

Look at the Fruit

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[0 : 00] Well, we're continuing on this morning in our journey through Luke's Gospel! If you have your Bible with you, you can open it up to Luke chapter 6. We are in verse 43.

Luke chapter 6, verse 43. And right now we're in the midst of a sermon that Jesus spoke. Possibly the Sermon on the Mount, or possibly a slightly different sermon with much of the same content. And let me just read the few verses that we'll be looking at this morning for us, and then we'll dig into them. So this is Jesus talking here in verse 43.

He says, No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit.

People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briars. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart.

[1 : 12] And an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

Now as we come to this in this passage in Luke, we may wonder, What's the connection here between this and everything that's come before it?

It kind of seems like a totally different topic. Just a moment ago in the verses prior to this, Jesus was talking about the hypocrisy of judging others, and being hypercritical of others.

But now he's all of a sudden talking about fruit trees as an analogy of what comes out of a person. And so, what's the connection? Or is this just a new topic?

This is where it's helpful to look at the parallel passage in Matthew's gospel, which adds some key context here. So let's just look for a second at Matthew chapter 7, verse 15.

[2 : 22] In Matthew's gospel, we read Jesus saying this, Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. And so, as we look at Matthew's gospel, it seems that at this point in the sermon, Jesus is introducing a new subject.

He's giving a warning to his disciples, and this whole analogy of fruit and fruit trees that we see in Luke is applied specifically to false prophets.

[3 : 39] Watch out for false prophets, says Jesus. And then Jesus tells us a couple characteristics of the false prophets.

The first characteristic, they come to you in sheep's clothing, he says. And so outwardly, they look like one of us.

Sheep are often used in the Bible to describe the people of God. God is the shepherd, and we who follow him and fear him are his sheep.

And then later on, Jesus will call himself the good shepherd, and his followers his sheep. And so when Jesus says that the false prophet comes in sheep's clothing, it means that they are dressed like us.

It means that they look like us, which probably means that on the surface, they talk like us, they act like us. It may at first be difficult to identify a false prophet.

[4 : 51] Well, there's another thing true about sheep here that might be in view here, and it's that sheep are very safe. See the contrast between the sheep and the wolf?

Sheep are very safe creatures. Probably most of us wouldn't even think about moving away from a sheep if it was just kind of walking right by us in a field somewhere.

They're not threatening at all. They're soft, and they're fluffy. But the problem here is that the false prophets, they're only wearing the sheep's clothing.

They are not true sheep of Jesus. how they appear on the outside is a facade. It's a deception. And so this leads us into the second characteristic of a false prophet.

Jesus says that inwardly, they are ferocious wolves. In other words, they're not safe. They're actually very dangerous.

[5 : 57] And I think we have to think through this analogy carefully at this point here because when we hear ferocious wolf, our minds go straight to something that's very visibly and obviously violent.

But remember, outwardly, they're dressed in sheep's clothing. And so the external behavior of the false prophet or the false teacher is probably not blatantly immoral or violent.

Rather, the damage they inflict is not physical. The damage is done through the false words that they speak. The division that they cause.

The way that they lead people away from the truth. These false prophets or teachers are not hungry for flesh but for attention and for people to follow them.

That's how the damage is done. Finally, let's just consider for a moment the meaning of the word prophet. Contrary to popular Christian conception, a prophet is not mainly one who predicts the future.

[7 : 12] Rather, a prophet in the Bible is one who speaks for God. One who, like his mouthpiece, speaks on his behalf.

And so a false prophet is one who claims to speak for God but God has actually not sent him or chosen him and is not actually speaking through him. But, if a false prophet can convince people that he is speaking on God's behalf, boy, can he lead people astray.

Once a person accepts that someone is speaking on God's behalf, a person will believe almost anything they say. Look at how the massive cult known as Mormonism traces back to a single man who had a special revelation from God, Joseph Smith.

or how far from the Jewish faith a Muslim is and how many Muslims there are tracing back to the false prophet Muhammad. False prophets are indeed ravenous wolves and very dangerous and the danger is in the lies that they speak which they claim are truths from the mouth of God.

So, how do we recognize these wolves in sheep's clothing? Well, this is what the analogy of the good tree and the bad tree is applied to.

[8 : 43] Jesus says, by their fruit you will recognize them. let's flip back to Luke and hear it from Luke's words the words that Luke recorded Jesus saying, no good tree bears bad fruit nor does a bad tree bear good fruit.

Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes or grapes from briars.

a good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart for the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

So, that first analogy given by Jesus is that of a wolf in sheep's clothing. The second analogy given has to do with how to identify the wolf in sheep's clothing and it's this analogy of tree and fruit.

Think about a tree for a moment. It's difficult to identify what kind of tree is in front of you in the middle of winter. If it's a deciduous tree it has no leaves and so you might look at that tree and wonder if it's even alive or if it's just dead sticks.

[10 : 21] There's nothing on the branches but then when spring rolls around all of a sudden the leaves begin to form. They just kind of pop out of nowhere and suddenly you can tell what kind of tree it is.

Not only that but in that one tree you can see which branches are alive and which ones are dead because the dead ones have no leaves. And then for fruit trees there's a step beyond that.

For a time unless you have a really keen eye for identifying fruit trees for a time it just looks like a tree and even if you can figure out what kind of tree it is from its leaves and other characteristics say that it's an apple tree you don't know just from the outward appearance whether it's the kind of apple tree that produces delicious red apples or sour little green apples you don't know that until the fruit actually forms and ripens and so fruit in this analogy is not the thing that you see initially from the person it's what comes from the person over time it's the product of their life their interactions their words over time you will recognize them by their fruit says Jesus but fruit usually takes a season to grow and to show itself now in this passage

Jesus actually contrasts the kinds of fruits that we might expect from a fruit tree he says no good tree bears bad fruit nor does a bad tree bear good fruit it's helpful to know here that the word for bad that's used here is not the usual Greek word for bad it's actually the word for rotten or putrid or spoiled and so we might even think of good and bad as far as the tree is concerned in terms of healthy or diseased or sickly really what Jesus is saying is no good healthy tree produces rotten sickly fruit and no diseased or sickly tree produces good tasty fruit a fruit tree can only produce according to its health whether good or bad and it may take some time and even some tasting to see whether that tree is diseased or healthy

Jesus is saying that it's the same with recognizing false prophets and false teachers initially we may not see anything wrong with them some of the things we hear from them may sound fine but eventually they will not be able to hide their true nature that inward nature they will produce fruit and things will come from their interactions and from their teachings that are either good or rotten those things will give clear evidence to whether they're a true prophet or a false prophet to whether they're a faithful teacher of God's word or an imposter Jesus even takes this analogy one step further first it's just two different kinds of fruit but the same kind of tree and now he takes it on to two different types of plants even in verse 44 he says each tree is recognized by its own fruit people do not pick figs from thorn bushes or grapes from briars now the point

[14:29] Jesus is making here is really the same point as the previous statement he's saying that the type of tree it is is proven with certainty by what kind of fruit comes from it but a fig maybe this just doesn't resonate with us as much or even grapes because it's just not something that we eat here and grow here in our climate in Davidson it's more common in the Middle Eastern climate and so let's just think of a cultural equivalent for just so that the argument lands in our hearts people do not pick apples from thorn bushes it's a pretty extreme and obvious contrast when you hear it that way that's what Jesus means to say with this a thorn bush simply does not produce any good fruit for us to eat and enjoy and Jesus is basically he says the same thing twice here for emphasis people do not pick grapes from briars briars just another word for thorn bush all that comes from a thorn bush is prickles because that's the type of tree that it is and it can really only produce according to its nature well it's the same with people is Jesus point what's really on the inside is what will eventually come out

Jesus just goes on to spell it out super clearly in verse 45 a good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart for the mouth speaks what the heart is full of what's stored up on the inside is eventually what comes out now we may wonder sometimes about this and how helpful this is because after all we all still sin sometimes right we have moments of temptation and regrettably we give in or we have moments when we are tested by others and get angry or impatient or say something that we shouldn't but

Jesus I don't think he's not saying that a false prophet can't ever do something right neither is he saying that a true disciple of his can never sin here's what I think the difference is between the false teacher and the true follower of Jesus first of all I think we're intended to look at the majority of the fruit when the fruit on the tree appears and ripens the majority of it is the same is the majority of the fruit rotten or is it good is it mainly selfishness or is it mainly love coming from that person is it mainly greed or is it mainly graciousness and generosity the majority of the fruit tells what kind of tree it is second we have to remember that the whole point of this analogy is that it's not the tree that you see initially that tells you what it is but it's the fruit which comes later over time what comes from the false teacher mainly self promotion greed division indifference to those who are in need compromise eventually it becomes apparent that they are as

Jesus referred to above perhaps a fault finding hypocritical hyper hyper hyper critical type of person claiming to speak for God in contrast to that what about the true disciple of Jesus well over time there should be the fruits of God's spirit in them we should see mainly love and kindness patience gentleness humility reverence generosity as we mentioned before a true believer still sins at times but then what happens after we sin unlike the false teacher or the false prophet there is repentance and confession and restitution that too is good fruit and it's always lacking from the false teacher or the false prophet because they're like the

Pharisees they're like the man with the log in his eye that we talked about a couple weeks ago unable to see their own fault and sin and so they don't ever admit to it or own it it's always someone else's fault it's always that speck in somebody else's eye so how do we apply these words of Jesus

well first I think it should be obvious that the the first place to look is we should use these words to discern who is the false teacher and who is the false prophet that's the context that Jesus gave these words in he said watch out for false prophets they're dangerous I've said this before but I'll say it again in our day in particular and in our context as a small town church the false teacher or the false prophet rarely walks through the door and requests to become a member of the church there's no need the false teacher the false prophet today has an easier time putting on a facade and peddling his teaching online on his

[21 : 09] YouTube channel through X and Facebook with that sort of distance it's much harder to see the fruit of this person influencing who we actually really almost know nothing about does he even belong to a local church does he even attend regularly and then there are all those tools today in our online world where you can cut segments out of the video and edit it and polish it up and make it look really good so that all people see is that put on version of yourself exactly what you want them to see and yet I would argue that even here the fruit can be seen is that influencer online hypercritical of other good Christian pastors and teachers and preachers authors are they often taking their words out of context and picking at every little detail of what they say is that online influencer that teacher helping

Christians to become more connected and involved with their local church or less are they causing division or are they bringing greater unity in local churches even the online false teacher can't hide his bad fruit what's the effect that this teacher online is having on others are their followers becoming more like Jesus are they producing more of the fruit of the spirit are they becoming more patient more gentle more gracious more generous or are they becoming more and more critical of others more anxious more worried more frustrated more impatient so this is the first place to apply these words of Jesus I think beware of false prophets or false teachers they are dangerous by their fruit you will recognize them the second place that we might apply these words probably the next place that we feel inclined to go is we may see these words as helpful for judging whether a brother or sister is walking with the Lord is there mainly good fruit coming from their lives or mainly bad fruit but while these words of Jesus are helpful in discerning what's inside of others let's not forget what Jesus said just a moment ago look up the page a little bit he said you hypocrite first take the plank out of your eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye and so we should not rush straight to judging one another by these words what kind of fruit is in your life are you a good tree or a bad tree before we even think of doing that we need to first apply these words of Jesus to ourselves so I want to encourage us to prayerfully ask this question

Lord what kind of fruit is coming from me am I producing the good fruit that you long for me to produce we notice in this passage that Jesus specifically highlights our speech he says for the mouth speaks what the heart is full of and so Lord what kind of words have been coming out of my mouth today and this past week and lately what kind of tone have my words had I'm encouraging us to ask God about ourselves I'm not saying just do some self-reflection because you know we always tend to be more lenient with ourselves than with others these words here today invite us to ask

God whether it's good fruit coming from us or bad fruit but then I want to challenge us all to take it one step further I want to challenge each of us not only to ask God but to ask one other person in your life who you're close to what kind of fruit they see coming from your life do they ever wonder whether you are a true follower of Jesus and if so why and if not do they see you as a healthy and growing disciple of Jesus or do they see you as a struggling and sick disciple of Jesus right now this is going to take a little bit of courage to ask somebody this kind of a question but what does the majority of the fruit that they see coming from your life indicate about what's inside of you maybe the

Lord would use these words and these kinds of questions to convict us and to help us see that we've gotten off the right path a little bit perhaps that we've been storing up evil in our hearts in ways that we've become blind to or maybe it's not that extreme not that we've been storing up evil but maybe it's been that we've been neglecting to store up good in our hearts lately through our regular prayer and relationship with God through time spent reading his word spent worshiping him spent fellowshiping with others only after we've asked these questions of others what fruit do you see coming from me are we ready to discern in others what fruit do I see coming from you and of course at this point when we get to that last question we're not talking about false teachers anymore we're talking about looking at one another's lives and there's two ways that we can do this we can

look at one another's lives and we can try to discern the fruit for the purpose of fault finding and with a critical spirit a judgmental spirit like the

[28 : 02] Pharisees had and Jesus just warned us about that don't do that he said or we can look at one another's lives and try to discern fruit motivated by a loving concern for the spiritual well-being of a brother or sister when a person's drifting away from the Lord and maybe getting into habitual sin or into addiction then it begins to show in their lives there's a fruit that we may begin to recognize and it's an opportunity for us to love them and to draw near to them and to say hey I've noticed this in your life what's going on this is the opposite of how our Lord Jesus asked us to live have a conversation about it and maybe they even shoot straight with you and confess to you well I've been drifting away from the Lord I haven't been walking as closely with him as I should you now have an opportunity to encourage that brother or sister and say come back to him repent maybe they even need some help with that can I walk with you through this is there a way that I can help you out with this especially if they're entangled in something that's addictive or really challenging and of course we must always do this graciously and humbly and gently we too still sin and fumble and falter finally as we draw things to a close here I want to remind us of the gospel as we hear those words of Jesus the mouth speaks what the heart is full of I don't know about you but I feel convicted I think back to when's the last time I yelled at my kids in frustration or when did I snap at someone or share a piece of gossip that I shouldn't have

I want to remind us that it was for these sins and all the sins that we've committed that Jesus died to forgive us there is complete cleansing in Jesus for every evil thing that has come out of us every piece of bad fruit even for the evil that's been stored up inside of us he died to wash us and cleanse us completely to forgive us and take all of our guilt away and so that's good news not only that but when it comes to this good fruit that Jesus is talking about we're not left to ourselves to try and produce it there's a good news here too God is at work in us who believe in him if we've believed in Jesus and we have been born again by his spirit his spirit lives in us and produces that good fruit in us

Jesus told us that we need to I should say Jesus told us that what we need to do to produce an abundance of fruit is to abide in him to remain in him to stay in his words to stay in his love now this doesn't mean that producing good fruit doesn't take effort it does and it will but our efforts are helped supernaturally by God's spirit who lives in us as we seek to imitate our father in our lives and so this too is good news by the grace of God by the spirit's power we can store up good inside of ourselves and we can expect to see good fruit flowing out of our lives and through out of our lips because of our relationship with Jesus Jesus makes all the difference in the past for all the bad fruit that we've produced and from now on for all the good fruit that he will produce through us this is the good news let's pray father in heaven we thank you that you have not just left us to ourselves to get what we deserve from you that your mercy and grace is so great that you looked at us as sickly diseased unhealthy sinful trees that we are and said

I'm going to cleanse them and wash them and make them new and I'm going to produce all kinds of good fruit through them you didn't have to do that for us Lord and so we're grateful we know our own frailties and weaknesses and sins and you know them even better than we do and we thank you that you will bring glory even through through us in our brokenness in our weakness in our struggles help us to submit ourselves completely to you Jesus give us wisdom to discern but even deeper than that make us full of the good that you long to see in us and may it flow out of us through us blessing one another and blessing our world and our community we ask this for your glory amen miracle miracle