The Life of Jesus (31)

A Good Tree And Good Fruit

Matthew 7:17-20

#1 A Good Tree and Good Fruit

A lot of passages in the Bible warn about false prophets or false teachers.

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." (Mt 7:15)

We should watch out for false teachers, and we should be able to identify them. Even though it's not easy to do, Jesus tells us about a simple way to recognize them.

"By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?" (Mt 7:16)

One of the ways to recognize false teachers is to look at their fruits. Here, fruits basically refer to their ways of life—how they speak, act, spend their time and money, relate to others, and more.

These tell us what they really follow—the ways of the world or God's will. If they follow the ways of the world, they will bear fruits of the world. But if they truly follow God's will, they will bear spiritual fruits.

#2 A Good Tree and Good Fruit

The same principle applies to Christian life.

Going to church on Sunday or professing their faith publicly doesn't really guarantee that they are true Christians. What shows whether we really belong to Jesus or not is the fruits of our lives.

"Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them" (Mt 7:17-20)

If you want to know whether a tree is good or bad, you can simply look at its fruit. That's how we check if we have true faith in Jesus or not.

Unless we actually allow Jesus to be the Lord of our lives and transform our lives into his good image, and unless we experience his presence changing our perspective and the way we live, we can't guarantee that we truly belong to him.

#3 The Purpose of Israel: Fruits

Bearing fruit is not a concept that only appears in the New Testament. The Scriptures say that God's purpose in choosing Israel was to make it bear good fruits for the whole world.

"You transplanted a vine from Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. Its branches reached as far as the Sea, its shoots as far as the River" (Ps 80:8-11)

The Psalmist said that God transplanted a vine from Egypt, which refers to the exodus of Israel. God not only planted the vine, but also cleared the ground and took care of it so that the vine could grow big enough to fill the land and produce lots of fruit.

God wanted its branches and shoots to reach to the ends of the earth so that other nations could rest under its shadows.

#4 The Purpose of Israel: Fruits

But Israel failed to bear good fruits. They failed to show God's goodness to other nations through their fruits. As a result of their failure to bear good fruits, God said that he would destroy his vineyard.

Isaiah chapter 5 tells us about God's purpose in making his vineyard. It also tells us about the Israelites' failure and God's judgment on them.

"My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit." (Is 5:1-2)

Here, my loved one refers to God, and the vineyard represents Israel. Because he did everything he could for his vineyard, it was natural for him to expect good grapes from the vines. But even though he looked for good fruit, the vines only yielded bad fruit.

#5 The Purpose of Israel: Fruits

"What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it." (Is 5:4-6)

There was nothing wrong with the way God took care of the vines. The problem was with the vines themselves. So, God said that he wouldn't take care of his vineyard anymore but destroy its protection so that it would be trampled.

"The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress." (Is 5:7)

#6 The Purpose of Israel: Fruits

God took care of the Israelites. He delivered them from Egypt and gave them good land. He protected them and made them a great nation among other nations. He chose them and blessed them.

But the Israelites failed to reflect God's justice and righteousness. They failed to be God's blessing. Rather they worshiped idols and their fruits were injustice and unrighteousness. That's the reason God decided to bring his wrath on them.

"I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?" (Jr 2:21)

"Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: As I have given the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest as fuel for the fire, so will I treat the people living in Jerusalem." (Ezk 15:6)

That's the result of failing to bear good fruits as God's vines.

#7 The Purpose of Israel: Fruits

We also find a similar parable in Luke 13.

"A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' "'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'" (Lk 13:6-9)

In this parable, the owner of the vineyard is God, the caretaker is Jesus, and the fig tree refers to God's people. If they fail to bear good fruits, God will cut them down, which refers to his judgment.

But there is a mediator between God and the trees—Jesus. As mediator, he will do his best to take care of the trees and try to restore them so that they can bear good fruits and not be subject to God's wrath.

#8 How To Bear Good Fruits

Then, the important question is how we can produce good fruits of faith as God's people.

We should remember that we can't bear good fruits on our own. Only when we rely on Jesus Christ and remain in him, will we naturally produce good fruits in our lives through his power.

"Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (Jn 15:4-5)

That's the only condition he requires us to meet. We should remember that we're nothing more than branches. what really enables branches to bear fruit doesn't depend on the branches themselves, but on their roots.

That's what faith means. To believe in Jesus is to acknowledge him as our Lord and surrender our lives to him.

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Memory Verses

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (Jn 15:5) (1)

"Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit... Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them" (Mt 7:17, 20) (1)

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Mt 7:21) (1)

Questions

1) Why do you think it is important for us to bear good fruits as Christians? What are good fruits of faith we should produce? What kind of fruits do you want to bear in your life?

2) What is the most important condition to bear good fruit that Jesus requires us? Why is it important for us to continue to remain in him? And how can you do so?