

Summary

Jesus warned that deception would define the last days. In Matthew 24:4-5, His first command wasn't about wars or disasters—it was "See to it that no one misleads you." Many false prophets will arise, not just claiming to be Christ, but speaking in His name while leading many astray.

In this message, I expose how deception works, sharing my personal journey through the Charismatic movement and the hard lessons I learned after following leaders who seemed anointed but were later revealed to be wolves in sheep's clothing.

We'll dive deep into Matthew 7:15-20, uncovering how to recognize false prophets by their fruit—not their words, charisma, or even their miracles.

Introduction

a) The Disciples' Question in Matthew 24

- Jesus' disciples asked about the sign of His coming and the end of the age.
- Before warning of wars, disasters, and famines, Jesus' first command was to guard against deception (Matt. 24:4).

b) The Pervasiveness of Deception

- Jesus warned that deception would characterize the last days.
- The internet, social media, and YouTube amplify false teachings faster than ever.
- Vigilance, discernment, and anchoring in truth are necessary.

c) Many Will Claim to Represent Christ

- Some will falsely claim to be Christ (Matt. 24:5).
- Example of "Jesus of Tongaren" in Kenya.
 - Claimed to be Jesus reincarnated, had disciples, and performed fake miracles.
 - Locals planned to test him by attempting to crucify him.
 - His fearful reaction exposed him as a fraud.

The Real Danger Isn't the Obvious Fraud

a) False Prophets Look Genuine

- Most people wouldn't fall for a self-proclaimed Messiah.
- False prophets claim to speak for Christ but mislead many.
- They affirm core Christian doctrines but still deceive.

b) How False Prophets Operate

- They are persuasive, articulate, and charismatic.
- They quote Scripture and claim divine revelation.

- Their goal is to draw people to themselves rather than Christ.
- They exploit people for sex, power, money, or influence.

c) Personal Experience of Deception

- Mike Bickle's deep impact on my life
 - His love for Scripture, deep insights, and prophetic vision drew me in.
 - His firsthand accounts of Bob Jones, Paul Cain, and the revival scene were more gripping than a movie.
 - His 1997 messages on the forerunner ministry changed my life.
 - I devoured his teachings from mid-90s to 2015.
 - He became a trusted mentor, almost like a spiritual father.
 - His teachings on the Song of Solomon allowed me to experience God's love like never before.
 - His teachings on passion for Jesus, the beauty of the Lord, the life of David, and especially the end times transformed me.
- The 2023 exposure of Mike Bickle
 - 17 women accused him of sexual abuse spanning over 40 years.
 - Evidence of manipulation and coercion.
 - Used prophecy to manipulate and silence victims.
 - Shock at how a well-respected leader could live a double life.

d) Many of My Heroes Have Fallen

- From the mid-nineties to 2015, my spiritual heroes were Mike Bickle, Ricky Joyner, Paul Cain, and Michael Brown.
- Mike Bickle has proven to be a false prophet—a wolf in sheep's clothing. The same is true of Paul Cain.
- Ricky Joyner, whose two life-changing books *The Final Quest* and *The Call*, deeply impacted me. But Joyner has platformed Todd Bentley—a known sexual abuser, been credibly accused of being addicted to hard liquor, and dismissed the Mike Bickle accusations as a "nothing burger."
- Michael Brown has also now been credibly accused of clergy sexual abuse, lying, deceiving, and manipulating.

e) Hard Questions for Discerning False Prophets

- How do you discern false prophets and teachers?
- How do you judge rightly without becoming cynical, critical, or dishonoring true messengers of God?

- How do you discern the false from the true without turning into a “discernment ministry who finds fault with everything?”
- What actually makes someone a false prophet or teacher?
- What does the New Testament say about false prophets and teachers?

f) Learn From Your Mistakes

- “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.”
- Afraid of becoming a religious Pharisee, I abandoned discernment altogether.
- I didn’t want to be like the cynical, critical, sessionists Calvinists who could only see what was wrong.
- If you don’t learn from your mistakes, you’re vulnerable to deception again.
- No one can risk this since deception is increasing in the last days.
- If you’re one degree off course flying from NY to LA, you’d land over 40 miles from your intended destination.

The Charismatic Movement at a Crossroads

a) The Need for Reformation

- Deception has reached unprecedented levels.
- The Charismatic Movement must examine itself.
- The 2008 Lakeland Revival.
- A major reform is needed, especially in what’s called “prophetic ministry.”

b) Purpose of This Series

- To learn how to discern deception without becoming jaded.
- To learn how to receive from the true messengers of God while exposing the false.
- We’ll take a deep dive into Matthew 7:15-27, 2 Peter 2, and Jude.

Jesus Warned of False Prophets

a) Matthew 24:11 – **Many** False Prophets Will Mislead **Many**

- Jesus emphasized that deception would be widespread.
- The importance of discernment in the last days.

b) Matthew 7:15-20 – Identifying False Prophets

15 Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

16 You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?

17 So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.

18 A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.

19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

20 So then, you will know them by their fruits.

c) Beware of False Prophets

- “Beware of the false prophets” (Matt. 7:15).
- Means to pay attention to, be cautious, be on guard, or devote oneself to something.
- Implies being alert, careful, and watchful.
- Often used in contexts where someone is warned to avoid danger or deception.
- Not a passive suggestion but a direct order to be discerning.
- Requires constant awareness, especially against spiritual deception.

Key Characteristics of False Prophets (Matthew 7:15-20)

a) Outwardly They Look Like Sheep

- “Who come to you in sheep’s clothing” (Matt. 7:15).
- False prophets appear harmless, trustworthy, and sincere.
- They seem to follow Christ and affirm correct doctrine.
- They are hypocrites.
 - Today, we use this word for those whose “talk” doesn’t align with their “walk.”
 - In ancient Greek, the word “hypocrite” referred to an actor or stage performer—someone who wore a mask and played a role in a theatrical performance.
- Jesus used this word to describe the Pharisees who appeared righteous but were inwardly corrupt.
- This word conveys the idea of pretense, deceit, or insincerity, highlighting the contrast between external appearances and internal realities.
- False prophets are actors, developing a persona that looks genuine.

b) Inwardly They Are Ravenous Wolves

- “Inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matt. 7:15).
- They don’t have the inward nature of the Lamb—humility, meekness, and self-sacrificial love.
- They have the inward character of a hungry wolf seeking to feed their carnal appetites.
- They are predators disguised as spiritual leaders.
- They appear gentle and genuine, but their true nature is predatory and destructive.

- "Ravenous" means having an insatiable, destructive hunger.
- They prey on the sheep rather than pray for the sheep.
- They prey on vulnerable people, exploiting them for personal gain.
- Their motives include sex, money, power, and control.
- In summary, they:
 - Are deceptive in appearance;
 - Exploit the vulnerable;
 - Have hidden motives that are selfish;
 - Lead people to spiritual destruction to satisfy their own desires.
- Most false prophets and teachers likely start with sincere motives to please Christ and represent Him well.
 - Though gifted and passionate, they lack the foundation of the cross.
 - Many enter ministry without a true wilderness experience—where God breaks and refines them.
 - When success comes through their gifting, but they have never learned the way of the cross, they begin to role-play.
 - They can imitate an anointed prophet, teacher, pastor, or apostle, but their desires for money, fame, power, control, praise, and sex remain uncrucified.
 - Over time, they drift into deception and, in some cases, full apostasy—crossing the line from disobedience to outright denial of Christ due to an unrepentant, sinful lifestyle.

c) Their Fruit Reveals Their Root

- Verses 16-18.
- False prophets can only be truly identified by their fruit—not the accuracy of their prophecies, the undeniable proof of their miracles, or their deliverance ministries that set many free.
- Do they draw people to themselves or point people to Christ?
- Are they the heroes of the story or is Jesus the hero?
- Christlike fruit cannot come from a rotten root—it can only come by the Spirit.
- If someone's doctrine, prophetic words, and influence produces confusion, division, immorality, greed, lust, fear, or arrogance rather than humility, holiness, love for truth, and a desire for Christ—those are thorns, not fruit.
- False prophets often say the right things, but their lives tell the real story.
- Here's the key to discernment: are they selfish or self-denying? Do they embrace the cross or resist it?
- Spiritual fruit takes time to grow and reveal someone's true nature.

- In Mike Bickle's case, even for those closest to him who are genuine and devoted followers of Christ, it took them 10, 15, even 20 years to discern who he truly was.
- Do they express Christ's nature—the fruits of the Spirit? Do they obey Christ's words, especially the Sermon on the Mount?
- Their teaching, character, and influence expose their real identity.
- Questions to ask:
 - Do they obey Jesus' words, especially the Sermon on the Mount?
 - Does their teaching lead to holiness and Christlikeness?
 - Do their disciples display humility and love for truth?
 - Does their life, marriage, and family reflect biblical values?
- Be patient in judgment—fruit takes time to grow, but it will eventually reveal the truth.
- Test all teachings and leaders against the Word of God and the evidence of transformed lives.
- Ultimately, Jesus' message is clear: what is inside a person will eventually come out.

The Consequences for False Prophets

a) The Judgment of False Prophets (Matt. 7:19)

- Trees that do not bear good fruit are cut down and thrown into the fire.
- Do you realize that some people you look to for spiritual guidance may not even ultimately enter the kingdom of heaven?
- A clear reference to divine judgment and eternal separation from God.
- Their end is destruction.

b) Discernment is Necessary (Matt. 7:20)

- Jesus assured that false prophets will be known by their fruit.
- Spiritual discernment is not optional—it is commanded.
- True messengers of Christ display the fruit of the Spirit and obey Christ's teachings, especially the Sermon on the Mount.
- False teachers disguise themselves well, but time will expose them.

The Dangers of Suspended Critical Thinking

a) The Influence of IHOP-KC and Similar Movements

- Many former followers report being trained to "suspend critical thinking."
- A fear of reasoning was instilled to avoid "interfering with the Spirit."
- This mindset allowed deception to flourish.

b) The Need for Biblical Discernment

- God gave us minds to use in evaluating truth.
- If something seems off, it likely is.
- We must test everything against Scripture and true spiritual fruit.
- Jesus expects us to practice discernment—not to be naïve or gullible, but to test everything against His Word.