

Fruit, words, heart, judgment

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[0:00] So we have an Australian man staying with us at the moment and I'm speaking to him. He suggested I open with, dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to celebrate.

! Come on, I can't open with that. If I open with that, everybody will laugh at me. But the more I thought about it, actually the more relevant it become. That's exactly what we're here to do, isn't it? The Bible says, shout for joy to the Lord and come before him with joyful songs.

Seems I've inherited your problem and feel. And we come to listen to him also. As Jesus says in the book of Revelation, here I am. I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person. And they with me. Excuse me. So when we listen, we hear him.

And the result of that is if we let him in, it's a celebration with him. And so that's what we're going to do tonight. We're going to listen. We are continuing in our series of the book of Matthew.

[1:21] So if you'd like to just have your finger in Matthew 12. And as I always like to do, we are going to be looking at the context of the verses for a short time first.

And then we'll take a walk through the text, which I believe to be separated into four main subjects, which is on the screen. Hopefully it will stay there. Good fruit, bad words, the heart, and what God does with these things.

So we'll make some observations as we go. I think we'll switch to the... So we'll make some observations as we go.

And we'll finish with some applications and conclusions. So last time in the book of Matthew. So Jesus has been traveling around towns in Galilee.

And he's been teaching and performing miracles. We've seen him heal all kinds of sickness and diseases. And we've seen him raise people from the dead.

[2:29] We've been hearing on previous Sunday evening services that Jesus has been establishing himself as the son of God. Chris reminded us last Sunday evening.

He is fulfilling the prophecies that were written about him several hundred years earlier. We also heard at the end of chapter 3 that God called down from heaven and he said, This is my son in whom I am well pleased.

At the end of chapter 11, Jesus openly invited people to come to him. Rightly labeling himself as the son of God.

And the evidence for that at this point is very, very clear. So Jesus had been gathering a lot of attention from a lot of people. Drawing huge crowds. And for many good reasons.

We've been looking at the interactions Jesus had with people. With crowds, his disciples. And very occasionally throughout the book of Matthew, we've seen these people called the Pharisees.

[3:36] They've cropped up now and again. If you're new to this, the Pharisees were the religious leaders and teachers of the day. They were the ones who knew God's laws. Back to front.

The laws that come back from the days of Moses. They call it the Mosaic law. They knew them by words.

In actual fact, when it comes to the actions, they got it all completely backwards. They become so obsessed with tradition and law that they valued this over compassion or love for their fellow man. For the most part, they were hypocrites. It's not to say all of them were. But the majority. So as we come to our text, we see that at this time, Jesus is with a large crowd.

We're bringing him sick people to heal. And the Pharisees were there with him. Now, we haven't heard all that much from them up until this point.

[4:38] And we really see them, who they are in this chapter, as they begin to challenge Jesus. At the beginning of the chapter, they accuse him for letting his disciples work on a rest day, the Sabbath, when actually they were simply hungry.

Jesus' response to that, as we heard from Phil a few weeks back, was to highlight that the Pharisees did not understand that God desired steadfast love over their external actions. They didn't understand that. Jesus also made the claim that he is the Lord of the Sabbath. We then see the Pharisees try and find reasons to bring charges against Jesus.

They question him as to whether it's appropriate or not to heal on the Sabbath. Jesus' response was to highlight that steadfast love by saying how important it is to do good.

So Jesus then heals a man with a withered hand. And the reaction of the Pharisees to this act of love is to plot to kill him. So we're building a good picture of what these particular Pharisees are like.

[5:54] Jesus moves on from that place. He heals more people. And the crowds bring him more people. And the Pharisees follow.

And they try to convince the crowd that Jesus is working for Satan. Straight away, of course, Jesus points out how ludicrous this is. Jesus goes on to address the Pharisees further by saying that you either stand with the Lord of the Sabbath or you stand against him.

Jesus makes a statement about the rejection of the Holy Spirit. If you want to know more about that, listen to the sermon from last week, which was Chris. You can find that on the website. And so that brings us to our text.

Let's have a walk through. Good fruit and bad fruit. Make a tree good, and its fruit will be good.

Or make a tree bad, and its fruit will be bad. For a tree is recognized by its fruit. So Jesus continues in this subject of one or the other.

[7:03] The thing I said the last time I spoke is they're very, very polarizing words. You have one set of people and another set of people. There's lots of images that back that up.

And he uses this example of good fruit and bad fruit. I think this is an image we can all relate to, isn't it? Because we've all probably had some kind of experience with fruit. So when I was a little boy, we had an apple tree in the back garden.

And I loved that tree. It would always produce these really big, green, juicy apples. And on warm summer evenings, I remember me and my brother used to get plastic bags, go up there, and gather all the apples up.

And then we'd chuck them over the fence at the neighbors at the back. I can't remember what they tasted like. That was our main activity. Jesus is using an image here which is very multi-layered. Because we read it and we think of two sets of things, don't we? We think of good and bad. We think of trees and fruit. There's actually a third element here, isn't there?

[8:29] Let's notice where the sentence starts. Make a tree good and then further on, make a tree bad. How do you make a tree good or how do you make a tree bad?

Whether a tree is good or bad, it depends on where the root of the tree is, doesn't it? See, my apple tree produced good fruit. Okay, for throwing, but I'm sure that it was good to eat.

But it didn't do that by sheer will or just to please me or just to upset the neighbors at the back of the house. It produced good fruit because it was in good soil.

And this is England, so it had plenty to drink as well. However, it wouldn't do so well if the soil was contaminated, would it? Or if it was planted in a pile of rubble or maybe a section of sand.

It would die off pretty quickly, wouldn't it? I think for this example of the tree, Jesus is drawing on the things that we've heard about previously.

[9:44] Not just in our context, but in previous chapters as well. See, the action of my apple tree was to give fruit. It was me and my brother named it Ammo.

And we can look back at this chapter and see the actions or the fruit of the Pharisees. We've already seen a lack of compassion, false accusations, plots to kill.

Conversely, the fruit that we see from Jesus, the Son of God, is to love, is to save, and it's to heal.

He's demonstrated his mercy, his steadfast love. He saved the girl from death in chapter 9 and he has already healed countless people.

So the fruit tells us of the tree, doesn't it? Jesus said this about false teachers in Matthew 7. He said, by their fruit you will recognize them.

[10:49] Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? We can spot a tree by its fruit. So this brings us forward to verse 34.

And Jesus talks of a kind of fruit that we can expect from people. So Jesus, addressing the Pharisees, says, you brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good?

For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. That's a pretty firm address, isn't it? To speak to someone. And you might be misled if you didn't really look at the context into thinking that Jesus is opening with an insult and off-the-cuff remark against someone because he didn't like them.

But that would go against the very nature of what Jesus is claiming in the text, isn't it? And it can't be the case as such a simple contradiction to the text wouldn't conform to the way that the book of Matthew is written or to Jesus' speech.

So it must be something else. The first most telling sign of what Jesus is getting at here is the word brood which means offspring or family.

[12:13] here's a picture of a viper.

If you didn't know, a viper is not just a car. It's a venomous snake. So what's Jesus saying? He's saying that the Pharisees were a family of snakes.

snakes. So I ask you, if you have a family of snakes, what creature is likely to be a parent? A snake. Or if you believe certain evolution theories, it could be anything. who else was referred to as a snake?

Satan was referred to as a serpent, which is also snake. In Genesis 3, it was the serpent that deceived Eve. He tricked her. He lied to her.

[13:20] and he used words to do it. In Revelation 12, 9, the account of Satan's coming to power on the earth says, the great dragon was hurled down, that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan who leads the whole world astray.

He was hurled to the earth and his angels with him. So the serpent, the snake, is Satan. And in John 8, 44, Jesus said this of the Pharisees, you belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires.

He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

So as we read this verse, we can see Jesus isn't randomly insulting the Pharisees, is he? He's telling it how it is. He's speaking the truth, the opposite of what the devil is known for.

The Pharisees didn't hold to the truth of God. They desired to murder. They rejected the work of the Holy Spirit. But they didn't do it silently, did they?

[14:39] I mean, part of it was silent. What exposed them was their words. as they sought to bring charges against Jesus, as they accused, as they plotted to kill, as they lied to the crowd by slandering Jesus, healing of the demon possessed man.

They were led by words. And like we can recognize an apple tree by its fruit, so can we recognize people.

As we said earlier, by their fruit, you will recognize them. That's what Jesus said. I think Jesus emphasizes this with the Pharisees when he says, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. Jesus' position is pretty clear. In calling out the Pharisees' hearts, it's completely wicked.

We can recognize the bad fruit of the Pharisees. we understand, everybody here understands the power of words.

[15:53] Genesis 1, God spoke everything into existence. The examples are behind me. A whole existence is founded on words.

Here's a test. Who can finish this popular kids rhyme? Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me. Now put up your hand if you've ever been hurt by words.

Everybody, right? They do have power, don't they? So I broke my hand once, I won't tell you how. It hurt, I went to the hospital, I had it bandaged and I carried on with my day.

And it really didn't affect me all that much. Yet I've been completely incapacitated by words. I've cried for four hours straight because of words.

I think we've all been in that position somewhere along the line, haven't we? The most powerful films ever made aren't powerful because of their CGI or effects, they're powerful because of their words, because of their story.

[17:05] try going to a job interview and not speaking or not using any kind of language that involves words.

Not giving a CV because I think we can include written words into this. I would say even if you're a professional mime, you're going to struggle. You're going to need words at some point.

So God made us to be affected by words, didn't you? And these words have to come from somewhere, right? And where does Jesus say that they come from?

Exactly. So the issue with the Pharisees began in the heart. The mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. So now we're really presented with a question, aren't we?

[18:16] This forces ourselves to ask the most important question. Where is our hearts? Jesus says in Matthew 6, 21, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Is the home of my heart good in nature? Or you could ask, and this is a far more common question, am I a good person? I think we all know how most people are going to answer that.

I think most people would say yes. I saw it on my Facebook recently. Someone put up, I know I'm a good person. Now more than ever, in the West at least, people compare themselves to what the media say is good and bad.

And you can say, I'm a good person because I don't murder, I don't rape, I don't steal, and I don't hurt people. Or you might say you're a good person not on the strength of what you don't do, but on the strength of what you do.

You can say, I'm a good person because I do good things. And those are the usual standards that you would find with people, aren't they?

[19:47] people. If we run that by the fruit test, I think we're going to fail pretty quickly. We're capable of doing good things, of course, but then we still lie, we still cheat, we still lust, we do all the things that we really shouldn't do, and we want things we shouldn't want.

we curse people with our lips, we get unnecessarily angry, we insult people, we say the things we shouldn't say, and it hurts people, doesn't it?

And yes, it does matter. On the subject of murder and sexual ethics, Jesus says in Matthew 5, I'm paraphrasing here, it's not just murder that is an offense, in fact, your anger is just as judgeable.

If you think you can look at someone with all kinds of sexually motivated thoughts, encourage those thoughts and say, yeah, that's okay, Jesus says, no, actually, that's not okay, because your heart is still wrong.

In fact, you've already committed adultery by being there with your eyes and your mind. So if we're such good people, where are all these evil things coming from? The Bible says, actually, we're not good people.

[21:15] Our hearts are by default set in an evil position. Matthew 15 says, don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body?

But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

Father. Earlier in Matthew 7, when Jesus was speaking to large crowds, he said, if you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?

Though you are evil. the human heart is evil by default. I want to point out here, make it perfectly clear, that the Bible is saying something which is slowly being washed out of our society, that good and evil are not absolute.

The Bible says they are. And it's not humans that get to decide these things. things. And this brings us to our final point.

[22:41] What God does with these things, the fruit, the word, and the heart. I tell you that everyone will have to give account on a day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken.

For by your words you will be acquitted and by your words you will be condemned. That's a pretty straightforward verse, isn't it? At some point in the future there will be a judgment upon mankind. Who is the judge? I think last time I spoke we looked at the end of chapter 11 and how Jesus projected his thoughts forward to describe the outcome of judgments on unrepentant towns and we agreed that the only possible person that could know the outcome of a judgment before it's happened would be the judge.

Jesus says this in John 5, verse says this father has life in himself so he has granted the son also to have life in himself and as he has given him authority to judge because he is the son of man. Do not be amazed at this for a time is coming soon when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out. Those who have done what is good will rise to live and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.

[24:15] By myself I can do nothing I judge only as I hear my judgment is just for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me. there will come a time when all people in history dead and living will rise to face judgment.

And who is the judge? It's Jesus. So when we read this verse in light of everything that we've just learned puts us in a really uncomfortable position doesn't it?

For Christians and non Christians alike because the text says that everybody will have to give an account. I tell you something I'm glad that God is outside of time because I would need an eternity to give account for all the careless words I've ever said.

So before we go any further let's just have a quick recap of what we've heard tonight. Our fruit will show where our hearts are. Our words are very important and very powerful.

The default position of our hearts is evil and we will give an account of our careless words on a day of judgment. Let's move to some conclusions.

[25:49] This is what our text is saying. Christians, non-Christians, Buddhists, Baha'i, atheists, regardless of who or what we follow we will all stand before the God of creation in judgment and give account for any empty this is also translated lazy, idle, thoughtless or unprofitable word spoken.

This is not optional for anybody. There's no get out for this. So what do we do with it? For the Christian, the first answer, I think, would be back in our first verse.

The tree needs to be made good. We need to be producing good fruit. Jesus said in John 15, I am the vine, you are the branches.

If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers.

Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burn. Romans 12 2 says, do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

[27:22] So if we're not remaining in Jesus, our fruit is going to be worthless. It's only by the good of Jesus and his righteousness that we can become renewed, acceptable to the judge and bear good fruit.

And this is done by the work of the Holy Spirit. As we heard, if we reject the work of the Holy Spirit, we reject good, we remain in evil. So what do we do?

I speak here as a family because that's what we are, regardless if we met each other or not, we're family in Christ. I've got a few list of things which I think would be helpful.

Let's be prepared every day to give an answer to God for every word that we've used. I mean, it's a very, very difficult thing, maybe impossible for us to do.

We're not perfect. There'll come a day where we are perfected in glory by God's grace. At this point, we're going to make mistakes. But if we're on top of it, if we're constantly looking at ourselves, this is a very good thing.

[28:36] Examine our fruits. If our speech is slipping, if our actions become constantly questionable, if our fruits are turning sour, it's a good sign that something is very wrong, isn't it?

we can see this in ourselves and we can look up each other and determine these things. Let's pray that God will reveal in us any offensive ways, that he will fill us with the spirit and lead us in the way everlasting.

Let's help each other to do this. I think that's one of the most important points, isn't it? And finally, rejoice.

Because we have to give account for every word that we say. But Jesus the judge paid the price of all our empty, lazy, idle, thoughtless, unprofitable words, didn't he? He took them to the cross.

Romans 8 says, therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Because through Christ Jesus, the law of the spirit, who gives life, has set you free from the law of sin and death.

[30:03] What was the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh. God did by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us who do not live according to the flesh but according to the spirit.

We give account. But in judgment, God closes the book because of Jesus, we're declared not guilty.

That's a reason to rejoice, isn't it? What about if you're not Christian? To be frank, I think what you've heard speaks for itself.

These are the truths of the human heart. However hard to swallow, they are. However hard to hear, they are. They're the truth. You have an origin.

Now origin is your creator, God. There is a day of judgment coming and everybody is guilty. The Bible says all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

[31:30] God offers an eternal life of peace and love. forget everything you've ever heard about fluffy clouds and harps. You don't get issued them when you die.

The Bible says that heaven is a substantial place with no pain, with no death. Everything is made new. Trees, rivers, a city, new bodies, new hearts.

all of the unwanted noise that we get with life here goes away. It's a win-win deal and you get to be forever with the Savior that made it happen.

All you need to do is turn to Jesus who was willfully executed so that you can have exactly that. Amen.