

Matthew 12 vs 33 – 50 Fruit Inspecting

{vs. 33-35} Jesus has used this illustration before and we are familiar with the idea – good trees are distinguished by the good fruit they produce. Now the word ‘make’ used here repeatedly is not saying they should go and create a tree, it is used in the sense of **recognizing, considering or labeling**. For our paraphrase today we’ll use the word **recognize** - “**recognize a good/bad tree (man, ministry, etc.) by what comes from it**”. In this, Jesus is calling for discernment from them (and us). Jesus displayed so much power: healing, casting out demons, feeding the four and five thousand and commanding the very forces of nature – but they did not know where He came from! How could they say that He was Satanic, if He was doing good (Godly) things? Similarly, Jesus is telling them that their words (fruit) gives evidence of the evil deeply hidden within them under the masks of legalism, scholarship and hypocrisy. Appropriately, Jesus calls them the brood (offspring) of vipers (just as John the Baptist had) and **in doing so; He comments on their behavior and associates them with the Devil – that serpent of old!** These vipers are elusive and deceptive, often camouflaging or hiding under rocks, in crevasses, etc. – lying in wait for some unsuspecting victim to come within striking range. Now Jesus compares them to a newly hatched brood that slithers around together striking at and poisoning anyone they can (especially Jesus). These are the ‘religious’ men who would not enter the Kingdom themselves, but made sure that no one else could either! It was this evil nature that made them speak evil of Jesus – “**how can you who are evil say anything good?**” Notice, they are not condemned **because of the words** (fruit) but those words displayed the condition of their hearts – which is why they stood condemned before they said it!

Jesus teaches this as a life principle – “**out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.**” What fruit is coming from our own lives (our words and actions)? When life is pressing hard on you – what fruit juice is squeezed out? I pray it is the Fruit of the Spirit! Do you know that **Jesus was not against “fruit inspecting”**? Many think that this is the kind of judging that Jesus taught against – but what He denounces is being **judgmental** (judging unto condemnation). As believers, we must test the spirits (by the fruit – what is produced) so that we are not swept away by heresy or distracted by ungodly things! If we do not know and stand for what is right, then we will fall for anything!

{vs. 36-37} As if the mere thought of being known or judged based upon our fruit was not frightening enough, Jesus teaches that on the day of judgment our very own words will be used to either acquit or condemn us! This is not just the well thought out words, prepared and spoken on ‘good days’ but the totality, even the idle words that fall from our lips! Here the word **idle** means **careless, of no purpose, useless or unproductive**. It is enough to make you want to take a vow of silence (most of us should talk a lot less – guarding what comes out)! Now many believers are quick to reassure themselves that they **will not be judged**, but that is not true! Everyone will stand before God – “**‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before Me; every tongue will acknowledge God.’ ‘So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.’**” (Romans 14:11-12 NIV) We see both the acquitted (saved) and condemned (unbelievers); so there are **two judgements**:

- 1) A judgement for the **righteous** (acquitted), not determining our salvation or entrance into Heaven, but how we will be **rewarded** (2 Corinthians 5:10) for all that we have done here on Earth with what God has given to us (time, resources etc.). God as the ultimate or Supreme Judge will open the books and those who have honestly declared their faith in Jesus (who show the fruit of a changed heart) are in the Lamb’s Book of Life (their sins paid in full by Christ and washed away). (Notice that the believer, those **acquitted** are mentioned first – that is because we are God’s priority, His beloved and Bride!)
- 2) A judgement for everyone else (condemned), the books will be opened and they will be judged based upon their **words** (this chapter), upon their **deeds** (Romans 2:6), upon the **condition of their heart** (1 Samuel 16:7) and upon the **amount of revelation** they have received (Matthew 10:15 & below!) All will suffer, but there will be varying degrees depending on these factors.

I want enough evidence to flow from my mouth so that I may give a good testimony before men and so that my words can be used to acquit me before the throne. Perhaps that is why Paul wrote that it is important for believers to “**declare with your mouth that “Jesus is Lord!”** (Romans 10:9)

{vs. 38-41} These Pharisees are unbelievable! **First**, they are obviously trying to change the subject – “**Jesus, we don’t like what you are saying so perform a sign for us!”** **Second**, who do they think they are? Jesus is not at their beckon call – He came to serve but as God directs. This plays into the people’s habit of looking at Jesus not for who He is, but as something to see or a source for things they might need. **Third**, there is a subtle problem with this request – Jesus has already done many signs that day (that Sabbath day). Matthew records only two (the withered hand and the deaf/dumb possessed man) but we know there are more because in leaving the Synagogue, Jesus **healed all who were ill** (vs. 15). In making this request, **they are saying that those miracles were not good enough to prove to us that you are from God** (we want a sign from Heaven, maybe the voice of God – oh, wait that happened and you ignored it!) By always seeking new signs, there is a pattern set up that makes Jesus only as good as His last miracle and miracles alone will not cause a person to believe – “**If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.**” (Luke 16:31b NIV)

Now Jesus understands that this is just a big distraction from the religious leaders who have already made up their minds – however, ever-loving He does not shut them down or send them away. What Jesus does do, is say “**You want a big sign? I won’t give you any of these ‘little signs’ – I’ll give you the granddaddy of them all!**” The sign of the prophet Jonah – we all know the story of Jonah and the great fish (no it does not necessarily say whale – the Greek word means **sea monster, great fish or possibly whale**). It catches our imaginations and has become one of the most famous of all children’s Bible bed time stories. Interestingly, **Jonah actually did no signs but in his rebellion he became the sign!** Jonah was the reluctant prophet who did everything to avoid his calling (including sailing to the opposite end of the known world!) but God would not be denied. Jonah spent “**three days and three nights**”, which is a Jewish figure of speech meaning **any part of the whole day** (just as we might say I’m going to New York for three days – not specifically saying I’ll be there for 3 consecutive 24 hour periods but I will be there during some part of three different days). That becomes important when you consider the time that Jesus’ body was in the tomb!

Jonah obeyed, after being vomited up on the beach, bleached and smelling like fish guts – which God caused to work for Nineveh’s good because water and fish played a huge role culturally – Nina (the goddess the city was named after) was the Babylonian goddess of the watery deep! In sending His fishy prophet, God declared to them that He ruled over all – even their fishy false god! **The people of Nineveh repented even though they had the worst of representatives** – Jonah still unhappy to be there, gave this message “**Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.**” There was no hope, no “God loves you” or even the hint that God might change His mind but somehow God’s Holy Spirit used that lackluster prophet to change the “**great city**”! **Jesus’ generation had the perfect messenger, the perfect representation of God** – Immanuel, God with us and **they rejected the King and the Kingdom!** Jesus tells them; on the day of judgment those repentant Ninevites will show how wicked and depraved their hearts are. You have so much more revelation and you will not believe!

{vs. 42} Not only will the Ninevites show your evil ways, but the Queen of Sheba also – that ancient ruler of the land of the Sabaeans (in Arabia) described by its great distance from Israel (1 Kings 10). She, the ruler of that distant land went to the effort to bring herself, her retinue, guards and vast (heavy) treasures to Israel because of the stories of Solomon’s God-given wisdom. Unlike her, upon hearing of the possibility of the Messiah’s birth, the religious leaders could not be troubled to travel the handful of miles (about 6) from Herod’s Palace (Jerusalem) to Bethlehem!

{vs. 43-45} After dealing with the distractions, Jesus goes back to the miracle that started it all – casting out the demon from the blind mute. It is important to understand that this is about the man and the condition of the hearers. Jesus makes the point that when freed, this man may clean up his life and begin to repair all that has gone wrong but unless he has protection, something greater to keep him from a re-infestation it will all be for naught! These Pharisees thought they could do it on their own – making little improvements, sweeping out corners of their hearts but unless they have outside help (help from God) it will never be enough. Only the indwelling Spirit of God can prevent this uninvited demonic house party (take over) and only receiving Jesus can save and can transform from wicked to holy.

{vs. 46-50} Satan, having failed with the Pharisees tries another distraction – let's see, maybe bringing His earthly family in will work. With this, the enemy tries to take the focus from the Heavenly Father – making Jesus just another man, a son and a brother. And while that is a part of His human existence and experience – Jesus is so much more! Jesus immediately brings it back to the Kingdom and the family of God made up of those who will receive in faith and obey in love! So once again, it is only by the fruit that the relationship with Jesus can be seen! Are you and I being fruity? If so, what kind of fruit do we bear?