Beware of the Wolves

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Date: 28 April 2024

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang. Thank you for joining us.!

Scripture all throughout, we hope that you understand that our desire every Lord's Day here is to sing things that are true and take us to sing things that are true and take us to study things that do the same.
In fact, two days ago I was asked to be a part of a day they were having at Oklahoma Baptist University and there were a few of us that were speaking and on a panel talking to pastors across our state.
And one of the questions that they asked me to address was the importance of and the connection between music and preaching. And one of the things that I feel so strongly about is that all of our worship service should be Christ-centered.
Everything we do should be rooted in the Word. And one of the things I shared with the pastors that day at OBU last Friday was that you don't want to be in a situation where the music is scaling one mountain.
[1:14] And then here comes the sermon and it's a totally different emphasis that while we open the Word and explain the Word and that's the high point of what we do, it shouldn't be something new we're doing in the worship service.

It's just a continuation of what we've already been doing. And that's just so important because it's just true for us that we want everything we do in here to be about the Word.
And so when we sing, we want our songs to be from the Word. When in between songs, if we're going to read Scripture, it's because we want to remind each of us of the primacy of the Word. When we open our Bibles for preaching, we don't want it to be the opinions of man. We want it to be from the Word. We want everything that happens in here to be very clear that the Bible is our authority and the Lord Jesus is our Savior.
And so with that in mind, let me ask you to turn with me to Mark chapter 12. As we continue in our study through the Gospel of Mark, we are just about finished with Mark chapter 12.
[2:25] We're going to look today at just this brief passage of verses 38 to 40. And then we will worship with the elements of the Lord's Supper. Remember, this is an interesting text for us for a number of reasons today, but one of which is that in the Gospel of Mark, we are seeing here the final things that Jesus will say to the crowds.

In verses 38 to 40, and then if you look down that brief paragraph, verses 41 to 44, we see Jesus here in the temple, and He is teaching, and He is giving His final words to the crowds.
After that, He's going to speak to His disciples, and that's going to take place in chapter 13. And then when you get to chapter 14, you're going to have Jesus being betrayed, Jesus being denied, and Jesus being arrested.
When you get to chapter 15, He will be crucified. Chapter 16, resurrected. These are the final things that Jesus will say publicly here in the Gospel of Mark.
These are His final words for the crowd. Let's look at it together. Mark 12, verse 38 says, In His teaching, He said, Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like greetings in the marketplaces, and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses, and for pretense make long prayers.
[4:22] They will receive the greater condemnation. I want to look at just these three verses this morning around the theme of beware of the wolves.

It is a reality, a sad reality, that there have always been those who are wolves, who try to infiltrate where God's people are, and lead them astray.

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It's true in our day, but it's not a new thing. It was true in Jesus' day as well. Let me show you first in verse 38, the reality of the wolves.
We can wish this were not true, but this is something we have to be aware of, the reality of the wolves. Jesus simply says, Beware of the scribes.
Now that by itself is a bit of an unfortunate thing to have to say, because the scribes were the men who were experts in the law.
[5:34] They were the Bible scholars. They were the ones who would be considered the most spiritual in the land. They were the theologians.

They're the men that should have been able to be trusted. But with this very simple statement, Beware of the scribes, Jesus tells us that there are religious people that you need to beware of, and you need to avoid.
Now I want us, as we think of how we would apply this in our own world today, I want us to strive to do so with a very balanced perspective.
On the one hand, I don't want us to be looking for reasons to denounce people.
I don't want us to be people who are just constantly on the hunt to try to find something wrong with what somebody said, or what some author penned, or what some song lyric says.
[6:47] I don't want us to be looking to find reasons to jump on things. At the same time, we must take Jesus' admonition seriously that we must beware of the wolves that are among us.

That just because you go to a Christian bookstore and buy a book does not mean that's penned by someone who is truly in the faith.
That just because you hear a song that is sung on the Christian radio does not mean it's a song being sung by somebody who truly knows and loves the Lord Jesus.
And if that sounds shocking to you, let me just remind you that there can be, like with any industry, a lot of money to be made if you are successful enough.
And if your desire is fame or fortune, if that's your God, it won't really matter to somebody what they have to say, write, or sing.
[8:03] If all of that is just a means to financial gain, you can write, sing, or say anything if it sells.
So I do want to be faithful biblically as a shepherd to caution you and to make sure you're clearly aware that there are wolves in our day too.

It was true in Jesus' day, and it's true in our day. And I also want to say that it should not offend us for someone to caution you to be aware of the wolves because in so doing, it's just exactly what Jesus did in his day.
Jesus says, you need to be aware of these scribes, of these wolves who are preying upon people, devouring people. They're supposed to be leaders.
They talk like leaders. They have positions of religious authority, but in their heart of hearts, it's all just a means to another end. Jesus' response to that reality is to warn people.
And so I want to warn you today. There are wolves in our day too. There are authors, and there are singers, and there are pastors, and there are speakers who, like the scribes, you need to be aware of.
[9:30] Now, in saying that, I also want to make sure that as best we can, that we're gracious.

That we're not desiring to discredit someone unnecessarily. We need to be aware of that.
We also want to be gracious in how we relate to and speak of other churches. I'll just give you one example here. This was something asked to me Friday at OBU2, so it's fresh in my mind with this thought.
But at our church here, there are some songs and some artists that we don't use their songs in corporate worship.
And the reason we don't is because we feel like it comes from people who their theology is dangerous. It's not that the song itself necessarily is wrong, but that's the whole point.
[10:41] That if you're trying to lead someone astray and music is your front door, you don't have song lyrics that put forth the strange, aberrant beliefs that you hold to.

You would make your song sound very normal. And you draw people in, and then once they're drawn in, you expose them to your false theology.
That's the way it works. Now, 1 Peter 5 says to the leaders, the elders, the overseers, the pastors of a church, all the language of the New Testament there, to shepherd the flock of God among you.

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Which gives us these two things, two sides of the same coin. One is that the leaders of a church, the pastors of a church, are supposed to shepherd the flock, protect the flock, feed the flock, guide the flock.
also, you're shepherding the flock of God among you. In other words, we're not the, we're not the people in charge of what every church in the world does.
[11:58] We're not in charge of what every church in our city does, or every church in our state does. We have a God-given responsibility to shepherd this flock. Now, I say that because there may be other churches who love Jesus and love His Word that may sing songs we're not comfortable singing.

And I don't want you to look down on those churches. I don't want us to speak poorly of those churches. I don't want us to think that we are above those churches. I also don't want to say that just because another church does it, it's okay for us.
We're trying to shepherd this flock as best we can in accordance with His Word. I also understand, and this is true for our church, that there are times where we may be at another church for a service or our youth or at a camp with other churches, whatever it may be, and other churches or other leaders may have different convictions and there may be times where we are, that leader has a different sense of conviction on this.
And I want us to be gracious and patient and kind. If I were at another church preaching and they sing a song that, well, this happens actually quite often.
I'm speaking somewhere and they're doing a song that we wouldn't do here at this church. It's not that the song itself is unbiblical. I would never sing that. But if the song itself is biblical, but it's a song that we wouldn't do for the reason I just described, I'm not going to walk out and protest.
[13:36] I'm not going to sit down and look down at the floor. I'm not going to cross my arms to let them know I'm angry about this. I'm not going to do that. I want to be gracious. I want to be kind. I want to understand that people in different places may have different decisions and land differently.

I'm okay with that. I can give grace to that. I also can also say in our church here, as our pastors and shepherds here try to shepherd the flock of God among us, that we do have a very strong sense of protection and guardianship over what we do in congregational worship.
Does that make sense? And so I want us as a church to understand that we must be very careful and very discerning with everything that we do.
But as we are careful and discerning, let's do so always with a heart of grace and love and kindness. And it may be that the conviction for your family lands at a decision somewhere different than a decision someone else that's a believer makes.
You can give them grace while you also uphold your conviction. So as a church, what we want to say is just what Jesus said. Let's remember the reality of the wolves.
[14:55] They're there. Jesus said, beware of them. Watch out for them. So there are some songs we don't sing here. There are some books that we wouldn't endorse here.

Books that sell very well. And it's not because we're looking to be difficult. It's because we want to practice what Jesus said.
To beware of the wolves. Now that doesn't mean that everybody has to think just exactly like us. Our bookstore right out there, we've got wonderful theologically rich resources that are there.
And I'll just speak for myself, I would not agree with every single belief of every single author. That would be impossible to do. But what we want to put forward for you are resources that are biblically sound, theologically rich, and will help you to understand and study God's word.
We don't want to live our life on an island or as one of my mentors says, you don't want to live your life in a phone booth where there's only room for like three people. And even at that, it's really crowded.
[16:10] You want to get someone out. We don't want to live like that. We want to be gracious and we want to be respectful. And at the same time, be reminded that just like in Jesus' day is true in our day, you need to beware.

Beware of the wolves. The scribes didn't dress like wolves. They didn't speak like wolves. But they prayed upon God's people like wolves.
There's a second thing in this short passage I want you to see and that's the motives of the wolves. Why would people that are Christian singers or pastors in a church or conference speakers or authors, why would people who study and preach and sing and teach, why would they even do this

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if they're not truly people who love Jesus?
Well, I think Jesus tells us. He says, beware the scribes who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts.
He tells us here three different motivations of the wolves. Number one is pride. They like to walk around in long robes.
[17:48] It was a sense of pride. We know in that day they would wear long white robes. They would have these large tassels on their robes that would identify them as scribes.

And the reason they did that is they wanted the robes they wore to be robes that would draw attention to themselves so people would be in awe of them.
This was just pride. And you can display your pride after you score a touchdown by wanting all the attention on you or you can display pride by being a religious leader and walking around town asking everyone to notice you, talk about you, show you preference and respect.
Either way, it's still the motive of the exact same root, the sin of pride. pride. He says they like greetings in the marketplaces.
They wanted to be recognized. They wanted to be admired. They wanted people to stand in their honor when they walk by.
[19:01] They liked greetings in the marketplaces because they were men who loved pride. This is the root of everything that comes forth from them.

And this is why you have to beware of them because they're driven by pride. Verse 39, they want the best seats in the synagogues.
They wanted to be sitting up front where they were looking out because that meant everybody was looking at them. And this is, this is a real danger for those who are spiritual leaders even today.
It's a dangerous thing when you teach a Sunday school class or when you lead a song or when you preach a sermon.
It's a dangerous thing to be in front of people no matter how small or large the gathering and say, what I'm about to do is worthy of every eye being on me.
[20:09] Which is why we must make sure that everything we do is focused on Jesus. And why the Bible is always the foundation of all that we are about.

It says, they loved the places of honor at feasts. Let me just bring this into our current day vernacular. There's no waiting in line.
If you were a scribe and you were wearing your extra long robe with your extra large tassel and you were to kind of mix metaphors here of the days, but if they were to walk into a restaurant in our day today dressed like that and that kind of a mindset and there was an hour long wait, they would walk in acting in such a way, dressed in such a way, they would expect people to stand in their honor and the hostess would say, I know we have an hour long wait, but not for you.
We've got a table just for you. That was the heart behind their motive of pride. They loved the honor they received.
And it wasn't just pride, it was also money. These two things often go side by side. They also loved money, verse 40.
[21:33] These scribes who devour widows' houses. Widows were the most vulnerable category of people in the day.

Widows were dependent upon what they have been given or what they've received. Widows had, in that culture, very little way to have any means at all of financial support dependent upon what they already had or dependent upon what someone else gives to them and in need of someone to watch over them to protect them.
This is why in the book of James chapter 1, it says, worship that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this, to look after orphans and widows in their distress.
Because you are protecting the most vulnerable of your community. What good is it if people sing songs about love and grace and salvation if they then ignore and hate and steal and devour from the most vulnerable among them.
And so, in James 1, he says, if you want to know what real worship looks like, real worship is looking after orphans and widows in their distress. Exact same idea here in James, in Mark 12, only you get the negative side of that, that these scribes, these leaders, prove their love of pride and their love of money by devouring widows' houses, destroying the very ones they should be

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protecting.
[23:26] Instead of defending them, they were devouring them. them. And so, Jesus says, beware of them.

Which is why, just because an organization has the word church on it, does not mean you should listen to just anybody teach the Bible.
Because there are religious leaders who are motivated by pride and by money. It was true in Jesus' day, it's true in our day, and Jesus' warning is you need to beware of them.
Beware of those who take advantage of others. Now, if you wonder, how were the scribes devouring widows, let me show you what it would look like, and you tell me if you've seen this playbook before.
These scribes would talk to widows who have only what's been left to them and given to them, and the scribes would tell the widows, you have a lot of needs.
[24:49] You need someone to pray for you. And the closer to God the people who pray for you are, the better for you. And if you would give to me and support me, I would be able to pray for you.

And the more you give to me, the less other things I have to do. I could pray more for you. So the more you give to me, the more I pray for you, the more I pray for you, the more blessings God will give to you.
Does that sound vaguely familiar to you? Scribes were doing religious TV before religious TV was around.
It's the exact same thing. Taking in this context widows at home on a fixed income needing to be loved and cared for and protected and instead praying upon them and saying if you give me your money God will give back to you.
What happens in our world today is nothing new. It's the same sin, it's the same condition and the warning should be the same.
[26:16] Be aware of the wolves. There was a third motivation, not just pride in money, but a third is power.

They wanted power. And their power came through their hypocrisy. Verse 40, they would devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers.
In other words, they would do religious things not for worship but for self promotion. They would use religious language not because they loved God but to lure people in.
This is exactly what happens in our day to day. It's the exact same thing. Which is why before you choose to buy the book or listen to the podcast or watch the service online or download the music, you can't just assume that because they refer to a Bible verse or a Bible story or use religious language that it means that they're safe.
False teachers don't advertise that they devour widows. Scribes didn't knock on the proverbial door of that day and hand a business card and say I'm here to steal all your money.
[28:08] They said I'm here to pray for you. I'm a scribe. I study the word. I'm a man of God. I'm respected. You can trust me.

I'm close to God. I'll pray for you. But it's hard to live this way. I need people to care for me.
Wouldn't you want to take care of the man of God who's going to pray for you? And when the man of God prays for you, God will give back to you. And so the best thing for you is to give everything you've got to me.
It's for your good. That's how they did it. which is why as shepherds of this congregation, as best we can, we want to be on guard with the songs that we sing and the studies that we promote, not because we're the perfect dispensers of justice, not because we know everything in the world, but because we do want to take seriously the biblical mandate to beware of the religious people who lure people in just to devour them.
And I'll tell you, I don't want us to ever be unkind, I don't want us to ever be lacking in grace, I don't want us to ever be motivated by anything ungodly that's not pleasing to the Lord, but I will promise you this, if fulfilling what God has called us to do means some darts or bullets come our way, I'll tell you this, bring them on.
[30:11] It doesn't bother me at all. If our pastors, our overseers, here, if we were being heartless or cruel or arrogant, that is a sin and should be dealt with, that is a problem.

However, if what we are doing is saying as best we can discern what God has called us to do to shepherd the flock of God among us, there are some things we're not comfortable doing, and in so

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doing, it's trying to live out Jesus' admonition to beware of the wolves, if that means somebody from outside doesn't like what we do or like what we say, I'm okay with that.
Because I'm far more interested interested in what Jesus would say of this church than I am of the world.
And I understand that even in this very text, what you see are people who are motivated by pride, money, and power are dangerous things among the body of Christ.
which is why we need trained leaders and trained teachers, not just behind this pulpit, but in classrooms all over this church.
[31:51] Which is why before somebody can open the Bible and say, here's what the Bible says, we want to do everything we can to ensure that whether you're preaching on Sunday morning, or open the Bible with third graders around a table, that it's coming from people who are not motivated by pride, money, or power, but by people who truly love Jesus and will manifest that by serving people, not devouring people.

people. And if you say, who in the world would be religious, who in the world would have a place of leadership that wants to devour people, let me just use nothing less than the very words of Jesus. These leaders devour widows' houses. And you say, well, why did somebody fall for it? Well, it's verse 40.
Because through pretense, they make long prayers. And their prayers don't speak of devouring or leading astray.
Their prayers sound so religious, just like the music would. The prayers sound so biblical, just like the book would.
[33:16] But motivated by money and pride and power, they lure people in and they devour them. Which leads us to a final thing that Jesus mentions in verse 40, and that is the judgment of the wolves.

The very end of verse 40, they will receive the greater condemnation. a greater judgment and a greater punishment awaits those who are wolves pretending to be shepherds preying upon the sheep.
James 3, 1, not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. Matthew 23, 15, woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.
If someone says to you, you should not be discerning, then you should just accept everything that comes through the religious pipeline because after all, Jesus was so kind.
Can I produce to you Matthew 23, 15, where the words of Christ himself says, those of you who use religious things to devour people are a son of hell.
[34:53] Not my words. That's Jesus. What would cause him to speak so harshly? Wolves.

Wolves would cause him to do that. To the one who is straying and struggling, Galatians 6, James 5, he says, go after them, restore them, help them.
To the one who is struggling in sin, 1 John 2, he's an advocate. To the one who is needing protection, he's the chief shepherd.
But to the wolf who would seek to sneak in, devour, and destroy, he calls it like it is.
one of the things we must do in our day is recognize the reality of the wolves, their motivation, and let me just remind all of us, there is a judgment awaiting the wolves.
[36:18] Here's the problem in Jesus' day. the scribes were careful how they appeared before men, but they were careless about how they appeared before God.

They made sure that they had their robes on so people would notice them. They made sure they had the extra large tassels so people would respect them.
They made sure they got all the right greetings in the marketplaces so that they were noticed and held in prestige. They made sure they prayed these long flowery prayers so that people would trust them and think they were righteous and holy.
They went to great lengths to make sure that they appeared a certain way before men. The problem is the God who sees and knows the secret things of the heart will not be fooled by their pretense, which is why Jesus says they will receive the greater condemnation, the stricter judgment, the more harsh condemnation.

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So what does this mean for us today? Let me just put three things in front of you as we prepare for the Lord's Supper this morning. Number one, use discernment in listening to teachers and following leaders.
[37:44] use discernment in listening to teachers and following leaders. And I've said this many times, let me say it again.

You should not believe a thing I say based on a title or an education or experience. Your question when I stand here to speak or to teach or to preach to be pastor is this in the text.
Don't ever let go of that. I hope you love me. I hope you trust me. I hope you know that I don't want to lead you astray. But when you start showing up to church without a Bible and you're just saying I'll take your word for it, you've missed it.
you should look at me every Sunday and say I've got a Bible open. What does God's word have for us today? Use discernment in listening to teachers and following leaders.
And I don't mean that for outside the church. I mean that for all of your life including inside this place. second, be gracious and charitable but wise in choosing who influences you.
[39:12] Be gracious and charitable but wise in choosing who influences you. So one of the things that I want us to all understand is that sometimes someone who is preaching may say something not as clearly or precise as they should have.

Or sometimes you're not listening as clearly or precise as you should. or sometimes something is said that's just unclear.
Let's not be quick to condemn. I don't want you going to Sunday school on Sunday with your pen and paper and your attitude is to your Sunday school teacher you say one thing, I'm ready.
And they say one thing you don't like and you say done with them, won't go back to them, heretic.
And you come in here and there's something that's said or a song that's got a lyric and you say oh no, no, no, that's it, that's it, done, heresy.
And you go home and you watch a trusted teacher on TV or on YouTube or on whatever it may be on a podcast and there's one thing they say that's just not exactly perfect or exactly how you wish they would say it or they use a word you don't like or didn't use a word you do like, whatever it may be in theology and you just say oh, they're done.
[40:55] Look, be gracious and charitable. Maybe they didn't say it exactly perfect, but be gracious.

Maybe you didn't hear it exactly right. Be gracious. Be gracious. Be charitable. Don't be looking for artists or churches or pastors or speakers or authors to go publicly condemn.
Be gracious and be charitable. But, be wise in choosing who influences you.
if somebody continually says things that are wrong or dangerous, if somebody has beliefs that are contrary to God's word, if somebody is preying upon the weak and the vulnerable, that's a different story.
There's a time to be gracious and to be charitable. There's a time to say this person's crossed the line, this ministry's crossed the line and they're not going to have access to my heart and my mind.
[42:27] Third, don't listen to teachers if a Bible is not necessary to follow what they're saying.

It may be that what they're saying is not false. But if somebody wants access to your heart and your mind to teach you biblically, theologically, to influence what you believe about God, if you don't need a Bible to keep up with what they're saying, move on.
And make sure that whoever has access to influence you for what you believe about God continually takes you to the text of Scripture to remind you that they are not the authority, but God's word is.
Now in two weeks, we're going to come back to verses 41 to 44, and we're going to look at an example of this very warning in process.
But until the Lord brings us back to that time, I want you to understand the reason why Jesus gives this warning so seriously is because he's just a couple of days away from going to the cross, Jesus.
[43:57] And right here in the echo of his coming sacrificial death are the words of men who would desire to lead people astray.

We must be careful to make sure our gospel is true. true. And the gospel is the death of Jesus, his sinless life, his resurrection, and his imminent return.
Which is why in just a moment we observe these elements to remind us that our hope is in what Christ has done. no one else, and nothing less.

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Let me invite you, if you would, to bow your head and close your eyes for just a moment as I invite our deacons to join me here at the front as we prepare to... what's what what's fathers what's fathers

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