

Good Trees and Bad Trees

Matthew 12:15-37

Main Truth: When we live fully in Jesus our lives will bear good fruit for His Kingdom.

Matthew 12:15-16 After confronting the Pharisees regarding his healing of the man with the shriveled hand, Jesus left that place. He then healed many people who followed him and warned them not to tell anyone.

Matthew 12:17-21 Matthew next quotes the prophecy found in Isaiah 42:1-4 which reveals Jesus as the Messiah. Even if no one follows or acknowledges who Jesus is, it doesn't change the truth that He is King of kings and Lord of Lords.

Matthew 12:22-24 Jesus healed a demon-possessed man who was blind and the people responded by asking if Jesus was the Son of David, the promised Messiah. In contrast, the Pharisees denied Jesus was from God and claimed that His power came from Satan. Their thinking was illogical.

Matthew 12:25-26 Satan driving out demons would be counter-intuitive and would be working against his own objective. Jesus is making the point that it is absurd to think He would be working for Satan, the enemy of God's Kingdom.

Matthew 12:27-28 Jesus points out that there were Jewish exorcists who apparently were successful in driving out demons and asks by who's power they drove out demons. (An example of this is recorded in Acts 19:13-16)

The miracle performed was the power of the Spirit of God working through Jesus to drive out the demon and heal the man. The Messiah was in front of the Pharisees and they totally missed it.

Matthew 12:29 Satan doesn't give Jesus authority, Jesus holds authority over Satan. Jesus operates with the power of God's Kingdom and authority, absolute power over the demon.

Matthew 12:30

"Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."

Blasphemy: to speak evil against, to slander, or revile

What is "blasphemy against the Spirit"? "What is the unforgivable sin"?

- The Pharisees showed contempt towards the Holy Spirit by associating the power source of Jesus' (the Holy Spirit) and His miracles to Satan.
- The Pharisees showed an intentional hardness of heart and rejection of who Jesus was.
- They claimed that what God had done was the work of Satan.

Jesus did not say that the Pharisees had committed the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. He confronted the attitude of their hearts and words and showed them grace by pointing out how close they were to committing a slander so serious God won't forgive it.

How do I know if I've committed the unpardonable sin?

- **The Bad News:** If we have completely turned our back on God and rejected His plan for repentance and salvation through Jesus who is empowered by the Holy Spirit, we're in danger. It's not because the sin is worse than all others, but because of our refusal to submit to God and ask forgiveness.
 - We can reject Him by choosing to rely on our own efforts to be "good enough" to make it to heaven.
 - We can do this by simply refusing to acknowledge the existence of God Himself, sometimes philosophically, sometimes because we don't want to be accountable to something bigger than ourselves or outside of ourselves. (Pride)
 - There are many ways we can reject God's plan for our salvation.
- Whoever rejects the prompting of the Holy Spirit to respond to the Gospel of Jesus removes themselves from the only provision God has established that leads to salvation and restoration in our relationship with God our Creator. Without that, forgiveness will never be possible. (In truth, if this is where we are, we won't care if we've committed that sin.)
- **The Good News:** That means, that if you *have* responded to Jesus as the Holy Spirit awakens us to our state of sin before God, have repented and put our complete trust in Jesus as our Lord, the Head of our lives, then even though we may still sin, our lives are covered by the righteousness of Jesus and sealed by the presence of God's Holy Spirit.

John 15:26 John 16:8-9 Jesus tells us more about the role of the Holy Spirit as recorded in the book of John. He is our advocate or helper, the Spirit of Truth. He testifies about Jesus. He will convict the world of its sin, of God's righteousness, and the coming judgement. The Holy Spirit matters.

Matthew 12:30 "You're either with me or against me."

Matthew 12:33 The Pharisees had rejected who Jesus was and the source behind His work. They were not producing good fruit because they were bad trees who produce bad fruit.

Matthew 12:34a Matthew 23:15 Jesus calls the Pharisees a 'brood of vipers' just like John the Baptist used 'brood of vipers' to describe the hypocritical Pharisees and Sadducees. They spread their religious, legalistic, and moral corruption like a poisonous venom enslaving people in spiritual bondage.

Matthew 23:15 Jesus does not mince words and calls the teachers of the law and the Pharisees hypocrites and a child of hell.

Matthew 12:34b-37 Jesus points out what is the ultimate revealer of the condition of our hearts. When it comes to our souls Jesus knows what matters. He came to save people from their sin.

The words of the Pharisees were a product of their heart condition. Their hearts were revealed by the words they spoke and the witness they delivered through their lives.

Our challenge for today:

- What does *my* life, *my* words, *my* attitudes and motivations reveal about *my* heart?
- We might try to draw on these verses as a call to be a nice person, say kind things, think positive thoughts, always be an encouragement to others as evidence of what good fruit is. Not wrong for these things to be part of our lives, but it goes deeper than that.
- What Jesus is indicating in this interaction with the Pharisees is that the fruit of a person's life will be impacted directly by their relationship with Him, with Jesus.
- It's about a transformed heart, a new creation, a new birth... all terms to describe the work the Holy Spirit does in us when we repent and put our trust in Jesus.
- Here is a great promise given to us as we enter into that faith:

Ephesians 1:13-14 “When you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him!”

- We are *with* Jesus!
- Who is the source of the fruit our life produces?
 - Do we rely more on the wisdom of this world than the truth of God's Word and the presence of the Holy Spirit?
 - Are we allowing even our words and conversations to be transformed by the Holy Spirit so that we can bring God's truth and blessing to people around us?
 - Are we willing to be disciplined by each other so we may grow in our faith, our knowledge of Jesus and the call we have on our lives to serve Him as we love Him?
 - Are we producing fruit for God's Kingdom with our lives?

John 15:5 If we remain in Jesus we will bear much fruit. Without Jesus we can do nothing.

Galatians 5:22-23 The Holy Spirit produces ‘the fruit of the Spirit’ in our lives.

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Small Group Discussion Questions

Good Trees and Bad Trees

Matthew 12:15-37

1. Have you ever had a garden that produced so much that you gave it away? What did your garden produce? Why didn't you just let it go to waste? How did you feel when you shared it with others? What was their response?

Matthew 12:22-29

2. Why were the Pharisees blind to God's power in Jesus' miracles?
3. How can we guard against rejecting God's work when it challenges our expectations?

Matthew 12:30-32

4. Jesus declares, "Whoever is not with me is against me." Why is there no neutral ground in faith, and how does this impact daily choices?
5. What is the Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit as described in this passage? How does it differ from other sins that can be forgiven?

Matthew 12:33-37

6. How does the metaphor of the tree and its fruit illustrate the connection between a person's heart condition and their words?
7. Why does Jesus warn that people will give account for every careless word, and how should this shape our everyday conversations?

Read **Galatians 5:22-23** Fruit of the Spirit

8. Identify each of the spiritual fruit mentioned in these verses.
9. Discuss how each of the fruit make a difference in your life.
10. What are practical ways you can share your fruit with someone you know?
11. What are ways your small group can share these fruits with those around you?
12. Plan as a group a practical way you can share your fruit with the community around you and go as a group and share your fruit with others.

Personal Study Guide

Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22-23

1 John 4:16

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Romans 5:1

Romans 15:13

Colossians 1:11

Romans 8:6

Ephesians 4:1-3

1 Corinthians 3:14

1 John 4:7

Colossians 3:12

2 Timothy 1:7

James 3:17

Titus 3:2

2 Peter 1:5-7

Matthew 12:33-37

Luke 6:43-45