



Matthew 7:13-23
What If Jesus Was Serious?
 (A Series on The Sermon On The Mount)
 “Good And Bad Fruit”

Rev. Brian North
 June 13th, 2021

Today we enter into the home stretch of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, but it’s coming in stages because next week we will start a new series on Exodus, then finish the Sermon on the Mount the following week, and then return to Exodus for the rest of the summer. Too many things were locked in place to really do it any other way in light of my appendectomy last Saturday night, so we’ll kind of intermingle the end of one series with the start of the next. Jesus’ own sermon does nothing of the sort. But, as he begins to bring things to a close, there’s a shift. Most of what he has said up until this point has been focused on how we live out our righteousness and our faith. That has been the central theme.

Now, however, there’s a shift to: “Who or what shapes, influences, instructs, leads us? Who is Lord of your life?” Or: Who makes you righteous? That’s where Jesus is going today, and then in a couple weeks when we get to the end, he closes with a vivid illustration with the point being: is the foundation of your life built to last? With that, let’s dive into **today’s Scripture reading.**

In v. 13 and 14 Jesus transitions from the Golden Rule to talking about narrow gates and roads compared to wide gates and roads. The wide gate and road, while easy to find, and easy to walk along, is not actually the best way to go. It’s attractive, it looks good, it’s usually the more popular way and more congested way to go...but it’s not the right way. **The right way is actually the one that has a narrow gate and a narrow path, is a harder trail to stay on, and isn’t nearly as popular.** In fact, only a few people even find it. Most just go on by without paying any attention to it.

This is frequently the way it is with roads and trails and such. If you drive on I-90 through Issaquah into the Cascade Mountains, there are some really great views of the mountains as you drive along – presuming they’re not shrouded in grey misty clouds, at least. And there are a lot of cars and a lot of people on that wide road. But if you exit and take the time to find one of the

many trail heads that exist in the Cascades – from Tiger Mountain to Mt. Si to Granite Mountain, each of which I have hiked to the top of, plus many more I haven't – you are rewarded with even *more* spectacular views – including mountain peaks and valleys that simply



cannot be seen from the wide easy road of I-90. Here are a **couple pictures** from the top of Mt. Si this past fall when my family hiked it. But it can be a little tricky to find those trailheads: they're not four or 6 lanes of concrete wide, and many of them are fairly challenging hikes. They're not easy. But they're worth it.

And: Jesus is saying that this is actually the place we want to be in life: on the narrow, hard to find, more difficult – but more rewarding – path. Eventually, we see that this has to do with our relationship with God, but right before this is when he gives the Golden Rule. “Doing to others as we want them to do to us” is a narrow gate and path. It's a difficult path to find and stay on because of pride. But this is the path we're called to be on.

Now, this *does* also lead into our own spiritual journey, our values, and who or what influences us and who or what is Lord of our lives. There are two things Jesus speaks of here in the rest of the verses, but they're very closely related – maybe even really speaking of the same thing. **First, he says (beginning v. 15) there are people who will seek to be spiritual leaders who are false.** Jesus says they are “false prophets.” The word he uses is “psuedoprophaytays” – pseudo-prophets. They look, act, and talk like a prophet (spiritual leader) but Jesus says they are wolves in sheep's clothing. We will be able to recognize them by their fruit.

Second, he says in verse 21 (and following) that not everyone who calls him “Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven. We might call these people false Christ-followers. They will say to him that they've done lots of wonderful things *in his name* – including prophesying, which ties this with the false prophets point of v. 15-20, and driving out demons, and performing miracles – but Jesus says he will tell them that he's never known them.

When you take these two things together, this message is one of the most challenging things to understand that Jesus says. Let's look at this further, taking them together, really, since there's overlap between the two groups.

First, **Jesus says that we will recognize these kinds of people by their fruit.** I often wonder what that fruit is. What is the good fruit that Jesus speaks of? Is it perhaps related to evangelism? That's a very popular thing a lot of Christians and churches will focus on. And perhaps it is the fruit Jesus looks for: The Book of Acts makes a point on a few occasions to tell us about how the early Church grew because of the spread of the Gospel. Even in Jesus' ministry the size of the crowds are often noted.

But then in the gospel of John, there's a teaching of Jesus' recorded in chapter 6 – it pertains to communion, but this isn't at the Passover/Last Supper so there's no bread and wine handy, and Jesus puts it a little bluntly without including that metaphor – that his followers will eat his body and drink his blood. And here's what John says was the outcome of Jesus' teaching: **“On hearing it, many of his disciples said, ‘This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?’...From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him” (John 6:60, 66).**

The gate and the path were too narrow and difficult for them, and a bunch of people un-followed and defriended Jesus on Instagram and Facebook...and #IRL: In Real Life. So, evangelism and having a bigger and bigger church or crowd doesn't really seem to be what the fruit is that Jesus is looking for.

And yes, Jesus wants us to share the gospel, we definitely should be reaching out to our neighbors and loving on them and inviting them to know Jesus, or inviting them to church where they will hear about Jesus...but that actually does not seem to be the good fruit Jesus is after, based on his ministry. Besides the significant losses John mentions, we can look at the end of Jesus' life, too. There were only a handful of people at the cross when he died. A few women went to his tomb three days later. The eleven disciples huddled in a room by themselves – not with the larger group of disciples. If “Bigger” and “More” is the fruit, then we should all be flocking to the largest church in the region, or move to Southern California or

Texas where they're even bigger, and start being a part of them...but before we pack up and leave, we should first recognize that Jesus didn't really even bear much of that fruit himself.

And by the way, please don't hear me saying that big churches are bad or wrong. There are big churches that, as near as I can tell, are bearing good fruit. I'm too focused on RH to spend time evaluating any other church, but I think many are making disciples of Jesus, like me. I grew up in a big church. Many of us here, maybe most of us, would love to see Rose Hill grow numerically. In fact, we believe that God has led us and transformed us in the last several years so that now we're on the cusp of growth. And certain facets of our church *have* numerically grown. But when Jesus says "by their fruit you will know them," if we think what he's looking for is "bigger," it sure doesn't seem to be so. Perhaps we should remember that just before this he said that few find the narrow path. So numerical growth is not necessarily the fruit Jesus is speaking of here. It's not bad...but it's not the fruit. So, what else?

Since Jesus says a few verses later that he "never knew" these people who did all this stuff in his name: maybe it's about "right theology?" Maybe "knowing" and "knowledge" is a key thing here. Maybe we need to be perfectly aligned with Him in our heads. Beyond the Christian basics – such as expressed in the Apostles Creed for example – does your theology matter? All Christians can affirm God is the creator of everything, humanity is created in His image, Sin has broken our relationship, Jesus is God come to us in the flesh and mended that relationship through his death on the cross, Jesus rose from the dead giving us the assured hope of eternal life through faith in him, and the Holy Spirit is now here to guide us into all truth and lead us in living our faith. **Outside of those basic things that all Christians adhere to and that Scripture clearly elevates as core beliefs for his disciples: how much does "right theology" matter? Is this the fruit Jesus is looking for?**

Perhaps a story helps clarify. "There was once a pastor's retreat where each pastor in attendance was asked: "How many people does it take to screw in a light bulb?"

- A Presbyterian Pastor responded, “None. If God wants the bulb screwed in he is sovereign and will do it himself without human effort.”
- A Charismatic Pastor replied, “None. The bulb doesn’t need to be changed. We should pray that it be healed.”
- A Pentecostal Pastor said, “None. We simply need to cast out the demon of darkness from the bulb.”
- The Fundamentalist Pastor stated, “None. We shouldn’t even enter the room because we need to keep ourselves separate from all darkness.”
- A Baptist Pastor responded, “None. If we allow physical contact between a person and the bulb it might lead to dancing.”
- The Wesleyan Minister replied, “None. If we just show the bulb its need, it already possesses the power to screw itself in.”
- A Non-Denominational Pastor said, “None. We don’t want to make the bulb feel unwanted or uncomfortable.”

This poll provides one clear conclusion: it’s no wonder pastors are always in the dark.” That’s how the joke ends, but I think it tells us more.

They all agreed on the core of the answer, “None.” But after that? Not so much. What about the theological differences (which are true differences) that the answers all represent: Do those differences matter? **Is a true prophet or a true disciple to whom Jesus will *not* say “Away, I never knew you”...is that someone who has right theology down to the last iota?** What about the next-to-last iota? Which iota is that? (And what is an iota, anyway?) Where is the line drawn? What if Reformed/Presbyterian theology has it wrong, and it really *is* all about the prosperity gospel, or Catholic, Pentecostal, or Lutheran theology, or something else? Maybe, instead of attending the biggest church we can, we should be attending all the churches that we can so we cover all the bases, know as much theology as possible and ensure that we *really* are with Jesus. I mean, it’s possible now that all churches are online and every pastor is an internet evangelist. You can go home and watch 10 different services today.

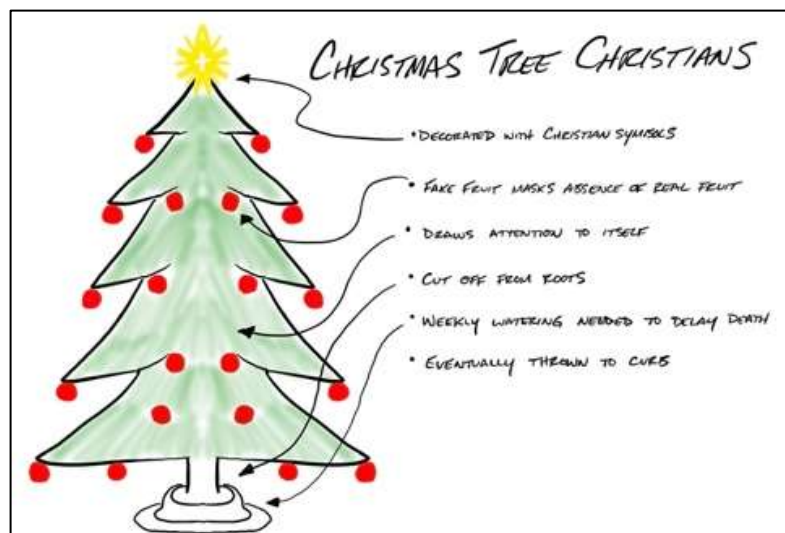
I actually Jesus blows this out of the water with the criminal who hung on the cross next to him. He said to Jesus, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom.” It’s a statement of faith, of sorts...kind of weak, really. But Jesus says he’d “see paradise that day.” Was *that guy’s* theology really all that

great? I don't think so, and yet Jesus gives him assurance of entering the Kingdom of God! So – other than the basics – is right theology down to the last period the fruit Jesus is looking for? I don't see it in Jesus' ministry.

We could go on with other things that we think are good fruit or express discipleship in different ways – several are listed by Jesus here himself such as prophesying, driving out demons and performing miracles...these are “crowd gathering” things, too – but they aren't what Jesus is after. What is he after? Jesus essentially tells us in verse 23, actually. Jesus wants us to *know* him. At least, that's how we tend to think of it. Actually, he says “*I never knew you.*” **So, more rightly, it's that Jesus wants to know *us*. Jesus wants to know *you*.** This word here is “gnosis” and it means “to know” someone or to know information. But in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, it's the word used, for example, when Adam and Eve “know” each other in an intimate sense. So, this word isn't just used about intellectual knowledge but about really, deeply, knowing someone. Jesus wants to know you deeply. To be completely engaged in all facets of your life. – not a mile wide and inch deep, but deeply.

While this kind of knowledge is a two-way street and he wants us to know him well (which we tend to focus on in the Church), it's interesting that he does not say “Away, for you never knew me.” He says, “Away, for I never knew you.” In other words, these are people who have done things (spectacular, attention-getting things!) in the name of Jesus: **But the real substance of Jesus dwelling in the deepest part of their being is missing.**

Two weeks ago we talked about chocolate Easter Bunny Christians, and this week we get Christmas Tree Christians. This time, the example comes from Sky Jethani's book, “What if Jesus Was Serious?”
(Picture):



“Christmas Tree Christians” look all put together on the outside. They have the Christian symbols and there’s “fruit” but it’s not real. But they tend to draw attention to themselves and build the kingdom of themselves, they don’t have any deep roots of faith, they constantly need watering and other attention to avoid decay and death, and eventually – as Jesus says – are thrown to the fire, or to the curb as the illustration here says.

That’s not the kind of disciple we want to be, *and* it’s not the kind of people we want influencing our faith. I say that last part – about people influencing our faith – with humility and even fear and trepidation, because it’s a humbling experience to be called “pastor” and have people trust you for Biblical insight. Some of you are Discipleship class leaders and small group leaders...or you’ve got kids in the house...you are also influencing people’s faith. But you let me have influence (whatever degree you allow) in your life in regards to your faith. That’s a big deal. And Lord knows, I’m not perfect. But Jesus is, and I just want to keep pointing people to the narrow gate and path to follow him and grow in their walk. I humbly hope I do that well.

So, Jesus wants to know us in a deep, connected kind of way so we’d bear real fruit. Another time when Jesus teaches something along these lines, he talks about bearing fruit, and his heavenly father pruning the branches that don’t bear fruit, and then he says, **“I am the vine, you are the branches, if you remain (abide) in me *and I in you*, you will bear much fruit” (John 15:5).** Again, we see this idea that Jesus is in us, that he knows us. There’s an intimacy and deep connection there.

So, between this word, “know (gnosis)” and other similar teachings, this gives insight, that what matters is abiding with Jesus – letting him into our lives so that he would know us...and so we would know him. But here in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is emphasizing that *he* never knew these false Christians. So: **How well does Jesus know you?**

And don’t tell yourself that he knows everything about you because He’s God. That’s a cop-out. How well have you opened yourself to him – through prayer, confession, spiritual disciplines – and asked him to strengthen you and lead you in this life so you would shine the light brightly for him?

Through that kind of openness of yourself to Jesus – which is a narrow, difficult road because of pride – you will know the Father’s will, live into it, and bear fruit.

Which, by the way, to answer the main question because we never did totally define the fruit he’s looking for: Jesus means not so much the kind of fruit that the world craves (not the wide road), but fruit that comes from being in relationship with him such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Or, if you want Jesus’ own definition rather than from Paul, go back a couple verses to the golden rule: Doing to others as you would have them do to you. If you do that, then the Fruit of the Spirit will likely be there – love, joy, kindness, gentleness, etc. Or the second greatest commandment, as Jesus says: love your neighbor as yourself. Again, there’s going to be peace, patience, kindness, etc.

So, Jesus invites you and me to let him into our lives so he would deeply know us, so he would abide in us, and we would each bear much fruit for Him. And by the way, what’s in side of fruit? Seed? It’s the seed that’s then scattered and sowed which brings about numerical growth. But it starts with the fruit. And bearing that fruit for Jesus is not easy, and it’s not popular – only a few find it. But with Jesus embedded deeply in our lives, we *can* live for him individually and collectively as a church, and bear the kind of fruit he’s looking for. Let’s pray...Amen.