

Sermon – 03/04/2011 am

Known By Your Fruit

Study Text: Luke 6:43-45

Some time ago a friend gave me some orchids and I now have a small collection at the back of the shed. The orchid plant is quite ordinary so behind the shed is the best place. The thing is that the plants all look the same – until they start to flower that is. It is only when the flower comes that I can distinguish between the plants. The flowers may be red, purple, yellow, white etc. Some have rather plain brown flowers. These will be going when they next flower. The others I will keep and propagate.

1. Trees

Jesus is a great teacher. He uses many metaphors and pictures to get his message across. He used the ridiculous picture of a man with log in his own eye trying to take the speck out of another man's eye to describe a hypocrite. He was telling the great multitude of disciples and others not to judge the faults of others when they had many faults themselves.

The picture changes in the following verse but the message is similar. It is about hypocrisy. It is about not being true to yourself. Jesus knows what we are like inside and out. He knows that our hearts are sinful and how our sinful hearts lead us astray. They lead us to partiality and favouritism, especially towards ourselves.

Sinful hearts are proud and selfish. Sinful hearts are not given to humility or honesty. Sinful hearts lead us to deceit and to covering up our sin. Let us beware of secret sins, remembering that nothing is hidden from the sight of God (Romans 2:16). People can only see the outside, but God knows us inside and outside. God looks on the heart.

Every tree is known by its own fruit (6:44). Jesus often drew pictures from his surrounds. Fig trees grew well on the hills of Galilee, as did weedy bushes. Sometimes these bushes might look like fig trees but they will never produce figs. No matter how much they are watered, fertilized and pruned they will not produce figs. Only fig trees produce figs. It is the same with a bramble bush. This will grow like a grape vine but will never produce grapes.

Every tree is known by the fruit it gives. This was clear to everyone listening to Jesus. Today we know that the blueprint of a tree is in the genes. It is the DNA that determines the type of plant and the type of fruit that will be produced. This knowledge only adds to the truth of what Jesus observed.

2. Treasure

Jesus was not giving a lesson on botany. He was teaching those gathered around him a fundamental truth about life. It is what is inside a person that makes them who they are. It is a person's heart that determines who they are and how they live. Jesus refers to the treasure that is in the heart of a man who does good (6:45).

By contrast the person with an evil heart does evil. Their evil heart is revealed by the evil things they do. There is a direct relationship between what is in a person's heart and what that person says and does. *Out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks* (6:45, Matthew 12:34).

'But what about a pagan person who does lots of good' you ask? He is not saved. His heart is sinful yet he does a lot of good. It is sometimes said that there are more Christians outside the church than inside. The world loves to say such things. But this judgment is based only on appearances, often selected appearances. We do not know what such people are like in their private life.

A man who did many good things in our society has just been released from prison where he served two years for lying under oath. We do not know what motivates such people. Ultimately it is God who judges a person's work, and God looks at the heart. The Bible says that all our righteous acts are as filthy rags in his sight.

We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us (Ephesians 2:10). Truly good works come from a truly renewed heart. They come from a heart that has been changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. *By grace you have been saved though faith and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast* (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

Truly good works come from a truly humble heart. They come from a heart that has been emptied of selfish pride and filled with the grace of God. The grace of God is good treasure. The heart of the believer is under the control of the HS. *If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has gone and the new has come* (II Corinthians 5:17, Romans 8:14).

In this sermon Jesus was preaching a radically new way of living. He was calling people to listen to God not men. He was teaching a new ethic, an ethic based upon a new heart, a heart transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

One morning as we walked through the bazaar of a town in India we came across a young man eating an omelette. There are no hot dog sellers in India but lots of boiled egg and omelette sellers. They are on the streets day and night. This young man said he had sneaked out of home to get an omelette. He was from a Jain family. These are strict vegetarians. They are the people who walk around with their mouth covered in case they swallow an insect. This young man appeared to be enjoying his omelette. Other young men have told us how they enjoyed a hamburger when they were in America even though their Hindu religion prohibits eating meat.

I sometimes wondered just how deep the religious 'faith' of these people was. Was there anything in their hearts that made them Hindu or Jain, or was their religion all about external things. We can ask the same question of Christians and of ourselves. Is there anything in our hearts that makes us Christian or are we just Christians on the outside – and busy keeping up appearances?

Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes 'the Puritans were very fond of dealing at great length with what they called 'temporary believers'. They meant by that, people who seemed to come under the influence of the gospel, and who gave the appearance of being truly and soundly converted and regenerate. Such persons said the right things and there was a change in their lives; they appeared to be Christian. But the Puritans called them temporary believers because those people gave clear, unmistakable evidence afterwards that they had never truly become Christians at all'.

3. Test

Every tree is known by its own fruit (6:44). What is in a person's heart will be revealed. By their fruits you will know them (Matthew 7:20). Jesus had alluded to the Pharisees in his comment about the blind leading the blind (6:39). In Matthew's gospel he was speaking about false prophets who come in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves (Matthew 7:15).

The Pharisees were very religious men. They endeavoured to keep the law to the smallest detail. They were legalists and as such did good works as required under the law. But inwardly they were corrupt. They were bad. This badness was revealed by Jesus. They sought to test him but in fact he tested them, and found them wanting. These outwardly righteous men turned out to be evil. In the presence of the Son of God they turned out to be murderers.

What does Jesus have to say to us from this lesson? The lesson is about hypocrisy. It is about putting on appearances. It is about saying one thing and doing another. It is about conversation and conduct that is consistent with our confession of Jesus Christ. By their fruit you will know them. What sort of fruit is hanging on the tree that is your life?

The 'temporary believers' the Puritans spoke about would have attended church. In the Old Testament we see the Jews attending to the sacrifices but not obeying God's word. In the New Testament we see the Pharisees making a great show of their praying and their giving but not obeying God's word as revealed in Jesus Christ. Still today people can join in worship and be very active in the church but not be obeying God's word. They may not have made a true confession and may not be born again of the Spirit of God.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness (Matthew 23:27). Whitewash does not stay on very long. With the first storm it is removed. It the same with nominal Christians. You will see their true colours the moment persecution comes. You will see those colours when they are challenged or suffer in some way.

People wearing a mask must take it off at some time. Observe a man when he is in his own home – that is where the mask comes off. Don't just listen to him preaching; listen to him talking to his wife and his children. By their fruit you will know them.

Attendance at worship is an obvious fruit in the life of a believer. If someone says he is born again and yet despises or neglects the gathering of God's people for worship, how can he pass the test? What is in a person's heart when they despise the house of God? There is no point in talking about good fruit if your heart is still ruled by self. There is no point in talking about good fruit if you never open your Bible, and never open your mouth to pray or praise God.

Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (6:45). Listen to what a person says – and does not say. Listen to what a person likes to talk about. By their fruits you will know them. Remember the fruits of the Spirit. Do you know them? Look in Galatians 5:22 – read them, learn them and bear fruit for to the glory of God.

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