

Matthew 7:15-23 June 22nd 2014 Jesus Directs Us

He was in a foreign country. He and his group pulled over in their car. They asked a man standing there for directions. The man gave very detailed instructions. They drove away with smiles. But, they ended up in the middle of nowhere – lost. What happened? They were sure they followed the instructions perfectly. It turned out the person didn't have even a clue of the place they needed to go. He just made up a set of directions.

It's obvious this man didn't help. He actually end up harming them. We know the difference between following good directions and following bad ones. How important is that difference?

So why did the man mislead them? It wasn't because he hated Americans. In this man's culture, people sincerely don't want to disappoint others. They certainly don't want someone to walk away – or, in this case drive away – from an encounter feeling bad. So, the man sent them off with some directions, in order to make them feel good - for the short moment. He didn't have an evil intent. And yet, that didn't prevent the sad outcome. The fact remained: they ended up lost.

Jesus teaches us today: When it comes to spiritual truth, it is vitally important that we receive correct direction. Jesus gives you the words upon which to build your hope and future.

In contrast, the world is flooded with examples of **bad spiritual direction**:

- Some will say: "I believe as long as you are a sincere person who is trying your best, God will be happy with that and you'll go to heaven." That would be like agreeing with the statement: "I believe building a house on a foundation of sand or building it on a solid rock foundation are both about the same - as long as you're sincere in what you're doing." Reply? No! Jesus uses a building example: in it, both individuals try. Both build a house, but ... (Visual aid: pour water into tub, where house of blocks is built on sand – see it fall). Try as much as you'd like, a house built on sand won't remain standing. Jesus' point is: it really matters what teachings serve as the foundation of your faith.
- Another common piece of bad spiritual direction goes like this: "As long as you are at a church on Sunday morning hearing something from some "Christian" preacher, you're fine - you'll be benefited." Reply: No! There is so much out there labeled "Christian" - but some isn't at all, and some mixes error & truth (& all spiritual error is harmful). Jesus in telling the danger of false teachers explains: if you go to thistles or thorn bushes (visual aid: hold up a thorn branch), try as much as you'd like to get food for your body, you'll end up getting yourself hurt going here. Jesus' point is: it really matters whom you are listening to for spiritual direction.

It is a fact: all false teaching is harmful, and potentially deadly, to Christian faith. How does this fact compare with the popular opinion among people today? Many people insist that departures from God's truth aren't that serious. They assign spiritual errors into varying categories, many being sorted as "quite harmless." Jesus cares too much about us to leave us thinking any such thing. God considers this a truth worth repeating often on the pages of the Bible. So, I'll say it again: all false teaching is harmful, and potentially deadly, to Christian faith. Let's look today and see how...

Jesus directs us: Don't be deceived by false teachers (vs.15-20)

False teachers have bite. There is a reason Jesus uses the example of wolves, and describes them as ferocious. Wolves seize, tear and kill the sheep that they get their teeth into. Do you see the danger level, the spiritual harm and destructive effect that false teachers present?



"They come in sheep's clothing." What does this tell you? Pay close attention to what any religious teacher presents. Carefully compare his teaching with what is written in the Bible, the Word. A false teacher may look harmless. What he says might seem appealing. In reality, he is the sheep's worst enemy.



The more you read through the Bible, the more you'll see this important truth spread throughout the pages:

- The threat was present in the Old Testament times as well. We heard in 1 Kings 22 how many false prophets were speaking lies.
- Return to the day Jesus spoke these words in Matthew ch.7. Jesus had just said in vs.13-14: *"Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it."* Jesus' words here in vs.15-20 give one of the reasons "why" so many are on that wide road: because of the lies of false teachers.

Do you think the destructive effect of false teaching only occurs outside "Christian" circles? Look in Acts 20:29. Paul speaks to the leaders of the Christians in Ephesus with the same warning as Jesus: *"...savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock... (ones who) distort the truth..."*

Jesus makes clear: our attention to this matter carries urgency and importance. *"Focus on keeping away from false prophets."*

God has given us the resources to recognize harmful teachers, and keep away from them and their deadly teachings. Think how... the thorough study our youth undertake in Catechism class – it's not just a formality – it is important & practical. So is the Bible Information Class for adults. Here's one example that shows how. Who remembers the 2nd commandment? **(Let someone say:)** *"You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God."* Luther's explanation in the Large Catechism highlights the most dangerous misuse of God's name.

"One cannot more grievously misuse God's name than by using it for purposes of falsehood and deception. ... The greatest misuse occurs in spiritual matters when false preachers arise and parade their lying deceptions as the Word of God." (Luther's Large Catechism, CPH p.20-21)

Real life examples of this were seen in both Bible Readings today. In 2 Peter, after hearing how God's Word is 100% reliable, we hear: *"there will be false teachers among you. They will **secretly** introduce **destructive** heresies... many will follow..."* Later Peter writes: *"be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of lawless men... but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ"* (3:17-18).

The apostle Paul gives the same type of encouragement: *“I commit you to God and to the Word of his grace, which can build you up...”* (Acts 20:32). Only the news of Jesus our Savior and the strength that comes from him can move you to 1) treasure God's truth, 2) study it, and 3) fight to identify any teaching that goes against it. The strength comes from God; it comes through His Gospel.

Another one of the commandments directs our hearts to this source of strength. Who remembers the 3rd commandment? **(Let someone say:)** *“Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy.”*

In the Small Catechism's explanation we hear how we should “not despise preaching and his Word, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it.” How will we identify the ones who pretend to speak the truth but really are speaking lies? Regularly hearing and studying the truth. You have an additional resource on call, as you study: your pastor. If you have questions whether something that you've heard or read is right or wrong, come & ask – or call & ask – or email & ask.

Learning God's Word not only gives us knowledge to distinguish between truth and lies; it also works in us the will and the strength to say “no” to the lies. It is the weapon that we use to fight our own sinful flesh. Have you noticed how tempting false teachings are to us? I'll give you a couple examples. Listen for how false teachings ring pleasant to our sinful flesh:

- The false teacher says, “It's different in our day. We know so much more in the fields of science... and sociology. It's common practice and acceptable today for a man and woman to move in together before getting married, and test out what life together is like.” That's only one example. Think of a false teaching you've had to struggle against, one which claimed “it's different in our day; that's no longer a sin.”
- So, one danger is false teaching that denies sin and its guilt/shame. Another danger is false teaching that promotes pride. False teachers say: “You deserve to receive some credit - you can at least take credit for coming to faith (or, credit for some other wee bit of how you are saved).”

Just listen to the false teachers' words in vs.22-23: *“We prophesied in your name. We drove out demons. We performed miracles.”* Did you hear it? *“We... we... we...”* It is significant to note: The topic is whether or not they should be let into heaven, and all we hear them offer is what they've done. Those to whom Jesus says *“I never knew you”* call attention to their own works. That will never get you into heaven.

God has brought us out of such error ourselves. Our past is clear: we all started in self-righteousness and rebellion. We admit, even since we have known God's truth, we've all fallen to times of neglecting it – not gladly hearing it. God, through his Word of Truth, has brought us to identify such sin. He has led us to confess our sins. We recognize what our sin rightly deserves: the curse of hell.

What, then, is the way to get to heaven? Jesus says in the 2nd part of vs.21. “Only the one who does the will of my Father” will enter the kingdom of heaven. Don't get confused now! What is the will of God the Father? To trust in Jesus' saving work. Jesus said, “For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40). You don't do anything. No credit goes to you or me. All the credit goes to the Lord.

Jesus – here – speaks of himself as the Lord, and as the Judge before whom we'll stand. He is God himself – God the Son. And at the very time as he spoke these words he was living the holy life God requires of us. He lived in our place.

Take comfort in the times you hear Jesus called “Lord.” After his resurrection, Thomas bursts out: “My Lord and My God.” Peter tells Cornelius and his house: “*The message of God [is] the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.*” And Peter goes on: “*all the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.*” (Acts 2:36; 10:36,43). May God keep us on this narrow way, which is: Jesus, all Jesus, nothing but Jesus.

Pick up where I left off in my opening story. The group of men ended up lost. Let's learn from their story. Is there a way to minimize your risk of having the same thing happen to you if you travel somewhere foreign?

Think of how beneficial some advance preparation & precautions would be. Find a reliable source for directions. Study ahead of time where you want to go. Learn the way well. Carry with you a resource that has the right directions, which you can refer back to as needed. You won't be misled then (you'll be ready even to reject directions, if they are offered, that would take you away from your goal).

And so our spiritual conclusion: Jesus says, “You know the way to my Father's house. I am the Way... No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14). “Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and guard & keep it” (Luke 11:28).