
Third Presbyterian Church
Sermon on the Mount – Lesson 26
“Fruit Inspectors”

Matthew 7:15-23 (NIV)

¹⁵ "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles?

¹⁷ Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. ²¹ "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. ²² 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?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

1. What kind of inner alarm (if any) alerts you to the fact that a person is a phony?
 - a. Now answer the same question as it relates to a preacher or teacher of the word, what are the signs of a false prophet?
2. Why do you feel that people will know that a pastor is not preaching the Word of God as it should be, but still continue to sit under the teaching? How do you minister to someone in this situation?
3. Why do we continue to sin if we have Christ in our heart and the Holy Spirit in our lives, Is this passage telling us that we have to be perfect? How would you explain this to a new believer or someone that is not saved?
4. Explain how doing good works and salvation fit together.
5. This passage is not talking about works to earn your salvation but works in response to your salvation.
 - a. What does this passage tell us about the importance of doing good works in response to your salvation?
6. Explain how someone can be "religious" yet not following Christ? What would you say to this person to witness to them?
7. What evidence in your life points to your relationship with Jesus? Be specific!

Workshop: Reread Verses 21-23. These scriptures can be scary when obviously the people thought they were doing the work of God. How can you be sure that this will not be you saying these same things on judgment day? Moreover, how can you ensure you are one who is genuinely following and not just hanging around the church.

8. Share your main takeaways from the sermon and how it will impact your life going forward?

V. The Warning about False Prophets, 7:15-20

(7:15-20) **Introduction— False Prophets:** note what Christ is talking about in this passage. He is talking about prophets, men who proclaim and teach the gospel. There are some who are false prophets, men who proclaim and teach a false gospel. Christ says seven things about false prophets. (Cp. Galatians 1:6-9.)

1. Their presence: beware (v.15).
2. Their chief trait: they appear as sheep, but inwardly they are wolves (v.15).
3. Their revealing mark: the fruit they gather (v.16).
4. Their true nature: it is not good, but corrupt and evil (v.17).
5. Their hopeless fruit: they cannot bear good fruit, but only corrupt and evil fruit (v.18).
6. Their terrible future: judgment (v.19).
7. Their fruit: exposes them (v.20).

1. (7:15) False Prophets: false prophets are present. They are among us. Note two emphases.

1. Christ says: "Beware" (*prosechete* ^{PWS: 370}). The word means to take heed, guard, watch, keep yourself. The word is emphatic; the warning is clear and strong.
2. Christ warns us: one of the major things that keeps us from seeking the right gate and the right way (salvation and heaven) is false teachers. (See outline—' Matthew 7:13-14; Deeper Study #1—Matthew 7:13-14; Deeper Study #2—Matthew 7:13-14; Deeper Study #3—Matthew 7:13-14.)

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

2. (7:15) False Prophets: the chief trait of false prophets is that they "come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves."

1. Sheep's clothing: *outwardly* they appear as all ministers and sheep of God in profession, behavior, call, position, and message (2 Cor. 11:12-15).
2. Ravening wolves: *inwardly*, false teachers are anything but sheep.
 - a. Some false teachers are just like wolves in that they may not be aware that they are *not* what they should be. They go about doing what they know to do, not knowing that what they do is corrupt and evil (Matthew 7:17). They appear as sheep, but consume all they can in order to fill whatever appetite—personal conviction or doctrine—they have.
 - b. Some false teachers are just like wolves in that they are out for self and personal gain: ego, recognition, fame, prestige, position, livelihood, career, and comfort. They are concerned primarily with realizing their own motives and purposes and with pushing their own thoughts and formulas for succeeding in life.

c. Some false teachers are just like wolves in that they want a pack in which to move and with which to identify. They want a following to acknowledge their lead in intelligence and creativity or knowledge and ability. They appear as sheep, but they howl their own formulas (false gospels), crying aloud: "This is the way, walk in it." When possible, they use all the media they can: screen, radio, journals, magazines, books, newspapers, pamphlets, and tracts.

Thought 1. False teachers are in sheep's clothing. They can easily deceive.

1) They appear as sheep or messengers of light (2 Cor. 11:13-15). They appear harmless, innocent, and good. They start out as excellent examples of society, but they lack two things: a life and a testimony changed by the Word of God.

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter 1:23).

2) They secretly and deceptively preach heresies (2 Peter 2:1-3; cp. Galatians 1:6-10; 1 Cor. 15:1-4). They proclaim justice, morality, righteousness, and good. They teach mental and emotional and physical strength—all the high ideals and commendable ideas of men. But they never preach the true gospel of the living Lord.

"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction" (2 Peter 2:1).

"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:6-10).

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve" (1 Cor. 15:1-5).

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world" (1 John 4:1-3).

Thought 2. Inwardly false prophets are wolves, real wolves, knowingly or unknowingly. They may appear as sheep, but they are wolves.

1) They have not confessed the *Lord Jesus*: that God has raised Him from the dead.

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).

2) They have not "put off the old man" of the world.

"That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" (Ephes. 4:22).

3) They have not been "renewed in the spirit of their mind" nor "put on the new man."

"And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephes. 4:23-24).

"And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:10).

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

4) They have not been put into the ministry by God. (Note esp. 1 Tim. 1:12: the fact that God counts the men whom He chooses as *trustworthy*).

"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry" (1 Tim. 1:12).

Thought 3. A false prophet sometimes does not know he is false. He is *deceiving* because he is *being deceived*.

"But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:13).

"In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Cor. 4:4. Cp. 2 Tim. 3:1-15.)

3. (7:16) False Prophets: how can we tell if a prophet is false? There is one revealing mark: the fruit he gathers. A false prophet is known by the fruit he feeds upon and the fruit he feeds to others (see outlines—John 15:1-8 and notes—John 15:1-8). If he *feeds himself* on thorns and thistles and not on grapes and figs, that is one way to tell. If what he *feeds to others* are thorns and thistles instead of grapes and figs, that is another way to tell.

Thorns and thistles are false food, worldliness (see Deeper Study #3—Matthew 13:7, 22). Grapes and figs are true food. There is only one true food for the soul of man: the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word. (See notes—John 6:1-71; outlines—John 6:30-36 and notes—John 6:30-36; outlines—John 6:41-51 and notes—John 6:41-51. Cp. all outlines and notes John 6:1-71; John 17:14-16; John 17:17-19; cp. John 5:24; 1 Peter 2:2-3.) A prophet must feed upon the truth of the Lord and His Word, and he must feed the same food to others. Any other source of food for the human soul is false food: it is thorns and thistles (worldliness). If eaten or served to others, it will choke the life out of the soul (Matthew 13:7. Cp. 1 John 2:15-16; 2 Cor. 6:17-18; Romans 12:1-2.)

Note that Christ asks a question: "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" This can mean two things.

1. Does the prophet himself feed upon a worldly nourishment or a nourishment of Christ and His Word?
2. Does a person seek grapes and figs among thorns and thistles, among false prophets? A person knows false prophets by their fruits.

Thought 1. "Ye shall know them by their fruit."

- 1) "Try [test] the spirits," the prophets (1 John 4:1).
- 2) "Prove [examine] all things," the prophet's fruit (1 Thes. 5:21).

Thought 2. We cannot always tell a tree by its appearance (bark and leaves), but we can always tell it by its fruit.

Thought 3. Fruit has to do with two things.

- 1) What a person bears in his own life.
- 2) What a person bears in the lives of others.

A prophet is to be measured by the fruit borne in his own life and the fruit borne by him in other lives (see Deeper Study #1—John 15:1-8).

4. (7:17) Prophets, False: What is the true nature of a prophet? Note something critically important: a tree is not judged by a bad piece of fruit here and there, but by the good fruit it bears. Every tree produces some bad fruit, yet the tree is not cast away. A tree is not rejected unless it *leans toward* bearing bad fruit. In testing and examining prophets we must observe not single acts here and there; but the tenor, the lean, the whole behavior of their lives. How important! Such considerations as the following are given in Scripture.

1. Their preaching and teaching. Are they "enemies of the cross of Christ"?

"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18).

"For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).

"For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ" (Phil. 3:18).

2. Their minds. Do they usually keep their minds on carnal or on spiritual things?

"Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things" (Phil. 3:19).

"For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Romans 8:5).

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

3. Their appetite. Can it be said, "God is their belly"?

"Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things" (Phil. 3:19).

4. Their day to day ethics or behavior. Is it their practice to live immorally, either vicariously (through what they look at, watch, read, talk, and joke about) or through what they do?

"Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren. Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:8-10).

Now, how can Christ call a man corrupt who does good in the eyes of the world? How can Christ say the man's fruit, his good works are evil? How can preaching strong character and moral justice, feeding and clothing, caring for and looking after the physical and emotional welfare of a person be wrong? It is not wrong. Christ is not saying social justice and welfare are wrong. What is evil is concentrating only upon social welfare. "Man shall not live by bread alone," not by the physical only, "but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

A prophet who only preaches and takes care of the physical and mental is corrupt in that he shortchanges and deceives people. He does not proclaim and minister the whole truth, but half truths. He preaches and teaches mental health in spiritual terms, but he lulls people to sleep spiritually. He leads them into thinking they are in good standing with God, but this is not the teaching of Scripture. They are not acceptable to God when only their physical and mental needs are ministered to, regardless of the spiritual terms used. They must have their spirits *made and kept* right with God. False prophets "are enemies of the cross of Christ" (Phil. 3:18). Thus, Christ says they are corrupt and bear fruit of evil.

Thought 1. A false prophet's *true* nature is not good, no matter what he or others think and profess (see note—Matthew 7:18).

5. (7:18) Prophets— False Prophets: the false prophet's fruit is hopeless. He cannot bear good fruit, but only corrupt and evil fruit. The results of his life and ministry are "evil," so says Christ. Why? His message at best is only half true. It is deceiving in that it leads a man into thinking he is acceptable to God when really he is not. Men believe what their prophets (ministers, pastors, and teachers) tell them and live before them. Thus, to share only part of the truth is evil and destructive.

What are some of the *evil fruits* (the evil gospel) proclaimed and taught by false prophets? Scripture covers the following.

1. There is the gospel which primarily stresses legalism and works, the efforts of man to do enough good to become acceptable to God. (See note—Matthew 23:4; Deeper Study #4—Luke 6:7.)

"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?...For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith" (Galatians 3:1-2, 10-11).

2. There is the gospel which primarily stresses grace and faith and minimizes behavior. A person can be worldly as long as he takes care of his spirit at the appointed times of worship on Sunday (Romans 6:1f).

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Romans 6:1-2).

"Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren. Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:8-11).

"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?...Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (James 2:14, 17).

3. There is the gospel which primarily stresses negativism, rules and regulations to control every act of behavior: "Touch not, taste not."

"Touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using; after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body [personal discipline]; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh" (Col. 2:21-23).

4. There is the gospel which primarily stresses physical and mental health in spiritual terms (see note—Matthew 7:17 for more discussion).

5. There is the gospel which primarily stresses formalism and ritual, externals and ceremonies—a person is acceptable to God just so he is baptized and somewhat faithful to the church and its rituals and ordinances.

"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:3).

"Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (2 Tim. 3:5).

6. There is the gospel which primarily stresses separation and monasticism: a gospel that takes a person out of the world (see outlines—Matthew 5:14 and notes—Matthew 5:14-15).

"I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John 17:15).

7. There is the gospel which primarily stresses the true spiritual needs of man, but ignores and neglects the physical needs.

"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not" (Matthew 25:41-43; cp. Matthew 25:34-46).

Thought 1. Good fruit can never be expected or produced by a corrupt tree.

Thought 2. Evil fruit is constantly being reaped from a corrupt tree. A false prophet is lulling more and more persons into thinking they are acceptable and deepening their faith in a false gospel.

6. (7:19) False Prophets: the terrible future of the false prophet is severe judgment (see Deeper Study #1—Matthew 7:19). When a tree leans toward bearing bad fruit, it is...

- marked as corrupt.
- cut down.
- cast into the fire.

Christ says the same fate is to be the destiny of the false prophets. The terrible judgment coming upon false prophets is given in several passages.

"Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taken away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit....If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:2, 6).

"Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren. Know ye not that the unrighteous *shall not inherit* the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:8-10).

"Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (2 Cor. 11:15).

"But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was" (2 Tim. 3:9).

"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2 Peter 2:9).

"I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. And the angels which

kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire....Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core....And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 5-7, 11, 14-15).

DEEPER STUDY #1 (7:19) Judgment— Hell Fire

7. (7:20) **False Prophets**: their fruit exposes them (see note—Matthew 7:16; note—Matthew 7:17; note—Matthew 7:18 for discussion).

Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible - Commentary - The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Matthew.