

## ***YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED***

Late on the night of April 14, 1912 the RMS Titanic, hailed as a “practically unsinkable” ship struck an iceberg. It sank, two hours and 40 minutes later, in the early morning hours resulting in the deaths of more than 1500 people. While there has been much false information about what actually did and did not happen on that fateful night, this much is clear. The ship’s captain had been notified of the presence of icebergs in the sailing lanes. Although the ship was traveling at a moderate speed, it struck one of those frozen monsters and received such a gaping wound that it could not recover.

A failure to heed warnings has been the reason for many tragedies throughout the ages, and it is the reason for the greatest tragedy of all history which occurs every time an unprepared soul enters into eternity. There is a verse of scripture that I find absolutely chilling. It is **Matthew 7:13**, where Jesus said, *“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”*

Jesus, are you telling us that most people are going to be lost? Yes, only a few are going to find the way that leads to eternal life. Well, why is that so few are going to be saved and so many are going to be lost? It is because people do not heed the warnings that given to them. Warnings such as was given to Adam and Eve. Warnings such as **Romans 6:23**, *“The wages of sin is death,”* and **3:23**, *“We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”* Warnings such as found in **Hebrews 9:27**, *“it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.”* Warnings such as found in **Revelation 20:15**, *“And if anyone’s name was not found written the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”*

It seems to be a persistent part of man’s nature to ignore warnings. How many lives might have been saved if the flashing railroad signal had been obeyed? How many people might be alive today if they had taken action when the first signs of that cancer or heart problem were seen? How many marriages and families might have been saved if those first early signs of trouble had been acted upon instead of ignored?

God in His word, obviously, has much to say about this matter and in fact, His word contains many warning. Many warnings! You have read a number of them even this past week if you are keeping up with the reading schedule for our New Testament Studies.

In fact, our reading this past Monday began with a warning, didn’t it? **1 John 4:1** says, *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.”* John was warning Christians about false teachers.

I think it is interesting in that passage that I referred to in Mathew 7:13,14, in the very next verse—**verse 15**—Jesus spoke to this very issue. After declaring that only a few were going to find the way that leads to life, and that most were going to go in the way that leads to

destruction, He said, *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”*

### **You have been warned!**

John had already given several warnings prior to what we find in chapter 4. In chapter **2**, beginning in verse **18**, John wrote:

*Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. 19) They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. 20) But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. 21) I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. 22) Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. 23) No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. 24) Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. 25) And this is the promise that he made to us--eternal life. 26) I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you.*

In the **7<sup>th</sup> verse of John's 2<sup>nd</sup> letter**, he repeated the warning about false teachers and deceivers. He said, *“For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.”*

What do you think? Do you think maybe John was concerned about the Christians being deceived? Do you think John (and even Jesus) was worried about the danger of false teachers and false teachings?

It sure seems like the apostle Paul was concerned about that. In **Acts 20, beginning in verse 28**, we find Paul's words spoken to the elders of the Church at Ephesus. He encouraged them about their work, but he also gave them a warning. He said:

*“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. 29) I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30) and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31) Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. 32) And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”*

Paul devoted several years and shed a lot of blood in trying to evangelize an area known as Galatia. A number of churches were established by Paul and by others, but Paul knew those Christians were sitting ducks for many false teachers who were circulating among the Christians in those days. And so, in **chapter 1, beginning in verse 6**, Paul writes to them, and says...

*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- 7) not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8) But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9) As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.*

At a later time, Paul wrote a couple of letters to a young co-worker named Timothy. He had worked with Timothy for a number of years, trained him in preaching the gospel, and in these two letters, writes to tell him about things that Timothy needs to keep in mind. Listen to these words taken from the **4<sup>th</sup> chapter of his first letter**:

**Verse 1** *Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,*

In the **4<sup>th</sup> chapter of his second letter**, Paul continued his admonitions to Timothy. He said,

*"I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: 2) preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 3) For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4) and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*

### **You have been warned!**

The apostle Peter also speaks a word of warning concerning those who preach and teaching things that are not true. In **2 Peter 2:1**, the apostle to whom the Lord entrusted with the keys to the kingdom, had this to say: *"But false prophets also arose among the people—referring to ancient Israel-- just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies."* He went on to say, *"they will exploit you with false words."*

As he ended that short epistle, Peter included another warning (**2 Peter 3:16-18**). Speaking of some things that his fellow apostle Paul had written, he said:

*"There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do other Scriptures. You therefore,*

*beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."*

Okay, I want you to notice, that in about **10 MINUTES, I HAVE READ 10 WARNINGS TO YOU FROM THE SCRIPTURES**. This is not stuff I just made up. Each of these warnings was given to us by the Holy Spirit of God. Each one warns us, not just of the possibility of false teachers and false teachings but of the certainty. So what do you think? Is there a possibility that at some time you and I might be in danger of false teachers and false teaching? Are we paying attention? Will we heed the warnings?

Some will probably just blow this message off. *This is "old hat." This is "much ado about nothing!"* They think, *"What is there to be worried about? I would know a false teacher if I heard one! I would know false teaching if I heard it!"*

But would we? Do we? Or do we blithely assume that if there was a problem, or danger, we would know it; or at least someone would catch it before we could get hurt by it. Surely one of the elders would catch it, or brother Don, or someone. But what if the false teacher looks like a sheep? As a matter of fact, what if the false teacher is a sheep? Didn't Paul say that *"men from among your own selves will arise, speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them?"* So what if the sheep is actually one of us?

Or, what if, as John said of some in his day, even if they are "not of us," they "sound like us?" There are so many voices out there today, both in pulpits and on radio and television, and in books, and they sound good. They quote scripture. They talk about God and Christ and the Holy Spirit. They say a lot of things that make sense. They say a lot of things we agree with. They make us laugh and they make us cry, and they make us feel good, and so it isn't long until we begin to think that maybe, just maybe they are teaching us the truth. And the next thing you know, we no longer believe what we use to believe. We no longer find it all that important that we do what we use to do.

Now let me make it clear, I am not saying that what we have always believed and done is the standard by which we determine if something is right or wrong. God's word is the standard. We need to be like the Bereans Luke wrote about in **Acts 17:11**. Paul and another brother named Silas had been whisked out of Thessalonica due to some danger they were facing, so they went to Berea, where they preached in the synagogue there. **Verse 11** says of those Jews, *"Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so."*

Are we confident that we would know a false teacher if we saw one, or that we would know false teaching if we heard it or read it? I get the idea that some of these persons are pretty slick. Paul wrote about some false teachers in his day. In **2 Corinthians 11:13**, he said: *"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ."*

*And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness."*

Sometimes I will ask people, "Do I look like a servant of righteousness?" "Do I sound like one?" Most people think that I do but guess what? Paul said false teachers are going to look and sound like that as well.

There were a number of things that John wrote in the chapters we read from his three epistles this past week. There were a number of things that I hope you read and pondered, and I hope this that I have shared with you this morning is not one that you missed. I hope you read and took seriously the warnings John was inspired to pass on to us. I pray that you didn't just skip over those warnings, thinking to yourself, "Well that's not anything I need to be concerned with."

I hope what John wrote is very true of each one of you. In **2:21** he said, "*I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it.*" Yes, I'm sure you've heard these things before but as Peter said, "*I intend always to remind you of these things, though you know them already, and are established in the truth that you have. But I think it is right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder,*" (2 Peter 1:12,13).

In closing,

- Let us not take truth for granted.
- Let us not make it easy for the devil to get to us.
- Let us not be naïve and think that we could never be deceived, or that we would always know it if we are faced with something isn't true.
- Let us not put our faith and trust in men, any men.
- Let us make sure our faith is based on, grounded in and growing by the Word of God.

Beloved, you have been warned!

Invitation

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