

# "HEAR YE HIM"

## A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS

Scripture: Matthew 7:15-20

And again, beware of false prophets, that come to you in sheep's clothing; but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits; for do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore, By their fruits ye shall know them.

God hath set some in the church, first apostles,  
secondarily prophets .....

In all ages, God has spoken through prophets. It is his eternal, unchangeable nature to reveal himself to men, insofar as men are receptive to that revelation. Therefore, in all ages there have been true prophets.

In all ages, however, there have also been warnings against false prophets who speak out of their own intelligence, their own desires, their own emotions. The false prophet often finds a ready acceptance, because he prophesies what the people want to hear and believe for the sake of financial, political, or ecclesiastical advantage. Almost every true prophet has been rejected as false by people who did not want to hear, because the true prophet is often called upon to speak in condemnation -- to speak that which is harrowing, distressing, and repugnant to his own feelings as well as to the feelings of the people. Jeremiah, for example, was constrained to prophesy the conquest of Israel by Babylon, and to counsel Israel's submission to that conquest. He was not popular, but he was a true prophet.

Because the true prophet so frequently speaks forth that which condemns our fixed habits of sin, stubbornness, and pride, it is only the contrite, humble believer who hears and heeds his voice. And yet even the humble and contrite believer must be warned against false prophets, who if possible will deceive the very elect, for it is the expectation of true prophets that helps to make men susceptible to deception. The warning against false prophets is an indication that we should still be looking for genuine prophets. Otherwise Jesus should have said, "Beware of all prophets, for prophets have ceased to exist."

In the New Testament church, gifts of prophecy were not confined to its ministers or officers, but were widely diffused throughout the membership. The 11th chapter of Acts tells how Agabus came from Jerusalem to Antioch and prophesied by the Spirit that there would come a great famine in Jerusalem and Judaea. The church at Antioch collected relief money and sent it back to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Saul. It was this same Agabus who prophesied to Paul of the sufferings he should undergo at Jerusalem and Rome. It was other prophets in the church at Antioch who spoke by the Spirit to say, "Separate unto me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." Paul had the gift of prophecy. Simeon, John the Baptist, Stephen, Judas, Silas, Peter, Jude, and John the Revelator are all mentioned as prophets.

Paul devotes a considerable portion of the first Corinthian letter to an exposition of the theme of diversity in unity and unity in diversity. Paul points out that there are many different organs and members, many diverse functions, gifts, and talents necessary to the complete functioning of the church which is the body of Christ. The analogy is further carried out in the 4th chapter of the Ephesian letter, where it is pointed out that the body needs every member, every officer, every function, every diversified gift, if it is to achieve a normal and complete and perfect growth.

One of the ministries needed in the church and body of Christ is the prophetic ministry. "God hath set in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets." Prophets are essential to a wholesome, well-rounded spiritual growth in the body

of Christ. Ephesians 4:11 in the Revised Standard version reads: "And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers...." If these officers were set in the church, they were meant to continue in the church permanently. They should be there now, living, functioning, contributing of their special and peculiar and diversified gifts to the edification of the body of Christ.

Why do we still need a prophetic ministry from genuine prophets? Old Testament prophets foretold the advent of the Messiah. Today we need prophets to bear testimony that Jesus is the Christ. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." No man can know that Jesus is the Christ but by the Holy Ghost, which is the Spirit of prophecy. That testimony is still needed today, and will be to the end of time.

We need prophets in the church today to give a prophetic ministry of inspired interpretation of scripture already written, in the light of current situations, needs, and problems. We need prophetic ministry in the church to give instruction and counsel; to call men to priesthood ministry by the voice of God; to give exhortation to those who have grown cold and indifferent, to reveal new unapprehended truth. Prophets are watchmen -- guardians of the people. If they be true prophets, they will be as Jeremiah, who said that the word of the Lord was as a fire in his bones which made it impossible to keep silent. They will give the word of the Lord to common men and kings, rebuking evil in high places and low, warning men and nations of judgment.

Every man has the responsibility of unmasking and rejecting the false prophet, who tickles men's ears with the things they delight to hear, who prophesy peace and safety when judgment impends, who through pride or desire for preferment and gain, speak the words of their own hearts and minds in the name of God. But it is equally true that every man has the responsibility of discovering, hearing, and obeying the true prophets who have been set in the church.

How shall we test a prophet? One test, as set forth in Deuteronomy 18:20-22, is the fulfillment of the prophet's predictions. But a true prophet's predictions may not be fulfilled for thousands of years, and the shrewd guesses of a false prophet may come true day after

tomorrow. By itself, fulfillment of predictions is not a good test of a prophet. A true prophet always speaks with power, and often accompanies his words with signs and wonders and miracles, as did Moses. But evil spirits may give the false prophet similar powers, as Pharaoh's magicians duplicated all of Moses' signs. Neither is this alone a good test of a prophet.

Another test is, "Do the words of the prophet agree with that which has already been revealed by prophets proved to be true?" The words of a true prophet always do. The words of even a false prophet may seem to do so to the ignorant or the spiritually immature. The false prophet may cry "Lord, Lord," and go through all the correct ritual and form, and still be false. This alone is again not an infallible test of a prophet. The humble, repentant, godly man who has the Spirit of God will recognize a true prophet by the response of the spirit of discernment which is in him. He will "prove all things, and hold fast to that which is good." He will follow the advice of John to "believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God..."

The supreme test of any prophet is the one proposed by Jesus: "By their fruits ye shall know them." What are the results of following their leadership? Will obedience to their words bring more spiritual power to the church, or more worldly power, money, and honor for the prophet? Will following the prophet's words bring more love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; or more hate, sorrow, strife, turmoil, restlessness, cruelty, doubt, fear, pride, and lust? Will obedience to the prophet's words bring more freedom or more bondage? More health or more disease? More light and intelligence and wisdom, or more darkness and ignorance? By their fruits ye shall know them.

Beware of false prophets. They are in the world as in the church -- preaching false economic, social, racial, and political doctrines, as well as false spiritual doctrines, bringing spiritual and physical death to men, and poverty, disease, famine, war, anarchy, oppression, and disintegration to nations. Keep the Spirit of God in your own soul. Listen for the voice of the true prophets who still speak the truth in the name of God. Try the Spirits. Prove all things, and hold fast to that which is good.

