

TWO TREES

Matthew 7:15-20

Intro: Last week we considered our Lord's teaching in Matthew 7:13 and 14 about two gates which opened upon two ways, which in turn led to two different destinations. He spoke of the wide gate which opened upon a broad way which led to destruction. But He also spoke of narrow gate which led to a narrow way, but it led to life. He said that many people go through the wide gate which leads to destruction, but that few find the narrow gate which leads to life. However, He began His comments with a command that they were to enter the narrow gate which leads to life.

He was actually preaching the Gospel to His disciples. We know from men like Judas Iscariot who betrayed the Lord, that a person can be a disciple, and even an apostle, without having entered into the gate that leads to life, that is, eternal life. We also read in John chapter 6 of many disciples who turned away from the Lord, and walked no more with Him. So you can be a disciple without being a Christian. You can be a church member without being a Christian. You can even be a preacher, or a pastor, or a Bible teacher, without being a Christian. The Lord was calling upon those who had not entered into salvation, to enter. And He was calling upon all to make sure that they had entered.

The Apostle Peter called upon the people of God in his day "to make their calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10). And he indicated that they could do this by looking at their lives to see if they were living the way a child of God should live. The Gospel transforms us. It does not perfect us immediately, but it will perfect us eventually when we see the Lord. The Gospel changes us.

There seems to be the idea in most people that whatever the majority of people is doing, has to be right. But that is exactly where they are mistaken. The Lord said most people are headed for destruction, and only few are headed for life, eternal life, and heaven. For example, when the Lord asked His disciples what men were saying that He was, they told Him that some were saying that He was John the Baptist. Others were saying that He was Elijah. Still others were saying that He was Jeremiah or one of the other prophets. But while you and I would feel complimented if anyone thought that we were John the Baptist, or Elijah, or one of the prophets, yet John the Baptist never saved anyone. Neither did Elijah,

nor did Jeremiah. Only the Lord Jesus can save us. Some said that the Lord was demon-possessed. So whether you thought that the Lord Jesus Christ was John the Baptist or a demon-possessed impostor, you were headed right for the broad gate that leads to destruction. From the answers that the disciples gave to the Lord the evidence was overwhelming that most people were headed for the broad gate that leads to destruction.

How would you evaluate our generation? What are people saying about the Lord Jesus Christ? Wouldn't we have to say that most people we know aren't saying anything about Him? All people are headed for the broad gate that leads to destruction, or the narrow gate that leads to life and to God and to eternal salvation – let me emphasize that this applies to *everyone*! If you are not headed for life, you are headed for destruction. There is no third possibility.

But when the Lord asked His disciples, “Who do you say that I am?”, Peter answered, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” How did Peter discover that? Was it on his own? Absolutely not! The Lord said that Peter was blessed because God the Father had revealed that the Man Jesus was none other than the Messiah, the Son of the living God. If you and I know that Jesus is the Son of God, it is only because God the Father has revealed to us Who He is. And I will take us a step further: If we are trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin and from hell, it is because He has given us the faith to believe in Him. Jesus Christ is the Author and Finisher of our faith. That is how you enter the narrow gate. And, as I said last Sunday, the gate is so narrow that only those who are trusting Jesus Christ as their Savior can get through the gate that leads to life.

This leads me to our text for today. Look with me at Matthew 7:15. Here the Lord Jesus Christ sounded a warning. What is it?

I. OUR LORD'S WARNING (Matt. 7:15).

The warning is that there are “false prophets.” Who is a false prophet? A false prophet is anyone who contradicts in any way the teaching of the Word of God. A false prophet will tell you that there is at least one other way of salvation. A false prophet might tell you that you can be your own savior. Or he might tell you that there are other Saviors. Or some will tell you that Jesus Christ is not a savior at all, but there is some religion

that they are promoting. This is what the Apostle John wrote about false prophets. You will find his words in 1 John 4:1-3:

1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

All false prophets are dangerous because it is their purpose to turn you and me away from Christ and the Gospel. They either want to widen the gate that leads to life so that everyone goes through it, or they want to tell you about another gate which they say is the only way of salvation. The most dangerous of the false prophets are those who use the Bible to contradict what the Bible clearly teaches, and especially what it teaches about Jesus Christ. A false prophet can be one who praises Jesus of Nazareth for His teaching, and for His good works, and for the life that He lived, but they either deny or stop short of saying that He is the Son of God, God manifest in human flesh. A false prophet may have a lot of commendatory things to say about how Jesus Christ died, but they either do not say that He died to save sinners from the penalty of their sins, or that He died as a martyr, but did not rise bodily from the dead. A false teacher is one who shows his true colors by what he does not say about the Lord Jesus Christ as well as by what he says. And there are many of them.

Modern humanistic, man-centered psychology is a religion of sorts which is leading multitudes today to the broad gate that leads to destruction. And the church's man-centered emphasis has open the door for the man-centered psychology which has replaced in many church a God-centered theology.

So at this point in our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, He was not only emphasizing that His disciples needed to be saved and to know that they were saved, but they needed to be on their guard for those "many false prophets" which are in every generation. And the only way you will be able to recognize error, and to distinguish between error and the truth, is by knowing the truth, the truth which you will only find in God's holy

Word, the Bible. That is why we at Trinity Bible Church spend our time teaching the Bible, and encouraging those who come to study the Bible. False teachers come to us “in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” They come like they were one of us, but if we follow their teaching, we will be destroyed eternally. Never minimize the destruction that a false teacher can cause because it leads from time into eternity. If you are wrong about salvation, it doesn’t make any difference how right you may be about other things.

When the Apostle Paul was leaving the elders at Ephesus, never expecting to see them again on earth, one of the things he told them was this:

28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (Acts 20:28-32).

But now let us move along in our text to notice how the Lord taught His disciples to identify false teachers. Here we see the Creator pointing out a simple lesson from His creation.

II. THE IDENTIFICATION OF FALSE TEACHERS (Matt. 7:16-20).

No false teacher is going to identify himself as being anti-Christ or anti-Bible. If he knows you are a Christian, he is most likely to try to impress you with the idea that he is a Christian too. But, going back to the time when the Lord Jesus was here on earth, who, primarily, was He talking about when He spoke of “false prophets.” As I have mentioned many times *He was speaking about the Pharisees*. They were hypocrites of the first order, and yet they exercised a tremendous influence upon the Jewish people of the day. Jews of that day who showed an interest in Christ were afraid to let it be known for fear that they would be cast out of the synagogue, which was to them the equivalent of being eternally damned. But

our Lord here indicated that the test for the Pharisee was the same as the test for anyone else: “Ye shall know them by their fruits.”

When the Lord said this He was not talking about how numerous their followers were. He was not talking about the power they exercised over their followers. *He was talking about their character!* Charles Simeon, whom I have quoted before, the preacher of the campus church years ago at Cambridge University, had this to say about the Pharisees:

The pretended to have a high regard for religion; but they were in fact, the bitterest enemies of all vital godliness (Vol. 11, p. 271). Simeon went on to say that they were proud, selfish, covetous, worldly, and oppressive; and when any opportunity arose of gratifying their malignant dispositions, they manifested their true nature, and showed themselves to be no other than ‘ravener wolves’ (*Op. cit.*, p. 272).

And we know that they resorted to what was actually murder in their intense hatred of our Lord, and their desire to get rid of Him. And the Apostle John, speaking by the Spirit said, “And ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:15).

Now the Lord takes a simple lesson from creation. He made a statement, and then He asked a question. See both in verse 16.

A child is qualified to answer the Lord’s questions. If you are looking for grapes, you don’t look for them on a thorn bush. A thorn bush by its very nature is incapable of bearing grapes. The same is true if you want figs. You will not find figs growing on thistles. Even some times you won’t find figs on a fig tree.

James wrote along a similar line when he was speaking about how the tongue is an indication of one’s nature. Cf. James 3:10-13:

10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

13 Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

Going on in our text to verse 16 the Lord indicated that “every good tree” (no exceptions) shows that it is a good tree by producing “good fruit.” And the same is true of a corrupt tree; it produces corrupt fruit. The Wycliffe Bible Commentary defines a corrupt tree as “one that is decayed, worthless, unusable. The worthlessness of such a tree calls for its swift removal from the orchard lest it infect the others.” If it produces fruit at all, it is worthless and needs to be thrown away.

But then in verse 17 our Lord went on to add that it is impossible for a good tree to produce evil fruit just as a corrupt tree cannot produce good fruit. People who are not Christians cannot live consistently, day after day, as Christians live. Our Lord was not teaching that His people are perfect, but He was teaching that there is an obvious contrast between the life of a child of God and the life of one who is not a child of God even though he might be clothed in clerical robes and bear the title of Rabbi or Reverend. The life is what identifies the man.

Paul was speaking about this in Galatians when he was teaching how impossible it is for the flesh to produce Christian character. He taught that if we walk in the Spirit we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. Cf. Gal. 5:16. And then after listing “the works of the flesh” he mentioned “the fruit of the Spirit” – “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (or self-control). Cf. Gal. 5:22-23.

Concl: How important it is to understand these important truths. A degree from a seminary does not mean that the bearer of that degree is a child of God, nor necessarily a true servant of the Lord. The garments a man wears do not mean that he is a true servant of the Lord. Age and experience by themselves do not mean that a man is a true and faithful servant of the Lord. Always, the true test is the life! It is godliness that identifies a true servant of the Lord.

But let us also remember that the same principles of Scripture apply to every individual believer. Ultimately our lives show what we are. What we are when we are all alone by ourselves, is what we really are. Twice in his first epistle John the Apostle said essentially the same thing about this important subject. Let me read to you what he said. First in 1 John 3:9-10:

9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

And then in 1 John 5:18:

18 We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.

All of us need to make sure that we really know the Lord according to how the Bible describes a child of God. But then we need to be careful that every day others can see by the way we live, by the traits of character that we display, that day by day we are being conformed more and more to be like our precious Savior. This is the greatest evidence that can be produced that we know the Lord and that we are inside the narrow gate.

The Lord spoke of two gates, two ways, and two destinations. But then he spoke of two trees, a good one, good as God counts goodness, good with the goodness of Christ, and a corrupt one, one whose nature has never been changed. All of us are corrupt by birth and by nature. I trust that now we have been transformed into good trees by the marvelous grace of God.