

True and false prophets

'Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognise them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognise them.

Intro

Last week we were exploring the different things that cause us to worry and learning about how to give those up to the Lord. As an example, one of the worries was on forgiveness. We were reminded it is a decision – first by the Lord in forgiving us and second by us in forgiving others. On our part, we are asked to forgive even when the other does not deserve it, and that makes it our decision, removing dependence upon the other and making it an offering of love. However, we learnt that even when someone is genuine is asking for forgiveness, that the hardening of our hearts sometimes makes that very difficult – as Corrie Ten Boom shared from her own experience.

We were also asked to consider what worries we have and challenged to lay them before the Lord. Today our first reading has the words of Jesus speaking about true and false prophets. He says prophets will be recognised by their fruit.

Questions:

- Is forgiveness one of those fruits?
- A later prophet (Paul) gives a list of the fruit of the Spirit,
 - what can you remember?
 - Look up that scripture: Gal.5:22-23
 - Is this a full list or an example list – if an example list, what else might you consider a fruit of the Spirit?

Back to the reading:

- Are you worried about false prophets?
- And who are the trees?
- did you notice how Jesus says, 'a good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit? If someone is a bad tree is all hope lost?
- Are all Jesus' followers called to be prophets?

True and false disciples

'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. ²² Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and, in your name, perform many miracles?" ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!"

- **What is the warning for us?**
 - Does this reading worry you or make you rejoice, and Why?
- **How can we evaluate our spiritual condition?**

Some may ask:

Do I really have saving faith? Is my faith real? Am I self-deceived? Some well-intentioned people try to lessen the problem by making faith a mere decision to affirm certain truths, like the truth: Jesus is God, and he died for my sins."

One commentator puts it like this:

What is saving faith? – Saving faith believes the facts of the gospel. At the same time, it accepts the gospel personally. Rather than being persuaded only intellectually, a person with saving faith comes to behold the deep goodness and greatness and beauty of Christ.

"Being persuaded with the mind that something is true is not the same as apprehending the beauty and worth of the truth."

The devil himself believes the facts of the gospel. But he hates them.

Others may believe the facts, but still choose to follow their own way rather than be a disciple of Jesus (like the man in Mark 10:17-31.) They are therefore indifferent to Christ and their heart has not been changed.

Others believe the facts and have some surface changes like going to church. This too is not a guarantee that the heart has been changed.

Saving faith is real. It is alive. It changes the heart. It is based on an intellectual understanding and persuasion but goes much deeper than that to the heart. It is a faith that with the mind believes and with the heart sees the beauty and wonder of Christ and enjoys Him. The person who has faith like this will be willing to do the will of the Father. In other words, this person will be a genuine disciple.

Some other scriptures to help us:

Do you know the story from Mark 9:38-41?

Does that give you more confidence? What about John 15:5?

Now what?

What can you take-away from the study that will help you be a tree of good fruit? See also John 15:16?

Do all the good trees bear the same amount of good fruit? (it's not the amount but the bearing of good fruit that matters)

How could you bear good fruit (have good roots and drink more water)?