righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come'.*

*In the same way the false prophet's teaching does not emphasize the utter sinfulness of sin and the total inability of man to do anything about his own salvation. It often does not really believe in sin at all, and certainly does not emphasize its vile nature. It does not say that we are all perfect; but it does suggest that sin is not serious. Indeed, it does not like to talk about sin; it talks only about individual or particular sins. It does not talk about the fallen nature, or say that man himself in his totality is fallen, lost and depraved. It does*

not like to talk about the solidarity of the whole of mankind in sin, and the fact that we have 'all sinned and come short of the glory of God'. It does not emphasize this doctrine of the 'exceeding sinfulness of sin' as you find it in the New Testament. And it does not emphasize the fact that man is 'dead in trespasses and sins', and utterly helpless and hopeless. It does not like that; it does not see the necessity of doing that.

What I am emphasizing is that the false prophet does not say these things, so that an innocent believer listening to him assumes that he believes them. The question that arises concerning such teachers is, do they believe these things? The answer, obviously, is that they do not, otherwise they would feel compelled to preach and to teach them. Then there is the expiatory aspect of the atonement, and the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ. The false prophet talks about 'Jesus'; he even delights to talk about the cross and the death of Jesus. But the vital question is, What is his view of that death? What is his view of that cross? There are views being taught which are utterly heretical and a denial of the Christian faith. The one test is this: Does he realize that Christ died on the cross because it was the only way to make expiation and propitiation for sin? Does he really believe that Christ was there crucified as a substitute for him, that He was bearing 'in his own body on the tree' his guilt and the punishment of his guilt and sin? Does he believe that if God had not punished his sin there in the body of Christ on the cross, I say it with reverence, then even God could not have forgiven him? Does he believe that it was only by setting forth His own Son as a propitiation for our sins on the cross that God could be 'just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus' (Romans iii. 25, 26)?

Merely to talk about Christ and the cross is not enough. Is it the biblical doctrine of the substitutionary penal atonement? That is the way to test the false prophet. The false prophet does not say these

things. He talks around the cross. He talks about the people round the cross and sentimentalizes about our Lord. He does not know anything about Paul's `offence of the cross'. His preaching of the cross is not `foolishness to the Greeks', it is not a `stumbling block to the Jew'. He has made the cross `of none effect through his philosophy'. He has made it a rather beautiful thing, a wonderful philosophy of love and heart-break because of a world that is not interested. He has never seen it as a tremendous, holy transaction between the Father and the Son in which the Father has `made' the Son to be `sin for us', and has laid our iniquity upon Him. There is none of that in his preaching and teaching, and that is why it is false.

**In the same way it does not emphasize repentance in any real sense.** It has a very wide gate leading to salvation and a very broad way leading to heaven. You need not feel much of your own sinfulness; you need not be aware of the blackness of your own heart. You just `decide for Christ' and you rush in with the crowd, and your name is put down, and is one of the large number of `decisions' reported by the press. **It is entirely unlike the evangelism of the Puritans and of John Wesley, George Whitefield and others, which led men to be terrified of the judgment of God, and to have an agony of soul sometimes for days and weeks and months.** John Bunyan tells us in his *Grace Abounding* that he endured an agony of repentance for eighteen months. There does not seem to be much room for that today. Repentance means that you realize that you are a guilty, vile sinner in the presence of God, that you deserve the wrath and punishment of God, that you are hell-bound. It means that you begin to realize that this thing called sin is in you, that you long to get rid of it, and that you turn your back on it in every shape and form. You renounce the world whatever the cost, the world in its mind and outlook as well as its practice, and you deny yourself, self, and take up the cross and go after Christ. Your nearest and dearest, and the whole world, may call you a fool, or say you have

religious mania. You may have to suffer financially, but it makes no difference. That is repentance.

The false prophet does not put it like that. He heals 'the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly', simply saying that it is all right, and that you have but to 'come to Christ', 'follow Jesus', or 'become a Christian'. Finally, therefore, we can put it like this. The false prophet does not emphasize the absolute necessity of entering this strait gate and walking along this narrow way. He does not tell us that we must practise this Sermon. If we only listen to it without practising it we are damned; if we only comment on it, without carrying it out, it will rise in judgment against us and condemn us. The false teaching is not interested in true holiness, in biblical holiness. It holds on to an idea of holiness such as the Pharisees had. You remember that they picked out certain sins of which they were not guilty themselves, as they thought, and said that as long as you were not guilty of those you were all right. Alas, how many Pharisees there are today! Holiness has just become a question of not doing three or four things. We no longer think of it in terms of 'love not the world, neither the things that are in the world ... the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life' (z John ii. 15, 16).

'The pride of life' is one of the greatest curses in the Christian Church. The false teaching desires a holiness like that of the Pharisees. It is just a question of not doing certain things that we ourselves have agreed upon because they do not happen to appeal to us in particular. Thus we have reduced holiness into something that is easy, and we crowd into that broad way and try to practise it. Those are some of the characteristics of these false prophets that come to us in sheep's clothing. They offer an easy salvation, and an easy type of life always. They discourage self-examination; indeed, they almost feel that to examine oneself is heresy. They tell you not to examine your own soul. You must always 'look to Jesus', and never at

*yourself, that you may discover your sin. They discourage what the Bible encourages us to do, to 'examine' ourselves, to 'prove our own selves', and to face this last section of the Sermon on the Mount. They dislike the process of self-examination and mortification of sin as taught by the Puritans, and those great leaders of the eighteenth century-not only Whitefield and Wesley and Jonathan Edwards, but also the saintly John Fletcher, who put twelve questions to himself every night as he retired to bed. It does not believe in that, for that is uncomfortable.*

*It is an easy salvation and easy Christian living. It knows nothing about Paul's feeling, when he says 'we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened'. It does not know anything about fighting 'the good fight of faith'. It does not know what Paul means when he says that 'we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places' (Ephesians vi. 12). It does not understand that. It does not see any need for the whole armour of God, because it has not seen the problem. It is all so easy.*

Let me briefly summarize what he feels these false prophets teach and live. First, they stress love. Second, no stress on doctrine and little teaching on hell. They leave out major truths while people take for granted they believe those things. They do not stress the sinfulness of sin. They talk about the cross and Christ's death but fail to stress it is because of our sin. And all of that could be summed up as a failure to require repentance, and that is what he mentions last. There is no stress on repentance and there is no agony over sin. We continue the quote:

*We do not like this kind of teaching against false prophets today. We are living in days when people say that, as long as a man claims to be a Christian at all, we should regard him as a brother and go on together. But the reply is that our Lord said,*

*'Beware of false prophets.'* These awful, glaring warnings are there in the New Testament because of the very kind of thing to which I have been referring. Of course, we must not be censorious; but neither must we mistake friendliness and affability for saintliness. It is not a question of personalities. We must not despise these people.

Indeed, Dr. Alexander MacLaren is right when he says that **they are unconscious hypocrites**. It is not that they are not nice and pleasing; they are. In a sense that is their greatest danger, and that is what makes them such a source of danger. I am emphasizing this matter because, according to our Lord, we should always be facing it. There is a way that leads to 'destruction', and the false prophet does not believe in 'destruction'. Is it not true to say that the explanation of the present state of the Christian Church is this very thing we have been considering? Why has the Church become so weak and ineffective? I have no hesitation in answering and saying that it is due to the type of preaching that came in as the result of the higher critical movement of the last century, and which utterly condemned doctrinal preaching. Its advocates preached morality and general uplift. They took their illustrations from literature and poetry, and Emerson became one of the High Priests. That is the cause of the trouble. They still talked about God; they still talked about Jesus; they still talked about His death on the cross. They did not stand out as obvious heretics; but they did not say those other things that are vital to salvation. They gave this vague message that never upsets anybody. They were so pleasant and 'modern' and up to date. They suited the popular palate, and the result is not only the empty churches about which we are hearing so much at the present time, but, as we shall see, the poor quality of Christian living of which most of us are so guilty.

Jones quote Alexander MacLaren as saying these false prophets are unconscious hypocrites. What does that mean? It means they are false prophets and don't know it. They think they are leading people in the right

path. They are unconscious of their hypocrisy. We go on:

*These things are distasteful and unpleasant, and whether you believe me or not, in honesty I have to confess that if I had not pledged myself to preach like this through the Sermon on the Mount, I would never have chosen these words as a text. I have never preached on it before. I have never heard a sermon on it. I wonder how many of you have done so? It is not liked; it is unpleasant; but our business is not to choose what we like. It is the Son of God who said this, and He puts it into the context of judgment and of destruction. So, at the risk of causing myself to be known as a heresy hunter, or as a peculiar person who is sitting in judgment on his brethren and everybody else, I have tried honestly to explain the Scripture. And I ask you to consider it again prayerfully in the presence of God as you value your own immortal soul and its eternal destiny.*

[David Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Studies in the Sermon on the Mount (Kindle Locations 8437-8582). Kindle Edition.]

Now I read that for these reasons. I can't improve on that. And I want you to hear most of what I have concluded from someone else as well; and that from a person far advanced from where I am. And because in listening to this you hear somebody far beyond me in spiritual stature, and these are the things he said. And let me add this. He is describing the false prophet from the time in which he lived. He lived from 1899 to 1981. You can hear it in the way he speaks. And I recommend to you that if you recognize the false prophet in one age, you won't recognize them in the next. Like a chameleon they change with the changing scenes in the church.

Now he dealt with just the words, "Beware of false prophets."

CONCL: Well, in conclusion, we have made an application from the narrow gate. Let me make it again briefly. Did you ever come to a place in life where you became spiritually bankrupt? You knew you were had unless the Lord delivered you from your sin? Now I

always find a difficulty here. Many who have grown up in Christian homes have never lived in deep sin. They may not have experienced deep immorality and drunkenness or drugs or murder or big theft and so on. And so there is not such a big turn. For those who have lived in such things, did you ever come to see your own deep and exceeding sinfulness? Did you come to a place of complete bankruptcy? You had nothing good to bring? Did you deal with those sins by repentance and confession? Did you then trust the Lord's sacrifice on your behalf and believe He had forgiven you when you repented and you trusted in Him. May I ask you, do you hunger and thirst for righteousness?

And for those who grew up in Christian homes, did you realize your own bankruptcy as well? Did you confess and repent where needed? Do you fully trust in Christ's redeeming work to save you? Do you realize you have no goodness of your own to merit anything?

Now let me ask all, how do you live? Is your walk equal to your talk? Those who have passed through the narrow gate have a walk that equals their talk. Now if you have read John Bunyan's allegory, 'Pilgrim's Progress', you will realize the pathway is narrow too. It happens that some err in this pathway. Maybe you say, "I did enter the narrow gate, but..." If there is any 'but', today is the day to repent and get back on the narrow path. Once you get off this path, you may end up back on the broad road. This has been the experience of many.

Now we have not looked at the full application Jesus makes in verses 15-22 and we want to do that next time. You see, these parables, as I interpret them, will introduce the Jews and introduce us to the change that is coming. Rather than God's people living in one nation, like Israel did, because they will reject their Messiah, a new work called the Church will begin. And God's people will be scattered out into all the world like salt on meat that is to be preserved. And they will become the light to the entire globe. And those who will become the salt and light of the world must enter through this narrow gate and walk this narrow path.



