

What Every Healthy Tree Will Do

How many of you, if you are children, or when you were, had a garden? Or, maybe your mom and dad wanted to teach you about plants so as an experiment you planted seeds to watch them grow. Maybe your grandparents had a garden or even some fruit trees and it was so neat to see the good things they grew. In the days of Jesus everyone would have been very familiar with the way fruits and vegetables are grown. Everyone would have known the answer to the question in **verse 16**: *Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?* Every child, would have known the answer is "No, of course not!" So Jesus builds on this, a truth about spiritual life everyone needs to understand. What is true of fruit trees is true of people, the evidence of healthy spiritual life is not what you say or claim but the good fruit of true faith. That's what this passage is about.

Through Christ, lives can not only be redeemed but transformed. Jesus Christ promised people he would bring change into their hearts and lives. He also taught that the evidence of his presence in our hearts would be the fruit of change in our lives. The good fruit seen in our lives would demonstrate the reality of our faith in him.

It's important for all of us to understand this. If you are struggling with uncertainty in your relationship to Christ, He wants you to resolve that so you can be deeply confident about his forgiveness *and* his presence. On the other hand if you have deceived yourself and think that you are fine when you are not, Christ wants you to reassess your relationship with him and get right with God. The words of Jesus in **Matthew 7** can help us with this.

One important principle Jesus clearly teaches in this passage is that...

I. IT IS INEVITABLE THAT A PERSON'S TRUE NATURE WILL REVEAL ITSELF IN LIFE.

Grapes do not grow on thorn bushes and figs do not grow on thistles. Trees bear fruit according to their kind and their health. **Verse 17** *So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.* It is inevitable, **verse 18**, *A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.* Jesus is talking about people.

A. What Jesus is saying is that true Christians have a new nature.

All through the *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus calls his disciples children of God. How does a human being become a child of God? It's not true that everyone is a child of God because Jesus says to *many people, I never knew you!* But if you go all the way back to the very beginning of Jesus' ministry you find the answer. **John 1:12-13** says, *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

Listen to another Scripture. **Ephesians 2:8-9** *For by grace, you have been saved through faith. (In Ephesians he's talking about faith that Jesus died for your sins and rose again as Lord and Savior) And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* So we never want to lose that clarity – but listen to what follows. **Ephesians 2:10**, *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus (that's the new birth) for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* Becoming a Christian is not just trying harder it's is going deeper. It is not turning over a new leaf; it is becoming a new person through God's grace.

B. The fruit of change in your life is not a condition for receiving Christ but a result of receiving Christ.

There's a British playwright named Murray Watts. He's been interviewed on the Cooper and Cary podcast. He writes plays that illustrate biblical truths. In one, he tells the story of a young man who had been intellectually convinced of the truth of Christianity because of the historical evidence for the truth of the gospel. However, he's concerned that if he were to commit to faith in Jesus, he would have to start talking to everyone about his faith. This scared him. He didn't want his friends to think he had gone crazy. He tried to just put it all out of his mind and go on with his life, but he couldn't get rid of the sense that Christ was calling him to come to him and follow him. When he couldn't stand the spiritual turmoil any longer, he went to an older man he knew who had been a Christian for a long time. He told the man how this fear of having to witness to everyone was made him afraid of becoming a Christian. The older man said: *“This is a matter between you and Christ. Why bring all these other people into it? Go home,” Go into your bedroom alone, forget the world. Forget your family. Make it a secret between you and God.”*

The young man felt as if an incredible weight had lifted as the older man spoke. He said: "You mean I don't have to tell anyone to become a Christian?"

"No," said the older man.

"No one at all?"

"Not if you don't want to."

No one had dared to give the young man this advice before.

"Are you sure?" Asked the young man because he so wanted to receive Christ. "Can this really be right?" he asked?

"It is right for you," said the older man.

The young man went home, knelt in prayer, and received Christ. He trusted in Christ and asked him to be his Lord and Savior. The first thing he did was to immediately run downstairs to where his wife, father, and three friends were hanging out in the kitchen. "Do you realize," He said, almost breathless with excitement, "that it's possible to be a Christian without telling anyone." What he had feared he would have to do, he now wanted to do without even thinking about it.

That kind of thing often happens when people come to Christ. There are changes that take place in your life, not as conditions for receiving Christ but as results! There's no cookie-cutter way it happens or pattern that it follows. It can be different for different people. Christ deals with each of us personally and individually and differently. But when Christ moves into your life with saving grace, there are changes that take place

We shouldn't push this to a ridiculous extreme as if to say that no true Christian ever does a bad thing. We know that isn't true. That would contradict what Jesus himself said in this same sermon. Just a few verses before this, he gave us the Lord's prayer in which he teaches his disciples to pray daily, asking for forgiveness. In **1 John 1:8**, the Bible shakes us out of any illusions of sinless perfection when it says: "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Jesus is not saying all true Christians are sinless.

What he is saying is this:

II. THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHO HAVE FALSE HOPES FOR HEAVEN AND ETERNAL LIFE. DON'T BE ONE OF THEM.

In **verses 21-23**, we are given two very common kinds of false hopes that people embrace.

A. The first false hope is hope in a correct confession of faith.

In **verse 21**, The Lord says, *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.* In Scripture, the characteristic confession of true Christians is: "Jesus Christ is Lord." However, Jesus Christ himself tells us here that the correct confession of His Lordship is not in itself a sure hope that we will spend eternity with Him. It is possible to confess with your lips a truth that you do not really understand have not truly embraced and do not actually believe.

I once did a Google search for the phrase, "I thought I was a Christian." I found story after story of people going to church, even doing mission trips and Christian service, but who came to realize they had never grappled with their own soul's relationship to God and seriously, prayerfully committed to him, to trust in him and to ask him to save their souls. I once heard a Christian describe his roommate this way: "He has all the right words, but none of the music in his heart." He was saying his friend had the right words about Jesus, but he did not seem to possess the life of Christ and the reality of the presence of Christ.

The first false hope in which people often wrongly trust is a correct confession of faith.

B. The second false hope in which people often wrongly trust is the false hope of spiritual experiences.

Verses 22-23 *On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’* How is it possible that someone could make such claims if Jesus says: *“I never knew you”?*

There are at least three possibilities.

(1) The Bible tells us that God sometimes gives amazing experiences and surprising powers to people who have not received his saving grace. In **1 Samuel 10:10**, king Saul prophesied. Jesus sent his disciples out to perform miracles, and Judas was one of them. He was never truly saved, in my opinion.

But there's a second possibility for these claims.

(2) The Bible tells us that sometimes Satan performs miracles. In **Matthew 24:24**, Jesus says: *"false Christ's and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead if*

possible even the elect (the chosen people of God)." Satan can sometimes work counterfeit miracles to mislead and confuse.

And there's a third possibility for these claims.

(3) Some claims like these are simply false. Sometimes people deceive themselves into thinking they have experienced and even done things that are supernatural and special when they have been deceived.

Ultimately it doesn't matter where these claims come from. The point is some people will say to Christ, *"I called you 'Lord.' I prophesied! I even did miracles in your name!"* Christ warns us that to *"many"* who say this to him, he will say, *"go away, I never knew you,...."*

This is something that should be taken seriously. Some today will say I don't believe any of this, so I don't think any of that is true. They say, *"I'm not religious. I'm a rational person. I want to live my life based on facts, not faith."* Please consider this. Years ago, there was a brilliant French thinker named Pascal. He was a tremendous mathematician and a philosopher, and he was a believer in Jesus. But he had many conversations with people who were not, so he came up with this idea called Pascal's Wager. It was a way of getting people to think about the issues differently. The idea goes something like this: he's a man who believes in God, Jesus, judgment day, and two very different destinies, some people are saved, and some people are lost. We're talking heaven and hell. Not some cartoon version but truly different spiritual and eternal destinies. Here's another man who doesn't believe in God, or if there is a God, he doesn't think there is an afterlife in which people are separated the saved from the lost. Now it is clear that the first man, the believer is a man of faith. What isn't immediately clear but is just as true is that the second man is also acting on faith. Why because he can not prove that there is no God, and there is no judgment, and there is no afterlife. The point Pascal made is that both man are gambling their whole lives and all of their eternity faith commitments. They are both wagering, and everything is at stake. Pascal was saying everyone is gambling with their souls, and they owe it to themselves to investigate the claims of Jesus thoroughly. The evidence is there for those who seek. So "yes," some people today will say whatever you believe, and whatever path you take in life in the end, they all lead to the same destination - the same place. Jesus says, "No. Your choices in life lead to different outcomes and differentiated destinies." Jesus makes it clear how urgent and serious it is that you take an honest,

careful look at your life and your faith. In **verse 19**, He says; *Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. The main point of ruling out these claims is to stress this truth:*

III. THE ONLY CERTAIN HOPE OF ETERNAL SALVATION IS A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST THAT BEARS THE FRUIT OF OBEDIENCE TO GOD.

The words of Jesus suggest two questions each of us should ask...

A. First, "Have I Genuinely Received Christ By Faith So That I Have A Personal Relationship With Him?"

When Christ says, "*I never knew you.*" he does not mean that he didn't know that they existed. The word "*know*" in the Bible is often used to describe an intimate relationship, a personal relationship. Jesus does not say, "*I knew you once, but I don't know you now.*" He is not saying you can receive salvation and then lose it. He is saying you can think that you have it when you do not any real relationship with him.

The first question: "Have I genuinely received Christ so that I have a personal relationship with him?" The second question is also important:

B. Second, "Do I See, In My Life, The Evidence Of A Relationship With Christ Revealed In The Fruit Of Obedience To God?"

In **verse 21**, Jesus says: "*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*" The best evidence of a new birth is not some vague leaning into goodness. It not even doing a lot of Christian things, but that you are doing the will of the Father in heaven. It's one thing to choose to do for God what you want to do for him. It's another thing to choose to *submit* to God's will in areas you would not have chosen. That is the truest expression of saving faith. The willingness to surrender your will to God's will is the most powerful evidence that Christ is at work in you.

We saw earlier that you don't have to be perfect for the evidence of authentic faith and a genuine spiritual rebirth to be seen in you. That's true, but shouldn't we want and aspire to a life in which the evidence of Christ is us clear, compelling, beautiful, and abundant. Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, **Matthew 5:16**, Jesus said, *let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.* So live that your light shines brightly and gives glory, not to you, but to your gracious Father

Do people see you as a child of God who loves Jesus more clearly than they see you as a supporter of this or that movement or political party? Do they see your love for God and others more clearly than your animosity toward those you disagree with? May God forgive us, guide us, and transform us by his grace. G.K. Chesterton said, "*The only good argument against Christianity is Christians.*" That's something to think about.

Christ died for our sins and rose again for our salvation. But the only salvation he offers is one in which our sins are not only forgiven but we ourselves are changed. We don't earn it we receive it by repentance and faith. Sincerely wanting Christ, not only to forgive you but to give begin in you a new life, genuinely wanting and being willing for Christ to renew and change you is part of what the Bible calls repentance. Believing Jesus Christ died and rose again for your salvation and trusting him to give you His gracious gifts of forgiveness and new life, the Bible calls faith. Turn to Christ and trust in Him with *that* kind of faith. There's nothing more important. Repent and believe the gospel.

Conclusion

You need to examine your life and faith carefully. I saw a little bit of *Ripley's Believe It Or Not* on the computer. I had heard about this segment about "The Human Cannon Ball". It was filmed here in Daytona Beach. This man gets shot out of a cannon. They showed the video of the last time he had done this. The cannon goes off. It seems like he flies high and out over a hundred feet through the air. Then, he misses the net and lands with a thud in the dirt and lies there like a rag doll. I would not have been surprised if they had said that he died. Can you imagine the instant you realize the blurry thing you just flew past was the net that was supposed to save you? He didn't die. In fact, he was going to do it again, and they were filming it. It was right here in our town. So they showed him getting ready. He was so careful. They showed him measuring the exact placement of the huge airbag that would break his fall. They filled a sack up with sand to match his weight exactly and fired it out of the cannon and measured and adjusted and made sure they got it right. Makes sense. When the stakes are high, you want to be careful.

Christ wants us to understand the issues are never more serious than when we are dealing with our eternal destiny and our relationship to God. Let's truly turn to him!

Amen.

Prayer of Response

Our gracious Savior, today I come to you with a humble heart asking for the fulness of your salvation. I praise you for the gift of spiritual rebirth that imparts your saving grace. I thank you for the death and resurrection of Jesus that atones for my sins and grants me eternal life. I praise you for the conviction that awakens my need and the faith that draws me to Jesus. He is my Lord and Savior and I am your grateful child. May you so work in me and I so trust in and submit to you that your grace is evident to the world. May the fruit of true faith in me bring glory to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.