



2019 VISION MEETING

Your Root Determines Your Fruit

Matthew 7:13-20



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Main point: Jesus calls us to a life of radical, fruitful, life-changing discipleship.

Introduction:

The Word of God gives us many pictures to describe a man's life. In Matthew 13, our hearts are described as **a field** in which seed is planted. In 1 Corinthians 3, our lives are described like **a building** with a foundation on it. In 1 Corinthians 6, our lives are compared to **a temple**. In 2 Corinthians 5, **a tent** with a tenant, and one day that tent will be torn down and believers will be clothed with our dwelling from above. At the end of Matthew 7, Jesus Himself describe a man's life as either being built on **sand** or a **rock**. However, of all the pictures of a person's life given in Scripture, for me, the most vivid is that of **a tree**. In our text, Jesus sets this illustration before us as He comes to the close of His most famous sermon, so that we might examine the root of our fruitfulness.

Our theme this year as a church is fruitfulness. We will be considering passages that explain to us what the Bible says about spiritual fruitfulness. What is it and what produces it? What are its marks? How do we cultivate it and what are some of the things that undermine its health or evidence in people's lives?

Today, I want to lay the foundation study that **your root determines your fruit**. Or to say it another way: *the fruit of our lives is the real indicator of the source of life or lack thereof in our lives.*

Mark Ruggles will deal with **fruitfulness in Christ** next week (*John 15:1-11*), Craig Cummings will address **fruitfulness in the conflict** in week three (*2 Pet.1:7-11*). Pastor Lack will examine **fruitfulness in character** in week four (*Col.1:9-12*). Finally, I will close out the series on **fruitfulness in conversions** in week five.

Are you concerned about the presence of fruit in your life?

- You would be if you were a *farmer* and your livelihood depended on it.
- You would be if you were a *mother* whose young children were nourished by it.
- You would be if you were a *sinner* whose earthly joy and eternal destiny were evidenced by it.

When it comes to discerning *what a true believer is* and *what the marks or evidence of spiritual life are*, there is a great deal of confusion. This text explains why this is of great importance to us. Jesus sums up one simple way that we can identify the reality of salvation in our own lives, as well as in the lives of those around us. In verse 20, Jesus says, *"So then you will know them by their fruits."*

In the immediate context, He is speaking of *false prophets*, but I believe it will be clear from this text and other passages, that the real character of a person will be seen by the fruit in their lives.

This truth opens up to us in three branches seen in our text.

- First, we see the SIMPLE COMMAND. (*vv.13-14*)
- Second, we observe the STRONG CAUTION. (*vv.15-16a*)
- Third, we notice the STRIKING CONTRAST. (*vv.16b-20*)

Context:

The context of these words flows from the *greatest* and the most *shocking* sermon that Jesus ever preached. It ends with one of the most *discriminating* invitations given. It is polarizing! There is no grey in this message. It is black or white. In or out, life or death. The Sermon on the Mount was a hard sermon. Not because it was hard to understand, but because it was *hard to hear, hard to accept, and hard to swallow*. What Jesus says is that there will be more religious people going to hell than going to heaven (*Matt.7:21-23*). These are people that you sit next to in church each Sunday. People who believe the Bible, attend the services, minister in the church, and enjoy the Christian fellowship. These will be people that say, *"Lord, Lord, did we not speak before others in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles....and then I will declare to them, I knew You"* (*Matt.7:22-23*).

There is no doubt in my mind that Jesus is deeply aware of a *dangerous possibility* that His hearers faced that day. It is a danger we also suffer from in this congregation. It is a **four-fold danger** that our response would be nothing more than that of 1) *appreciation*, 2) *admiration*, 3) *agreement*, or even 4) *accommodation*. *"Wow, I appreciated that word (appreciation)...Man, did you hear how He broke that down (admiration). Or, yeah, I agree with everything He said (agreement)...Oh, I can see how that fits in my life (accommodation)."*

Jesus is not interested in our *appreciation, admiration, agreement, or accommodation* this morning. Jesus wanted more than an "amen" from the crowd in that day, and He wants more from you and me today. He calls for a clear-cut commitment—a radical choice. Jesus is not preaching *faith* without *repentance*. He is not offering a *cheap grace*. To be saved is not an *easy thing my friends*, it is an *exceptional thing*. Jesus never preached *conversion* without *consecration*. He never taught *commitment* without *cost*. To that end, our Lord sets before us at the close of this sermon.

- **Two gates**—one *wide* and the other *narrow*. These gates places one onto,
- **Two ways**—one *broad* and *comfortable*, the other *tight* and *hard*. They are traveled down by,
- **Two groups**—one *large* and the other *small*. They culminate in,
- **Two destinations**—one in *destruction* and the other, *life*.

He is not calling us to choose which *vacation to take*, *what school to attend*, or *what house or neighborhood in which to live*. He is speaking of *eternal damnation* and *eternal life*. There will be something in us that resists these words—but may the Lord give us ears to hear His Word! May the Lord be pleased to grant us a true and self-inquiring spirit that we might see where we are today.

Exposition:

A. The SIMPLE COMMAND (vv.13-14)

- ¹³ “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. ¹⁴ For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Notice, three things about the simplicity of this command.

1. ***The sole requirement of this command. “Enter.”*** In order to be saved, there are not five things to do, but only one, according to Jesus. The terms are clear: “Enter.” To “enter” is a commandment that calls for immediate energy, action, and determination. You cannot be passive and enter this gate. You must take a step of faith and enter through the narrow gate. The sole requirement is not to *study* the gate or *admire* the gate, but we must *enter* through the narrow gate. It is not enough to *believe* that the gate exists, to *watch* others go through the gate, or to be *born near* or *grow up* near this gate. It is not enough to *have your toes right up* to this gate. *Pondering* this gate won’t do it. You must enter! You must *leave* where you are, cross over the line, and come all the way to Christ. This is a total commitment that Jesus is calling for here.

Have you made that total commitment of your life to Christ?

The word “**through**” tells us that we cannot have one foot on one side of the gate and another foot on another side. There must be a *planting* of both feet squaring on the other side and a full submission to Christ.

Luke uses the word “*strive*” which means to enter at once (*Luke 13:24*). In other words, don’t delay. Don’t admire! The aorist tense signals to us that this requires a definitive and decisive act from which you are not likely to drift. It involves a summoning of the will to act in faith so that we will be without excuse when we stand before the Judge of all the ages. It is a sole requirement...enter!

2. ***This sole requirement summons us onto the exclusive way.*** We are to enter “**the**” narrow gate. Not “*a*” narrow gate, but the only gate to eternal life that there is. This gate is none other than Jesus Christ. This command IS NOT a call to believe “*in*” Jesus, but a call to believe “*into*” Jesus.

- **John 10:7**—So Jesus said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

- **John 10:9**—I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

This gate is not a *church*, an *aisle*, a *pastor*, a *baptism*, nor a *membership* class. This gate is no other than *Jesus Christ Himself* (John 14:6).

Notice, it is a ***"narrow"*** gate. It is narrow because you must enter it *individually*. It is so narrow that you must go through it *alone*. You cannot go through this gate with a *crowd* or your *family*. It is like a turnstile at ballpark or a security gate at the airport. You must strip down and repent of your sin before you can come through this gate. Spurgeon said, "You and your sins must separate, or you and your God will never come together."

This exclusive way means that you must intentionally go through it. Like threading the eye on a needle, no one will just trip through this narrow gate. Because it is narrow, you might miss it, so it requires intentionality and great attention. The narrowness of this gate requires us to come through it humbly. No one struts through this gate with their chin held high and their chest stuck out. No, it is narrow and small, and we must come through it on our knees with deep humility, acknowledging that we are bankrupt, we cannot pay our debts, and we need forgiveness. We need mercy. We need grace. We need life, light, and rescue!

The ***"gate"*** is the beginning of the way. It is a place of *entry*. In that day, gates were often at the entrance of a city, a field, or a country. And Jesus is the starting point—the place of entry for life.

Now why is it so vital for each of us to follow this simple command?

- for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. ¹⁴ For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

First, because the ***"wide gate"*** is so *easily found*, *discovered*, and *accessed*, and very *easily entered*. You can walk through this wide gate in *any church* or *any religious system* and read about this ***"broad gate."*** It is so wide that you can enter with a *crowd*. You enter this wide gate with *all your baggage*. You do not have to *repent of sin* to enter through the broad gate. It is wide in *friends*, wide in *doctrine*, wide in *morals*, and wide in *pride*.

You can keep *your sin*, *your lifestyle* and enter this gate. It is called *easy believism*. No sacrifice is required and no turning from sin is needed. It is religion on your terms.

Second, it is important for each of us to follow this simple command because the wide gate is so *deceiving*. It DOES NOT tell you where it is leading, for it deceives you on *the front end*, but on the back end it leads to destruction (Prov.14:12). The broad gate leads to the way that is broad. The way speaks of a person's lifestyle. The course of one's life. It will accommodate any *self-defined way* you want to live. It is a self-focused way. It is self-indulgent. Self-focused. Tolerant. Compromising. Unchanged.

B. The STRONG CAUTION (vv.15-16a)

Some charlatans walk both sides of the fence. They flip phrases, spin words, and stand on the side of the road waving unsuspecting people away from the narrow gate and onto the broad road. What are we instructed to do?

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

Jesus begins with a strong appeal to "**beware**." This is the same strong warning Jesus gave concerning *practicing your righteousness before men (Matt.6:1)*. But here, the warning goes beyond *watching what you do* so that people can see, to *watching what you listen to or whom you give your attention to which can lead you astray*. He repeats this warning in Matthew's gospel (*Matt.10:17; 16:6; 11-12*) and we find it through the New Testament letters (*2 Cor.11:13; Gal.1:6-8; Col. 2:8; 2 Pet.2:1; 1 John 4:1; 2 John 7; Rev.2:2; 14-15; 20*).

The idea behind this term "**beware**" is literally *to hold your mind away from*. Do not just be on the look-out for these charlatans, but once you spot one refuse to pay attention to them. The danger lies in the fact that if you give your attention to them, it won't be long before you are giving your devotion and consent to them. To "**beware**" as Jesus puts it here, is not simply to *notice it* or *sense it*, but to *be on guard against them because they are so harmful*. It is a present imperative, which means this is a *command calling for continual attention*. The warning is to "be on guard" or to "watch out"— "*Beware of the false prophets.*" Beware of the odor of the wolf, although he comes to you in sheep's clothing.

1. **WHOM? Now, of whom are we to beware?** *False prophets*. False prophets include those elsewhere referred to as *false brothers (2 Cor.11:26)*, *false apostles (2 Cor.11:13)*, *false teachers (2 Pet.2:1)*, *false speakers (1 Tim.4:2)*, *false witnesses (Matt.26:60)*, and *false Christs (Matt.24:24)*. Why? Because they are promoting *the wide gate* and the broad way that leads to death and destruction.

What is a prophet? A prophet is *someone who claims to speak with the authority or the voice of God*. A prophet is not someone who foretells the future. When you take all the prophecies in all the prophetic literature in the Bible, 80% of prophetic literature is not telling you *what God says about the future*, but they are statements about *what God means about the present situation at that time*. Only about 20% is about future events.

2. **WHY? Why is it so essential to beware of false prophets?** What are the characteristics of false prophets? What do you look out for? Jesus gives us a clue in verse 15,

who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

What does Jesus mean here? Using the imagery of the animal world, our Lord gives us three reasons that we are to be on the lookout for them.

- a. **They are deceptive.** "*...who come to you in sheep's clothing*" It will not be so easy to distinguish between the wolf and the shepherd because when he comes, he will appear as if he is a member of the flock—hence "the sheep's clothing."

Now in that day, shepherds wore woolen clothing made from the very sheep they tended. And that is the “sheep’s clothing” that Jesus speaks of here. False prophets not only *pretend* to be Christians but go beyond that by *impersonating the shepherd* who wears sheep’s clothing.

They pretend to be *something they are not*. They go out of their way to mask themselves as sheep, or members of the flock. They also go out of their way to *disguise what they really are*. Therefore, it is so important to be on the “lookout” or to “watch” for them. We must recognize that this is an on-going reality in the church of God. What Jesus is seeking to teach us here is that false prophets do not come to us with neon signs saying, “I am a false Christian, teacher, or prophet.” They come to us with an *appearance of spirituality*. The appearance of being a member of Christ’s flock. They look the part. They are simple, mild, inoffensive, patient, and obedient to a point.

- **2 Corinthians 11:13-15**—For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

Paul was concerned about this, and this is what he said to the elders at Ephesus, one of the most influential churches among the early church.

- **Acts 20:28-30**—Be on guard for yourselves and for 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 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

They sit on platforms, occupy the airwaves, write books, sit on elder boards, deacon boards, and parachurch ministries. They have all the appearances of spirituality, qualities of leadership, sweetness of personality, willingness to serve, eagerness to fellowship, yet, Jesus says, **“beware....!”**

Listen to Jude’s description their deception in verses 11-13:

- ¹¹ Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain (*hatred and murder*), and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam (*worldliness*) and perished in the rebellion of Korah. (*rebellion against authority*)¹² These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts (*dangerous*) when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water (*deceitful*), carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit (*dead*), doubly dead, uprooted; ¹³ wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam (*disturbed*); wandering stars (*doomed*), for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever.

Scripture speaks of three basic kinds of false teachers: **heretics, apostates, and deceivers (false prophets)**.

- **Heretics** are those who *openly and willingly reject the Word of God after being shown their error and teach that which is contrary to divine truth*.
- **Apostates** are those who *once followed the true faith but have turned away from it, rejected it, and are trying to lead others away*.

- **Deceivers or false prophets** are those who *give the appearance of orthodoxy and do so with great fanfare*. They are not liberal or cultist but one who speaks favorably of Christ, the cross, the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and so on, and who associate themselves with true believers. He appears to be fundamental and evangelical and from his looks, his vocabulary, and associations. He gives considerable evidence of true belief, but he is not genuine; he is a fake and a deceiver. He has the speech of orthodoxy but is living a lie.

b. **They are dangerous.** *"who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves."*

The word for "**wolves**" here describes a literal wolf, but of course, it is used metaphorically, of a rapacious (*excessively grasping, covetous*), *utterly selfish, violent, wolf-like person*. In Palestine, wolves were the most natural enemy of sheep. They were known for being *ruthless* and *ferocious*. They roamed the hills and valleys, looking for a sheep that strayed away from the flock or lagged behind. When a wolf found such a sheep, it quickly attacked and tore it to pieces. Even a grown, healthy sheep was utterly defenseless against the cunningly wily wolf.

The word "**ravenous**" (*harpax*) means *grasping*. This word was used to describe a certain kind of wolf. Harpax (ravenous) represents the spirit which grasps that which it has no right with a kind of *savage* ferocity.

Jesus is teaching us that the character quality of these false prophets is *destructive and dangerous*. *They possess a grasping, robbing, greedy spirit*. We are told to keep our eyes open for this kind of attitude in those who seek to be spiritual leaders.

In the Acts 20 passage that we read earlier, Paul uses the word *"savage...wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock and from among your own selves men will arise speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them"* (Acts 20:29-30).

Illustration: A New York City couple were mailed two tickets to a smash Broadway hit with no explanation or identification of the sender. Nevertheless, they decided to attend the show which they thoroughly enjoyed. Returning after the show that night, they discovered their home had been ransacked and looted of furs and jewelry. On the pillow was this simple note: "Now you know." Like that nameless thief, false prophets and false teachers know what people want to hear, and so they proclaim a message that appeals to sensual desires.

They are masterful spiritual chameleons who make stupendous claims, but in due time their followers usually end up paying a high price.

That is why God's Word repeatedly exhorts us to *study the Scriptures* (1 Pet 2:2), *test what we hear* (1 John 4:1; Acts 17:11), and *grow in the faith* (2 Pet.1:5-9). That way, we won't someday go to our "home" and find out that it was not the home in which we expected to spend eternity (Matt.7:21).

Jesus warns us to **beware of false prophets**.... they are *deceptive*, they are *dangerous*, but now He switches the metaphor from the animal world to the agricultural world to tell us that they are also *diseased*.

c. ***They are diseased.***

¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits.

The word “**know**” here is *epignosko* which means *to discern something clearly and distinctly*. It means to know them or be acquainted fully with them. False doctrine cannot restrain the flesh, so false teachers/prophets will always evidently manifest the innate wickedness of their hearts.

Vincent, the New Testament scholar, once said, “*Character is satisfactorily tested by its fruits.*”

However, we must remember that **character** and **reputation** are not *synonymous*.

Abraham Lincoln said, “Character is like a tree and reputation its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing.”

The expository genius **John Calvin** said, “if we would judge rightly any man, we must see how he bears good and bad fortune.”

Dr. Marytn Lloyd-Jones put it this way, “Our behavior in times of need and crisis proclaims what we really are.” What do you do in times of need and crisis, and what does it really about what you are?

C. **The STRIKING CONTRAST (vv.16b-20)**

- ¹⁶ Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they? ¹⁷ So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.

Jesus asks a rhetorical question that anticipates the negative answer: “*grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?*” And the answer is no! Grapes come from grapevines and figs come from fig trees.

What is the point? The nature of a tree determines the fruit it *naturally* and *consistently* bears or *produces*. Fruit is the best indicator of the character of the tree.

- ¹⁷ So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.

If we take note of what these false teachers DO, and refuse to be charmed and enamored by their golden oratorical skills, we will recognize them for what they are— “*you will know them by their fruits.*”

By “**fruits**” here Jesus meant *their doctrine, their deeds, and their impact*. Or you could put it this way: by *their speech, by their character, and by their influence*. Sometimes the real character of a person remains hidden for some time. But eventually, the true nature of a person becomes apparent. Many times, we only look at the few good works that a person does over a short period as the indicator of good character. But over time, the true nature of a person becomes clear. Why?

Fruit is the best indicator of a person's true nature. Every man produces according to his own nature. He cannot do otherwise. It is the proof! A poisonous tree will yield poisonous fruit. It cannot produce healthy fruit. Likewise, a good tree—such as an apple tree—bears good, nutritious, healthy fruit. Bad fruit may look good for a moment. False Christians and false prophets may look good temporally and superficially.

The ESV translates the phrase "**good tree**" as "*healthy tree...*" and the "**bad tree**" as "*diseased tree...*"

- ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ So then, you will know them by their fruits.

This bad tree is what false prophets and false Christians are. They have a *diseased soul* that has never been cleansed by the atoning work of Christ (Cf. 2 Tim.3:5-7; 4:3-4).

- **2 Peter 2:1-3**—But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. ² Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; ³ and in *their* greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

Did you know that there are sea creatures that you can see through? They are transparent.

Now come up close and listen...**people are not like this**. They wear clothes, they have skin, they hide behind pretenses, but spiritually we need to learn to see right through them. How? Let me give you three helps:

1. Pay attention to the **CONTENT** of their teaching/speaking. Does it line up with God's Word, or is it man-centered, appealing to the ears that want to be tickled? Or if I would stay with the illustration that Jesus is using, a wolf can only sound like a sheep for so long. Eventually, you will hear a growl! Usually, this happens at crisis points. We are not just looking for what they **SAY**, but we are also looking for what they **DON'T SAY**. There will be little to no reference about the sufficient, atoning, substitutionary work of the cross and living a sacrificial life under that cross.
2. Pay attention to the **MANNER** of their living. Does this person show righteousness, humility, and faithfulness in the way they live?
3. Pay attention to the **EFFECT** of their teaching. Are people growing in Christ or merely being entertained? Are people falling away or growing in grace?

Conclusion:

I think the best way to apply what we are hearing from Christ to our own hearts is by looking at a parable that reveals the condition of our hearts. We are familiar with the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13, but now I invite you to ponder with me the meaning of Jesus' words as He explains four conditions of the heart.

- ¹⁸ "Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil *one* comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. ²⁰ The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. ²² And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. ²³ And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

There are four types of soil and each represent the heart.

1. The hard heart (v.19)
2. The shallow heart (vv.20-21)
3. The strangled heart (v.22)
4. The open heart (v.23)

Of all four of these conditions, the only sure evidence of a genuine reception of the Word of God in a person's life is spiritual fruit. The presence of fruit is the important thing, not the amount of it—at least in most cases.

Only the open heart that receives the preaching of the Gospel is saved. Not the hard heart. Not the shallow heart. Not the strangled heart. Only the open heart.

Do you have an open heart? Are you receptive to God's truth? Have you allowed the teaching of the Bible to settle down into your life so that you have turned from sin, placed your whole trust in Jesus, and begun to produce the Holy Spirit's fruit in your life?

Perhaps you desire to have an open heart, because when you examine yourself, all you see is hardness, shallowness, and the world's goods strangling the air out of your soul. What can you do? Here is the truth. You can do nothing to change your heart, any more than dirt can change its constitution. But the good news is that there is a Divine Gardener. He can break up the hard ground and remove the stones and thorns. This is our only hope—not us, but God.

- **Ezekiel 36:25-27**—Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶ Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

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