Two Trees — Delivery Transcript

Matthew 7:15–20 (ESV) · Wes Terry · Sunday, January 12, 2014 · *A Tale of Two*

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And the other half of the 9:40 has made their way in, so it's good to see you this morning. I didn't see you earlier. I want to welcome you and if everybody would just take your Bible, open it up to the Book of Matthew. We're going to be in Matthew chapter 7. And I don't know about you, maybe this is just me, but when I was a little kid, I loved going to my grandma's house. Loved it. In fact, I loved my grandma's house so much that I would have rather been at my grandma's house than I would have been at my very own house.

And the very reason why I liked my grandma's house so much better than my house is because my grandma had cable and we didn't. We didn't have cable. I don't know why, backwoods, Amish, I don't know, but we didn't have it and grandmother did. And so every time that I would get out of school, I would go straight not to my house, but I'd go straight to my grandma's house, and that way I could watch the final scenes of Baywatch, which my mother would not have approved of and my grandmother didn't know about till now when she watches this on the internet.

Sorry, grandma. I'd watch the final scenes of Baywatch. Then I'd watch a couple episodes of Saved by the Bell. Any Saved by the Bell people in here? Yeah? Okay. And then I would struggle, suffer through about 30 minutes of the 5:00 news with my granddad as he decried the evils of America. Very political person. And then I would go back to my house about 6:00, 5:30, 6:00, and eat. I would eat dinner. I loved my mom's cooking. On Mondays, I would go to my house and eat, and then afterwards I'd go back to my grandma's house so that I could watch Monday Nitro.

Anybody do that? You know, wrestling? WCW, nWo, anything like that? Mom didn't know about that. Sorry, Mom, by the way. Grandma didn't know about that so there's my confession. But my grandma had cable. That's one of the reasons I loved going to her house. I liked going to my grandma's house because my Daddy Bob, he had a shop, a big shop. Who

doesn't like a shop when you're a little kid, you know? I used to play with his gunpowder. He used to reload his own weapons. Almost blew myself up one day.

Lots of fun at my grandma's house. My grandma cut my hair. In fact, there's a special bond created between a person who cuts your hair and the person who has their hair cut. It creates a rich... Don't worry, ladies, I mean, your man's probably not cheating on you with his barber, but I bet he considers them a friend. It just creates a unique bond. I loved my grandma's house. And one of the things you need to know about my grandma, she's probably like your grandma, she had a few quirks and she liked to squeeze everything that she could squeeze out of a dollar.

Anybody's grandma like that? She didn't grow up in the Great Depression, but she was very conservative. She's a very generous woman. She's just very generous, but she's also very conservative. And one of the ways that my grandmother would conserve money is by when she would get water jugs, she wouldn't go buy water jugs. What she would do is she would use her empty vinegar jugs and fill them up with water, and so you drank out of the vinegar jug if you wanted a glass of water. And to this day, I don't know how she had so many vinegar jugs.

How can one person use so much vinegar? I don't get that, but she had like 25 of them. And if you wanted a glass of water, you'd go next to the fridge and there was a vinegar jug there. You'd pop off the plastic top, and you weren't supposed to do this. You're supposed to pour yourself a glass, but I'd just take two hands, plop it up in the air, and drink until my thirst was quenched. And one day after school, it was an especially hot summer day. I'd come in. I needed a glass of water.

I was so thirsty. In fact, all the way to my grandma's house, that's all I could think about was running in there, going next to the fridge, grabbing that bottle of vinegar that had water in it, popping the top off, and just chugging it until my heart was content. So I get into the house. I go straight to the fridge. I go next to the fridge. There's the bottle. I pop off the plastic top. I grab it with both hands. I throw it up in the air, and I begin to feel this room temperature liquid make its way through the crevices and dark tunnels of the human mouth, and suddenly I realized this isn't water.

This is vinegar. And so I spit out what I could. I expressed genuine remorse over what had traveled down my esophagus, and took a step back and realized I had just ingested vinegar. Gross. Anyone ever ingested vinegar? It's gross. You do it for medicinal purposes. It was more than that. It could've done some real damage, I really believe. I was so embarrassed, I couldn't go tell my grandmother, so I just pretended like nothing happened. But eventually, after she came in from the beauty shop, I had kind of mentioned to her, "I don't know what's going on over there, but that bottle does not have water in it; it has vinegar.

Need to fix that." And she says, "Well, that's supposed to have vinegar in it. In fact, there's a mark that distinguishes between the non-vinegar vinegar bottles and the vinegar vinegar bottles, and you have to look for the mark." And ever since that day, any time I go to my grandmother's house to get a drink of water, I look for the mark, because without the mark, you cannot tell whether or not you're going to get a mouthful of water or a mouthful of vinegar. And the only reason I tell that story isn't just to make you laugh, but because Jesus is going to bring up an issue this morning in the text that we're looking at, in which there are two groups of people.

If you think about it, their natures are fundamentally different, but from the appearances, just from looking at them, you cannot tell the difference. And so Jesus says to his disciples, "Look for the mark." So Matthew chapter 7, we're going to start in verse 13, though the focus text this morning is verses 15 to 20. If you can, let's just read the whole text, starting in verse 13, going all the way down to verse 27, 28. Jesus is preaching to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. He says, "Enter by the narrow gate.

For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits." And I don't know if this is on the screen, but verse 21 says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell. And great was the fall of it." Verse 28, "And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as one of their scribes."

So three major headings I want to break down in chapter 7, verses 15 to 20: the warning, the wardrobe, and the way. Those are what Jesus does. He first gives a warning against false teachers. He's saying they're out there, they exist, be careful. And then He gives the wardrobe. He says, "This is what they look like. In fact, this is what they look like on the outside, and then underneath what they are on the outside, this is who they are on the inside. They look like sheep, but they're not sheep, they're ravenous wolves."

And then He gives the way. He gives a test. He says, "Here's how you spot them. Here's how you determine whether or not they're the real McCoy or they're just pretenders." So the warning, the wardrobe, and the way. Can't pretend forever, so let's just start with the warning. And I just want to mention, I don't know if you see this or not, maybe it's just me, but it seems as though verses 15 to 20 are just kind of forced in there. If you remember, in verses 13 and 14, he talked about the narrow gate and the broad gate.

He talked about the easy way and the hard way. He talked about a destination that leads to life, and then a destination that entails destruction and judgment. And then he talked about the two groups of people. He talked about the many, and then he also talked about the few. He said the many go through the broad gate, down the easy road, which leads to destruction. But the few enter in the narrow gate, leading down the hard road that leads to life. And then in verse 22, jump all the way down to 22, he brings up the many again.

He says, "On that day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name?'" And so on and so forth. And Jesus basically says, "Depart from me." But between the many in verse 14 and the many in verse 22, you have this discussion from Jesus, and he says, "Beware of false prophets." And you want to ask the question, where did that come from? Is this just forced in there? Did Jesus... Is he off his rocker here? And of course, the answer to that is no. Jesus, the genius preacher, puts this little text strategically in the Sermon on the Mount, I think because he's showing his disciples that there are people who are flagging other people onto the broad road, and these people are the false prophets.

In fact, if you think of verses 13 and 14 of Matthew chapter 7, if you think of them as kind of like an end cap on the Beatitudes, where Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek." And Jesus gave the upside down kingdom, and Jesus gave the contrast of the Kingdom of God versus the kingdom of the world. If verses 13 and 14 were an end cap for that, then verses 15 to 20, I believe, are an end cap for Matthew chapter 5, verses 21 to 48.

Because in Matthew chapter 5, verses 21 to 48, you remember what Jesus said. He said, "You've heard it said, but I say to you." He started bringing up all this teaching that the religious leaders, the scribes and the Pharisees, they were doling out what was already commonly held belief, and Jesus is saying what they're teaching you is false. In fact, let's just go back, Matthew chapter 5, look there in verse 21, just to give you a survey. Matthew

chapter 5, verse 21, Jesus says, "You've heard it said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.

Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council." Verse 27, "You've heard it said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Look again in verse 31. "It was also said," see here's the false prophets, " 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' Verse 32, "But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

Verse 33, "Again, you've heard it said," verse 38, "You have heard it said," verse 43, "You have heard it said." And so Jesus is saying, "You have teachers teaching. You have false prophets who are looking at the Old Testament, the scribes and the Pharisees, and they're saying of the Old Testament what the Old Testament isn't really saying. And so I'm going to unleash the Old Testament. Here's what they're saying. Here's the truth of the matter." And now Jesus in the end of the Sermon on the Mount, he's reminding them of what he said in Matthew chapter 5, and he's saying, "You better watch it.

There are false teachers everywhere, and they look good. They look religious." In fact, what's so crazy about this thing is that Jesus is pointing to false prophets who were just parroting what was already commonly held belief in the religious establishment of the day. You might think of it as Jesus pointing out a warning. He's saying, "Beware of what you read on the bestseller shelf at Lifeway." It was just regularly... It was common stuff. It was the going thing. Beware of the bestseller list at Mardel. Is everything at Mardel false prophecy?

No, I'm not trying to make that connection. I'm just showing you that Jesus is shocking his listeners because these false prophets were just parroting what was already commonly held belief. He's saying they're out there. There are false prophets that are teaching a kind of teaching that is going to lead you astray. I'm preaching towards the heart. They're preaching towards the behavior. I'm going for inner transformation. They're saying so long as you look good around other people, that's all that matters. I'm saying what God sees is the most important. They're saying what people say is most important, and they're leading you astray.

Watch out. Beware of false prophets. And it's not just here in Matthew. If you read through the Old Testament, in the Book of Jeremiah, if you want to put it in your notes, Jeremiah 6:14, in that day, there were prophets, Jeremiah said, who were telling the people, "Peace, peace," when there was no peace. In other words, God's not mad. You're all good. Doesn't matter how you live. Everything's fine. And the Lord is saying, "Everything is not fine. I'm coming in judgment, and yet these false prophets are leading people to believe that I won't come in judgment, and when I do come in judgment, there's going to be a rude awakening.

These prophets are lulling my people to sleep." Jeremiah 6:14 says that "they have healed the wound of my people lightly." False sense of security, lulled to sleep in their sin. Over and over again in the Old Testament, the prophets... Many of the reasons the prophets were even in the Old Testament is because they were reacting to false prophecy of the people in that day. Then you go over to the New Testament, the warnings are just multiplied. You could write down Acts chapter 20. Acts chapter 20 is the apostle Paul telling the Ephesian elders that there are going to be false prophets that rise up within their midst.

For those of you who don't know, Paul was a church persecutor. He was someone who wanted to wipe Christianity off the face of the planet. And then by a miracle of God, Paul was converted, and instead of persecuting the church, he began planting churches all over the known world. And Paul would write letters to these churches, and one of the churches that Paul planted was the church at Ephesus. And he's going to leave that church, and he's got the little preachers there, the leaders of the church, and he says to them in Acts 20:29, "I know that after my departure, fierce wolves," okay, same word, "fierce wolves will come in among you."

Okay, they're from within the church. They're coming out of the seminaries. They grew up in your Sunday School. Okay, you changed their diaper, nursery worker, and they're going to preach false doctrine. "Not sparing the flock," Paul says, "and from among your own selves there will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them." And so he says, "Be alert. Remember. Remember, remember the truth," because there are going to be people who come up and preach against the truth. 1 John 4:1 says, "Test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone into the world."

Matthew 24:11, "Many false prophets will arise and lead many astray." You have it again in the Book of Mark, you have it in the Book of Luke, you have it in the Book of John, you have it in all of Paul's epistles. Peter, James, Jude, John, the beloved apostle, every time they wrote a letter to the church, they said to that church, "Watch out. Beware." There are people who look good, who preach out of the Bible, who sound Christian, and they're not. They're leading people astray. And it wasn't just a 1st-century phenomenon.

It's a 21st-century phenomenon. They're in the bookstores. Some of them have churches. Some of them have large churches. Some of them have small churches. Some of them have television ministries. Some of them have radio ministries. Some of them have large followings on the internet. Some of them have very popular YouTube channels. There are false prophets in the world which are using the Bible to preach a message that'll lead people astray, flags people onto the broad road which leads to destruction, and Jesus is saying, "Keep your guard up." And the word is a present tense verb, so he's saying, "Keep your guard up and keep it up."

So the threat of false teachers is always present, and since the threat is always present, the need to keep a guard up is also always necessary. And you think about this, I mean, come on. Jesus, we're in the 21st... Are we in the 21st century? I keep saying that. Is that true? It is, right? 21st century. I always think of 20th Century Fox, and I get messed up, so. We are in a tolerant society, Jesus. We're in America. We don't say of people that their opinion is false. Everybody has the right to their own opinion, and Jesus is saying, "Even though everybody has the right to their own opinion, not every opinion is right, and you need to take the standard of the Sermon on the Mount, you need to take the standard of the scripture, and you need to measure their teaching off the teaching that I'm teaching you because if it doesn't line up, they're teaching false doctrine, and they'll lead you astray."

Even in America, even in a tolerant society, even though they may be in LifeWay or Mardel, or even though they may have big churches or fancy TV programs, and even though they may sit on the stage at a conference with somebody that you trust, that does not tell you whether or not they're teaching the truth. What tells you whether or not they're teaching the truth is that their teaching lines up to the Word of God. That's what Jesus is saying: Beware. Beware of the one who preaches religion without repentance. Beware of the one who preaches cheap grace.

Beware of the one who says there are many paths to heaven. Beware of the one who doesn't stick with the narrow gate. Beware of the one who says there's no need for any poverty of spirit. You remember the Beatitudes? Blessed are the poor in spirit. Beware of the teacher who tells you there's no need for humility in the Christian life. Beware of the one who tells you there's no need for repentance or no need for brokenness over your sin. Beware of the one who tells you don't need to have meekness, you don't need to have surrender.

Beware of the one who tells you that your righteousness is good enough to get you into the Kingdom of God, that you don't need to desire the righteousness that only he can give. Beware of the one who tells you you can live however you want, that you don't have to have purity of heart, you don't have to be a peacemaker, you don't have to be rejoicing in persecution. Watch out. They're out there. Beware of the ones that tickle the ears and make you feel good. He gives the warning, but he also gives you the wardrobe.

He says they look a certain way on the outside, but they're actually a certain other way on the inside. Jesus says in verse 22—"They will come to you in sheep's..." I'm sorry, in verse 16. Verse 15. "They will come to you in sheep's clothing." And so false prophets are not only dangerous, they're also deceptive. They come to you looking not like a real animal, not like a sheep. Baa. Yeah, they don't do that. When Jesus says they come to you in sheep's clothing, he means that they're going to look, sound, behave like a real Christian.

From the outward appearance, there won't be any discernible difference between them and a regular believer. In fact, some of them may look like mature Christians. They may have

knowledge. They may talk about the Bible. If you watch enough TV preachers, you'll hear them talk about God. That's what they do. God. Okay, they say the religious language. They pray the prayers. They look so pious. They look so moral. They look so holy. They look so religious. They talk about Christ. They talk about success. They talk about dreams. They look like water, but inside they're vinegar, poison.

Nasty. And why does Jesus give this warning? I think he gives this kind of warning because he knows that Christians aren't so susceptible that they would fall for any old thing. I would at least hope not. It's not as though, as believers, we're just held captive to any old preacher. Okay? Most Christians are discerning enough to not be convinced by someone who's preaching absolute hedonism or someone who's trying to weave the Bible teaching with a conspiracy theory to try and overthrow the government. Okay, most Christians aren't going to go that route, but there are many believers who don't have enough discernment, and even mature believers who don't have the discernment to spot someone who sounds so good, says the things they're supposed to be saying, who makes them feel as though they're godly, and yet on the inside they're fierce wolves.

Ferocious. You know what that word ferocious really means? It was a word that was applied to thieves, charlatans. Had to do with money. They weren't in it for the sake of the congregation. They weren't in it for the benefit of the people. These people are preaching the word of God for what's in your wallet, which fits so many TV preachers very well, doesn't it? Preach the word of God, buy my carpet with holy water. They're in it for the money. They're fierce, ferocious wolves. They'll do whatever it takes to make you feel however you need to feel so that you'll write them a check.

They say the right words in the right way at the right time. They look like sheep, but inside they're ferocious wolves. They can't advertise who they really are because if they advertised who they really were, nobody would listen to them. And so they come to you with PhDs. They come to you with theology, Master of Theology. They come to you maybe as a professor of a Christian college, and yet they're not true prophets. They're not true teachers. They're leading people astray. Their books may have the right endorsements. They may be in the right bookstores.

Everything looks right, but it's not right. And so what are you supposed to do? Am I saying that you should never trust anyone? I'm not saying that. I'm saying Jesus is calling us to discernment. Okay? Don't be a hobbit. Don't write your own Christian books because you're the only one I can trust. I mean, there are good stuff out there. Jesus is saying, "Watch out." I don't think Jesus is calling for a heresy hunt, okay? So you don't need to go onto YouTube and post that Rick Warren's a heretic or John Piper's a heretic or Joel Osteen.

I mean, I know people do that and some of that I get, but maybe Jesus isn't really calling for a heresy hunt. What he's calling for is discernment. Beware. Put your antennas up. They may

look a certain way, but they're not. So how do you spot them? That's the next point. Jesus is saying it's difficult to distinguish between false prophets and true prophets, and so the way that you need to discern whether or not they're the real McCoy or just a pretender, you don't look at their TV ministry, you don't look at their radio ministry, you don't look at who's on the platform with them, you don't look at the size of their church, you don't even look at their sincerity.

What you look for, verse 16 and again in verse 20, what you look for is their fruit. You will recognize them, Jesus says, by their fruits, which immediately raises the question: What is fruit? And most people when they see the word fruit, they immediately go to a person's moral character, which it does entail, but if we learned anything from the Sermon on the Mount, we learn that a person's mere external behavior, it doesn't tell the whole story, right? Do you remember in Matthew chapter 6, Jesus points to the godless people, or he points to the kingdom citizens and the non-kingdom citizens, but both groups of people gave, both groups of people prayed, both groups of people fasted, okay, both groups of people practiced religion.

On the outward appearance, they both looked as though they were in. In fact, if you were to take the scribes and the Pharisees, and you were going to judge them on their external appearance only, they would get the gold medal, okay? It wouldn't just be the participation ribbon. It would be the number one blue ribbon. The external behavior isn't enough. Jesus is saying you got to look at the heart. And the other thing, if you just define the word fruit contextually, Jesus is saying you need to look at their teaching.

What is the fruit of an apple tree? An apple, right? The fruit of an orange tree is an orange. The fruit of a grapevine is a grape. And the fruit of a prophet is prophecy. The fruit of a teacher is their teaching. And so Jesus is saying, "Listen. Listen to what they teach." A false prophet doesn't... Let's put it this way, a true prophet of God, someone who's really preaching the way Jesus preached, isn't going to tell you to pull yourself up by your beard—by your beer? By your spiritual bootstraps.

They're not going to say, "All that matters is what people think about you." A true spiritual prophet is going to tell you that there is a need for a poverty of spirit. A true prophet of God is going to repeat the beatitudes and say that there's a need for repentance, there's a need for brokenness over your sin. That a true prophet is going to tell you not that there's nothing wrong with you but that there's something incredibly wrong with you on the inside of you, something that you can't fix yourself, something that you'll never be able to resolve, and it's a problem of sin, and the only way for you to be rid of the sin in your life is to cry over it, to mourn over your sin, to confess it, to let Jesus cover you with his righteousness, because your righteousness will never be good enough.

That's what true prophets say. True prophets don't teach there's many ways to heaven. True prophets don't teach that you can come to God on your own terms. True prophets don't preach religion without repentance. True prophets teach the way Jesus taught, and the way Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount had some hard things to say. True prophets don't just preach to impress people. It's not just a matter of what other people think, it's a matter of what God thinks. A true prophet, Matthew 5:21, a true prophet will warn you that anger in your heart could lead to murder.

A true prophet will tell you that lust in your heart can ruin your marriage, that lust in your heart can cause divorce, ruin your family, ruin your life. A true prophet will tell you that if you're going to be in the kingdom, if you're a Christian, then God's Spirit comes and it dwells inside of you and that Holy Spirit inside of you produces in you radical change. And so the Sermon on the Mount says that you're going to have a radical integrity, a radical honesty, a radical love, that you're going to have a purity of heart, that you're going to be meek, that you're going to be a peacemaker, that you're going to be someone who's merciful, forgiving people even though they don't deserve it.

That the Holy Spirit living inside of you is going to produce this change, and if it doesn't produce that change, then you need to look at your life. True prophets preach the way Jesus preached. False prophets don't. And if this teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is absent, then you need to question whether or not this person is a real prophet. You say, "Wes, good grief. I mean, you never even preached on the Sermon on the Mount for like, 20 years." I mean, that's a good point. Are you a false prophet?

It takes time for a tree to bear fruit, doesn't it? You can't get it in one fell swoop, which is why I don't think... You know, Jesus isn't advocating heresy hunting. He doesn't want you to go on YouTube and watch one clip of Joel Osteen and write him off. You look at a person's life, you look at the whole of their teaching. Put your antennas up. Beware. Watch out. The secondary sense of fruit, I believe, is the person's lifestyle. So the first question you ask is whether or not this prophet's preaching matches up with the preaching of Jesus, and then the second question you ask is does this prophet's life measure up to this prophet's preaching, which is very difficult for me to say because now the glass house just got cleaner, right?

Looking at the preacher's lifestyle. Is the preacher himself, is the prophet himself someone who is humble, someone who is poor in spirit, someone who recognizes his own failings, his own sin, and repents and confesses those sins? Is the prophet someone who is surrendered and genuinely surrendered, not just someone who's playing the games, not someone who's pretending, but someone who you can tell has a genuine relationship with their Heavenly Father? Does he have a purity of heart, some undivided loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ? Is he merciful? Is he someone who's making peace?

Is he someone who's joyful in persecution, or is he always complaining about how people don't like him? Is he someone who has a check on his anger, someone who has a check on his lust, someone who has a check on his integrity? Is he someone who, when he preaches the word of God, that he's only in it for the applause and he's only in it for the acclaim, and he's only in it for what people think of him, and he's not in it for what God thinks? Would he be able to preach and be happy if no one even knew who he was?

Or is he in it for the money? Is he someone who seeks the good of the church, someone who seeks the good of the congregation, or is he someone who uses the church, uses the platform to get his own message across, he's using the church for his own agenda? Okay? You're looking for fruit, and you're supposed to look for it in my life. You're supposed to look for it in the life of the person you listen to on the television or the radio or YouTube. You're supposed to look for it in the books you read.

Your antennas have to be up because there are so many people today leading Christians astray. And so many of us are just walking right along. We're gullible, we're blind. Jesus said of the Pharisees, "They are blind leaders leading blind people through a broad gate, down an easy road leading to destruction." Open your eyes. That's what Jesus is saying: open your eyes. Look at his teaching, look at his life, because the fruit leads to the root. We're going to have to be very quick, okay? Let's very quickly go through the rest.

Look at verse 16. Jesus puts forward a rhetorical question. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Of course, the answer to that is no. And people in this room, you're like, "What is a thorn bush and what is a thistle? Isn't that for a fatty liver?" No. Let me just kind of give you the background. Jesus is talking about two different sets of two different things that look very similar. There was a thorn bush called the buckthorn that produced little bitty blackberries, and the little bitty blackberries from a distance looked just like grapes.

And so Jesus is saying from a distance everything looks good, but if you get to the nature of the thing, they're absolutely fundamentally different. Same with the thistle. There was a kind of thistle that produced a certain kind of flower, and the flower looked like a fig. Fig Newton. Not a Fig Newton, but a fig. And Jesus is saying from the outside, from a vantage point maybe if you're not paying attention, if you're just being casual about it and you don't have your antennas up, they look legit. But if you get close, the natures are fundamentally different.

And here's Jesus' point. The nature of a thing will always determine its produce. Good produces good. Bad produces bad. Healthy produces healthy. Disease produces disease. Apples produce apples. Oranges produce oranges. And a true Christian convert is going to produce true Christian fruit. A non-Christian person is going to produce non-Christian fruit. A non-Christian teacher is going to teach non-Christian teaching. The nature of a thing

always determines its fruit. So he says in verse 17, "Every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit." Okay, it's consistent with its nature.

Then he reverses it in verse 18 to strengthen his point. "A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit." It's just not possible. It's a principle of the universe. You are going to produce what is consistent with your nature. And then verse 19, very alarming, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." And there Jesus is talking about judgment. He's talking about hell. This is the destruction that was mentioned in verse 14. This is the place of the departed that's mentioned here.

It's the place of the departed in verse 23. It's the storm of verse 27. Jesus is talking about judgment. Jesus is saying what you do in this life matters, that there is a judge coming. There's a day coming in which Jesus will return, and you will have to give an account for who you are and what you've done. And Jesus is saying if fundamentally inside your nature is not converted, if you're not a Christian, then your nature's going to produce non-Christian fruit. And when Jesus comes in judgment, those who are not in Him will be eternally separated from Him.

Say, "Jesus, really? You're going to talk about hell in the 21st century in America?" And Jesus says, "Absolutely." You need to hear it. The images, they're startling. I don't like these images, but they're necessary in order for us to take Jesus seriously. Jesus is asking every single one of us this question: "Have you as an individual found in me, the Lord Jesus, the inner transformative power that is going to produce change in your life? Or are you just listening to the loudest voice? Or are you just listening to the person who makes you feel good?

Are you just listening to the one who's popular? Because who you listen to matters. What your life produces matters. Your obedience does not get you into heaven, but your obedience is a sure indicator as to whether or not you're in the kingdom. And so Jesus is asking us to look at the fruit. He's asking us, yes, to pay attention to teachers. He's asking you to look at me, to examine the fruit in my life, to look at the fruit of our staff and anyone who teaches or preaches the word of God.

But in this illustration, he's shifting it from the teachers and he's putting it at a ground level. He's asking every single one of us, what does the fruit of your life say about you? What does the fruit of your life say about the nature? Because the nature of a thing determines its produce. And if you're able to look at your life and you say, you know what, nothing has ever changed. I got saved when I was 13 and there has been no spiritual discernible difference in my life ever since. And Jesus says of that kind of person in verse 19, every tree that does not bear good fruit.

Okay, there's no fruit. There's zero fruit. Anyone who does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. There's a real hell. It really exists. And people who are not believers go there. And one of the ways you can test whether or not you're in the kingdom is to look at your life. And if you're here this morning and you say you know what, I'm a diseased tree. I look at my life, everything's wrong. Everything's bad. I've made a wreck of it. Maybe you're bold enough to say, I never even bought into the deal.

I never really trusted Jesus. I never believed in Christ. And you're beginning to see the destruction that kind of life brings. And Jesus is stirring in your heart this morning and he's calling you to himself and he's saying, come to me. Let me plant a new seed, a new tree in your life. Your diseased tree is never going to produce what you want it to produce. And so I'll put the seed of faith into your heart. Trust in Jesus. If he's calling you today, come. Maybe you're here today, you're a believing person and you look at your life and you say yes, there's been repentance.

Yes, I can see that I'm a Christian. But as I look at my life, especially as I look at my life over the last 20, 30 weeks, two, three years, there's just not enough fruit. I'm not living the way I used to live. I'm not pleasing the Lord the way I used to please the Lord. And I don't know that I'd want you to question your salvation this morning, though maybe you should. But maybe the question you need to ask yourself this morning is to who or to what am I listening to?

Double preposition. To who or to what am I listening? You know, false prophets, they come in all shapes and sizes. It could be a television program, it could be a CD, it could be a DVD, it could be a preacher, a radio ministry, a TV ministry. And ever since you've started listening to that person or reading that person's books, the Christian fruit in your life has been visibly absent, and you need to put it down. Throw it away. Don't buy another copy. Cancel the cable. Your kids will go to your grandma's house.

Okay? It's not worth it. There are consequences. Jesus is saying, "This is a real deal. This is very important." At the first of the week, I thought, "Man, how am I going to make false teaching relevant?" Oh, it's so relevant. It's already relevant. So many of us are already listening to voices that are leading us to destruction, and Jesus is saying, "You need to put your antennas up." Okay, don't go on YouTube, don't type in the comments, but put your antennas up. What are you listening to? What is your life producing?

Jesus is calling us to a life of discernment. I'm going to ask Ryan to come and lead us in an invitation.

[Recording ends.]