

Matthew 7:15 –21

A GOOD TREE BEARS GOOD FRUIT

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

'Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit' (Mat. 7:17). Jesus actually isn't talking about trees here –he's talking about people.

Jesus is warning us about false prophets in the church. I guess we are aware enough of false prophets in the church, and, since Jesus warned us against them, we should not be surprised when we come across them. I trust that none of us would want to count ourselves among the false prophets.

But in the course of the warning, Jesus states a very important principle, which we can apply to ourselves:

every good tree brings forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit.

He goes on to say:

A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

He is saying: A tree produces fruit from what it is inside –from its internal makeup. That is true of trees but, as we said, Jesus isn't talking about trees here –he's talking about people. Trees produce what they are structured and geared to produce, according to their inner nature. As Jesus said, you can't gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles. Thorns and thistles can only produce more thorns and thistles. Grapes grow on grapevines, and figs grow on fig trees. You can't change that –with trees, and plants. Jesus is saying: It is like that with people. What we produce in our lives is what comes out from the way we are inside. As he said when he explained it later in Mathew chapter 12:

The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure (Mat. 12:35).

He is talking there particularly about the things we say: 'out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks' –what we say to each other comes from how we are inside, at heart. But there he also holds out to us a great hope. Jesus says in Mathew 12:

Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad (Mat. 12:33).

Trees and plants are what they are –they don't change. But Jesus is saying here that it is possible for people to be changed: a 'tree', that is, a person, can be made 'good', with 'good fruit'. That is good news for us.

For that is not how we have started out. Jesus chooses his words carefully. When he says, 'Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?' (Mat. 7:16), what is he referring to? When did God say to the human race: 'cursed is the ground because of you . . . thorns and

thistles it shall bring forth for you ‘ (Gen. 3:17, 18)? It was when sin first came into the world – when we first turned against God to go our own way and make our own destiny. ‘Thorns’ and ‘thistles’ are a reference to human sin, to human hearts that are dead set against God. Jesus is saying: nothing good can come from us while we are in that condition.

Jesus had an uncanny insight into the human heart: ‘he knew what was in everyone’ (John 2:24). What did he see when he looked there? He told us once:

For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person (Mark 7:21 –23).

That is your ‘corrupt tree’: any sinful human being. A terrorist is not ‘sub –human filth’ –he is a human being bringing out the murder that is in his heart. Any of us are capable of that, and if we think we are not we are kidding ourselves.

The good news is that it is possible for human beings to have a change of heart –for the ‘evil treasure’ inside to be exchanged for ‘good treasure’ –so that what comes out is good.

Jesus is the one who told us that, because that is what he came to do. How did he do that? The prayer of consecration in this service tells us how:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of thy tender mercy didst give thine only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption; who made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world . . .

The apostle Peter tells us: ‘ He himself carried up our sins in his body to the tree ‘ (1 Pet. 2:24). Jesus took us into himself, with all the ‘evil treasure’ that is stored up inside us, and took us there to judgment and cursing in his own body on the cross, and finished us there, as far as that ‘evil treasure’ was concerned. He said, ‘Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire’ (Mat. 7:19), and that is what happened to us there in him, if that is where our faith is. There we were well and truly buried with him; and he raised us up there with him and gave us his own Holy Spirit, with all the ‘good treasure’ of his own holy and blameless heart, to be ours with him, so that we would bear much ‘good fruit’ in our lives. That is what we have been brought to know by faith, through the gospel, and that is what we have been baptised into. ‘Make the tree good, and its fruit good’.

There are two things that follow from that. First: do not keep trying to produce good fruit in your life, if that has not yet happened to you. If you have not yet been born again through baptism and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, then what is inside you will still be the ‘evil treasure’ that cannot produce good things –it is still in the ‘thorns and thistles’ category, and there will never be any grapes or figs from that. As long as we remain in that condition, any ‘good fruit’ that we try to produce will only leave a trail of harmful damage and devastation in our own lives and in the lives of those around us. So believe and keep on believing in the one who took you with all of that to his cross on Calvary and finished you there, and raised you up and remade you as a ‘good tree’, full of all of his ‘good treasure’, from which ‘good things’ come.

The second thing that follows from that was in the epistle reading from Romans 8. There Paul tells us that we have received the Holy Spirit, and we are back in right relationship with God, as our Father to whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ We are God’s own children and heirs, jointly with Christ himself. We live in him, we suffer with him, we will be in glory with him. So we now owe nothing to what Paul calls ‘the flesh’ –that is, the old sinful human condition with the unchanged heart. That old ‘evil treasure’ now has no claim on us. It is dead and buried. So any attempt it makes to reassert itself from the grave is to be denied –‘mortified’

Trinity 8 MATTHEW 7:15 -21

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is the word Paul uses –it is already dead and buried: let it remain so. We are alive to God – the ‘tree’ has been made ‘good’ –let it be so. Walk in this by faith, and see what follows.