

The Parable of the Tree and its Fruit

Matthew 7 v15-20

¹⁵ "Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves. ¹⁶ You'll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ In the same way, **every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit.** ¹⁸ A good tree can't produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ So you'll recognize them by their fruit.

Where we root our lives, will determine our fruit

Let's say it together - **Where we root our lives, will determine our fruit.**

Context

Jesus told a short parable about trees and fruit. He said *every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So you'll recognize them by their fruit.*

In Matthews Gospel, this parable is in the context of Jesus talking about false prophets that mislead the people. In a broad sense this can be anyone who tried to look Godly, but actually led people away from Gods true purposes. The Religious leaders of his day could be accused of that, and they even accused Jesus himself of being false. Using Donald Trumps words, they said 'You are fake news'. But Jesus says look at the fruit some-one produces. In other words what is their character like, and what good works do they do? Jesus said to them, you may not like my words, but look at my deeds. You might not like it when I say 'Your sins are forgiven to a paralysed man, but look – I also say to him get up and walk, and he walks!'

What about us today? Who are the false prophets? It would be too easy to look at some of the Christian writers or evangelists that we do not agree with and say they mislead the people. However this parable could equally apply to any one who says they are a Christian, or goes to Church. Why? Because other people will look and you and see how you behave, and they will make a judgement on what God is like, or what the Church is like, based on what they see in you. So if you are behaving in bad ways or doing bad things, then it could give others a bad image of Jesus and his Church. You often hear people say that they were put off going to Church because of the way some Christians they knew behaved. They came across as hypocrites. However, if we are genuinely doing our best for Jesus, then we will in some way be fruitful for him. I think here that Jesus is not just talking about a few good deeds here and there, because everyone is capable of that, but spiritual fruit, spirit-led good works that have an eternal value in the Kingdom of God .

Two Trees

Do you have any trees in your garden? Do you know how they got there?

Today's parable is about trees and their fruit. I have two trees in my back garden, and they both have a story. There is the Crab Apple Tree and the Flowering Cherry Tree.

When I was living in my old house, I wanted an apple tree, and was advised by the expert at the local nursery that I would do best by also buying a crab-apple tree because although you can't eat the fruit (except in jam), it will help pollinate the apple tree and you will get more apples. So I bought them both, two saplings about 2 metres tall. Then one day a large cat climbed up the little apple tree, and it snapped in half. Thankyou Fat Cat! So when we moved house we were just left with the crab apple tree. However at the side of the lawn amongst over grown shrubs there was a sad looking skinny Cherry tree 3 metres tall. It was getting no significant light and probably not a lot of water to its roots. So I decided to dig it up and take it with me, to see if it will grow at the back of my new garden. The Cherry tree would not fit into a vehicle so I carried it on my shoulder, the mile across the village. So I planted the two saplings about 4 feet apart at the back of the garden.

So how did the two trees get on next to each other? 17 years later I have got a beautiful flowering cherry tree which I could no longer carry. Why because it is now much taller than the house, perhaps over 15 metres high and its canopy of leaves spans the whole garden. It has really prospered from being replanted. It has matured well beyond our expectations.

But what of the Crab Apple tree? Well to start with it grew well, but then as the cherry tree grew much faster, it overwhelmed the smaller tree, and its roots took the moisture first from the ground. I failed to transplant it when perhaps I should have done, and it has been forced to grow out at any angle, and its growth has been inhibited by the large branches of the cherry tree. It doesn't look too good, and although it does blossom and produces fruit, you know it will never reach its full potential.

For my trees it was all important where their roots were. It totally determined how they turned out. The Cherry tree had a rough start, starved of light, got replanted and did incredibly well. My crab apple tree would have done well on its own in my old garden, but it was replanted too near to the cherry tree and has suffered.

Jesus is saying in our parable that it is the same for us as for the trees. We will do well if our roots are in the right place. Spiritually, there are two types of trees. A good tree produces good fruit and the bad tree – guess what? – it produces bad fruit. We are either a good tree or a bad tree. Which one will depend on what are roots are in.

Where we root our lives, will determine our fruit

Where does bad come from? (Human Nature)

So what makes us a bad tree? Where does bad come from?

Look at the person next to you. Are they human? Of course, and there are natural behavioural patterns generally associated with being a human. We call that our human nature. "That lad is always chasing girls!" "Oh well, it's how young men are wired" She's always gossiping – yeah but all women enjoy a bit of gossip - its just human nature".

Paul describes this human nature in Galatians (chapter 5v19-21) in very strong terms. *"What human nature does is quite plain. It shows itself in immoral, filthy and indecent actions....People become enemies and they fight. They become angry, jealous and self-focussed in ambition... They are envious, get drunk, have orgies and do other things like these" – Oh dear!*

When our human natures are unconstrained they can spiral our lives down into indecency and unhealthy living. Can't they? We probably all know some-one who has pressed the self-destruct button. We only have to look at our newspapers over the last year to see how evil people can be. It all comes from our human nature, which is rooted in darkness.

But taking Pauls words out of context you might jump to the wrong conclusion and think that our human nature makes us spend all week fighting, watching pornos, taking drugs, getting drunk and having orgies.

Clearly that's not true, and there is good and bad competing within us humans. The bad side is often referred to in Pauls teachings as 'the flesh'. It is like the adverts where some-one has a little devil on one shoulder and a little angel on the other. Your doctor has put you on a diet. You go into the office the next day, and it's a colleagues birthday, and they have brought in slabs of chocolate cheesecake. What is happening in your head. There's one voice saying don't do it remember the diet, and another saying go on, go on, you can start the diet tomorrow! Which voice will take control and win?

Without God in our lives, before we meet Jesus, we just have our human nature with its conflicts, and many are pulled by it towards life-styles that are unhealthy.

We all know people with destructive patterns of behaviour, and those that do bad things. When we just have our human natures then our roots are planted in the darkness. Like my cherry tree, if we are to have a future, we need to be transplanted into the light.

Spiritual Nature

There is Good News. There is New Hope. That is why Jesus died on the cross. He died there so that if we believe in him, we can be saved and taken out of darkness. Imagine Jesus has this cross shaped shovel, and he uses it to dig up our roots and transplant us into the light.

As Christians we use the phrase '**born again**' to symbolise, how we are born into a new spiritual life when we accept that Jesus has died for our sins, and we ask him to take control of our lives by his Spirit. Some then say 'I have seen the Light' ! So we have been born twice, first into our human flesh and secondly into our spiritual lives. So we now have both our human nature (with its good and bad fruit) and our spiritual nature (with its good fruit)!

We need light, and Jesus says '*I am the light of the world*' (John 9v5). He came to earth to walk with mankind, light up his way, through his example, his teaching, and his love. The spirit illuminates the truth for us, i.e. shows us what is right. The spirit is also a guide to us, showing us where to go and how to live. If we stick close to Jesus we walk in the light, so can see what is right. So when we live in the light of Jesus and his ways, we are putting our roots down into good soil, into Gods love. We have a personal faith, but it is not a private one. We need to be living out our faith in view, in the light, so others can see it and be drawn to the light themselves.

If we distance ourselves from him, then metaphorically we walk in the darkness, we cannot see clearly what is right or wrong and our human nature will start to drag us more into the bad soil, our bad ways. If we stay rooted in the dark, and are not transplanted by Jesus, there will be no Spirit in us, and we will not be able to produce the good spiritual fruit. If we end up as bad trees with no fruit, then the parable tells us of an unhappy ending. ¹⁹*Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

So as Christians we have two natures now, our human nature and our spiritual nature. Whilst there is good and bad in our human natures, there is no bad in the spiritual nature; it is all good.

So we have our new spiritual lives to help guide us and encourage us into doing the good things, but still have our human nature. The bad part of this, 'the flesh' opposes the good in us. So as Christians in order to please Jesus and thank him for all he has done for us, we should try and live more and more like him, doing the good stuff that we know he likes. This produces the good fruit, but whether we are successful at this or not will depend on where our roots are.

Even now with our spiritual nature, we still have to contend with the bad side of our human natures, and even when we are saved we can still have roots in some bad stuff. It is like our roots trailing back into our old lives, habits, and attitudes. We need Holy Spirit to move our trailing roots into the good soil.

There is also a tendency amongst some Christians to put their lives into compartments. This is the spiritual parts of my life, where I will live in the light and do what God tells me. However this part of my life (perhaps my career, finances, or whatever) will remain secular and I'll carry on ruling that area myself with my human nature and reasoning.

If that is true then we are purposefully putting down some of our roots into bad soil, because we are choosing to not let Holy Spirit have any influence over it. Jesus does not want just part of us, he wants all of us. He wants fullness of life for every area, for our relationships, our work, our finances, our family – everything. We need to keep trying to put all our roots down into the light even if we are struggling to do so.

Time to self-analyse

Where we root our lives, will determine our fruit

This is the key message today. Where you put your roots down, in good or bad places, will determine what fruit you produce, good or bad. There is the big question to ask yourself, and that is "What is my life rooted in today?". First, what are the negative things that you are tied into which are impacting your life for the worse.

I don't want you to be critical of yourself as a Christian, or feel guilty about anything, because don't forget Jesus died to free you from guilt. There is no condemnation in him when we are saved. However I am asking you to take the opportunity today to reflect on what you are rooted in that could be negatively impacting your life, is not where Jesus wants you to be, and could be stopping you producing good spiritual fruit in your life.

What does bad look like?

Bad, can be seen in our habits, attitudes, emotions and self-image

So on the negative side:

Are you rooted in any bad **habits**: i.e. Do you drink too much alcohol, swear a lot, like pornography or watch a lot of X rated films. Are you addicted to work (so that you have no time for others), or have you formed lazy habits and waste loads of time. What bad habits are **you** rooted in?

Are you rooted in any **bad attitudes and emotions** – Do you regularly get bitter (proper moaner) and resentful, or jealous of what others have got, or quick to get angry. Do you usually feel hateful to some-one or a group of individuals. Do you often feel lonely or sad and depressed. Are you pained with guilt perhaps about something you did a long time ago. What bad attitudes and emotions are **you** rooted in?

Are you rooted in bad **self-image**? What is your attitude towards yourself. Are you always negatively comparing yourself to others? 'I'll never be as clever as him. She's so much more attractive than me etc. Do you not like yourself for some reason and perhaps want to self-harm, or perhaps binge on food to comfort eat? Do you have low self-esteem and believe you deserve to be treated badly by others? Or perhaps the opposite, are you in love with your own self-image, part of the selfie culture, must take more photos of me and then upset when others don't get enough 'likes' on your social media. Is your focus on making yourself look better and better to others. What unhealthy self-image are **you** rooted in?

I am sure for each of us there is something in there we recognise, as being relevant to our lives, some bad habit, emotion or attitude or self-image that impacts us negatively. Some area where our roots are still in the darkness.

Where we root our lives, will determine our fruit

Show me Spirit

Think through that list, and take a moment right now to ask Holy Spirit to show you one area that you have kept back from him, and that you need to work on with his help, to give over to Jesus, to move from darkness into light.

Pray with me - Holy Spirit right now put that directly into my mind <Pause for 10 seconds>

Has everybody got one area?

Pray again – I surrender that thing to you now Lord, and pray for your help Holy Spirit to transform that area of my life and root it firmly in the light.

What does good look like?

Good, can also be seen in our habits, attitudes, emotions and self-image

So on the positive side:

Are you rooted in good **habits**: i.e. Do you take time out each day to read and study the bible so you can learn more about Jesus. Take time alone with God to pray and listen, keep that conversation going, ask him about everything. Have fellowship, have some time in the week where you meet with other Christians and encourage and help each other. Turn over or turn off the TV when negative stuff is on, get in the habit of avoiding porno and nasty stuff on the

internet. Perhaps you have good routines that keep you healthy, watch what you eat, take exercise. So you are getting into good habits that look after your body, mind and spirit.

Are you rooted in good **attitudes & emotions** – Do you quickly forgive any wrongs they have done you, do you try and see the good in people, and if you can't say anything nice, just don't say anything. Are you patient and kind towards others, with an aim each day to show love to the person that God has put in front of you, whoever it is. Do you respect other people's boundaries and relationships and realise where the right and proper limits are to your involvement with them. Are you faithful. Do you feel happy at the start of a new day, seeing it as a gift from God. Do you feel thankful for all the good things that you have in your life, your friends, and family, house and food, holidays and countryside, warmth and safety, and all the freedoms we have.

Are you rooted in good **self-image**? Do you respect yourself and look after yourself, going easy on yourself when things go wrong or you make mistakes, but you don't need to obsess about what you look like, or what others think of you, You have a healthy self-image, knowing that you are what God is made in his image, that you are loved by him, and adopted into his family. You are a son or daughter of the King of Kings.

What good habits are **you** already rooted in? What good attitudes and emotions do you already show? What aspects of healthy self-image do you already embrace? Thank Jesus for them.

Roots, Blossom, Fruit

How do we become a good tree? How do we develop those good habits, emotions, attitudes and self-image.

Paul has some good teaching on roots in the letters that he wrote.

Paul tells the Ephesians (3 v17) to put your **trust** in Jesus and as you do **your roots will grow down into Gods love** and keep you **strong**. Paul is saying here to trust Jesus with all your life, you can depend on him. If you do trust Him, then your roots will grow down into Gods love, which will bring his strength into you.

He says..“ **root** yourself in Jesus and your **spiritual nature** will produce in you love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control (Gal 5 v22-23),. Who wants more patience, more joy, more self-control? We all do, don't we? We would all like to have more goodness and love in our characters.

These attributes are often referred to as the 'Fruit of the Spirit' to distinguish them from the spiritual gifts that God gives us (such as prophecy, and healing etc). But for the good tree analogy, these wonderful character traits are like the blossom of the Spirit. Because it is the blossom that produces the fruit.

If we put our roots down into Gods love by trusting Jesus with our lives, all of it, and persist with this relationship, then our character will be made wonderful in those ways by the Spirit. Then it is out of the blossom, that the fruit comes. Anyone that grows fruit trees, and I come from a cider apple area, will know the importance of good blossom. If the trees are out in blossom, and it gets damaged by a heavy storm, then it will have a dire effect on your future fruit harvest.

Just like fruit comes out of blossom, then our good works will come out of our good character. If you trust Jesus, and root yourself in God's love, it strengthens you and you will produce the blossom of the spirit. If we have the blossom of the Spirit then we will produce good fruit. If you are loving, kind, good and patient with people, then you can not help but do good things for those that God puts in front of you every day, and you will attract them into the light, they will be drawn to Jesus.

Then Paul tells the Colossians “ **Keep your roots deep in him**, build your lives on him, and you become **stronger** in your faith”. Paul is saying this is a life-long journey you are, not just a one-off. You are to put your roots down in Him, and keep trying to move your trailing roots across into good soil, keep going over those compartments that you kept for yourself. Do this and you will grow strong. Your new spiritual nature will produce more and more of that good nature, the blossom of the Spirit, which will in turn produce good fruit, spiritual fruit of eternal value.

Where we root our lives, will determine our fruit

Help is on hand - Pollination

So we are on a Christian journey, where we are seeking to move our trailing roots from the darkness into light, to become more like Jesus, to live more fully in his love, peace and joy. When we look at our lives it may seem that we have a real challenge ahead of us. But we must remember that Jesus is with us. Greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world. He will never give up on you and leave you.

Jesus is cheering you on and supporting you all the way. He is passionate for you to succeed. As his followers, he said he will never leave you or forsake you. He will be with you even to the end of the age.

But also he gives us his Church to help us. We are alongside millions of other Christians trying to become more like Jesus. We are in this together.

We are part of a big family of believers. Wherever you go in the World you will find there are Christians who will open themselves and their homes to you, because you both love Jesus

How we respond to other Christians is so important. Jesus said you will know that they are my disciples by the love that they show one to another (John 13v35). If you are just around people (including other Christians) who are always moaning, or who are down on you, and never encourage you, then it will sap your strength to do God's work. The same is true if you isolate yourself, and do not have the love, example and encouragement of fellow believers to spur you on.

When I bought the little Apple Tree, as I said earlier I was recommended to buy a Crab Apple Tree, because they helped each other pollinate. They are good for each other. Are there Christians in our lives, that can help us, encourage us, pray for us and inspire us to produce good fruit. In the presence of the Apple Tree, the Crab-apple would have done well, but when it was replanted next to the faster growing stronger cherry, it got overwhelmed, and its growth has been both stunted and distorted. It still produces good fruit, but it is only half the tree it could have been.

Ask God for some discernment on who you need in your life.

I had the privilege to pray for my friend Jason to accept Jesus when he was going through a very rough period in his life. He had his roots in bad soil. After that he replanted his roots, really turned his life around and was sold out for Jesus. We just seemed to gel and enjoyed praying, worshipping and serving God together. When he moved house and church, we missed praying together at the Church prayer meeting, so we started weekly prayer meetings around his house instead, which Richie joined and our focus turned to Macedonia. We are good friends and we love doing God's work together. My friends are like my pollinators. We support each other through the hard season and help each other produce better fruit.

There will be some Christian who are producing much more fruit than you, who seem to have better ministries, whose prayers seem more powerful. Some people get jealous of them, which is ridiculous. We are in the same team. The branches all need to connect to the same vine, we are all in this together. Be happy when others are successful. Encourage them. Learn from them.

We benefit by having individuals like that alongside us in our Christian walk. Where are your encouragers? Who are you encouraging? Part of your good fruit is to encourage others. They will help you put your roots down in good soil, they will help you trust Jesus with your life, and they will help you persist in doing what is right and becoming more and more like Jesus.

Conclusion

So Jesus told this parable in which a bad tree produces bad fruit and a good tree produces good fruit.

1. When we do not have Jesus in our lives, then we are controlled by our human nature, we are in the dark when it comes to the ways of God, and the bad side of our nature (flesh) can sometimes lead us into bad ways. We can become a bad tree with bad fruit, and if we stay that way will have an unhappy end.

2. When we trust Jesus with our lives, we get transplanted from darkness into the light of Jesus, but we still have roots which trail back into our old lives. When we are reborn we get a new spiritual nature, Holy Spirit working in us, which is all good, and Holy Spirit can help us win out over the bad side of our human nature, and move our trailing roots into the good soil if we ask him and let him. Then with our roots in Gods love, he will produce in us the blossom of the spirit (love, joy peace, patience etc) which will attract others toward Jesus, and will produce good works, good fruit.

3. We are work in progress. The more we trust Jesus with our lives, and persist in doing what is right, then his love will strengthen us. We will become stronger, produce more good fruit with eternal value.

Jesus says to you today "I love you too much to leave you the way you are".

This in not fake news. This is Good News. This is the Gospel Truth

Where we root our lives, will determine our fruit

So root your life in Jesus

Amen.