

Speaking to the Soul



False prophets

**“Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act.”
Matthew 7:15–16**

False prophets make an appearance in both the Old and New Testaments. Jeremiah had a particular problem with them. He believed that he was called by God to inform the people that, unless they turned back to him, a foreign nation would sweep over them and take them into exile. This was

not the message that people wanted to hear. They much preferred the soothing words of the false prophets who prophesied that all would be well because they had the Lord's Temple. But Jeremiah's words were true and, in due course, the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem and took the Lord's people off into exile.

False prophets were a continual challenge in the early Church; Jesus sought to prepare his followers to meet them. What they needed to know was how to spot a false prophet. Jesus warned that there would be teachers who would come among them and give every appearance of being the real thing. But although they presented themselves as sheep they were in fact vicious wolves looking for every opportunity to disrupt and destroy the Church. So how could they be spotted if their words were so persuasive and their manner so attractive? Jesus told his followers to look carefully at their lives, because the way in which they acted would be bound to reveal the people that they truly were.

False prophets still exist today. Their message may sound good and attractive, but their actions reveal what they are really like. When we see people who are only out to make money, or to gain a reputation and a following, we need to be suspicious. When we see anger, rudeness, selfishness and divisiveness we are bound to ask where those actions come from. As Jesus said: "a good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit" (v17).

QUESTION

How would you spot a false prophet?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you for warning us about the dangers that we might face and for providing your Spirit who gives us wisdom and strength as we confront them. Amen