

MESSAGES FROM THE MOUNT – *Fruit Trees*

Open your Bibles to **Matthew 7:15-20**. Let's see what the LORD JESUS has to say about "Fruit Trees." Pay close attention: 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.** Like it or not, **we are all fruit trees - and we all (should) bear fruit.** What's interesting here is that earlier in the chapter He warns that we shouldn't judge our neighbors unless we want to be judged by God. The apostles expound on this idea in their letters to the churches with cautions that the measure we use to judge people will be the measure God will use to judge us – especially if we condemn people for the same kind of things that we are guilty of ourselves.

Yet, Jesus is saying here that we must make some judgments about people – and particularly about those who claim to be speaking for God. He says though they're "disguised and dangerous," we'll be able to recognize them by their fruit. Evidently, it will take some careful scrutiny. Outwardly, they will look fine, but what's on the inside is rotten to the core. Jesus is telling us that we need to be diligent "fruit inspectors."

These words from Jesus particularly cause me to sit up and take notice. Though I do not claim to be in the same caliber of those Bible prophets God spoke to directly with a message to relay to His people, when I accepted the call to preach, in effect, I accepted the responsibility of being His spokesman. So, you have every right to look at my life and examine "my fruit." Do I practice what I preach? Am I in communion with God? Do I have a real relationship with Jesus? Am I following Him or not?

Now, perhaps you're thinking, "Since I'm not a pastor or preacher, let alone a prophet, I needn't be concerned." Think again. If we claim to believe in Him and His word; if we call ourselves Christians, we also need to bear "good" fruit. We're His ambassadors and representatives in the world. We're to speak as if our words are the very oracles of God.

Some "bad fruit" is easily recognized. That's true spiritually speaking as well. Paul says in **Galatians 5:19-21** **"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."** Of course, our culture would have us to believe that most of this isn't "bad" fruit at all - just another type. You know, like apples and oranges. These days, sexual deviation such as is found in the LGBT community is considered to be acceptable "alternate lifestyles."

And what of intimate heterosexual relationships God clearly intended to be reserved for marriage? Does Jesus really see this as “good fruit?” Should we? But, though we may fixate on “sexual sin,” there’s a whole lot of stuff listed here that believers often excuse as “lesser imperfections.” C’mon, if we’re gay bashers or endorse hate crimes, do we honestly think our fruit is any better? And what’s that “**debauchery**” thing? It’s defined as “depravity” – indulging in whatever feels good without inhibitions; a total lack of self-control. That’d include gluttony as well as drunkenness, and drug and porn addiction.

Some “bad fruit” may not be quite so obvious. You may have to be around someone awhile to notice this “bad fruit.” But is “**envy**” or “**jealousy**” any better? If we’re throwing temper tantrums, or gossiping, or stirring up trouble all the time, doesn’t that also displease God? A tendency I’ve noticed is since we all have our blemishes and bruises, we buy into that idea that it’s all “good” rather than be honest with God and ourselves that it’s all “bad.”

Some “bad fruit” is phony. Some looks and feels so real, unless you actually taste it you can’t know for sure. But, it’ll definitely leave a bad taste in your mouth you won’t soon forget. When the world even “gets a whiff” of believers – and especially church leaders who are driven by “**selfish ambition**” - let’s just say they’ll no longer find anything they have to say palatable. **A word of caution** here though: Paul addresses this issue in the Philippian letter, encouraging people not to toss out the baby with washtub. Jesus does the same thing in **Matthew 23**. Accept truth, even if the messenger is a phony.

In Jeremiah’s time, God’s people had become so comfortable with their sin that **the LORD was moved to say: “Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when I punish them.” (6:15)** Would He not be justified in saying something similar to us today? I’m afraid so. Listen, *The world’s prophets may present sinful behavior as acceptable, but God’s children must not be deceived into becoming comfortable with such fruit, let alone partaking in it.*

Why? The LORD will punish. Remember what Jesus said about this? **Those who bear bad fruit will be cut down and cast into the fire.** By who? Not us. “Good trees” on the other hand bear good fruit. That’s what they do. Why, because by God’s grace they are “healthy.” Paul continued in **Galatians 5:22-25: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there’s no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.** Is this fruit obvious in your life? It should be - if you “belong to Christ” – and if you are “keeping in step with the Spirit.” That’s not you?

Then, listen to what the LORD said to those people in Jeremiah's time who had lost their way. **He said: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls." (6:16)** That's a call to repent - to turn around and come to Him. Jesus put it like this in **Matthew 11:28**, "*Come to me - and find rest for your soul...*"