

The Half Truths That Deceive Us Today

by Jeremy Utley

This sermon emphasizes the prevalence of deception in the last days, warning about the dangers of half-truths and wrong interpretations that can lead believers astray. Using the example of Jesus being tempted by the devil with scripture, the speaker highlights the importance of knowing and applying the full truth of God's Word to combat deceptions. Four key areas of susceptibility to deception are discussed: the definitions of worship, discipleship, God's kingdom, and belief, urging believers to align with the true essence of these concepts rather than popular misconceptions.

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Scripture: Matthew 4:1, Romans 12:1, Romans 14:17, John 20:27, 2 Kings 19:14

Topics: "Deception in the Last Days", "Importance of Biblical Truth"

Description

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Transcript

One of the things that the Lord warns us about repeatedly, the Holy Spirit reminds us of repeatedly, is that the last days, the mark of the last days, is going to be is deception. Deception will be rampant, and the enemy is a deceiver, and he's clever, he's very sneaky, and I wanted to share some deceptions that I found myself susceptible to, and they all involve half-truths. If you think about it, the enemy isn't a wolf in a wolf's clothing, he's a wolf in sheep's clothing, and it says he disguises himself as an angel of light, even, and there can be, there I find, as I look at my own susceptibility, no one else's, there's all sorts of dangerous half-truths being peddled around Christendom today, and if we're not careful, we can be taken in by them, and the deceptions that we are in danger of aren't outright lies, they're more a matter of wrong emphasis or wrong interpretation.

I was really humbled to remember, if you look with me at Matthew chapter 4, where the enemy comes to tempt Jesus, I was really humbled to see that, if you look with me, you know, in verse 3, the tempter came and said to Jesus, Matthew 4, verse 3, if you're the son of God, commands these stones to become bread, and Jesus answered and said, it is written, and so the devil sees, wow, Jesus values the scriptures, and

so in the next temptation, it's, he takes him to the holy city and has him stand on the pinnacle, and verse 6, he says, if you're the son of God, throw yourself down, because it's written, I know that you value the scriptures, so here, because it's written, and he uses scripture as a justification for temptation, and it's humbling to think there are scriptures, even, that with a wrong emphasis, we can be in danger of being misled, because was it scripture, is it scripture, that do the scriptures say, he will command his angels concerning you, regarding Jesus, yeah, the scriptures do say that, would it have been wrong for Jesus to heed that scripture in that moment, yes, would have been wrong, and it humbled me to see the devil, if he is going to tempt even Jesus with the scriptures, I'm deceived, if I think that the only deceptions are non-spiritual, even as we heard earlier tonight, what hope do I have, if the devil comes to me as an angel of light, and he brings the scriptures as a, you know, it is written on their hands, they will bear you up, right, he had two scriptures for Jesus here, and what encouraged me was, I have the same hope that Jesus had, which is that the Holy Spirit wants to bring to mind the right verse for the right time, and we're in great danger, if we don't know what is the word for this moment, but by God's grace, we can be just like Jesus, who said in verse 7, if you look with me, Matthew 4, verse 7, Jesus said, on the other hand, it is written, or as we've heard, it is also written, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test, so I wanted to mention a few, it is also written, so to speak, in regard to some of the half-truths that are being promoted in Christendom today, because I don't think that, my feeling is, you know, about our church is, probably people aren't going to be deceived by the health and wealth gospel, but just because we aren't deceived by that, doesn't mean that we're immune to any deception, the devil didn't decide, oh, I'm not, you know, I'm not going to bother with Jesus, tempting him with scriptures, because he knows so much, no, he still came, and I've noticed just for myself, as I look at my own susceptibility, is that there are different deceptions at play today, and it's in the water, it's the current, the course of, forget the course of the world, not that we should be oblivious or indifferent to that, but even the course of Christendom is headed in a direction, it says in Daniel chapter 11, I think it's verse 32, those who know their God will display strength, and we have to know God, we have to know his word, and we have to know his will, if we are to be able to resist not just the current of this world, but also the current of Christendom today, and so I wanted to mention four things very briefly, and here are the four things, definitions, where the deception is in having a wrong definition in Christendom, one is the definition of worship, two is the definition of discipleship, three is the definition of God's kingdom, and four is the definition of belief, and just really quickly, I'm not going to do like an in-depth, you know, study of these things, I just want to quickly mention, one, it is also written to combat the deceptions that are prevalent, I feel, in our, you know, in Christendom today, so that when the enemy comes to us, we can at least have him, it is also written in our back pocket, so I want to mention these really briefly, the first one, what is the definition of worship, what is worship, if, you know, if somebody says, come to our worship service, what do they mean, they mean a time of singing, you know, and worship is often defined as singing, and we are deceived, if after being moved by a nice time of singing, if we think to ourselves, wow, I'm really worshipful, or I feel like a worshiper, that's a deception, it's not that singing is wrong, I mean, it's written, sing to the Lord a new song, right, so, but is that the whole truth, no, it's a half-truth, that we're in danger of being misled, if we think that, if we think that our singing makes us a worshiper, Romans 12, I'm going to turn there, here's the, it is also written that we need, whenever the enemy comes in and tries to deceive us by getting us to define our worshipful attitude in terms of our song, and I really think, by the way, this is a strong current in Christendom, whenever somebody talks about, you know, I didn't like that church's worship, what are they talking about, they're talking about the music, they didn't like the music style, that's what they mean, and yet, what is worship in the New Covenant, in Romans 12, in verse 1, it says, therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of

worship, so what is worship, it's presenting my body as a living sacrifice to God, and I want to be clear for myself, if I say I like the worship service, or I don't like it, it doesn't have anything to do with singing, what it has to do with is, you know, if I say I like the worship of our church, what I want to mean is, I love how everyone is determined to offer their lives as a living sacrifice to God, the current of Christendom is defining worship as singing, but the spirit of worship is, as we heard even just a moment ago, it's from Anna, I believe, it's not my will, but thine be done, and if I want to know if I'm a worshiper, I don't need to look at how I feel when I'm singing, I need to look at the altar, and I need to see, is my life, again, being laid down, that's how I should define worship, that's the first thing, the second thing is, what's the definition of discipleship, I would say for myself, the thing that I found that I'm susceptible to, if you think about many churches, or many environments, and people say, hey, join our discipleship group, what is discipleship, in the eyes of Christendom, I see some of you smiling, right, you know, it's a Bible study, discipleship is studying the Bible, and, you know, if I'm a disciple, I've had a quiet time this morning, I've read my Bible, and we also heard this verse earlier tonight, it's blessed me to see how the Lord's kind of brought some of these things together already tonight, Kelly mentioned John 5 39, I'll just tell you how that verse came into my life, you know, as a good Bible student, as a good disciple, I've always learned, you have to study a verse in its context, right? And I read in John chapter five, and I see, you know, there's the healing of Bethesda, and then he's speaking to the Pharisees, and every verse I read, I go, Oh, yeah, I could, why would Jesus say that to the Pharisees, and the Pharisees didn't need to hear that, you know, and I can, I can be contextual, you know, which is all good. But one time I was reading the Bible, and I turned there, it's not this one, because the page break is different. But I just happened to open and like a bad Bible student, I didn't go back to the beginning and look at the context, I just read the verse at face value.

And instead of reading it, in the context of Jesus speaking to the Pharisees, I read it for me. I joke as a bad Bible student, obviously, by saying that, but it says, and this is what I read for myself, you search the scriptures, Jeremy, because you think in them, you have eternal life. It's these that testify about me.

And I was thinking, yeah, I do. I search the scriptures. Yeah, that's good, right.

And they testify to you. Good Lord. And so I must be good, right? I must be a disciple.

And then he says to me, and yet you are unwilling to come to me, while searching the scriptures, which testify to me, you're unwilling to come to me. And it struck me for the first time, how do I define disciple? Is it somebody who reads the Bible? Is it somebody who studies, who has a concordance, you know, and it struck me that no matter how much I read the Bible, if I'm not coming to Jesus, if I'm not walking with him, I'm not a disciple. And when the question comes, am I a disciple? I don't need to look at my morning routine.

I don't need to see that I have a quiet time. That's not how I define the word. I need to look and see, did I come to Jesus in the midst of the good day? Did I depend on the Lord? If I depended on the Lord, even if I didn't have a quiet time, good discipleship day.

If I had a rich quiet time with lots of connections and insights and all sorts of things, and yet in the moment of need, I did not come to Jesus, no matter how good my quiet time was, I'm not a disciple. And the current of the Christendom today is, it's all about concordances. It's all about cross-references.

It's all about, you know, getting your time in, you know, it's all about the streak in the Bible app or whatever it is. It's fine. It's good.

We should read the Bible. It's not discipleship. And it's been an incredible encouragement and challenge to my own susceptibilities and definitions to be reminded, as Brother Zach reminded us, for 1400 years, disciples didn't have Bibles.

If reading the Bible in one's home in a daily quiet time were essential to discipleship, surely the Lord would have seen fit to invent the printing press a thousand years plus earlier. And yet there were wholehearted disciples who walked with Jesus every day, full of the Holy Spirit, willing to go to martyr's deaths, to reach distant lands, who didn't have Bibles in their language, in their homes. And if I define discipleship in terms of my, as much as we treasure the scriptures, if I define my discipleship in terms of how much time I'm spending in the Bible, rather than how much time I'm spending with Jesus in His presence, taking refuge in Him, drawing strength from Him, I've got the wrong definition.

The third definition that I want to mention that I've been susceptible to myself is, what is the kingdom of God? There is a movement at a foot that's in the world for sure, but it's also, I find in the church, the kingdom of God is the eradication of poverty, the eradication of social ills. If we can just get rid of racism, if we can just get rid of abortion, if we can just get rid of fill in the blank. And by all means, we should hate racism, we should hate evil, we should hate abortion, all those things.

But the kingdom of God isn't the eradication of any particular social ill. The kingdom of God is where God reigns. It's where God is king.

And if I'm not careful, I can get caught up in some social justice movement or some social impact movement, and all the language can be right, as far as my feelings and my perception of what God's kingdom must be like. And I find I'm not where God reigns. And nobody here, all the people I'm aligned with, you know, all these movements don't care if God reigns here.

Am I in the kingdom of God? If we've eradicated whatever social ill, illegitimate, I'm not even questioning whether these ills are, they're terrible evils, but eradicate it. The question is, is God king? And you know, Romans 14 is our, it is also written there. It is also written, Romans 14, verse 17.

The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. If I eradicate some great social ill or evil, and yet I'm not righteous inwardly, I'm not in God's kingdom. If I have participated in some great movement to abolish some wicked thing, and I'm not at rest in my heart, when a storm comes, I'm not in God's kingdom.

If I have done great, you know, work, great good work, which God prepared in advance for me to walk in, right? Again, it's a half truth. It's one scripture. It is also written in his presence, his fullness of joy.

And if I'm doing my good work, but I'm not full of the joy of the Holy Spirit, I'm not in God's kingdom. And that's why I mentioned these things, because it's so, the word of God wants to divide and pierce between joints and marrow. And it's really tempting to just take half truths and say, I know what it means to be a worshiper.

I know what it means to be a disciple. I know what God's kingdom looks like. And all of these things can be backed up with scriptures.

But if we don't have the, it is also written, we can find somehow we're actually outside of the kingdom altogether. Last thing I'll mention is, what is belief? You know, there's this kind of colloquialism I've noticed. Is he a believer? You ever say that or hear somebody say that? Is she a believer? Are they a

believer? I say it.

And I understand the shorthand, but I want to mention that this is a deception because I feel we can run into trouble if we think in terms of that label. And I want to point you to, and it is also written that the Lord has put on my heart many times from John chapter 20. That's what Jesus says to Thomas, but I think it has truth for us.

He says in verse 27, he said to Thomas, John 20, 27, reach here with your finger and see my hands and reach here with your hand and put it in my side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing. He doesn't say be a believer.

He says be believing. And I noticed for myself, it's fine. Shorthand, is he a believer? Is she a believer? You know, a heuristic is fine.

But the question for myself when I'm examining myself is not, am I a believer? That is irrelevant. You know who's a believer? James tells us, the demons believe and tremble with fear. So am I, okay, I'm a believer.

Am I in the same camp as the demons? Is that success? The question isn't, am I a believer, but am I believing? And the great danger, the great deception is it's possible to be an unbelieving believer. And I can look at my label of I'm a believer and yet be unbelieving and yet not come to Jesus and not yet lay my life on the altar and yet not be righteous and at peace and full of the joy of the Holy Spirit. What's the mark of someone who's believing? I want to give one word, which has really blessed me.

What's the mark of someone who's believing? The word is from 2nd Kings 19. There are many words for this, I'm sure, but this is just the word that the Lord gave me as I was dealing with the area of my life where I needed to not just be a believer, but believing. But in 2nd Kings 19, Sennacherib has come and he has assaulted Judah and, you know, threatened Hezekiah.

And there's this wonderful, and with really, you know, offensive assault. And what Hezekiah does, if you look with me at 2nd Kings 19 in verse 14, it says, then Hezekiah took the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it and he went out to the house of the Lord and he spread it out before the Lord. And I love that phrase, spread it out before the Lord.

And he prayed before the Lord and he said, Lord, you who are enthroned above the chair of Him, you are God alone. He has this wonderful prayer. And he says in verse 16, incline your ear, O Lord, and hear.

Open your eyes, O Lord, and see. Hear and see what? Listen to the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. And what does it mean to be believing? One way to think about it is it means to be bringing my trials to Him.

I've noticed there's a tendency, if I'm a believer, I'm looking back in time. And all my life, the question is, did I yield it? Did I? I mean, I'm just giving you my life as a circle, right? But what I've noticed is, if you think about it, to use the picture, that's kind of my mind. Every day of my life adds a little bit more area to the circle.

And if I ask myself, am I a believer? The question is, well, looking back. But if I'm believing, the question is, this thing, I mean, I had this happen at work the other day. This thing is something that Wenhai shared a couple weeks ago, really spoke to my heart.

And it showed me I hadn't spread this out before the Lord. I didn't realize it. I'm a believer as much as the demons are.

But I hadn't said this thing that's bothering me. I have to spread it out before the Lord. This is why I'm burdened.

Something new came in my life, and I haven't spread it out before the Lord yet. And to be believing means to be bringing constantly, continuously, my needs before the Lord. And it's a tremendous revelation to say, Lord, I want to be the kind of believer who's constantly bringing and spreading out my needs.

It's important to speak it that he might hear. It's amazing. Look at verse 20.

This is the Lord's response to Hezekiah. It blew me away to see this. It says, then Isaiah sent Hezekiah saying, here's what the Lord says.

Thus says the Lord, because you have prayed to me about Sennacherib, king of Assyria, I have heard you. And it's actually, I have heard. The you is in italics, which means it's not actually in the original.

And it's useful to say, I've heard you. But to think for a second, God heard you because what he's saying here is because you prayed, I heard. Heard what? Well, what Hezekiah said in his prayers, hear what Sennacherib said.

Hear these words that he's saying. And God's, the God who's omnipresent, who we know hears everything. Hasn't the Lord already heard, right? We can think that.

Hasn't the Lord already seen this thing that came into my life? Why do I have to bring it to him? He's already, he already knows. And yet what the Lord says to Hezekiah is because you prayed, I've now heard what Sennacherib said. And to me, it spoke of the importance of actually bringing things to the Lord.

Whatever it is, spread it out before him. Don't assume he already knows. You know, that song, what a friend we have in Jesus.

One of the lines that blesses me is, oh, what peace we often forfeit. Oh, what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer. And my biggest problem today isn't that I don't know something about the Bible.

It's not that I'm not being used. It's not that I'm not accomplishing some good. It's that there are things in my life today that haven't been brought into submission to Christ, that haven't been brought and spread out to the Lord.

And as the days of my life pass, the area expands. And as the area expands, my need for surrender grows. And if I define believer in terms of a past event, I go, I'm good.

But if I look at believing, I don't want to settle for a once for all belief. I don't want to be an unbelieving believer. Jesus said to Thomas, be not unbelieving, but believing.

And he says that to me in the midst of my difficulties. But he says, don't be a believer. He says, but be believing.

And there are probably others, by the way, I'd mentioned these four half truths and the four, it is also written that the Lord has used to encourage me as I found myself susceptible to these deceptions. I'm sure there are other deceptions. I believe that we, that the Lord, as he reveals them, he'll preserve us in his word.

I just want to close with a verse from the chapter where our memory verse is, because it's the confidence we can have. Like when I said at the very beginning of the meeting, we need to, our utterance should be a confession of faith. What's our utterance? This is the utterance the Lord laid on my heart.

As I, as I heard him say that, thinking about what I was going to share. Psalm 16, our memory verses in verse eight. And I would say, if verse eight, I said the Lord continually before me, verse 11, you will make known to me the path of life.

I don't have to be afraid. The enemy may come and he may try to bring some half truth to me, may quote scripture to me just as he did Jesus. But as I'm setting the Lord continually before me, I truly believe he will tell me the word that's relevant in the moment, the word that's needed.

He will give a revelation by the Holy Spirit for the exact needful word. So whether it's these deceptions that he's shedding light on or others that are to come, we can say, in your right hand, there are pleasures forever. I won't be shaken.

And as Jesus warned us, the last days will be marked by deception. We're seeing deceptions, not just in the world, but in the church. I pray that the Lord would preserve us in the full knowledge of his word, the full knowledge of his will, so that we wouldn't be tricked by these half truths, but that we would know the full counsel of God and we would know how to apply his word in times of deception.

Deception is only going to increase. I pray the Lord would truly establish me and establish us so that we'd be strong. We'd know our God, we'd work exploits in these last days.

May the Lord help us.

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