

## MONDAY 23 May 2022 "Fruit?" (Matt. 7:15-23)

Good morning to you my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

Are you one of those people who likes growing your own vegetables in your own garden, or perhaps going into the orchards and picking your favorite fruits when harvest season comes? Are you a person who can identify when the vegetable or fruit has matured to the point it is ready for picking and can you even distinguish the best ones as you evaluate which ones to pick?

These days we are with Matthew, one of Jesus' disciples, who recorded for us the first big message Jesus spoke to a crowd of people. In this message Jesus covered LOTS of topics and so today let's join the crowd and focus on these words Jesus spoke that day: ***"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."*** (Matt. 7:15-17) Then as now dishonesty was a widespread problem, even among political and religious leaders. Jesus' use of the words **"false prophet"** would be understood by His listeners as a religious leader either teaching things which were not true or predicting things which were not going to happen.

*We understand Jesus' metaphor of a 'wolf in sheep's clothing' don't we?* I'm confident you have been lied to or scammed more than once in your life, right? In fact, these days dishonesty is a widespread profession, especially utilizing technology and targeting the senior population among us. Sadly, we've all heard of bank accounts emptied or people sold things or places that don't exist. As a result, we are skeptical of people we don't know, aren't we?

Did you notice that powerful statement Jesus made: ***"By their fruit you will recognize them."*** When talking about plants, fruits and vegetables, we understand, don't we? But when talking about people, that's a bit more difficult, isn't it? So, let me ask... *how can you discern when a person is NOT telling you the truth, especially if it's a person you don't know, or they are talking about a topic on which you are not well versed?* Here's another question: If you've been lied to once by a person, but now they've come back asking your forgiveness and promising it will never happen again, will you be able to discern if it does happen again or will you fall into their deceit trap again? *What is the obvious fruit of an honest person of integrity? What evidence convinces you that a person has a compassionate heart and is trustworthy?*

Jesus went on to say: ***"A good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit."*** I don't know about fruit trees, but I do know about people... can this same statement be made about people? Sadly no.

Too often we hear reports of those we thought were God honoring, or at least kindhearted, trustworthy, people but we were shocked to hear they failed miserably and were found to be cheating on their spouse or stealing money from their employer or abusing children. That's because there are no 'good people'! *Down deep inside every human being has a sin nature we were born with.* We inherited it through the conception process. Selfishness, deceitfulness, envy, pride, jealousy, lust, anger, are all evidences of that sinful nature we all have, and therefore EVERY person has the potential to do bad things, every person!

It is true that when a person trusts Jesus Christ to be their Savior, the Holy Spirit births in them a new spiritual nature. That's what Jesus was explaining to Nicodemus in John 3:3-7. *But that spiritual birth does not kill the sinful nature, and thus we who have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ have two natures in us, and they battle each other for influence in our hearts, minds and decision making.* Paul wrote about this to the Galatian Christians recorded for us in Galatians 5:16-25 and to the Christians in Rome as recorded in Romans 7:7-25.

But what about Jesus' statement: **"...a bad tree cannot bear good fruit."** Is it true that a person who has no relationship with God at all is incapable of doing anything that we might call 'good'? No that's not true. We all have seen what we might consider to be 'bad people' do what we consider nice things, helpful things. What Jesus is saying here is that people without a relationship with God and without the Holy Spirit in them, are not capable of consistently doing God honoring holy things without a change in them that only God can bring about!

So, Jesus concluded with this statement: **"Thus, by their fruit you will know them."** (Matt. 7:20) Jesus is reminding us that since we cannot read each other's minds, we cannot see into each other's hearts to understand emotions and motives, all we have is the outward expression of a person... their words, their attitudes, their tone of voice, their body language, their choices, their decisions, their actions. *THOSE are what Jesus calls the 'fruit' of a person and we naturally evaluate and form our opinions about any person based on the 'fruit' of their lives that we personally experience with them.*

However, it's also true isn't it, that we form a reputation in our heart about a person *based on what we hear about that person...* and that's the power of media, gossip, rumor and social media. In short, that's the power of the tongue! Oh, the Bible says so much to us about keeping a close reign on our tongues! May I ask, **what reputation does your tongue have?** Pause here just a moment to reflect on that question.

I think Jesus paused here as He spoke, and He let the power of His words burrow down deep into the hearts and minds of His listeners that day. Conviction can be a very powerful emotion, can't it? Can you remember sometimes when something you read or heard, especially from God, very powerfully convicted you? Did it motivate you to action? Perhaps confession and repentance? Or did you battle and resist the conviction?

Then Jesus spoke again, continuing this theme of hypocrisy and deceitfulness with these words: ***"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but only the person who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from Me you evil doers!'"*** (Matt. 7:21-23)

Look around at the crowd, especially those on the hillside that day who thought of themselves as religious, devout, pious people. Stunned, shocked, offended, confused. What did He mean? Who was Jesus talking about? *Is it possible there were then, and are even now, people who say and do things claiming to be religious, even people who think of themselves as Christians, who will NOT be going to heaven and do NOT have an authentic relationship with God?* **Yes my friends, that is exactly what Jesus is warning us about!**

So, what did Jesus mean by saying ***'only the person who does the will of My Father who is in heaven'*** will be getting into heaven? John the disciple records for us that Jesus several times said He only did what His heavenly Father guided Him to do and that when the Holy Spirit would live in us, we too would be guided to do the Father's will. Jesus said: ***"I have come down from heaven not to do My will but to do the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I shall lose none of all that He has given Me but raise them up at the last day. For My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."*** (John 6:38-40)

So, what do you understand in this my friends? What is God the Father's will regarding you and me, the human race? Just in case you don't see it, consider this written by Peter, another of Jesus' disciples: ***"The Lord is not slow in keeping His promises... He is patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."*** (2 Peter 3:9) Do you see the will of God the Father now, my friends?

*The will of God the Father is that EVERY person God created will recognize that their sin prevents them from having an authentic relationship with God, and that sin destines them to eternity apart from God. But God sent Jesus to be the remedy for this problem.* God's will, God's deep desire is that every person will recognize their need for a Savior and that Jesus is the ONLY legitimate Savior who is acceptable to God. God's will for every person is therefore that they would trust Jesus to be their Savior and God will then draw them into a sin forgiven wonderful relationship with God, living a God honoring life here on earth and after death will then spend all of eternity with God in heaven. *But even though this is God's will, God will NOT force ANYONE into this will.* In fact, at any moment in time there are far more people on earth who refuse God's will than accept, embrace and are living God's will.

So, let's pause right here and reflect on these powerful words of Jesus and how our lives line up with His words. And here's a song to help reflect my friends.

**Today's Scripture is Matthew 7:15-23.**