

By their fruits ye shall know them

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Preacher: Rev W.Macleod

[0 : 00] We shall now turn to this passage which we read together. The Gospel of Matthew chapter 7. And we shall read again verse 20. The Gospel of Matthew chapter 7 and verse 20.

Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them. By their fruits ye shall know them. The picture here is simple.

Maybe, for example, you've never seen a vine. You don't know what it looks like. Yet, if you saw a, what should I call it, a tree or a bush.

With grapes, bunches of grapes growing on it. Then you would know that that was a vine. Similarly, you might never have seen an orange tree.

But yet, if you saw a tree growing with oranges growing on it. Then you would know that that was an orange tree. The idea is, a tree is known by its fruit.

[1 : 14] Similarly, Christians are known by their fruit. By their fruit ye shall know them. The first point, then, that I would like us to notice here today is, that a fruit tree naturally produces its own kind of fruit.

A fruit tree naturally produces its own kind of fruit. People don't gather grapes off thorns or figs off thistles. Fruit doesn't make a fruit tree.

You could say you had, for example, a fir tree or a pine tree or a sycamore tree. A tree which doesn't bear fruit. And then you took along some apples and you stuck them on the fir tree.

That wouldn't change the fir tree into an apple tree. You would have to change the nature of the tree before you could change it into an apple tree.

You would have to change the wood that it was composed of. You would have to change its shape. You would have to change its leaves. You would have to change its sap. You would have to change the whole tree before you could change a fir tree, for example, into an apple tree.

[2 : 40] And this, of course, emphasizes to us that it's not enough, as it were, to polish the outside. To hang up a few apples on our fruit tree, as it were.

To make our tree into a tree which bears good fruit. It emphasizes to us that we need a radical change in our lives.

That we need to be transformed. You must be converted. It's not enough to just change one or two things on the outside. To try doing good works.

Good works are fruit. But if the tree hasn't been changed inside, then the good works don't really stick properly. They don't come naturally from the tree.

They're artificial. They're hypocritical. We need to be changed from the inside out. Transformed. We need to be born again.

[3 : 46] Trying to bear the apples when you're still an old fir tree is no use. You must be born again, said Christ. You can't put new wine into old bottles.

Otherwise the bottles will burst. You can't put a piece of new cloth, unshrunk cloth, onto an old garment.

Otherwise the rent, the tear, will be made worse. Because the new cloth will just pull in the old garment. Similarly, it's not enough just to try patching up an old man.

You need to be made new. Each one of us need to be a new creation in Christ Jesus. New from the inside. New men and new women.

New women. So, just sticking on fruit doesn't make a fruit tree. Just trying to do one or two good works here and there doesn't make us into a fruit tree.

[4 : 55] Then, secondly, under this heading, the production of fruit is natural to the real fruit tree. A vine normally produces grapes.

A fig tree normally produces figs. It's natural for the apple tree to produce apples. You don't have to force the fig tree to produce figs or force the apple tree to produce apples.

It just comes naturally. It's in the very nature of the apple tree to produce apples. And here, of course, you find tremendous encouragement to the person who's concerned about their soul and seeking salvation.

Maybe you feel that you could never come up to the Christian standard. That you could never live as a Christian supposed to live. You feel that your heart is so wicked.

You feel that you are so twisted. So evil. That you could never come up to that standard. And, of course, you never could in your own strength and without being born again.

[6 : 12] This is the great thing. When you're born again, Christianity comes naturally to you. Of course, we must admit that as Christians we sin. We do many things wrong.

But what a difference there is between the Christian and the non-Christian. The Christian has the capacity to bear fruit. The sort of natural ability because they've got a new nature.

It's so difficult, so impossible for the person who's trying to be good living without being converted. You're trying to be interested in Christian things and trying to show love and kindness and meekness and humility and all the rest of it.

And it all seems so impossible and so easy to slip back again into your old sins. But the great thing is if you're born again you're made a good fruit tree.

You're made like the vine which naturally produces grapes. And so there's tremendous encouragement for you here. The production of fruit is natural to the real fruit tree.

[7 : 25] What you need is to be born again and then it'll come easy to you. It'll be natural to you. And your chief desire and your deepest wish your greatest longing will be to be fruitful for God to live for him and to stop sinning.

As Christians we do many things wrong but our heart's desire is to please God. And then further under this heading thirdly the purpose of a fruit tree is to produce fruit.

That's the reason why we have a fruit tree. It's to produce fruit good fruit that is. The reason why you plant apple trees in your garden is that you'll have apples.

Or a pear tree so that you'll have pears. The reason why you have gooseberry bushes and blackcurrant bushes in your garden is that you'll have gooseberries and blackcurrants or blackberries.

The purpose of a fruit tree then is to produce fruit. And of course the purpose of a Christian in this life is to produce fruit for God. The reason why we exist indeed the purpose of every man and woman the purpose of your existence is to produce fruit for God.

[8 : 56] To glorify God. That's why you're in the world. And it's only by asking yourself am I producing fruit for God that you're going to find out if you're really fulfilling your responsibility your duty your position in this life.

God created you to glorify and enjoy him that is to bear fruit and if you're not doing it then you're unfruitful you're barren. And so in this passage we see every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.

Trees are expected to bear fruit. What's the use of a fruit tree an apple tree that doesn't bear apples? You just cut it down and throw it away. It's useless. It's abnormal.

There's something wrong with it. It's no use to anybody. And Christ says to us John 15 verse 16 You have not chosen me but I have chosen you and ordained you that you might bear fruit and that your fruit should remain.

I've chosen you and I've ordained you. Way back there long before you came into existence way back in eternity I elected you and ordained you so that you might be fruit bearing.

[10 : 24] That's the purpose of our existence in this world to bear fruit for God. I wonder then are you a cumberer of the ground?

Remember the parable Jesus told about the man who planted a fig tree in his vineyard and then he came year after year looking for figs in that fig tree and there was nothing to be seen and he cared for it and he looked after it and still there was no figs in it.

What's the use of it? Cut it down. Why cumber it with the ground? It's just taking up space it's just using up the good soil it's easy enough to get another fig tree. Is God saying that about you?

Why are you cumbering the ground? Just filling in space cut it down cast it into the fire it's no use. And then the vine dresser says leave it for one more year just one more year and I'll try again and I'll dig about it and I'll dung it and I'll prune it and I'll care for it one more year and then if it doesn't bear fruit cut it down.

Is God saying that about you? I'll give you one more year or has he said you've had your year? Are you a cumberer of the ground or are you bearing fruit?

[11 : 56] we need to examine ourselves because the very purpose of our existence is so that we might bear fruit to God and also we must strive to bring forth more fruit if we are bearing fruit then we should try and bring forth more fruit for God because that's the reason why we exist and that's the way we can please our master please our God we must strive to bring forth more fruit and fourthly there's a warning here the warning is every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire shall warning every one of us those who aren't

Christians if you haven't even started to bear fruit there's a warning there for you and those who are Christians there's a warning there for you too how much fruit are you bearing?

every tree that beareth not fruit is hewn down cast into the fire a fruit tree then naturally produces its own kind of fruit secondly a useful tree is distinguished from a useless tree on the basis of the fruit which it bears you can distinguish the useful tree the good tree from the bad tree the evil tree the corrupt tree the useless tree on the fruit that the trees bear by their fruits you shall know them by their fruits you can distinguish a good tree from a bad tree this section of the sermon on the mount starts with Jesus talking about false prophets beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravening wolves he shall know them by their fruits false prophets coming amongst the sheep just like sheep they've got wool on them and they look from the outside exactly the same as the sheep but inside they're ravening wolves they're not there to bear fruit they're not there to help the sheep but they're there to prey on the sheep to destroy them and to tear them apart beware of false prophets that come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravening wolves you shall know them by their fruit they come in disguise but do men do men gather figs or thorns or grapes or thistles know you'll know them by their fruit a thistle that bears thistles fruit a thorn bears thorns fruit which is nothing useless and so every teacher who comes our way every minister we hear every preacher we must examine them and examine their message to see are they false prophets it's not enough to ask the question do they seem to have converts because people can have converts without necessarily being good prophets

I remember being told about a minister who was living in sin with another man's wife and at the same time was seen it would seem lots of conversions in his congregation conversions in and of itself is not a sufficient guide to good fruit even unconverted ministers could have conversions because God can use even Satan for the glory of his name so what must we do when we're looking for fruit we must view the whole life of an individual and every area of that man's life we mustn't just view one narrow area like converts or being able to preach or being good in prayer or being kind to the poor we must take everything together we must view the whole life of an individual in every area secondly we must take a long term view of it it's not enough just to look at a narrow section of a person's life or a person's work because a person might seem to be getting on really well for a short period and then maybe all the fruit which he had will wither away we must take a long term view of the situation and look for lasting fruit and then thirdly the clearest fruit of all is obedience to the revealed will of God and if there is disobedience to the Bible it doesn't matter what else there might be that's a false prophet obedience to God's word is the clearest fruit of all doesn't matter what other fruit might seem to be there if obedience and a humility before God's word is not pleasant then what we have is a false prophet sometimes we're too keen on looking for outward dramatic results the most important thing is faithfulness to the revealed will of God but this passage isn't just talking about teachers or preachers or ministers it's talking about every

Christian look at verse 21 not everyone that saith unto me Lord Lord shall enter into the kingdom of heaven but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven many will say to me in that day Lord Lord have we not prophesied in thy name and in thy name cast out devils and in thy name done many wonderful works then will I profess unto them I never knew you depart from me ye that work in equity not everyone who says Lord who says Lord Lord not everyone who seems to be religious not everyone who prays not everyone who comes to church not everyone who seems to be very godly and upright will get to heaven and not everyone who seems to be and not everyone who seems to have very dramatic fruit in their lives who performs miracles and heals the sick and casts out devils and does all sorts of great and dramatic works not everyone who prophesies and who foretells the future by the power of

[19 : 54] God or whatever not every one of them shall get to heaven we've got to examine ourselves and see is it the right fruit that's there examine every area of our lives not just some sort of dramatic frothy fruit on the surface but that inward constant abiding fruit is it there sometimes it's not so easy for the person himself to see the fruit Jesus says by their fruits ye shall know them or other people shall know you by your fruit sometimes it's very difficult for the true Christian to see any fruit in their own life but the people around them their friends their neighbours their relatives they'll see the fruit by their fruits ye shall know them a useful tree then is distinguished from the useless one in the fruit that it bears and we must in looking for fruit view a person's whole life take a long term view of it and remember that obedience to God's word is the clearest fruit of all finally it's important for us to look at some of these fruits that we are supposed to bear by their fruits ye shall know them what then are these distinguishing fruits that belong to the Christian we've already mentioned the most important the first one obedience to God's word a reverence before God's law a desire to do what God says to us in the scriptures and to try as best we can to keep

God's commandments that's the first fruit of a Christian the second one that I would mention is poverty of spirit blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven the person who's poor in spirit is a person who's conscious of his own sinfulness mourning over sin blessed are they that mourn the person who's conscious of not having come up to the standard that God has set the person who's always longing to be better and feeling that they're getting nowhere feeling that they're doing so little for God oh that I would bear more fruit oh that I would be more useful to God oh that I could be more pleasing to him is that your attitude or is your attitude well I'm not really doing such a bad job with my life after all I've got just as much fruit in my life as so and so and there's that person that calls themselves a

Christian and well I think I've got just as much fruit in me that sounds very like a person who's just like the fir tree and sticking apples on the outside of the fir tree a truly converted person changed from the inside is yearning to bring forth more fruit and feels that they're doing nothing for God blessed are the poor in spirit so poverty of spirit is a great mark and distinguishing fruit for Christians another thing is interest in Christian things an interest in the Bible an interest in prayer an interest in church an interest in worshipping with God's people an interest in discussing the things of God a love for Christian things for the means of grace and the ways whereby God's grace is bestowed upon men and women do you have an interest then in Christian things a real interest a deep interest a greater interest in Christian things than in anything else a fourth fruit is that Christians have a high moral standard they exercise self-control moderation we often come across the word temperance in the New Testament temperance not just with regard to drink but with regard to everything the idea is one of self-control keeping one's body in subjection not getting carried away with any passions worldly passions or lusts high moral standards fifthly there's love love love is a great fruit of the spirit's work in any individual there's no love in your life doesn't matter what else is there though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and have not love

I am nothing though I speak with the tongues of men of angels and have not love I am nothing though I give my body to be burned and have not love I am nothing love to God Christian loves God Christ and the things of God and the Christian not just loves God but loves his fellow Christians has a respect for them and prefers others rather than themselves tries to help loves God loves fellow Christians and loves sinners others I heard just the other day about somebody who was claiming to be converted and showing a very arrogant attitude towards unbelievers they had taken an unbeliever to a certain meeting and then insulted them in the presence of others and so on I felt that there was a very clear evidence there that although this person was saying that they were filled with the spirit and that they were

Christians but they weren't Christians at all the person who is a true Christian has love and compassion and sensitivity towards fellow believers but also towards those who have not as yet come to know the grace of God who are still poor sinners without God and without hope and then there's meekness and humility meekness controlling our temple humility exalting others rather than ourselves and then there's the fruit of hope true Christian hope and faith and joy and peace and so we could go on do you bear fruit do you have the fruit of the spirit in your life does it bother you how little fruit you have it's a good thing if it does repent of your lack of fruitfulness and strive by the grace of God to bear more fruit to him be not barren or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour

[28 : 07] Jesus Christ you know the Lord and Saviour and you've received knowledge of the gospel don't let that knowledge be barren in your life be not barren or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ but seek to bring forth fruit unto God every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them do your friends know you do your neighbours know you by your fruits to be a good tree a Christian tree or are you barren unfruitful strive to bear fruit for God and if you're unconverted seek to be born again because that's the first step and it's essential before you can start to bear fruit for

God let us pray gracious God we pray that we might not be barren or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ but we pray that we might bear much fruit to thy glory that thou would help us and strengthen us and work in us and change us and transform us and make us like Jesus for Christ's sake Amen