

Matthew 7:13~27, part 2

(Mt 7:15~20)

This morning we continue our study of this passage, we come to what may well be the most important part of the passage. For the simple reason, that it speaks to how to know whether a man is a true man of God or not, when it comes to those who proclaim the word of God. What “*We believe*” determines the way we live, right? Which is the whole emphasis of this passage. Jesus is saying you have to be careful who you listen to, because they may lead you down the wrong path! Now it may appear to be the right way, but that’s just the point... It’s a warning not to be deceived. The men Jesus is warning about here, appear to speak God’s truth, and teach the way of God...but it’s not the way! Thus the warning...
“BEWARE of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing...”

This morning, we’ll be looking at the matter of “*Spiritual Discernment*”... That’s at the heart of what Jesus is calling us to here, when He says, “*Ye shall know them by their fruits.*” If there’s one thing greatly lacking in the church today, it’s the matter of “*Spiritual Discernment.*” It amazes me, how that in our day, how so much that is said to be “*Of the Lord, or done in God’s name*”...is so readily embraced as so! Beloved, I know you’ve all heard the expression, “*everything that glitters is not gold.*” God help us, not to be so gullible to think that everything that claims or professes to be “*of God*”...IS. Matter of fact, after studying the bible now for over twenty two years, I’ve come to the conclusion, that MUCH of what we see being done in God’s name, is not of God. And given what Jesus says here, I believe bears witness to that. (Jesus says MANY will say Lord, Lord...we done this, and we’ve done that in your name, right?) According to that, there’s going to be a large amount of religious activity, that’s not OF God. And that coincides with what Paul says in 2Timothy 3 about the last days, in how he describes how the “*church*” will turn it’s ears away from the truth, having itching ears, and the fact that there will be a “*form of godliness,*” just no content. In laymen’s terms, in the last days, religion will abound, but there’s nothing to it, it’s all superficial, nothing more than religious activity.

Given all that, its all the more reason for “*Spiritual discernment*” within the church today... Especially when it comes to those who claim to teach the way of God. This warning here of false teachers is a continuation of what He just said about the “*Two Ways.*” The point there was, you better be careful who you listen to and who you follow, because there’s only one way that truly leads to the kingdom. The way these false teachers teach, which appears to lead to the kingdom, but it doesn’t. And according to what Jesus says here, MANY are going to follow them, and their ways, thinking it’s the way to heaven...only to find out when it’s too late, it doesn’t!

Knowing that, WHO you listen to, WHAT you believe becomes very important...right? I’ve heard people say, “*It doesn’t matter WHERE you go to church, just as long as you go.*” I beg to differ with you, it does matter. Who you listen to and what you believe is extremely important. It is the doctrines of our faith that shape what we believe and how we believe. If anyone needs proof of this, simply look around at all the different denominations we have in our day. You’ve got, Baptist, Christian, Methodist, Church of Christ, Pentecostal, Holiness, Church of God, Nazarene, Church of Latter Day Saints...and countless others. Beloved, we live in one of the most religious societies in all the world... There’s a church on every corner, literally! It’s like a buffet of churches...if you don’t like this one, or that one, just keep looking, there’s a church out there for every taste. We have all these different denominations, with different beliefs, teaching different things... Can I just say, “**Somebody’s WRONG.**” And that’s all the more reason that you better heed the words here of Christ, and be careful who you follow.

So let’s look at this... (Vs 15) *¹⁵Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. ¹⁶Ye shall know them by their fruits.*

First we have the WARNING... “*Beware of false prophets*”...“*false teachers*”...who come to you in sheep’s clothing... The fact they come to you in sheep’s clothing refers to the fact, that at least outwardly, they appear to true prophets, true men of God. (This is important! I’m convinced, that a merely superficial

examination of these men, would leave us deceived, believing them to be the real deal) So how do you know who's real and who's not?

Well, as Jesus says here...¹⁶*Ye shall know them by their fruits.*” Jesus says, “*You will be able to judge who is OF God, and who isn't, based on the conduct, or character of the man.*”

Now I know...upon hearing that, there's some whose minds immediately go to what Jesus said about “*Judging.*” I know this, and before I can teach this passage, I need to clarify what Jesus meant by that. There's a common misconception among many today that I want to make sure we make clear this morning. I've heard it said many times, “*We're not suppose to Judge*”... And in the proper context, they're right. Matter of fact, that's exactly what Jesus commanded here in the first part of this very chapter, He says, “¹*Judge not, that ye be not judged. ²For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*” That's pretty clear, we are not suppose to judge. BUT, I want to make sure we understand what He means by that, because according to our passage this morning, He is calling us to make a “*judgment,*” right? “¹⁶*Ye shall know them by their fruits.*” Here, when He says, “¹*Judge not, that ye be not judged,*” He's referring to judging in the sense of “*Condemning*” others. (Which as you will see, plays a major role of interpreting this passage of ‘Knowing them by their fruit.’) He's talking about “*judging or condemning sinners out here.*” Reason being, number one, we aren't “*Their Judge*”...the Lord is. And another reason is, we're no better than they are. How can we, who are just as much as sinner as them, judge them? When you read on in that passage, you realize that's exactly what Jesus is saying. Once again, He's speaking to these religious leaders of His day, who went around judging and condemning their neighbors. The reference to the “*beam*” in their own eye there, was a reference to the fact, they were “*worse off*” than the one's they were condemning! It's an indictment to their “*Spiritual blindness.*” Listen, the nation Israel, which was supposed to be a shining light and witness to the nations *around them, ended up being stumbling blocks.* Because they considered themselves to be these “*Righteous men,*” they judged and condemned those around them, separating themselves from them, wanting nothing to do with them. (We see the same thing in many of our churches today) They may “*think*” they are righteous, and better than other men...but the reality is, it just reveals they are spiritually blind. It's easy to spot those who are “*spiritually blind*”...ironically, they can “*See*” the sin in others so well.

It's easy to tell; whose spiritual eyes have been opened...they are “*merciful*” towards sinners. A result of seeing their own sin, and need of mercy. Jesus had just taught there, “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*” Here in seven, Jesus warns, whoever judges and condemns, will be judged and condemned in the same manner.

So, understood, we are not to Judge, in the sense of condemning. But, we must judge, in the context of discerning what is right and wrong! Listen, as God's people, being the church, we must set the standard of truth, the standard of right and wrong, right? Not because we're smarter or more intelligent than the rest of the world...but because we possess the written word of God! According to the apostle Paul, the *church of Jesus Christ* is the “*pillar and ground of truth*” in this world. (1Ti. 3:15) ¹⁴*These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: ¹⁵But if I tarry long, that thou may know how thou ought to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, **the pillar and ground of the truth.** So yes, we must be discerning, we must declare what's right and wrong.*

That is what Christ is calling for here in this passage...¹⁶*Ye shall know them by their fruits*”...It's a call to use “*Spiritual Discernment*”...when it comes to the things of God, and those who claim to be of God. To “*Spiritually Discern*” something simply means, we're not to judge things by the outward appearance, that which is seen with the eyes. But rather, we must look beneath the surface, to what is underneath, to what it's made of, the content. And that's exactly what Jesus is referring to here when He says, “*You shall know them by their fruit.*” The analogy He uses here is that of a “*Tree,*” and the fact, that you know “*What Kind of Tree it is,*” by the *Fruit* it produces. That's simple enough, right? If a certain tree produces apples,

then it's an apple tree. If it produces oranges, then it's an orange tree, right? That's just a basic, fundamental principle of life. **(Story of Dad and Roma tomatoes)**

¹⁶*Ye shall know them by their fruits*...right? The kind of fruit produced reveals what kind of plant or tree it is. Well, Jesus tells us here, that using that same principle, you can tell whether a man who professes to be a man of God, is a true man of God or not, by what he produces. Speaking of the false prophets/teachers, Jesus says, ¹⁶*Ye shall know them by their fruits*...then He asks a question...***Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?*** What's the obvious answer? NO... It's not fitting, right? No one would expect to find grapes growing on a thorn bush, right? Nor would you expect to find figs growing on thistles. Those kinds of bushes are simply not conducive to producing "good fruit." The only thing a thorn bush can produce *is thorns*... The only thing a thistle (briar bush) can produce *is thistles*.

So don't miss what He's saying here... The "grapes and figs" here represent "good fruit"...while "thorns and thistles" represent "bad fruit" or as He says here His analogy, "evil fruit." It's crucial we understand this, because herein lies the understanding of the passage. Let's read that again...

Jesus says... ¹⁶*Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?* ¹⁷*Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit.* ¹⁸*A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.*

The grape vine and the fig tree represent the "good trees"...whereas the thorn bush and the briar bush represent the "bad trees". Understanding that, it makes complete sense now, right? A "good tree" brings forth "good fruit." And a "bad tree" brings forth "bad fruit." A "good tree" cannot bring forth "evil fruit," just as a "bad tree" cannot bring forth "good fruit." A grape vine cannot produce thorns, nor can a fig tree produce briars/thistles. Just as a thorn bush cannot produce grapes, nor a briar bush figs.

²⁰***Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them...***The "thorns" will reveal, it's a thorn bush... The "grapes" will reveal it's a grape vine... The "briars" will reveal, it's a briar bush... The "figs" will reveal, it's a fig tree... Pretty simple, right?

So what's all this got to do with false prophets, false teachers?

Well, everything! Here Jesus says that same principle can be used on men as well. Especially when it comes to discerning whether a professing man of God, is truly of God or not! You shall know them by the "fruits they bear." Using the analogy Jesus uses here, if you see "thorns" on what appears to be a grape vine, than know this...it's NOT a grape vine, no matter how much it looks like a grape vine! Or, if you see "thistles" on what appears to be a fig tree, know this, it's NOT a fig tree, no matter how much it looks like a fig tree! Don't be deceived! ¹⁶***Ye shall know them by their fruits.***

(Vs 15) ¹⁵*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravaging wolves.* ¹⁶*Ye shall know them by their fruits.*

He begins by stating they come to you in "Sheep's clothing"... (There's been some debate, whether He's talking about a "sheep" and a "wolf," or whether He's referring to a shepherd. Either way, we get the point, but I prefer shepherd, simply for the idea of him leading the flock. (The concern here is that you don't follow false teaching) He says they come to you in "Sheep's clothing"... Listen, by all "Outward accounts," they appear to be genuine shepherds. They look the part, they speak the language. I am convinced, that based solely on "outward appearances," and a *superficial examination*, that we'd be easily fooled by them. So how can you discern if they are real or not? Well, look at what He says...

¹⁵*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing... **but inwardly** they are ravaging wolves.* ¹⁶*Ye shall know them by their fruits.*

We see here that the "fruits" Jesus is referring to here, is a reference to the "Inward Character" of the man, or the "nature" of the man... This is what tells you the truth, about what kind of man he is. The image here is of that of a "Shepherd," and shepherds are supposed to love their sheep...just not in the sense of wanting to eat them! When Jesus describes the nature of the false teacher, He describes the inner

man, as a raving wolf! The arch enemy of the sheep, is the wolf...¹⁵ *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, **but inwardly they are ravening wolves.***

Now think about what He's saying here... "He may look like a man of God on the outside, but on the inside lives a much different man." Listen, the point here is, that we are to look to "Inward man" rather than the "Outward" man, when it comes to determining where a man is truly of God or not. It is the "Inward character" that reveals what kind of man he truly is! Just as the "Fruit" reveals what kind of tree it is, the same is true with men... Turn with me to Luke's account of this same passage, where Jesus makes it crystal clear as to what he means by the "Fruits" when it comes to men...

(Luke 6) ⁴³ *For a good tree brings not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. ⁴⁴For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. ⁴⁵A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.*

Jesus says, don't allow yourself to be deceived by "Outward appearances"...remember, they come in sheep's clothing, meaning they look the part of a man of God. But it's what's on the inside that reveals the true story, as to what kind of man he really is. Here Jesus says, if he's a good man, than out of the good treasure of his heart, he'll bring forth that which is good. In like manner, an evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, will bring forth that which is evil. Then He says this, which is the key to whole passage, "...*for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.*" Jesus says, just close your eyes, and listen to him. And it won't take long, and you'll know what kind of man he really is!

What do you mean preacher? Well, let me explain, the key to this passage once again is understanding WHO Jesus is referring to here as the false teachers. Once again, it's the religious leaders of the day, the Scribes and Pharisees. It's only when you understand that, that you can truly appreciate the seriousness of the warning Jesus is giving here. The reference to "False teachers" is not to those who teach contrary to God's ways... Matter of fact, there was no one more diligent, no one more meticulous when it came to teaching God's word, than these men. They highly esteemed the Law of God, given by Moses, and declared it to be the standard by which all men were to live their lives. (Thus, the "Broad Way"...this is the path that leads to destruction.) Reason being, no amount of obedience to God's Law can save a man. The so called "righteousness" produced by man's obedience to God's law is not righteousness at all. It may appear that way, especially when compared to some out here living contrary to God's laws...but even so, it's still not righteousness. It's nothing more than the works of sinful FLESH! The FLESH refers to the fallen, sinful nature that we all received at the fall...

And herein is the understanding of the passage...when Jesus refers to the fact, that... ***inwardly they are ravening wolves***... He's referring to the "Unchanged Nature" of the man! He may "Look like" a man of God *on the outside*...but the "man on the inside" is anything but *God-Like*!

Listen; if you don't hear anything else, I want you to hear this...God loves "Sinners." That's what the "Sheep" represent here in this passage. Jesus, the "Good Shepherd," came to lay down His life for the sheep! While in contrast, these men, like a pack of wolves, "*gnash on them with their teeth!*" These men despised sinners, and separated themselves from them, wanting nothing to do with them. They walked in their self-righteousness, and judged and condemned those around them! (**Much like many in our churches today**)

Over and over in the gospels, we see these men blasting Jesus for hanging around sinners...

(Luke 7) "If He were a prophet, He'd know what kind of woman this was that touches Him!"

(Luke 15) "This man receives sinners and eats with them!"

Over and over in the N.T, we see these men judging and condemning sinners, despising them, wanting nothing to do with them! Given their adherence to God's Laws, and obedience to God's commandments...they may have appeared to be these "Godly man" on the outside...but based on the way they treated sinners out here, revealed they were anything but "Godly!" God loves sinners!

They may look the part on the outside, by conforming to God's ways and commandments externally...but the "*inward man*" remains the same. No amount of adherence to religion can change that. Which is the whole point of this passage. You can tell who the false is, by the fruits they bear. Any man can be religious, but religion can't change the man's heart! It is only the grace of God, that is able to change a man's heart. That's why man's only hope is the "*Gospel!*" "*Ye must be born again!*"

You see ultimately, this passage is best understood by contrasting these men with Jesus. Jesus said, "If you've seen me, you've seen the father." And based on what we see in Jesus, God loves sinners. We learn that God is humble, meek and lowly in heart. (These men are prideful, arrogant and boastful) These are the kinds of "Fruits" Jesus is talking about! Jesus showed mercy and compassion, forgiveness to sinners...while these men only judged and condemned them, despising them!

Again, these men that Jesus is referring to here, by their "*outward appearance,*" appeared to be these men of God...but given the way they treated sinners, revealed they didn't have a clue who God was! They are "*false prophets/teachers*" and you need to beware of them...their ways lead to the pits of hell! That's what the reference is to there in verse 19...¹⁹*Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.* Beloved, that's a picture of Judgment! Just as a corrupt tree, a bad tree is cut down and cast into the fire, so it will be with false teachers... And sadly to all who follow them. Which is the emphasis of this passage. That's what makes them so dangerous and so deadly. According to what Jesus says here, MANY...MANY will follow them, and walk the broad way that leads to destruction... "*If the blind follow the blind...they both fall into the ditch*".