

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 26 November 2023. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

“Ye Shall Know Them by Their Fruits”

Matthew 7:15-23

In the year 1536, in Vilvoorde, Belgium, a godly Englishman named **William Tyndale** was strangled to death, and then burned at the stake, for the “crime” of translating the Bible into English. He was also condemned by the Roman Catholic authorities for teaching and disseminating “heresies.” His so-called “heresies” were many; but the chiefest of his “heresies” was the teaching that a man is justified by *faith in Christ’s sacrifice alone*, and not by doing good works to *earn* salvation. Tyndale’s opponents (Sir Thomas More, for example), wrote nasty, scathing books and pamphlets to try to “debunk” Tyndale’s doctrine; and in their writings, they often protested that “If a man be justified by faith, and not by good works, then he could commit whatever sins he wants to commit, and still go to Heaven. What motivation, then, would he have to do good works, if his salvation were secure?” Tyndale’s answer to this question was simple, and scriptural. In his book, *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, Tyndale made this powerful statement: “**Deeds** are the fruits of **love**; and love is the fruit of **faith**.”¹ Simply put, truly righteous deeds are the *product* of faith—just as fruit is the product of a tree. Good fruit doesn’t make the tree from which it came “good”: rather, the fruit *is* good because it comes from a good tree! A *good tree* produces good fruit: and likewise, *true faith* in Christ produces *love for Christ, and good works*.

In his writings, Tyndale *often* used this “tree” and “fruit” analogy to describe the Christian life. However, this was not his own idea: he was simply using the analogy that *Christ Himself* used when He was on earth. As the Lord Jesus wrapped up His Sermon on the Mount, He used this analogy. First, He warned that there are only two possible gates to enter, and only two possible roads to travel. He said that there is a strait gate, and a narrow way, which leads to eternal life; and there is a wide gate, and a broad way, which leads to eternal destruction. He warned His listeners they *must* strive to enter in at the strait gate. However, Jesus was not done with His warnings. You see, there is something that *prevents* many people from entering the strait gate of salvation: and that thing is *false teachers*. This morning, we will see what Jesus had to say about the “fruit” that false teachers produce. The title of this message is “**Ye Shall Know Them by Their Fruits.**”

Read Matthew 7:15-23.

I. The deception of false prophets (vv. 15-18, 20)

In last week’s message, we took a close look at **verses 13 and 14**. In these verses, Jesus was warning those who were “sitting on the fence” that they could *not* remain indifferent—that they *must* “**strive to enter in at the strait gate**” of eternal life, by placing their faith in Him. With this thought still fresh in their minds, Jesus now gives them another solemn warning. He warns them to “**Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.**” Is there a reason why Jesus gave this warning about false prophets *just after* He had urged the people to enter in at the strait gate? Yes, there is! You see, false teachers direct people away from the strait gate, by teaching them a false way of

salvation. Therefore, in order for a sinner to escape the damnation of hell, he must close his ears to false teachers, and run to the narrow Door of Jesus Christ, and enter in there!

Now, who were these false teachers of Jesus' day, whom Jesus was warning the people about? The Pharisees and the Sadducees! The Pharisees were the religious conservatives, and the Sadducees were the theological liberals; and in many ways, they were on opposite ends of the theological spectrum. Yet, both these groups were united in their hatred of Jesus, and in their teaching of a false way of salvation—a salvation through good works. The religious leaders of Israel taught the people that the way to obtain entry into the Kingdom was to *keep the Law of Moses* (as well as *their* laws), and thus *earn* your way into the Kingdom.

Now, on the surface, the Pharisees' way of salvation *seemed* right, and godly. It seemed very narrow, too! After all, according to the Pharisees, you not only had to keep all 613 laws of the Torah in order to be saved, but you had to keep the hundreds of traditions that *they* had made up, as well! The Pharisees' way of salvation *did* seem “narrow”; however, in actual practice, it was much wider than it appeared. As Jesus put it, these men strained at a gnat, but swallowed a camel. In other words, they made exceedingly restrictive rules, which were like a noose around people's necks; yet, in their secret lives, they were filled with lust and wickedness—just as a mausoleum looks beautiful on the outside, but is filled with rotten corpses on the inside. They justified their inward depravity by scrupulously observing outward restrictions--such as not eating an egg that had been laid on the Sabbath day (since the hen had “laboured” to lay the egg)! The common people of Israel copied their religious leaders' hypocrisy, as well. Jewish women wouldn't even help a Gentile neighbour woman who was in labour, because if they did so, they would be “defiled”; and Jewish men would vigorously wash their clothing upon returning from a heathen district, for fear that the dust from the Gentile land would defile them. Yet, Jews would often go to the Roman gladiatorial games, and sit in their own little Jewish section, and enjoy the bloodlust (as long as the gladiators weren't fighting to the death). (It's like professing Christian churches today that go on an outing to a movie theatre, and take in a movie with cursing, blasphemy, bloodlust, and nudity, yet justify it because it had a “good overall moral,” and because they were watching it as a church group!) All the Pharisees' “righteousness” was outward; and even in their *outward* practice, they often created loopholes and technicalities to excuse themselves from obeying God's Law. They *looked* holy on the outside; but they were hypocrites. This is why Jesus warned the disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees (which was hypocrisy), and not to copy it.

Now, please notice how Jesus describes “false prophets.” First, He says that they come to you in “*sheep's clothing*.” Is Jesus speaking *literally* when He speaks of “sheep's clothing”? In one sense, He may have been! Jewish prophets were known for wearing rough sheep skins. It was a lowly-looking garb; yet, everyone recognised it as the clothing of prophets. (It was the equivalent of a clergyman's “collar” or “robe” today.) How, then, should we apply this warning to ourselves, today? We should apply it by being very careful not to accept a man's teaching simply because He is clothed in “religious garb”! The natural man is easily impressed by outward appearances, such as long, religious-looking robes, or habits; but to God, it means nothing! Many false prophets in ancient Israel wore a “*rough garment to deceive*”: and likewise, countless priests and preachers today look the part of a “man of God,” when, in reality, they are wicked deceivers. As Christians, we must not be swayed by outward

things, such as clothing: rather, we must measure what a teacher or preacher is saying against the Bible! If a “man of God” preach a false way of salvation, or other unbiblical and subversive doctrines, he is a deceiver, and should be shunned.

Now, although “*sheep’s clothing*” *could* refer to actual sheep skins, Jesus probably was referring mostly to the deceitful manner in which false teachers present themselves. False teachers *appear* godly and righteous. They *appear* to be Christ’s sheep; and oftentimes, they come right into the “fold” of a local church, and spread their doctrine. They look at a church as a “recruiting ground” to find followers for themselves; and they slowly, subtly draw people away from the body, by secretly spreading their doctrines. In our modern day, this infiltration is easier than ever before, since people are able to bring all kinds of false teaching (which they have picked up from You Tube, or elsewhere on the internet) right into church, on their phone. Though the false teacher himself is not physically present, he *may as well* be present, because his doctrines are being carried right into the assembly. One pastor described it this way: “Now, thanks to the internet, you can find all kinds of experts to tickle all your fancies. With [one] man in our assembly, it got to a point where he was bringing his smart phone and computer to church and looking up the texts we were using in real time. Then he would raise his hand and contradict me by quoting the internet teacher... You want booze, we have a teacher for that. You want to be a pastor without meeting the qualifications, we have a teacher for that. You want to have women leaders, we have a teacher for that. You think your pastor is a bad guy, we have a teacher for that. You want to stop separating, we have a teacher for that... Anything you want, we have a teacher for that.”²

False teachers are crafty and insidious. They *look like good guys*; but they are “*wolves in sheep’s clothing*.” They turn lost people away from the strait gate of salvation; and they ensnare genuine Christians with false teachings, which cause them great spiritual harm. They have *not* gone through the Door of Jesus Christ to enter the local church (in other words, they do not have a genuine testimony of salvation): instead, they have been admitted into the sheepfold on the basis of a false testimony. As Jesus said, they have climbed up “*some other way*.” Paul had to warn the church of Corinth about this, because they were being hoodwinked by false teachers who were calling Paul’s apostolic authority into question, and who were craftily re-introducing a works salvation. In fact, *every* church that Paul established was infiltrated, to some degree, by false teachers (or else *was in imminent danger* of being infiltrated); and he was constantly having to warn the pastors and church leaders to be on the lookout for them! Just before he left Ephesus, Paul warned the pastor and elders to guard Christ’s flock, because he knew that as soon as he left, “*grievous wolves*” would enter in among them, “*not sparing the flock*.” By the way, folks, please pray for your pastor. There are often spiritual battles going on that few people in the assembly, or even *no one else* in the assembly (sometimes, not even the pastor’s wife) ever knows about; and as the undershepherd, I *must* protect and guard the flock. (If I *didn’t* do this unpleasant job, I would be nothing but a hireling!) Let’s see what Paul and the Lord Jesus said about false teachers.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 13-15.

Read John 10:1-2, 11-14.

We have seen that false teachers are insidious and crafty. How, then, can we know a false teacher when we see one? Let's look again at what Jesus said. **(Read Matthew 7:16-20.)**

In order to know a false teacher, you must closely examine his fruit. A good tree does not produce evil fruit; and an evil tree does not produce good fruit. By "fruit," Jesus is referring both to *doctrine* (what they are teaching), and to *practice* (how they actually live their lives). Thorn bushes don't produce grapes: and likewise, false teachers don't produce sound doctrine, nor godly living. Instead, they produce doctrine that *looks* godly, but is actually corrupt: and the way they and their followers actually *live their lives* will show it. How, then, can we distinguish right doctrine from false doctrine? **By the Word of God!** God's Word is the yardstick against which we must measure every teaching.

Read Isaiah 8:19-20.

We *cannot* go by our feelings, folks. Feelings are what *falsely professing* Christians go by. As Paul said in **2 Timothy 4:3**, there would come a time when ***"they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears."*** Sometimes, false teachers don't even try to hide their strategy: they just say it the way it is. For example, Dave Houston, the founder of the Hills Christian Life Centre in Sydney, Australia, built an incredibly wealthy megachurch by preaching a false "prosperity gospel"; and the Hillsong music movement, which launched from his church, rakes in millions upon millions of dollars every year. Why is Houston's church, and the Hillsong movement, so successful? A reporter from the *Sydney Morning Herald* once asked Houston that very question; and Houston's response was, "We are scratching people where they are itching."³ *That* says it all! False teachers are successful because they tell people things that they want to hear. If people want to hear that they must go through a labyrinth of strict religious rituals to earn their salvation (since it appeals to their sense of mystery, and their pride in earning their salvation), then that is the message they preach. If people want to hear that they can do "churchy" things, yet secretly indulge in their fleshly fantasies, because "no one has the right to judge me," then that is the message they preach. If they want to hear that perversion is acceptable to God, then that is the message they preach. (That is why the Hillsong movement now openly embraces and affirms the homosexual lifestyle!)

Jesus said, ***"Ye shall know them by their fruits."*** What, then, are the "fruits"? Let's turn to **2 Peter 2**, and examine Peter's description of false prophets.

Read 2 Peter 2:1-3.

In these verses, we see, first of all, that false teachers don't always come from the *outside* of a church: they often come from the *inside*. Peter says that there **“were false prophets”** among the people. What “people” is Peter talking about? He's talking about the nation of Israel, in Old Testament times. Usually, these false prophets did not deny the existence of Jehovah, or His marvellous works. They *talked* about Jehovah, and invoked His name. Yet, they gave false “prophecies” which contradicted God's Word, and which encouraged the people to add idol worship to their worship of Jehovah. Likewise, Peter warns that there will be **“false teachers”** among *us*, just as there were in Israel in Old Testament times. He's warning us to “be on guard”! The Lord had to command two of the seven churches of Asia to cast out false teachers from their assemblies; and so must we! Many Christians would say, “Well, I don't have the stomach for that.” Brethren, we'd *better* have the stomach for it, because apostasy can arise in *any* church. We must be ready to **“contend for the faith.”**

Now, look at what Peter says next. **(Read 2 Peter 2:2 again.)** Peter says that another “fruit” of false teachers is that they “deny the Lord that bought them.” (By the way, the fact that Jesus **“bought”** false teachers does not mean that they are saved: it simply means that they, like every other descendant of Adam, had their sins paid for on the cross, so that they *might* be saved. However, they have *not* embraced Christ's sacrifice by faith.) What, then, does Peter mean when he says that false teachers “deny the Lord”? Does he mean that these teachers openly say, “Jesus is false. Jesus is evil. Don't follow Jesus”? No, that's not what he means. On the contrary, apostates use words that make it appear that they are Christians. Yet, they present *another* Jesus—a “Jesus” other than the Jesus of the Bible. For example, they'll present a “Jesus” whose sacrifice on the cross is *not* all-sufficient—a Jesus who says that you must do good works, sacraments, or rituals in order to pay the debt for your sins. By teaching a false gospel of salvation, they are denying the Lord, and preaching “another Jesus.”

What other “fruit” do false teachers produce? They produce the “fruit” of large followings, and big money! **(Read 2 Peter 2:2-3 again.)** Please notice what Peter says here in **verse 2**. First, he describes the **“ways”** of apostate teachers. He calls their ways **“pernicious.”** What does **“pernicious”** mean? It means “destructive” or “ruinous.” Apostate teachers bring spiritual *destruction* to themselves and to their followers—both in this life, and in the next. That's pretty scary stuff! However, that's not all. Notice what Peter says about the *number* of people who follow their destructive ways. Does he say that “few” people follow them? No! He says that **“many”** follow their **“pernicious ways”**!

Let's face it: most people gauge a religion's “validity” according to how large its following is, or according to how much wealth it possesses, or how big and beautiful its buildings are. But what does the Bible say? The Bible indicates exactly the opposite! Throughout the Scriptures, the Lord refers to His people as a “remnant”—a *small* number. God assures us that the number of people who truly believe in Him is *small*. In **Luke 12:32** Jesus said, **“Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”** As we have just seen in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that those on the path that leads to destruction are *many*; and those who are on the path of life are *few*.

Now, what do false teachers *do* with their large followings? They fleece and butcher them! They “**make merchandise**” of them. They tell their followers that they must pay money to them in order to secure their salvation. In the case of the Catholic Church, they say that you must continue to pay for the souls of your relatives *even after death*, to get them out of Purgatory! Yet, the Bible makes it clear that salvation is a free gift, which Jesus paid for *in full* on the cross! The Bible also says that “**ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold....but with the precious blood of Christ.**” The palaces of Rome drip with gold and jewels; and they were built upon the backs of millions of poor people who believed that salvation can be purchased with money. My friends, don’t be deceived by false teachers, who take the simple Gospel of salvation through faith in the finished work of Christ, and twist it into a salvation through works and rituals, so that they might line their pockets, and make merchandise of you! Trust in *Christ alone*, and in His finished work on the cross!

Now, what else characterises false teachers? Let’s go back to **2 Peter 2**, and see.

Read 2 Peter 2:10-22.

We could spend many messages talking about this passage; but for sake of time, I will briefly sum it up. First, Peter says that false teachers “**despise governments,**” and are not afraid to speak evil of “**dignities.**” Just as Dathan, Abiram, and Korah were not afraid to malign Moses, so that people would follow *them*, so false teachers are not afraid to malign the pastor and other church leaders falsely, so that they might draw followers after *themselves*. They are like “**natural brute beasts.**” In other words, they are like animals, in that they have no spiritual understanding. They see things only according to the sight of the eyes, and according to outward appearances. As for their *eyes*, Peter says that their eyes are “**full of adultery.**” Oftentimes, they are sexual predators. They see the church as a wide open field to catch prey. They look for unstable souls—people who are not grounded in God’s Word, or who, like themselves, are not even saved—and treat them as “fresh meat.” They also love money; and they will tell any lie to acquire it. They give all kinds of promises of “health, wealth, prosperity, happiness, and freedom”; yet, they can’t deliver what they’ve promised. They are like wells that *look* as though they will provide spiritual water for the soul; yet, there is no water in them, because they are destitute of the Spirit of God. They are like clouds that *look* as though they will deliver rain; but they never do. They themselves may, at an earlier time in their lives, have been sincere in their search for truth; but they never found it. They had a *head knowledge* of the “**Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,**” but never a heart knowledge. They may have even gotten themselves morally cleaned up; and because they “cleaned up their act,” they appeared to have become Christians. Yet, they were never truly converted into one of Christ’s sheep. They never stopped being “dogs” and “swine,” spiritually speaking. They are like dogs or sows that have gotten out of the mud, and have gotten a bath; but their insatiable desire for that which is morally unclean eventually overtakes them. Eventually, they go back to the mud puddle of wickedness, and jump in (although they may continue to maintain their moral image *outwardly*, in order to keep their followers).

My friends, don't be taken in by false teachers. Jesus said, "***By their fruits ye shall know them.***" False teachers may *look* godly: but they are not. They are deceivers: and, tragically, not only have they deceived others, but oftentimes, they have *deceived themselves*. Let's go back to **Matthew 7**, and read further. (**Read Matthew 7:21-23.**) These are fearful words, my friends! Jesus says that many false teachers will one day stand before Christ to be judged, and will say, "***Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name have done many wonderful works?***" They will actually *think* that they were Christians: but they were not! Were these people once saved, but then *lost* their salvation? No! Jesus says that He will profess to these people, "***I never knew you.***" Jesus *never* had a relationship with them, because they *rejected* His offer of salvation through simple repentance of heart, and faith in Him.

By the way, perhaps you are wondering why these false teachers will claim to have "prophesied" in Jesus' name. Can false teachers *actually* exorcise demons, even though they themselves are unsaved? No, they cannot! The name of Jesus is not a "magic word" which anyone can "tap into," and use to cast out demons. Only Christ's apostles were given the power to command a demon to leave a person immediately; and only genuine Christians have the power, through prayer and fasting, to cast out demons. Those who try to cast out demons without having a personal relationship with Christ are opening themselves up to great harm!

Read Acts 19:11-16.

Now, let's get back to **Matthew 7**. If the false teachers that Jesus is talking about did not actually have the power to cast out devils, then why will they *say* that they cast out devils? Because even as they stand before Christ, they will be self-deceived! *Jesus* didn't say that these false teachers prophesied, or cast out devils, or did miracles: *they* will claim to have prophesied, cast out devils, and done miracles. Because they rejected Christ, they will remain in their sinful state for eternity; and in their sinful state, they will remain *self-deceived*. They will *actually believe* that they had power to do these things, when, in fact, they did not. Whatever supernatural powers they may have had were not from God, but from Satan.

By the way, while we're on the subject of the power of Jesus' name, I would point out that God *will* respond to a lost person who sincerely cries out to Him for deliverance—even if that person be not saved yet. For instance, many people who have been abducted by so-called "aliens" have, in desperation, cried out to Jesus for help; and they found, to their amazement, that the "aliens" began to recoil away from them in fear; and when they cried to Jesus again, the "aliens" vanished entirely. Many of these people have, shortly thereafter, found their way to the strait gate of salvation, and become genuine, born-again Christians. Why? Because they realised that these so-called "aliens" were nothing but demons who were deceiving them, and keeping them in spiritual bondage; and when they looked into God's Word to find the answers, they found Christ! My friends, there is *power* in Jesus' name: and anyone who will sincerely cries to Him for help will be heard!

Now, there is one more point that I would make about false prophets. We've learned about the *deception* of false prophets: now, we will learn about...

II. The damnation of false prophets (v. 19, 23)

(Read Matthew 7:19, 22-23.) Jesus says that *"in that day,"* many false prophets will stand before Him to be judged. What *"day"* is Jesus talking about? *"In that day"* is an expression that is used many times in the Old Testament; and almost every time it is used, it refers to *the day of the LORD*—that future time when Christ will deal with the world in judgment, and then in blessing. The term "Day of the LORD" refers to a total period of 1,007 years. In the first seven years of the Day of the LORD (the Tribulation period), God will pour out great judgments upon the world; but in the 1,000 years to follow, God will be deal with the world in *blessing*, as He rules and reigns the whole world from Jerusalem.

The *time* in history when this judgment will take place is important to understand. You'll notice that Jesus said, *"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven."* The term *"kingdom of God"* refers to the invisible, *spiritual* realm of all who are born again; but the *"kingdom of heaven"* refers to the *visible* kingdom that Christ will establish when He returns to earth. Throughout the book of Matthew, it is the *"kingdom of heaven"* that Jesus offered to the Jewish people. This means that the judgment that Jesus is referring to here in **Matthew 7** is not the final judgment of all the unsaved of all ages, which we read about in **Revelation 20**; rather, it is the *Judgment of the Nations*, which will take place here on earth, just after Christ has returned to earth at the Battle of Armageddon. We read about this judgment in **Matthew 25**.

Read Matthew 25:31-46.

The judgment that we are reading about here in **Matthew 7** (the "Judgment of the Nations") will be for all those who *survived to the end of the Tribulation period*; and it will be here on earth. This judgment will determine who will enter into the 1,000-year Kingdom of Heaven, and who will be cast into hell, to await the final Great White Throne judgment at the end of the world. All who rejected Christ during the seven years of the Tribulation period will be barred from entering the Kingdom; and the sole test of whether one was a true believer or not will be how he treated *"the least of these"*—Christ's brethren. By the end of the Tribulation, the line will be clearly drawn between the followers of Antichrist, and the followers of Christ. No one who chose to take the Antichrist's mark (and thus follow Satan) will have any sympathy for the followers of Christ, or for the Jewish people; and their refusal to give any help or quarter to persecuted believers, or to Jews, will reveal whose side they are on.

Yet, here is the amazing thing: many of the people who stand before Christ at the Judgment of the Nations will be false teachers who, at one time, were *professing Christians*. During the Tribulation period, they will ditch their profession of Christ in order to live; and some of them may even change their religious garb, and become priests in the new religion of Antichrist! Yet, at one time in their lives (before the Tribulation period began), they were supposedly serving Jesus, and casting out devils! How is this possible? Because they never were truly saved; and when they missed the Rapture, and the Tribulation period began, and it became a crime to be a Christian, they abandoned whatever profession that they had made. Jesus was never *real* to them, because they never knew Him.

Conclusion: As we close this morning, I would ask, “Do *you* know Him?” Do you personally have a relationship with Christ, because you have repented of your sin, and trusted in Christ alone to save you? If you haven’t, please listen to God’s Word! Jesus said, **“*I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth in me shall never thirst.*”** The Bread of salvation is free to all who will simply humble themselves, and receive Christ by faith. Believe that Jesus’ death on the cross is all that you need to be saved; and in your heart, turn to Christ from sin, and ask Him to come in and be your Lord. To those who are saved already I would ask, “Are you able to discern truth from error, because you are reading this Book daily?” If not, I urge you to get into the Book, so that you will not be led astray! If the people who sat under the *Apostles’* teaching were able to be led astray, we certainly are no better than they! Delve into God’s Book daily, so that you may know false teachers by their fruits!

¹ <https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/resources/william-tyndale-apostle-of-england/>

² Dr. David Cloud, “The Internet: Every Heretic at Your Fingertips,” from “Friday Church News Notes,” Way of Life Literature, October 13, 2023 - Volume 24, Issue 41, <https://outlook.live.com/mail/0/id/AQMkADAwATY0MDABLTlINGQtYWY2Zi0wMAItMDAKAEYAAAMveC%2BLiwB2.AkqVsRQRBsFCXwcAzVtUsjKgFU66HiTNxbn0%2FgAAAEMAAAZVtUsjKgFU66HiTNxbn0%2FgAHqUeKLQAAAA%3D%3D>.

³ Dr. David Cloud, “Darlene Zschech and Hillsong,” Way of Life Literature, October 12, 2022, https://www.wayoflife.org/database/darlene_zschech_and_praise.html.