

Fruit Inspectors

Matthew 7:15-20

Intro

*It is worth noting that the Bible has a great deal to say about **fruit** and very little to say about **vegetables**...*

Of the four uses of the word **vegetable** or **vegetables** in the Old Testament, two are related to Daniel and his friends choosing to eat only vegetables so they would not violate the Mosaic dietary laws...

- One reference is to the Israelites when they were slaves in Egypt and they grew vegetables...

And the final OT reference comes from the *worst* king in the history of Israel — **King Ahab**...

- And King Ahab wanted his neighbor's land in order to make it into a vegetable garden — *gross*...

Interestingly, the only reference that I could find to vegetables in the NT is in the book of Romans when it is used in reference to weaker Christians who would not eat meat but only vegetables...

- With this in mind, consider that the words **fruit** and **fruits** are used a total of 226 times in the Bible, **proving once and for all that fruits are far superior to vegetables**...

In Galatians 5 we read of the **fruit** of the Spirit — not the **vegetable** of the Spirit...

As we consider the evidence, it could be that *fruits were a part of the original creation and vegetables were the result of the curse...*

- *I'm just kidding* — I know that vegetables are good for you — and I even eat them from time to time — but it is clear that the Bible places a strong emphasis on **fruit**...

And the Lord Jesus will be talking about **fruit** as we continue our journey through the gospel of Matthew...

But before we get to our new material, let's remind ourselves of the two verses that we covered last week...

Matthew 7:13-14 (NKJV)

13 “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.

14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

- [expand — Choice between **God's way which gives life** vs **man's way which leads to destruction...**]

[expand — difficult way of discipleship // 3 enemies — world, flesh, devil...]

So, what we are studying this week should be understood in light of what the Lord Jesus taught in Matthew 7:13-14...

Please follow along as I read our passage...

Matthew 7:15-20 (NKJV)

15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?

17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

Let's move into our first section...

1) Appearance (vs 15)

appearance — *the way a person or thing looks to other people...*

Some common sayings related to appearance...

- ***"Looks can be deceiving"***
- ***"Things are not always what they appear to be"***
- ***"Don't judge a book by its cover"***

1 Samuel 16:7 (NKJV) [S. thought Eliab would be king...]

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

John 7:24 (NKJV) [Jesus speaking...]

“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”

So, with all of this in mind, we would be wise to doubt our ability to judge by appearance and instead seek the guidance that the Lord Jesus offers...

15 “Beware of false prophets,

beware — *to be in a state of alert, to be concerned about...*

The Greek word translated **beware** is used 24 times in the NT...

- And this makes sense because there are many things for the believer to **beware of**...

The NT warns us to **beware of** doing our good deeds to be seen by men...

- We are warned to **beware of** both those who teach legalism and those who teach licentiousness...

We are warned to **beware of** drifting off into sin in its many varieties...

And all of these warnings are in the NT for a reason — because we live in a fallen world that is dangerous — both physical and spiritual dangers abound...

We are to walk wisely — avoiding the pitfalls that would hinder us as we seek to follow Christ...

- And here in Matthew 7:15 the Lord Jesus warns us to **beware of false prophets**...

Now, a **prophet** is someone who proclaims to speak in the name of the Lord...

- And the ministry of a prophet generally has both and **foretelling** and a **forth-telling** component...

When we think of prophets, we almost think exclusively of the **foretelling** aspect — of prophets telling what is going to happen in the future...

- And that is a very real aspect of the life of a prophet — this *foretelling* — which is also referred to as **predictive prophecy**...

But in addition to foretelling there is another, even more common mission of a prophet, and that is the aspect of **forth-telling** — *of reminding people what God has already said*...

- Forth-telling is so needed because it calls people to obey what God has already told them to do...

Forth-telling calls people to return to God in repentance — it is reminding people to obey the revelation that they have already received...

It is calling on people to get back on the difficult path of discipleship...

Forth-telling encourages people to ask for the old way, the good way — and then walk on it in obedience to God...

Forth-telling reminds me of the saying that...

“People need to be reminded more often than they need to be taught something new”...

Philippians 3:1 (NKJV)

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe.

2 Peter 1:12 (NKJV)

...I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth.

So, as we consider *true prophets* of God we understand that they appropriately **foretell** certain aspects of the future...

- *True prophets* also **forth-tell** — they remind people of what God has already said and call people to repentance and obedience...

Unfortunately, false prophets also have foretelling and forth-telling aspects to their ministries...

They deceive people with false prophecies that appeal to the crowds that they are gathering to themselves...

False prophets also mislead people with their deceptive forth-telling...

- They misinterpret what God has already said and claim that they are the ones who are truly qualified to tell you what God means...

Continuing on Matthew 7:15, the Lord Jesus warns us about these individuals...

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing,

*Please notice the phrase “**who come to you**”...*

This lets us know that false prophets are *motivated* — they are *active* — they don't just sit at home — they go out and find people to influence...

The Lord Jesus spoke about this reality in...

Matthew 23:15 (NKJV)

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.”

Unfortunately, these false prophets make their way into peoples hearts and minds through books, thorough cable networks, through the internet, and through churches and conferences...

And the Lord Jesus says they **come to you in sheep's clothing**...

Now, there are at least two ways to interpret what the Lord Jesus is saying here...

1) Sheep's clothing could mean that the false prophets look like sheep — they pretend to be believers so that they might get past the defenses of those whom they are seeking to deceive...[expand]

2) Sheep's clothing could mean that the false prophets dress like shepherds — they deceive people by appearing to be true shepherds...

And I believe that this is the preferable understanding of sheep's clothing — because false prophets inevitably seek a leadership role — they want to shepherd the unsuspecting sheep...

The Lord Jesus continues His warning in vs 15...

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

Though these false prophets may appear to be loving shepherds, they are actually **ravenous wolves**...

- [ex. *Little Red Riding Hood* — wolf dressed up like Grandma...]

Now, the Greek word for **ravenous** can also have the meaning of **extortioner** — one who uses evil means to get money out of another...

And being greedy for money may be the number one attribute of false prophets...[expand]

For more on this subject of false prophets pretending to be true shepherds, would you please turn to...

Ezekiel 34:1-16 (NKJV)

1 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?

3 You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock.

4 The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them.

5 So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered.

6 My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching for them."

7 'Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD:

8 "As I live," says the Lord GOD, "surely because My flock became a prey, and My flock became food for every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, nor did My shepherds search for My flock, but the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock" —

9 therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD!

10 Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them."

11 'For thus says the Lord GOD: "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out.

12 As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day.

13 And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country.

14 I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel.

15 I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down," says the Lord GOD.

16 "I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment."

Now please turn to...

Acts 20:25-31 (NKJV) [Paul to Ephesian elders...]

25 “And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more.

26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men.

27 For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.”

So, false prophets who appear in sheep’s clothing are a very real danger that we should be on guard against...

With this in mind, let’s turn back to Matthew 7 as we move into our second section...

2) Reality (vs 16-20)

As we move into this section, the Lord Jesus changes the imagery from shepherding to botany...

16 You will know them by their fruits.

Here the Lord Jesus gives us a criteria for judging false prophets — we are to **know them by their fruits**...

This leads me to believe that the Lord Jesus is calling us all to be **fruit inspectors** — that those who seek to **lead us** and **teach us** should be judged by the fruit that they are producing...

- [ex. I know an apple tree is a good apple tree by the fruit that it produces...]

fruits — *the outcome or product of something; deeds, works and conduct that are the output of one's life...*

Threefold criteria for judging the fruit of prophets & teachers...

- 1) ***Their manner of living...***
- 2) ***The content of their teaching...***
- 3) ***Their effect on others...***

We shouldn't simply trust leaders because they say they work for God...

Titus 1:16 (NKJV)

They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

To be a faithful fruit inspector we must honestly judge if a leader's life lines up with the words and works of the Lord Jesus...

1 John 2:6 (NKJV)

He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

Continuing on in Matthew 7:16, the Lord Jesus asks...

Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?

The answer is NO!...

Men *do not* gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles — that's not how it works...

- If we do not understand this we will be injured...[expand]

[ex. me seeking to pick up a tumbleweed, not knowing it had thorns...]

Continuing on to vs...

17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

good tree = good fruit // apple tree produces apples...

bad tree = bad fruit // chinaberry tree produces chinaberries...

- [expand — one tree produces life-giving fruit — the other tree does not...]

*Now, it is very interesting to note that the Lord Jesus uses two different words for **good** and two different words for **bad**...*

good tree — **agathos** — good in the sense of being morally upright / of good character...(who you are)

good fruit — **kalos** — goodness in the sense of good conduct / doing good things...(what you do)

So, good character produces good conduct...

- [expand — vital importance of developing good character — the most important thing about you is your character...]

But it is important to understand that godly character formation does not come cheaply...

Romans 5:3-4 (NKJV)

3 ...we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;

4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

“Calm seas do not make good sailors”...

Let's now consider the two words for bad in vs 17...

bad tree — **saprós** — *bad, rotten, putrid character...*

bad fruit — **ponerós** — *morally or socially worthless / wicked, malicious conduct...*

So, bad character produces bad conduct...

Let's move on to vs...

18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

The quality of the tree determines the quality of the fruit — and this is what the Lord Jesus said in...

Matthew 12:33-35 (NKJV) [please turn there...]

33 “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit.

34 Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

35 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.”

Now, as we turn back to Matthew 7, it is important to understand that the true prophet has been empowered to bring forth good fruit...

• [ex. **John 15 — fruit, more fruit, much fruit...**]

But the false prophet does not have the power to bring forth good fruit because that person is not in relationship with Christ...

John 15:5 (NKJV)

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

Moving on in Matthew 7 to vs 19, Jesus warns...

19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

This is the ultimate end of the false prophet — the judgment on the one who proclaimed to speak the words of God without a relationship with God...

- [expand — fruit trees exist to bear good fruit for the owner of those trees — a failure to bear good fruit is to be useless tree...]

For more on this subject, please turn to...

2 Peter 2:1-3 (NKJV)

1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.

2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

3 By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

Let's turn back to Matthew 7 as we move to our final verse...

20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

In other words, a person proclaiming to be a prophet of God — a person claiming to speak for the God of the Bible — whether by foretelling, forth-telling or both — should be judged by their fruits...

- 1) *Their manner of living...***
- 2) *The content of their teaching...***
- 3) *Their effect on others...***

- [ex. health of a fruit tree is shown by the quality of the fruit...]

Conclusion

As we wrap up our time together, I will ask you to turn to one final section of scripture — and it is a great passage for calibrating our ability to inspect fruit...

Galatians 5:16-23 (NKJV)

16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

19 Now the works of the flesh [bad fruit] are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,

20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,

21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit [good fruit] is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Let's pray and then we will move into our time of communion...

****Communion****

Matthew 26:26-28 (NKJV)

26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."

27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you."

28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."