

Matthew 7:15-23

Vicar Peter D. Preus (08/07/2022)

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Muncie, IN

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus says, **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”** The thing is, though, is that all prophets, both true and false, come in sheep’s clothing.

Prophets are those who teach. They claim to have the right to teach with authority. The sheep’s clothing, which all prophets wear, is an appearance of trustworthiness and credibility, even purity. Those who are true prophets, who indeed are sheep, look like sheep. But those who are false prophets, who indeed are actually ravenous wolves, who want to kill your soul, *also* look like sheep. They look innocent enough. And this is why Jesus tells you not to judge prophets by what they look like, but rather Jesus says, **“You will recognize them by their fruits.”**

Now, how do you know if a fruit is good or bad? Well, you would have to eat it! But some fruit can make you sick, even kill you. A fruit that kills you is obviously bad fruit. God wants to prevent you from even trying bad fruit. Yet, still, without eating the fruit, God wants you to be able to recognize the bad fruit for what it is and to beware of it. Other fruit, however, gives you life and sustains you. Life-giving and life-sustaining fruit is good fruit. God wants you always to be fed with good fruit.

Fruit represents that which is taught by the prophet, especially as it pertains to the effect that the teaching has on your soul. So how does the fruit which the prophet sets before you affect you when you eat it? When consumed, does the fruit, or teaching, contradict what God’s Word says? Does it tell you to believe or to do something contrary to the Christian faith? If so, then this fruit is bad, and it will kill your soul. Or when you eat the fruit does it agree with what God’s Word says? Does it uphold the pure doctrine of the Christian faith and encourage you to do good works in faith? Then this fruit will sustain your soul unto everlasting life.

It's really interesting to think about the spiritual effect that eating fruit has had on our ancestors. It determined what they believed, what they thought about God, and even the condition of their souls.

The account from Genesis, when Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil literally happened. Real fruit was literally eaten by Adam and Eve, which changed the way their conscience responded to the voice of God. Before Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they were not sinners. They, with every bite of the good fruit from any number of the good trees, enjoyed a peaceful and joyful conscience. They were truly grateful toward God for this fruit. And this good fruit was all that they ever ate. Consequently, they heard the Word of God and were not afraid. But when doubt was invented by the devil to deceive our first parents, Adam and Eve chose to despise the Word of God, heed the word of the devil, and to eat the fruit which God commanded them not to eat. And it changed them. Their conscience became terrified as God came near to them.

The fruit about which Jesus speaks, though not literal fruit like the Genesis fruit, still has the same spiritual effect. God's Word sustains you. It alone gives you life. You need to eat of it every single day. And whether you realize it or not, you are eating spiritually good or bad fruit all of the time. And you can know if good or bad prophets are feeding you based on what their fruit does to your soul. Bad fruit will contradict the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures and will lead you to sin, self-justification, unbelief, and hellfire.

So if you think that there is a place within your Christian life for activities which the Bible clearly calls sinful, it's because you've been eating bad fruit. You've been listening to wolves, to false prophets, who are trying to kill you by giving you poisonous fruit. You may have heard these false prophets in places where you didn't even know that they were feeding you. But Jesus says, "Beware of them!"

There is absolutely no place in your life for getting drunk, even if some country-music prophet thinks it's funny and cool to do so. No, drunkenness will destroy your faith and your soul. Beware of false prophets!

There is absolutely no place in your life for viewing explicit images or videos, even if the prophets of Hollywood, Netflix, and Amazon Prime tout how normal it is. No, sexual immorality is the opposite of normal. It destroys what is normal. It will poison your mind and your soul. Beware of false prophets!

There is absolutely no place in your life for gossip, even if the person you're slandering already has a bad reputation. And even if the prophets, who may be your coworkers, your friends, or an anchor from your favorite news outlet—even if these false prophets say that you shouldn't feel bad about hating someone whom that false prophet himself has demonized. No, repent of demonizing and slandering anyone for whom Jesus shed His blood! And repent of eating the fruit of any false prophet.

But the prophet who gives you good fruit will never tell you to break God's Law. God's Law is good. Instead of pointing you to drunkenness, lust, gossip, or any other sin, the true prophet will exhort you to be sober, self controlled, chaste, and to speak well of your neighbor. The true prophet will love the Law of God. Because the true prophet will teach what Jesus teaches.

You will truly know that a prophet's fruit is good if he warns you of your sin and points you to Christ crucified as the only true Tree of Life. Pray that God give you the fruit from the Tree of Life constantly. Yes, a true prophet works for Christ. A true prophet will gladly give you the good fruit which Christ has commanded him to give to you. Demand this good fruit from your prophet. A true prophet will love you for it.

The fruit of Christ, the Tree of Life, is His teaching. It is the same teaching which you have today in the Holy Scriptures. Jesus teaches that you need Him; that His teaching is pure and holy, and life-giving. Jesus does not compromise His teaching. Even when it led Him to His bloody death on the cross in your place, Christ abided in His teaching and fulfilled the Word of God which promises to save you from your sin. Behold, the fruit He bore on that cursed tree.

Yes, the punishment for your sins Jesus bore in His holy limbs. It was just hours before He was nailed to the tree where He took your curse upon Himself, that great drops of Jesus' precious blood flowed forth in agony from His every pore. What

must have looked like an awful fruit tree, languishing away in the Garden of Gethsemane, was really the most beautiful Tree of Love and Life. Yes, the Tree of Life was nailed to a tree designed for death. But in death, this Tree of Life bore the fruit which gives you eternal life.

His obedience, self control, and self-sacrifice for you on the cross, has wiped away your every selfish, filthy, and indulging sin. Even those from the deepest, darkest, crevices of your broken heart. Even that of drunkenness. Even that of lust. Even that of slander or gossip.

See how Christ denies Himself every pleasure as He hangs on that tree for you! He is faithful in His promise to save you from your sin, even when you have been *unfaithful* in thought, word, and deed. Yes, even when you sought comfort and rest in your own sinful pleasures—Christ’s faithfulness to you overcomes your sin. Jesus’ love and compassion calls out to His Father in Heaven, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Accept Me as the sacrifice in their place.” Yes, He drank the cup of His Father’s wrath to save you from your sin. To free you from it!

This teaching, which confesses Christ crucified in your place for the forgiveness of all of your sins and of the sins of all people—this teaching is the most precious of all fruit. Eat this fruit—the teaching of the forgiveness of all of your sins for Christ’s sake—yes, eat this fruit right up.

So yes, Adam ate the fruit of death. But from Christ’s fruit you eat life. You see in Christ His blood shed for you in agony during His Passion and Crucifixion, His blood which is the price of your salvation. His same blood, which covers you even today. Just think about that. Your life, your salvation, no matter who you are, is so precious that it required the blood of God as a payment.

So, dear Christians, do not be sluggish in the faith. No, be confident. Get up and eat up the Scriptures. In them is truth and love and *life*. You need this all. And this is all you need. Because faith is your only shield and the Word of God is your only weapon against the devil. The devil wants you to doubt the Scriptures. And the devil attacks true prophets at every front. He attacks your prophet. The devil hates true prophets and tries to poison them with bad fruit. Be on guard for the sake of

your pastor and for yourself. If your pastor is poisoned, he will poison you, too. Pray for him, and watch his teaching. Encourage him when he preaches the Truth. Ask him to clarify anything which seems to contradict God's Word. Have high standards for preaching. The highest! You need good fruit to live. Hunger to be fed with this good fruit. Hunger for pure doctrine. Hunger that your own sinful flesh be rebuked by God's Law from the pulpit. But most especially, when you confess your sins, hunger to hear that your sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, and that the death and resurrection of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ alone has the power to reconcile you to your God and Father. Indeed, through Christ, you are reconciled to God.

This, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, shall be the fruit which satisfies your hunger, this teaching. So be like those in the church of Berea from Acts 17, who searched the Scriptures daily. Let no one twist God's Word to fit his own agenda. Memorize Luther's Small Catechism and read it often. Be confident in and comforted by what the Scriptures teach.

And because you are a Christian, you too, are a healthy tree bearing good fruit. It's as Jesus says, **"every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit."** You are a healthy tree. You do bear good fruit. This is because the Holy Spirit dwells in you and causes you to confess the true doctrine, and to live in repentance and faith that your sins are forgiven. But you aren't a healthy tree because what you do is good. What you do is good, because you are a healthy tree. And you're a healthy tree because of Who has planted you. You are planted by Christ. He has given the roots of your tree an everlasting, life-giving, water in Holy Baptism. These roots will never thirst. And He graciously sustains you with His Word and Sacrament. May your soul always hunger for the pure Word and the Sacrament. Rejoice, dear Christians! You are planted to be with the Tree of Life and all the faithful forever, in the garden of paradise.

In Jesus' name.