

7/27/25 - Order of Worship

Red = Slide Change

Purple = Sound Person Note

Green = PC Person Note

Blue = Note for Speaker

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- **Welcome!**
- **Today's Sermon**
 - SOTM Part 26 - Recognizing God's Voice
 - Sermon notes available
- **SOTM Reflection**
 - Jesus' words aren't just meant to be **heard**... they're meant to be **lived**.
 - I invite you to reflect: How has the Sermon on the Mount been shaping your heart? What questions are still stirring in you? What practical steps have you taken in response to Jesus' teaching?
 - Feel free to email me your thoughts, questions, or even small changes you've made in daily life. If I receive enough responses, I'll share some (anonymously or with permission) as part of the final message in the series.
 - Sharing what God's doing in us is one way we celebrate how He's **shaping us together** as His church family.
- **Church Newsletter** - This is the best way to find out what's going on at Refton. We send it through email every week, but we also have several printed copies on the welcome desk in the church lobby for those that don't do email. Feel free to take one if you need it.
- **Women's Breakfast** - Saturday, August 2nd, 9am at Joe on the Go - sign up at the information desk in the church lobby
- **Connect Cards** - place them in the offering boxes

PRAYER

WORSHIP (3 Songs)

CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

SCRIPTURE READING - Butch Miller - *check livestream audio - handheld mic*

MESSAGE - The Sermon on the Mount - Part 26

PRAYER

RESPONSE SONG

MESSAGE - SOTM - Part 26 - Recognizing God's Voice

Last week we talked about walking the narrow road, and how it presses in on us—how it shapes us into people after God's own heart.

This week we're talking about how to stay on that narrow road. Because there will be competing voices that tempt us to veer off course.

So how do we know which voice to listen to... or better yet...

[SLIDE 1] How do we recognize the voice of God?

This question reminded me of something that happened back when I was a sophomore in high school.

I had a pretty tough—no nonsense—English teacher. Looking back, I *think* she was fair—but she definitely didn't have time for excuses.

Well, one day the topic of religion came up in one of our assignments. And for whatever reason, my teacher shared a story about her sister being diagnosed with a terminal illness.

Her sister ended up going to a "faith healing service" that someone recommended. She went up on stage, was prayed over, and came away convinced she'd been healed.

But several months later, she passed away.

So... what happened?

Honestly, I don't know.

But what I do know is that **my English teacher was devastated**. She watched her sister literally "buy" into false promises. And because her sister wasn't healed, her conclusion was that either God doesn't exist... or He's cruel. Her heart was hardened by false promises made in Jesus' name.

That moment left a mark on me. 26 years later—and I’m still thinking about it. It’s just another example in my life that illustrates why Jesus said, “Watch out for false prophets.”

Because not everyone who claims to speak for God is actually pointing people toward Him.

So how can we tell the difference between God’s voice and false promises?

Well, it’s not always easy—but Jesus gives us some guidance. He knows how important it is to stay on the narrow road. And He’s equipping us to remain faithful—even when signs along the road tempt us by promising a better way. Jesus encourages us to watch out for those “signs,” recognizing them for what they are. He said...

[SLIDE 2] Matthew 7:15a - Watch out for false prophets.

“Watch out” isn’t just a warning—it’s a command. And that tells me something right away: **We need the kind of wisdom that helps us sense when something’s off**—even if it sounds spiritual or looks right on the surface. It’s like a Spirit-led awareness that helps us stay grounded in what’s true.

And Jesus is saying that this kind of **spiritual discernment isn’t optional**. It’s a *vital* part of walking the narrow road. And so He said...

[SLIDE 3] Matthew 7:15 - Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

So who are these “false prophets”?

Those listening on that hillside would have immediately been reminded of Old Testament warnings from passages like the one Butch read this morning—Jeremiah 23—where Yahweh exposed lying prophets...

[SLIDE 4] Jeremiah 23:16 - This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false

hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD.

Think about who these prophets were...

They were recognized as *the LORD's* prophets—they were the prophets of Judah—and yet, *they* were the ones filling God's people with false hope. They were saying: *Everything's fine! Babylon isn't going to come and destroy us. We're in a time of peace!*

But their words were just hot air. Jeremiah warned them: a storm was coming. Judgment was coming. Their sin wouldn't go unnoticed. They needed to turn their hearts back to Yahweh!

But they wouldn't listen. They fell for the lie of peace and security as they worshiped Yahweh alongside other “little-g” gods—Why? Because that's what the prophets were encouraging them to do!

So—I don't want us to miss this—**these prophets were leading God's nation down the wide road, and they didn't even realize it.**

They weren't just wrong—they were *dangerously misleading*. They gave people confidence in a lie.

Their words *sounded* spiritual. And the nation listened. To them, rebellion *felt* righteous—and judgment *seemed* unlikely.

But in reality, they were following false prophets down the path of destruction.

Now, to us, it might seem like they should've known better. Like—*wasn't it obvious they were going against the LORD? How could they not realize that worshipping other gods was wrong?*

But that's *exactly* the point Jesus was making...

[SLIDE 5] Matthew 7:15 - Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

False prophets can be hard to spot. They look the part. They say the right words. They even disguise themselves with good works. But in reality, they're predators—they're predators who lure God's people away from truth and into ruin.

They have a way of making things *sound* good—so much that, in hindsight, we find ourselves saying, *"Yeah... we really should have known better."*

So how do we recognize them *before* the damage is done? Well, Jesus gives us some advice. He said...

[SLIDE 6] Matthew 7:16a - By their fruit you will recognize them.

In other words—**watch how they live.**

Are they a "beatitude" kind of person? Do they hunger and thirst for a "greater righteousness"? Do they actually live out the Golden Rule? Do their lives reflect a genuine desire to do God's will?

Because that kind of desire eventually shows up in visible ways—just like healthy trees produce healthy fruit. And that's exactly where Jesus goes next.

He said...

[SLIDE 7] Matthew 7:16b-20 - Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

Well that makes it clear! I mean, it should be easy to tell whether fruit is good or bad... right?

Well, not always.

I remember when I was a kid my mom boarded a horse named Pete.

[SLIDE 7.1] (picture of Pete with apple trees)

We'd let Pete out in a field next to the barn—but the thing is, the field had apple trees. Sounds great... except, apparently horses are like me when it comes to pizza... they don't know when to stop eating. I'm told that too many apples can actually make them really sick—or worse, they could die.

So we'd go out and gather up as many apples that fell from the trees as we could. And I distinctly remember this: **A lot of the apples looked great on the outside. But most of them were rotten and infested with bugs on the inside.**

But you wouldn't want to eat anything from these trees anyway because no one took care of them—they were just there. But the thing is, unless you looked at their fruit, you probably couldn't tell that the trees were bad. Hence why Jesus said...

[SLIDE 8] Matthew 7:20 - Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

In other words, the *fruit* is the *evidence* of their heart. It's the visible outcomes of a person's life—how they speak, how they act, and the kind of character they show. As James put it...

[SLIDE 9] James 2:18 - Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.

It's not that our good behavior earns us a spot in heaven. James is saying that a genuinely *faithful heart* will naturally produce *faithful action*—or, as Jesus puts it, *good fruit*.

But here's where the tension comes in...

On one hand, Jesus tells us to watch out for false prophets. Why? Because they come in sheep's clothing. They *look* the part. They *sound like* God's people. Nothing really seems off about them.

So we *might not* see them as the wolves they are.

And yet, on the other hand, Jesus says we *can* recognize them—by the way they live.

So can we really tell?

Well... even that can be tricky. Look at what Jesus said next...

[SLIDE 10] Matthew 7:21-22 - Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one 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 in your name perform many miracles?'

Again, they look the part. And they might even be convinced they're faithful—because they're doing things in Jesus' name.

But they're missing the log in their own eye.

In fact, in Luke chapter 10, we're told that Jesus sent 72 of His disciples out in pairs to go into the towns ahead of Him. They were preparing the way for people to hear the gospel.

And before they left, Jesus gave them authority to perform miracles in His name. So, during their travels, they were healing the sick and even driving out demons—the very things Jesus talked about here in the Sermon on the Mount.

And when they came back from their trip, they were rejoicing that *even the demons were submitting to them*.

But Jesus shut that down real quick! He rebuked them because they were letting pride sneak in their hearts.

And that's the warning implied in Matthew 7:21-22. People can do amazing things in the name of the Lord and *still* be disconnected from His heart.

That's what makes these verses so heavy... because now the implications get personal.

I've always felt like this is one of the most sobering passages in the Bible. Because **while Jesus is talking to His first century audience, He could just as easily be talking about us.**

His warning reminds me of Revelation chapter 3, when Jesus spoke to the Church in Laodicea. He called them "lukewarm." They had deeds—but their faith was useless, because they confused pride with righteousness.

Their actions were producing bad fruit.

And so Jesus said something that I imagine shocked them. He said...

[SLIDE 11] Revelation 3:16 - because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

That feels like the kind of tone Jesus had toward false prophets when He said...

[SLIDE 12] Matthew 7:23 - Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

Look at how Jesus labeled both groups...

Jesus called the church in Laodicea **lukewarm**. I picture that like a spiritual flatline. They were doing the right things, but for the wrong reasons. And Jesus was trying to shock them back to life with His words.

Jesus also labeled the false prophets as **evildoers**. But I suspect that word doesn't carry the same weight as Jesus intended.

The Greek behind it means more than just bad behavior. It literally means "lawlessness." It describes people who live as if God's law, His Word, doesn't even exist.

But here's what stood out to me: Both groups—the lukewarm and the lawless—were *active*. They were *doing* things. But they were disconnected from God's heart. Their lives didn't reflect His Word or His will.

But here's the thing...

Jesus wasn't just warning *them*—His Words ought to shock *us*! They should cause us to examine our own hearts. Because if our faith is disconnected from God's heart, then even our “good deeds” could prove useless.

Following Jesus was never meant to be about religious performance. It's about surrender. It's about aligning our lives with His good and perfect will.

And whatever the posture of our heart is—the fruit of our life will show it.

That's why Jesus said, “Watch out.” Because false prophets—and false teaching—can lead us away from God while convincing us we're still on the right path.

So how do we guard against that? How do we stay rooted in truth?

I think that's the *invitation* in the *warning*.

Because watching out for false prophets isn't just about spotting wolves—it's also about examining ourselves. It means checking the log in our own eye and asking:

Do I know the real Jesus?

Does what I'm hearing actually line up with God's Word?

And that brings us back to the deeper question...

[SLIDE 13] How do we recognize the voice of God?

I've had moments in my life when someone said, “God told me to tell you something...”

It doesn't happen often—but when it does, honestly, it can be hard to know what's legit and what isn't.

I do believe God can speak through people—not like the Old Testament prophets, because we have the Holy Spirit. But God *does* use His Spirit to speak into our lives... whether personally, or as a moment of encouragement for someone else.

But how do we know it's actually God's "voice"?

What if it's just my own thoughts?

Or worse—what if I'm being led astray?

I'll give you three examples from my own life...

I may have shared this one before—it was the summer before I started undergrad at Lancaster Bible College. I was working the evening shift at Interiors, helping customers load up whatever they just bought.

One guy bought a big sectional sofa. Since he lived down the street, he decided to take it in two trips. I helped him with the first load, and he said he'd be back.

About an hour later, he returned—and said something that threw me.

He said, *"As I was driving back, I felt the LORD told me to tell you that you're going to be a great leader in the Church. Can I give you my card? I run a Bible college—I really think you should check it out."*

Now, that might sound like a powerful God moment, right?

But here's what he didn't know: I already knew who he was.

A coworker of mine had just started attending his school, and I'm pretty sure he told this guy about me.

But what really made my spirit uneasy was when he said: *"The LORD told me to tell you that you're going to be a **great leader** in the Church."*

And here's why it felt off:

First—why would God tell *him* that? I mean, does that *sound* like something God would say?

And second—When he said I'd be a "great leader" in the Church—that felt prideful. That's not a path I want to follow.

So what about his "fruit"—Jesus said by their fruit you will recognize them. I didn't know that guy well enough to assess the fruit of his life. But I *do* know that his words didn't sit right with my spirit. Something just felt... off.

Something similar happened not long after I applied for the lead pastor position here at Refton.

A friend of mine was visiting our church that day, and he said, *“Hey—I feel like the Holy Spirit told me to tell you that big changes are coming in your near future.”*

Now, I know this guy—not super well, but well enough to know that he genuinely follows Jesus, and that he wouldn’t say something like that lightly.

So, I thanked him—I appreciated his encouragement. But still... it was vague.

I mean, was he talking about my shift from youth pastor to lead pastor? Maybe. But maybe he meant COVID—that hit a few months after I started.

I don’t know what the message meant. And, I don’t know if he really heard from God—it was hard to tell. I just know that he was sincere. So I took it as an encouragement—because I knew that’s how he meant it.

Now... the third moment was very different.

It happened not too long ago. Sonia and I were talking about the sermon I was prepping about the Narrowing Road, and I was explaining how the Greek indicates that the road actually presses in on us.

And in that conversation, she said something like, *“I feel like the Lord keeps bringing the word **perseverance** to mind.”*

Notice that she didn’t say, *“The LORD told me to tell you...”* Nothing like that.

She simply shared what the Holy Spirit brought to her mind in that moment.

And man... When she said that, my spirit resonated. It hit deep.

My mind immediately went to James 1 where he says...

[SLIDE 14] James 1:2-4 - Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

I’m convinced that the LORD used Sonia in that moment to speak truth into us.

And so that's why I ended last week's message with this reflection:

[SLIDE 15] The Narrowing Road (Quote)

"Jesus *invests His heart* in us during those moments that *press us*.

He *strengthens* us as we walk the narrowing road.

He *enables us to persevere*,

As we walk through the fire toward the tree of life."

That's how the Lord works in each of us. This is why we're not meant to live in spiritual isolation. We're not meant to be closet Christians.

We *need* each other.

We're *called* to build each other up with the encouragement of God's Word.

We *need* reminders of His faithfulness.

This is "iron sharpens iron" in action.

And it's also how we stand firm against the devil's schemes.

We can't afford to miss this: When Jesus said, "Watch out," He meant it—because we live in a spiritual reality.

There are evil forces at work in our world that want to pull us away from God. That's why Paul said our struggle isn't against flesh and blood—we're not fighting each other.

Our real fight is against the spiritual forces of evil.

It's not against someone we disagree with theologically. It's not the person who wronged us. It's not even our enemies.

Our struggle is against the enemy behind the scenes—Satan and his forces—their constant influence... their lies... their twisting of truth...

And if we don't recognize that spiritual reality, we won't be equipped to "watch out" the way Jesus calls us to.

But as followers of Jesus, we stand in truth—and we don't stand alone.

[SLIDE 16] We're able to stand strong against the waves of false teaching because we persevere *together* in the strength of Christ.

Because the waves *will* come.
But let's not hold on to false hope or empty promises.

We know the real Jesus.
We know what His fruit looks like.

I'll end with another encouragement from James...

[SLIDE 17] James 5:10-11 - Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

That's the kind of endurance Jesus is calling us to. The kind that holds fast to God's mercy—even when we're pressed on every side.

[SLIDE 18] James 5:19-20 - My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Because people *do* wander from the faith. False voices *do* lead people astray. But, by God's grace, He uses us to bring them back. That's the kind of love that walks the narrowing road.

So let's be people who persevere.
Let's keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.
Let's stand firm in truth.
And let's walk the narrowing road—together,
with each other, and with Jesus.

Let's Pray

Let's pray together as the Lord taught us to pray...

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

And lead us not into testing, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.