

Questions Jesus Asked: Do people pick grapes from thornbushes?

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[0 : 00] Please pray with me again for this message now.

God, give to all your people gathered here this morning and increase of your grace. We could meekly hear your word to us and receive you with our deepest affections purified by your spirit and that we would bear forth the fruit of the same spirit, the very character of Christ as we exercise the gifts that you've given to us in the world in which we live so that your name would be glorified not only in our lips but in our lives.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, today is the conclusion of our mini-series called Questions Jesus Asked.

The first three questions were as followed. Why are you so anxious about clothes? It's about trusting in God.

Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye? Which is, of course, about the judgment of God. And which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?

[1 : 43] Which is about the providence of God. Now, I need to prepare you. I don't know if you noticed the question that was in the gospel lesson, the second reading today, but it isn't really at first a great attention-getter.

This is a bit of concern for me. So this week when I was preparing the sermon with another associate on staff who will be preaching the same text this evening, I asked, you know, can you help me just identify some really good questions?

And he said, sure. You know, why don't you just go to Google and search best questions? So I did. And he said, but, you know, when you get there, just bypass the first entry and go to the second entry.

Now, why? Why wouldn't you just go to the first entry? I looked at the first entry. It was great. It was the best questions for life stories. I read it and it looked pretty good.

I thought, well, I'll look at the second one. And the second one said, the best questions for speed dating. Thanks, Aaron. We'll pass that.

[2 : 51] Actually, you know what? I did look at it. And I just felt like I can't do this. You know, I just, who knows what you might get into. And oddly enough, it's, you know, there are good questions to think about when you're thinking about something like that, which I'm not, of course.

Or maybe I am. You know, I date my wife. And so, but all those questions I mostly know the answers to. So, anyway, here we go.

So, back to a really good question, I think, that's in the lesson today. And I just love the questions that are raised in the Bible. They tell so much about the ones raising the question, as well as those who are questioned.

The questions in the Bible are raised by God and man and woman. The questions are sincere, always when asked by God, but sometimes sincere when asked by men and women, but sometimes really insincere.

The questions are rhetorical, and they're real. The questions are opened, but some are actually closed. Here's today's question.

[4 : 00] You can look at it in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 7, beginning at the 15th verse. It's this. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?

How about that for a question? This is a closed-ended question that we can answer one of two ways. All right.

It's either yes or no, or as we actually learned about true and false, sometimes there's an evasive answer to a question like that. But before we look at how Jesus answered the question, let's look at why Jesus asked questions in the first place.

He asked questions, I think, for one of three reasons. Questions asked by Jesus are a way of leading us not into temptation, but actually delivering us from evil. In other words, questions like parables are a way that Jesus brings us to repentance.

Sometimes the question is embedded in a parable, but sometimes the question works like a parable that searches our hearts. Right? That's one reason that he uses questions.

[5 : 07] The second reason he uses questions is that questions asked by Jesus are a way of punctuating his life into ours. Sometimes people come to Jesus on his terms with a question, and other times they come to him on their terms to question him.

When religious leaders ask Jesus a question, he often turns it back on them with a question. And when Jesus is asked a question by seekers, he gives them an answer they may want to hear or may not want to hear.

And sometimes he uses a question as well. Even though the Hebrew and Greek languages have no punctuation, I think that the Christian life is a punctuated life.

Punctuated by grace through faith with hope. That's the second way that Jesus uses questions. The third way he uses questions is this. Questions asked by Jesus always put us in a position of making a choice between the true and the false so that our faith will not be ruined or wrecked and that the Lord will be glorified as we produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

Let me say that again because I think that you're going to hear about false prophets today but I think that this is what this passage is about. Jesus raises questions for this reason and in this instance so that we'll make a choice between what is true and what is false so that our faith will not be ruined or wrecked or ravished and the Lord himself will be glorified in our decision as you and I produce fruit in keeping in keeping with repentance.

[6 : 52] That's what this question embedded in the parable-like teaching of Jesus is all about in Matthew chapter 7 verses 15 to 20. I love questions more than any other literary device in the Bible.

I love questions more than as we look at the Bible and read it and search the scriptures more than repetition and cause and effect and effect and cause and general to the specific and specific to the general and even sometimes more than single words themselves even though I actually think that a single word of Jesus is worth a thousand pictures in a culture where we think a picture is worth a thousand words.

Well here we go. Here's Jesus' question. A closed-ended question. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?

Look at your Bible chapter 7 beginning at the 15th verse and follow along with me briefly. Jesus asks that question and he answers it after first warning a massive crowd about false prophets.

This is in the Sermon on the Mount. There's a huge crowd that's gathered. He also then describes then the manner and the motivation in which the false prophets come followed by assuring the disciples of their capability to identify false prophets.

[8 : 18] He says that you will recognize them by their fruits. And then he actually flushes out that metaphor of the trees their root and their fruit. And then he comes back by way of repetition repeating the assurance for the disciples capability to identify false prophets.

That's what he does in these six verses. What is Jesus doing when he raises this question? It is a question that is closed and we all know that the answer to it is no.

Right? But he answers the question with no in saying every healthy tree bears good fruit but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit nor a diseased tree bear good fruit.

And I think we all know that. He raises and answers the question to establish I think the reality of false prophets marks and there are three marks of a false prophet in and around this text.

Let's look at those three marks of a false prophet. The first one is that they have a message. Before Jesus warns his disciples about false prophets he gives a preview of their message in verses 13 to 14.

[9 : 28] Look at that with me. Enter by the narrow gate for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction and those who enter by it are many. for the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life.

And those who find it are few. There are two messages one of a narrow gate and one of a wide gate. Right? There's also the message that leads to life and to destruction.

There's a message that is hard and there is a message that is easy. One message includes just a few and the other one includes many.

The false prophets teach a message of a wide gate where many access heaven but in reality it leads to destruction. In other words the false prophets saying relax take it easy we're all making it to heaven well or at least most of us.

You're just fine the way you are don't worry be happy. That's how Jesus prefaces his warning about false prophets. False prophets have a message.

[10 : 41] It's not the one that is the narrow gate that is difficult and where there will be few. That's the message actually of the true prophets. The prophets also have a manner.

After Jesus names false prophets and if there are false prophets then it's important to know that there are true prophets he then tells how they come to his disciples. Look at how they come.

They come in sheep's clothing. Inwardly they are but wolves but outwardly they are sheep. The wolves intend to deceive and they pretend they're someone that they're not.

They're hypocrites. They're the whitewashed tombs that Jesus talks about on other occasions. They cannot come as they are and so they hide behind a costume.

They are total spiritual frauds masquerading as if they are something that they're not. Every day is kind of like a spiritual Halloween for them except they're not in costume then.

[11 : 46] They really are. They never actually make it to All Saints Day. They're never pure. They're never holy. They're never white. But they pretend to be holy and innocent.

Pure. They presume they are clothed in the righteousness of Christ but really deep down they're children of the devil. It's important to know that the false prophets of the past generation we see so clearly in hindsight but there is a new generation of them as well.

We can identify what they looked like back then but there are false prophets that are here now. Well that's the second mark of a false prophet.

The third mark is this and that is that they're really motivated. They're really motivated. After the initial description of their appearance their manner or presentation the false prophet's motivation is disclosed.

Look at me what the false prophet does. Right? Right from the beginning beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

[12 : 57] They know exactly what they're doing. Along with their easy casual and nice message is the real effect. This false prophet's motivation knowingly or not is to ravish to ruin and to wreck lives.

And they're without excuse. They intend to do exactly what they do thinking it's the right way. You may think it's the name of love but it doesn't include the Lord's difficult definition of covenant faithfulness which comes by grace and mercy and it's not cheap.

If you look at these false prophets their lives are riddled with broken covenants and promises. They wreak havoc on people and families and communities. And that's what false prophets do.

And that's how they come. I lived in Abbotsford which is far from Chilliwack and there are lots of sheep out there not as much as in a place like New Zealand I'm sure or Australia or maybe other places in the world.

So I can't give you a first hand kind of description of what wolves can do to sheep but I think that we all know how they can bring them to death in a very short period of time.

[14 : 15] And that's what prophets do. That's how they come. And so Jesus describes the false prophets in these terms. He raises the matter of false prophets because of this reason now I think.

Why does he do it? Not only how does a false prophet come but why does Jesus do it? Why does he bother with exposing false prophets?

What's at stake? And I think it's this that Jesus knows that it's a matter of life or death. The first reason he does it is this I think and that is that there are works that are to be done.

There are some works to be done by those sheep. Look at the passage following in verses 15 to 20 with me. Jesus follows the description of false prophets in verse 21 with not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven.

I'm going to skip the next phrase for those of you who are looking at your Bible. For those of you who are not then you wouldn't have noticed it. Sorry. It's worth following along. On that day many will say to me Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name and then I will declare to them I never knew you depart from me you workers of lawlessness.

[15 : 36] At this point Jesus is talking about false prophets but also maybe those who have listened to them and been ravished as well. They seem to have done the work of Jesus.

They had creedal ministry, deliverance ministry and miraculous ministry. Despite good works many will hear Jesus say those are his words not mine I never knew you.

This must mean the workers of prophecy those who were involved in deliverance ministry and miracles never knew Jesus because he never knew them.

the other explanation verse 23 is these deeds were done apart from the law. He says away from me you who are workers of lawlessness.

Maybe they thought they were doing acts of love but it was really a cheap kind of love. It was a kind of you know Paul McCartney love. Sorry all you need is love.

[16 : 36] That's not what St. Paul said. Faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. There's a great description in 1 Corinthians doesn't he?

You think at the end that he would say and sing maybe even all you need is love. But he doesn't. He says faith, hope and love. The greatest of these is love. Love gets the gold but faith and hope are on the podium as well.

So the false prophets and other wishful thinkers will not be with Jesus in the end. And as one preacher said, Jesus is saying there is a real destination and a population for the people who think they're headed for the kingdom of heaven based on creed, deliverance, and miracles alone.

They're bound for hell. But that doesn't mean we can put a smirk on our face or a cop, a kind of a I told you so attitude. Our mind should be like that of Jesus Christ who when he was about to be crucified looked over Jerusalem and wept because they didn't know what made for peace.

Jesus weeps over those who listen to the false prophets rather than the true ones. And that's why he's doing this. Secondly, then I think the other reason that Jesus is exposing the false prophets because he wants us to know that the will of the father is absolutely preeminent.

[17 : 57] It's all about the will of the father. We see in verse 21 then. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven. But, it's a contrast, a clue the phrase at this time, the one who does the will of my father who is in heaven.

Jesus contrasts the one group now with the other. Right? The latter group in comparison to the false prophets and those who follow them are now this other group and they do the will of the father.

The will of the father seems to be what differentiates what is true and what is false. It's pretty disturbing that someone would do the right thing but for the wrong reason.

Before anyone does the works in the name of Jesus, he or she needs to know the will of the father. And that's why Jesus says, seek ye first the kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.

Jesus shows us the way which is not his will but thine be done. Incidentally, here's a very interesting observation that was shared with me today by, I'm sorry, this past week by Terry.

[19 : 12] You know the hymn that we just sung, seek ye first the kingdom of God? Terry looked at it in common praise. He noticed that it only included two verses and that the third one was omitted.

Here's the third verse that was omitted but Terry, who's no false prophet, included. We do not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

That's how we know the will of God. From the mouth of God. And what is the will of the father? The will of God, I think, is to glorify himself through Jesus' preaching the kingdom, performing miracles.

And ultimately, though, not his mission alone, through his passion. That's how God glorifies himself. The father, that's his will, to glorify himself through his son's death and resurrection and ascension.

And in the gospel of John, Jesus spoke indirectly about himself saying these words. He seeks not his own glory, but the glory of the father who sent him.

[20 : 21] It's the will of the father. The false prophets don't do the will of the father, which I think is to be amazed and praise and wonder and worship the son, only to name a few responses that we could possibly have to the father's will as he glorifies his son in our midst.

The false prophets seem to be focused on tasks and they completely miss the glory of Jesus high and lifted up on the cross and ascended into heaven where he rules and reigns over all creation and sees that we know the will of the father.

So let me conclude with this. I've got two more questions. And to hear this, these aren't kind of judgmental questions, but they are directed at you. I'll use you.

It's the inclusive you, all of us. And they're not my questions. They're questions from the Bible. Not out of the text that we looked at today, but ones I think that are related to this text.

And the first one is this. It's one of my all-time favorite questions in the Bible. Where are you? Sure, I know you're at St. John's in Vancouver, in BC, the greatest place to be.

[21 : 32] You'd never want to leave there this time of year because it's so great. But that's not what I mean. Where are you? It's the first question our Lord actually asks in all of the Bible.

It's not the first question in the Bible, but it's the first question our Lord asks in Genesis chapter 3 verse 9. And the Lord asks it, you know, after Adam and Eve are tempted by Satan and fall.

I love that question. I mean, think about it. They've sinned. They've fallen from the glory of God. And God comes to Adam and he doesn't say, what did you do?

He doesn't say, in anger, why did you do that? He said, where are you? Where are you?

That's all. And I think that this text in part today about the false prophets can be got at or can get at us when we think about the question coming from our Lord who loves us so dearly is, where are you?

[22 : 39] He wants to be in close proximity with us. He wants us to know that he wants us to be with him. This is what Calvin says about our proximity to God.

He said, we know what a strong propensity men and women have to falsehood. So they do not only have a natural desire to be deceived, but each individual appears to be ingenious in deceiving himself.

And we deceive ourselves when we are out of proximity with God and don't find ourselves close enough to him but start listening to the false prophets because we have itching ears or for some other reason.

And so God asks us, ask you, ask me, where are you? There's my second most favorite question in the Bible, and it's this.

What do you want? The first question Jesus asked in the Gospel of John is this one. It's pretty simple, or in other words, what do you seek?

[23 : 50] Jesus asked this question after John the Baptist's disciples turn from him. They turn from him and then they go to Jesus. And one of them is Andrew, and he's following Jesus at a kind of a reasonable distance.

And Jesus turns around to him and he says to him, what do you seek? I don't know if you remember his answer, and at first I thought, you know, this is a really lame answer to a great opportunity.

And Andrew says, where are you staying? Doesn't say, what is truth? Doesn't say, when will the kingdom come? Doesn't ask a whole host of other questions that you and I might ask.

But he says, where are you staying? And I thought after a while, you know what? That was a great answer. Because it strikes me that it's so much about that.

It's about being in relationship with Jesus Christ. And God calls out of us the answers to the questions just like that. What do you seek? Where are you?

[24 : 58] It's as if he gives us the answers to those questions. He knows what's the deepest longing of our hearts because he's put it there in the first place. And he and only he can satisfy it.

And the satisfaction of it is to do as Jesus said, that those who know him know and do the will of the Father, which is to glorify his son in our lives.

And despite our propensity towards falsehood and our failure to seek truth, Jesus calls us to repent and he knows that we can respond.

Jesus is confident a few people will recognize the false prophets by their fruit. And you and I can discern the tree that produces good fruit and the ones that produce the bad fruit.

But hear this. Jesus doesn't want us to conduct a campaign of rooting out false prophets. He warns us to be cautious. He doesn't want us to become erratically suspicious or spiritually paranoid.

[26 : 03] In fact, Jesus issues a warning. And get this. He doesn't reissue what the law commands in the book of Moses. And here's a great picture of tolerance when you think about Jesus.

is that the Old Testament, the false prophets, were to be stoned. That's not what he says here. No, rather, Jesus wants us to do what the false prophets cannot do.

And that is to do the will of the Father. This is the road less traveled or a long obedience in the same direction of heaven that is a place. And it is a real destination with a real population.

we have it now. Eternal life is for now as well as then. And we'll make it there when we choose the true and ourselves produce good fruit in keeping with repentance.

Speak to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[27 : 12] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Please kneel and join with me in prayer.

When I pray, Lord, in your mercy, please respond, hear our prayer. Heavenly Father, you who grants wisdom and discernment and who, through your Son, Jesus Christ, taught us to beware of and to recognize false prophets and their message.

We thank you and praise you that you have set before us the truth, the way that leads to life, though the gate is narrow and the way is hard.

For your glory and for the sake of your Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, grant us the understanding to recognize and to follow truth where and when it is taught, and guard us against all falsehood and deception.

By your Holy Spirit, renew our vigilance and preserve us from harm. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

[28 : 50] Lord, in your mercy, we confess that we are prone to falling away. We repent of the many times that we have chosen to please ourselves rather than pleasing you, to pursue selfish gain or frivolous diversions instead of serving others, or to entrust our future to our own cleverness instead of trusting in your good providence.

Have mercy upon us, God our Father. For the sake of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, forgive us.

By your Holy Spirit and for your glory, restore us to the way of truth and peace. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We continue to bring before you the people of Syria, the civil war raging in that country, and the devastation and suffering it has brought.

As the world looks to London and the Summer Olympic Games, we pray for all those gathered there who have yet to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ clearly proclaimed.

[30 : 19] For his sake and for your glory, cause your gospel to go forth there and draw to yourself those who you have chosen.

In these and in the other concerns of our hearts, give strength to the weak, console those who grieve, restore those who are broken, and by your Spirit, surround with your care all those who are in need.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. We pray now for our leaders, for the Prime Minister, the Premier, the mayors of our cities, and all who serve in public office, for the bishops of the Anglican Communion, and for the clergy, and for the clergy, ministers, and lay leaders of St. John's.

Direct them in truth, according to your perfect will. By your Spirit, grant that they would fulfill the responsibilities of their offices, according to the wisdom you have given.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. We pray for the AMMIC, Asian and Multicultural Missions in Canada, for Bishop Stephen Leung, and for all the leaders of this ministry.

[31 : 55] We pray also for Anglican 1000, the initiative of the Anglican Church in North America, calling for 1,000 new congregations and faith communities across North America.

We pray for Christ Church of the Valley in Mill Bay, Seanigan Lake, and for Christ the King, Anglican Church in Victoria.

We pray also for the sick and suffering, Derek, Rowena, Chris, Linda, Marguerite, Glenn, Doug, Jock, Beatrice, Nora, and Carly.

We pause now and name silently in our hearts, others who especially need your care. Amen. We lift them all to you, Heavenly Father, you who knows every deepest need and who satisfies the longing of every heart.

Lord, in your mercy, keep us in your care, Heavenly Father, through the days of this week. Cause us to remember you often in our homes, in our places of work and study, and as we travel.

[33 : 50] Bring to our attention opportunities for us to bless others. May the power of your gospel transform us and all the people who you place in our lives.

In all things, be glorified forever through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.