

## Deceived

I ended the message last Sunday talking about the tragedy that took the lives of more than 900 people at Jonestown in Guyana almost 40 years ago. I asked how could so many people, good people, have been so deceived that they followed Jim Jones unquestionably to their deaths? How could this happen? We are going to look for answers to that question over the next couple of weeks and hopefully learn to avoid being deceived by false teachers and charlatans in this sermon series, Deceived.

Jesus said, **“Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming ‘I am the Christ’ and will deceive many...false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect if that were possible.” Matthew 24:4-5, 24-25**

Jesus puts us on notice, false teachers and false prophets will try to deceive us. They may even perform signs and miracles. Sounds legit doesn't it? Jesus suggests even the elect could be deceived if they aren't careful. Then how do we avoid being deceived? Jesus said, **“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them.” Matthew 7:15-16** They may look like sheep but check the fruit they are producing. Fruit production may take a little time. It may not be obvious overnight, but you will know eventually by looking at the fruit.

Deceivers, false teachers are not a new thing. Jesus warned us. The New Testament authors warned the churches of the first century and they are warning us as well. Paul warned the elders of the church at Ephesus, **“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Acts 20:28-31**

It was happening then and it happens today. Be on your guard because people are still trying to distort the truth of the Scripture, still trying to draw disciples away from Jesus and from the church and God's word. There are frauds out there, more concerned with making money than saving the lost and helping the hurting. There are false teachers distorting the truth. Their teaching may come under the guise of liberating you from the “oppression of the church”, of religion. They want to help you achieve a higher consciousness, to reach a higher plane of

spirituality. It's the same old deception just with new packaging. They may tell you the doctrines of Christianity are antiquated and irrelevant to 21<sup>st</sup> century culture. "Watch out that no one deceives you!"

Turn to 2 Peter. I want to share a word with you that I believe can help you avoid being deceived. Peter writes, **"But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them..." 2 Peter 2:1**

Peter doesn't suggest there might be false teachers, he says there were false prophets in the Old Testament and there will be false teachers trying to pull you away from the authority of the word of God and from faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord. He says they'll be "among you." He is suggesting these are people claiming to be Christians but distorting the truth, presenting a counterfeit gospel. Satan is a counterfeiter and will sow deception everywhere he can. So how can we tell the difference between truth and deception? In chapter 1 Peter talks about the certainty of our salvation and the trustworthiness of the gospel. He says we can be certain of this because he was an eyewitness. He was with Jesus. He contrasts the certainty of the Scripture ("the word of the prophets made more certain") in chapter 1 with the false teachers and their heresies, the distortion of the truth in chapter 2. I want us to examine these contrasts. (Let me give credit to Colin Smith, a Scottish Pastor of an Evangelical church in Illinois and the author of several books. I read an article he wrote where he shared these seven differences between the authentic and the counterfeit, between truth and deception.)

**Different Source. What's the source of the message?** I mentioned last week regarding James Jones' preaching, one author said the sermons were based on his own word rather than the biblical scriptures. What's the source? Peter says, **"We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty." 2 Peter 1:16** Peter was an eyewitness, a reliable source. The Scriptures are our reliable source. This is the authoritative rule of faith and conduct for us. "The bible is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it commands, trusted in all that it promises and revered in all that it reveals." But Peter says of the deceivers, **"In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up." 2 Peter 2:3**

Once you abandon the Scripture, you're headed into deception. So many false doctrines and false teaching begin by questioning the authority of the Scripture. Billy Graham always said

in his preaching, “the bible says.” When you start believing someone’s opinion over the truth of the Scripture, you are going to be deceived. Check the source.

**Different Message. What is the substance of the message?** If you are seeking the truth, Jesus is the substance of the message. Peter said, “we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” **“For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.” 2 Peter 1:17-18** There is only one message: Jesus! The one who received honor and glory from the Father. He is the center of all. But for the false teacher, Jesus has to move to the margins. Peter says, **“They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them.” 2 Peter 2:1** “Secretly.” They may not openly deny Jesus, but they will start moving away from him as Sovereign Lord. Eventually denying Jesus and denying the Scripture go hand in hand. John says, **“Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.” 1 John 4:2-3.** Jesus is central to our lives and central to the truth of the gospel. If he isn’t, you’re being deceived.

**Different Position. In what position will the message leave you?** After hearing and believing the message of the gospel, you are redeemed, delivered, set free. Peter says, **“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him...He has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.” 2 Peter 1:3-4.** In what position does the truth of the gospel leave you? Free from sin and the corruption of the world, equipped with everything we need to live a godly life, sharing in the very nature of Christ. But in what position does the message of the false teachers leave you? Peter writes, **“They promise...freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity – for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.” 2 Peter 2:19** Is the message being preached leading you to freedom and victory in Christ, or is it moving you toward slavery to self and sin? It matters what you believe! Don’t be deceived. Where is that message taking you?

**Different character. What kind of people does the message produce?** Peter gives us a sad description of the false teachers and those who have been deceived by them. He says they **“...follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority...arrogant and not**

**afraid to slander celestial beings” (2:10). They have “eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable...they are experts in greed...they have left the straight way and wandered off.” (2:14).** They may produce nice sounding arguments but they have left the straight way and their message corrupts the character of people and leads people to sin.

Contrast that with the character of the true believer, one who follows Jesus and believes and obeys God’s word. Peter says, **“Make every effort to add to your faith goodness and to goodness knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control and to self-control perseverance and to perseverance godliness and to godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness, love.” 2 Peter 1:5-7.** Here is the character of the follower of Christ, the character of one who builds their life on the truth of God’s word and pursues a life that is pleasing to God. Peter says these qualities make us effective and productive in the Kingdom of God. There is a marked difference between the character of the believer and the deceived.

**Different appeal. Why listen to the message?** The teacher of truth appeals to the Scripture. God’s word is the source of our appeal. Peter writes, **“We have the word of the prophets made more certain and you will do well to pay attention to it.” 2 Peter 1:19.** Peter has already made clear he was an eyewitness. There was no doubt for Peter. He made his appeal based on the word of God and his own eyewitness account of Jesus.

We make our appeal based on the infallible word of God. False teachers make their appeal somewhat differently. Peter says of the false teachers, **“For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error.” 2 Peter 2:18.** False teachers and deceivers base their appeal on boastful empty words and appeal to the lustful desires of our sinful nature. Instead of asking “What has God said in his word?” the false teacher asks, “What do people want to hear? What will appeal to their sinful flesh?”

Paul warns us, **“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.” 2 Timothy 4:3-4**

Church, the time has come. People calling themselves Christian have rejected sound doctrine. They are looking for a church and a doctrine that will suit their own sinful desires. We

cannot compromise the Word of God. What does the bible say? What does the consistent, historic teaching of the church say? Our appeal must be to the Scripture.

**Different fruit. What fruit does the message produce in the lives of people?** Peter shared some of the character qualities of the believer in chapter 1 -- faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness and love. You can't fake those qualities. Not for long anyway. Jesus said "by their fruit you will recognize them." Paul suggested similar character qualities as the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness gentleness and self-control. That's the fruit the message of the gospel produces.

But what of the false teachers and their fruit? Someone said, "False teachers are not just false in their teaching but also in their living." Look at the life of the teacher and the fruit that's being produced. Is that teacher living an ethical life? Are they morally and spiritually clean or is there compromise in their life? "But they pastor a huge church and they write books and have big crowds." Yes, but check the fruit.

They may talk a good game, but look at the fruit. Peter describes the false teachers like this: **"These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm." 2 Peter 2:17** They promise a lot but produce very little. A lot of wind and mist but no rain. Springs that offer hope but when you get there, the springs are dry and you are still thirsty. Check the fruit.

**Different End. Where does the message finally lead you?** Holding to the truth of God's word, persevering, living for Jesus, where will it finally lead you? Peter tells us where it leads: **"Therefore my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 1:10-11**

Is there a cost involved in serving Jesus? Absolutely. We take up our cross and crucify the flesh and walk in step with God's Word and with His Holy Spirit. We say no to the pressure of the world and the culture around us. We refuse to compromise, regardless of what the devil and the world offer. And the result? Is it worth it? Absolutely! Peter says we won't fall and instead will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom and presence of Jesus! Heaven is where the message of the gospel leads us.

But for the false teacher and those who depart from the truth, for the deceived, the end is tragic. Peter says, **"They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them – bringing swift destruction on themselves." 2 Peter 2:1**

Destruction is coming. False teachers and false Christians, those who buy into the deception and stop obeying the word and stop truly following Jesus, the end for them is destruction.

Hear the words of Jesus. **“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus by their fruit you will recognize them. Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evil doers!’”**

**Matthew 7:19-23**

There are going to be false teachers in the church. There are going to be people who call themselves Christians, who say “Lord, Lord”, professing to be believers but who have rejected the authority of the bible, who have allowed sin to dominate their life, who no longer do the will of the Father in heaven, and Jesus says they will come to a different end, away from him!

It’s our eternal soul, our eternal destiny I’m talking about this morning. That’s why we have to guard our hearts and minds and not allow anyone to deceive us and draw us away from Christ. Know the word of God. Read it, study it, hide it in your heart and obey it! Connect to a solid, bible teaching and believing church. I believe you’re at one today. Stay close to Jesus. Check the source. Where does the message come from? Check the message? Is Jesus at the heart of the message being proclaimed? Will the message being preached lead you to living a holy life or will it move you toward compromise and bondage to sin? Does the preacher appeal to Scripture or to popular opinion? Does the message produce the right kind of fruit and where will the message finally lead you?

Peter ends his letter with this. **“Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.” 2 Peter 3:17-18**