

DAY 1 (week starting 4th June 2018)

Read - Matthew 7:15-23

By their fruit you will recognize them. v16

Jesus is warning us to beware of false teaching and false prophets. True teaching and true prophecy is always about what God wants us to know and hear. False teachers and false prophets say things that sound religious, and quote scripture to back it up, but they are often pushing their own ideas, or they may be teaching doctrines that are false, or they may say things that will merely make people feel comfortable in order to stay popular and make people like them.

There were false teachers and prophets around in Old Testament times and in Jesus' day, and there are still many around today. Jesus had some tough things to say to them.

There are two main ways to deal with false teaching when we meet it. One is to compare it with the clear meaning of scripture and the normally accepted teachings of the Church. Ministers and "kosher" Christian teachers can help you with this. The other way is to check out the fruit of their teaching, especially in their lives. Is the fruit in keeping with what you know of Jesus. Can you see Christ-like character in them? Does it produce Christian fruit, morals and values? Does it lead to Christian action and involvement in the needs of people and society?

Most people I know have a good "nose" that senses wrong teaching when they hear it. They sense something is wrong. When you feel this, check it out with someone you trust.

Lord give me a deep spiritual sensitivity to know when I hear teaching that is not of you.

DAY 2

Read - Matthew 7:15-23

A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. v18

Clearly Jesus is saying that if someone, or something, is inherently bad at the core, their actions will produce bad fruit. And conversely, if someone, or something, is inherently good at the core, their actions will produce good fruit.

But is Jesus therefore saying that if you are a bad tree you will always be a bad tree? You are what you are and you cannot change? Just as a leopard cannot change its spots, bad luck, you are pre-destined to be a bad tree? Absolutely not!

At the very heart of the Christian gospel is the good news that any man or woman who sincerely turns to God can be changed at the deepest level of their life. They can be spiritually born again. *"If anyone is in Christ they are a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come."* 2 Cor 5:17

A person can change from being a bad tree that bears bad fruit, into a good tree that bears good fruit. It has happened to millions of people in the last two thousand years since Jesus walked among us. People have changed from being the most dysfunctional, broken, sinful and despicable human beings, to Christ-followers, living amazing lives and making a positive difference in the world. Some have even become saints.

How would you rate yourself right now? A good tree, bearing good fruit? A bad tree, bearing bad fruit? Perhaps a bit of both? Maybe you have slipped a bit? Talk to Jesus about it. What needs to happen in your life? What would be the turning-point?

DAY 3

Read - Genesis 1:11-13

Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with their seed in it, according to their various kinds." v11

There are so many different kinds of trees and plants. I wonder how many different types of fruit-bearing trees and plants there are, producing seeds and fruit that feed animals and birds and humans. God has blessed us with a rich, wonderful and diverse eco-system that sustains life on this planet. Different-ness and variety characterize the creation, yet it all hangs together in one glorious whole.

It is much the same in the Kingdom of God. Each believer is different, with a different character, abilities and gifts, yet they all combine and are used by God to advance the growth of the Kingdom in our world. Paul says, *There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works in all believers.....The body (ie. the Church) is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they all form one body. So it is with Christ. (1 Cor 12:4-6 & 12)*

In his letters Paul identifies over 26 different kinds of Kingdom gifts, some spiritual, some practical; some big, some small; some visible, some hidden. Yet God uses each one, and each one of us, in so many different ways, to make a Christian difference in the world and grow the Kingdom. (1Cor 12:4-11, Rom 12:4-8, Eph 4:11-13)

What gift/gifts has God given you? How are you using your gift/gifts to grow the work of God in the world, especially in the places where you live out your life?

DAY 4

Read - Galatians 5:19-25

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. v22

These nine fruits of the Spirit sum up the essential marks of the character of Jesus. This is part of what Jesus meant when he warned about false prophets. When you look at their lives, false teachers will not display the character of Jesus. These are the traits we should look for in those who claim to speak for God.

The Holy Spirit is the power of God at work in us to shape our character so that day by day we become more like Christ, and we reflect these qualities and values in who we are and how we behave. In his letter to the church at Ephesus Paul speaks of the Spirit as God's *incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead. (Eph 1:19-20).*

When we surrender our lives to Christ and invite him to become our Lord, he removes our guilt for past sin and we are declared "just"/innocent in God's sight. But this is only the beginning. Now starts the process of changing us, inside and out to become more like Jesus. As Christ-followers we are always a work in progress, but also always making the effort to be more like our Master.

***Finish then thy new creation
Pure and spotless let us be
Let us see thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in thee
Changed from glory into glory
Till in heaven we take our place
Till we cast our crowns before thee
Lost in wonder love and praise.
Charles Wesley***

DAY 5

Read - John 15:1-12

Every branch in me that does bear fruit he trims clean (prunes) so that it will be even more fruitful. v2

So much of the teaching of Jesus points to the fact that God wants us to live fruitful lives. The fruit of a life lived in fellowship with God will show healthy growth; in our inner character we will become more and more Christ-like; we will move from knowing Jesus just as Saviour to Jesus as Lord (in control of every aspect of our life); it will show itself in good deeds (acts of love and mercy); in witnessing to others about the love of God for them; and in making a Christian difference in the world. We don't achieve this in a day, it is a life-long process of growth as we walk with Jesus day by day.

Part of our growth will come through two words Jesus uses. The first is **cutting**. Jesus is not saying that if you don't bear fruit you will be cut off and thrown into the fire, rather that sometimes things in our lives must be cut away and got rid of because they are a hindrance to us bearing fruit. These could be habits, sins, attitudes, addictions, wrong relationships, even wrong thinking or theology.

Pruning on the other hand is shaping a plant so that it can be more fruitful. If you are fruitful for God, expect that you may receive pruning from him. Sometimes we may also need to do some pruning ourselves. Sometimes hardship and suffering do this for us. At times even some good things might need to be put aside so that we can be more fruitful for the work of the Kingdom. John's word is **cleaning**. We have been made clean by the blood of Jesus, but now we need to be made more clean so that we can bear more fruit.

Show me what needs to be cut or cleaned in my life Lord?

DAY 6

Read – Genesis 2:8-9, Revelation 22:1-2

On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. v2

We live in the time between the two trees.

There were two trees in the garden of Eden; the **tree of the knowledge of good and evil**, and the **tree of life**. When Adam and Eve sinned by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they were expelled from the garden, and the way to the tree of life was barred to them by an angel with a flaming sword. The reason God has come to us in the person of Jesus, is to open a way for us to come back to the tree of life. Through faith in the blood of Jesus we have access once again to the Life and peace God wants us to have.

The time in which we are now living is the time between the two trees. We live in a sinful world that is focussed on the tree of disobedience. It is therefore a life that is cut off from the tree of life. But Jesus provides a way for us to come back to the tree of life. Those who come to him in faith may once again, even now, enjoy the fruit of that tree. And one day, at the end of all things when God wraps it all up, access to the tree of life will be there for everyone once again.

The leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations. It is only as the world turns back to God through Jesus that the evil, pain, suffering, division, war and alienation of the present time will be healed. We who have tasted the fruit of the tree of life must work and give ourselves for this.

Thank you for re-opening the way to the tree of life, Father. Amen