LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

Matthew 7 (Part 5) :15-20

A Tree and It's Fruit

Pastor Paul LeBoutillier · April 18, 2026

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Chapter 7 verse 15 watch out for false prophets they come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ferocious wolves by their fruit you will recognize them do people pick grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles likewise every good tree very good fruit but a bad tree bears bad fruit in fact a good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire thus by their fruit you will recognize them Holy Spirit open our hearts to this word we pray in the name of Christ our Savior Amen in this section that we're dealing with of the Sermon on the Mount here today Jesus warns us about false prophets simply saying beginning here watch out watch out for false prophets obviously by sounding the warning Jesus is affirming the existing or the existence rather of false prophets they exist there in the even in the body of Christ and a prophet is by definition someone who speaks for God now don't think of prophecy only as foretelling future events some people make the mistake of assuming that a prophecy must always deal with future events like something that is going to take place that is not at all the case prophecy is as much forth telling as it is foretelling it may involve the you know future events that the Lord is trying to expose to his people and confirm but but it could just be simply a message from God if someone were to walk up to you assuming they were genuinely moving in the power of the Holy Spirit and they simply said you know I really feel like the Lord wants you to know that he loves you God loves you that is every bit as much a prophecy as someone who says you know something else that related to the future so again prophecy is merely speaking a message from God and and and and it's very very possible it could be something very simple but Jesus here is warning us against false prophets now the Greek word for false is one that you will probably recognize it's it's it's kind of where we get our word pseudo it's pseudo us it we don't pronounce the P in English but in Greek every single letter is always pronounced which makes it easy to read actually but it's pseudo us and it means it means a lie in that interesting so a false prophet then would be someone who is lying when they are otherwise attempting to convince you that they are communicating a message from God and I think that that that's an important distinction for us to keep in mind and and one of the best books to illustrate this the the characteristic of lying that often takes place through false prophets is in the

Old Testament book of Jeremiah some of you guys might be fairly familiar with the book of Jeremiah but Jeremiah was himself a prophet he was prophesying at a time in in Judah's history when they were on the precipice of seeing the judgment of God falling upon that nation because of many many years of disobedience and rebellion and so forth and they were they were going to receive exactly what God had told them many years before they were going to receive but while Jeremiah was giving them the true prophecy of the Lord which was it's coming judgment is coming and frankly there's nothing that you can do about it in fact in fact Jeremiah was telling them you need to go along with what the Lord is doing related to that prophecy there were false prophets at the very same time who were giving a very different message and I want to put on the screen for you a passage from Jeremiah chapter 23 it says this is what the Lord Almighty says do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you they fill you look at this with false hopes they speak visions from their own minds not from the mouth of the Lord they keep saying to those who despise me literally people who hate the Lord the Lord says this is what they say you will have peace and to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts they say no harm is going to come to you that's the characteristic of false prophecy as it was given in the Old Testament during the time of Jeremiah do you see what what Jeremiah or the Lord is confronting through Jeremiah that the characteristic of these false prophecies was that they would tell people what they wanted to hear not what the Lord wanted them to hear they were telling the people what they wanted to hear and that's always an easy thing to do frankly it's can I can I just admit that it's easy to tell people what they want to hear it's hard to tell people what they don't want to hear and yet if we are going to be true to the Lord sometimes the message that we are called upon to share is not a fun one to hear and yet the warning must go out and it must go out appropriately so that people will get ready actually the Lord speaks himself in Jeremiah 8 I'll put this one also on the screen about the characteristics of these false prophets look what he says he says they dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious peace peace they say when there is no peace and you know he's basically saying my people have this horrible wound but they're like putting just a band-aid on it they dress it like it isn't really serious and they're saying to the people peace peace so you know we see that the characteristic as it's given a false prophecy here in Jeremiah is that it wants to give people a false sense of security it wants to on the outside appear very soothing and very calming and say you know it's going to be okay it's going to be okay God is with you and so on and so forth but what it ends up doing is it ends up lulling people into into a sleep or a slumber as it relates to their sin and rather than warning them to get right with God and that's what false prophecy does it blurs the the the the distinction between righteousness and sin and prophets will do it again by telling people what they want to hear they will say anything to make people happy you guys you you've heard me hounding you over the last several years I've been telling you that one of the characteristics of the world in which we live is that there's this goal of

happiness everybody wants to be happy people will say it to me quite often and I'll hear it also from the lips of Christians I just want to be happy and I've shared with you and warned you many times that you need to be very careful about that attitude because that's a worldly attitude to make happiness the goal and you know what happens when happiness becomes the goal we become susceptible to false prophets because the false prophet comes to say what will make you happy and they're playing into that desire for you to want to be happy you might say well pastor Paul what's wrong with being happy problem is that happiness is fleeting happiness is temporary God is not here to make you happy he's here to make you holy whole different goal and if happiness becomes our goal then the temporal becomes our goal rather than the eternal and so for those who long for happiness I just want to be happy I'm tired of being sad I want to be happy you are now fodder for the false prophet who will come along and say anything that you want to hear to just simply get you to do that look what Paul warned in 2nd Timothy chapter 4 verse 3 he says prophetically by the way speaking of prophecies for the time will come Timothy says when men will not put up with sound doctrine instead to suit their own desires they will gather a great number of teachers look at this to say what their itching ears want to hear what do their itching ears want to hear good news they want to hear good news they want to hear things that are going to make them happy look also at a prophecy given by the Apostle Paul from 1st Thessalonians fascinating he says now brothers about times and dates we do not need to write to you for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night when people are saying what be happy don't worry We even have a ditty that came out about 20 years ago with that basic theme peace and safety And he says at that time destruction will come on them suddenly Like labor pains on a pregnant woman, why why will it come suddenly because they were so fixated on hearing the message of happiness that the warning of God's Word completely just Went right over their head They weren't listening. They weren't open to it. They weren't responsive to it. Anybody that was saying, you know They will treat people who speak the truth like the Jews did of Jeremiah Back in his day. They told him to shut up and if he wouldn't shut up, they would do something about it and They attempted on several occasions Threw him into a well at one point Threatened his life on numerous occasions Anything they could to get that Negativity out of their lives, you know Because the world, you know just doesn't want to hear anything about it.

They want to be soothed They want to be told that everything is all going to be alright and and and so forth The next thing that Jesus makes us aware of is How these false prophets are going to appear among us look once again in your Bible the second part of verse 15 says they come to you in sheep's clothing, but Inwardly, they are ferocious wolves. And this is the first metaphor that Jesus uses for us and it should be pretty clear He's basically telling you and I that the false prophets are going to be impossible to distinguish from just regular sheep They're gonna look like sheep they're gonna act like sheep, you know, at least on

the outside they're gonna sound like sheep But inwardly and that's an important word inwardly They're actually ferocious wolves I find it interesting that Jesus would actually use that word ferocious Because their intent is exposed in that word. There is a ferocity to their Their their hearts and their longing to destroy people's lives and and so They will look they will sound like sheep But make no mistake their wolves and their goal is to destroy and the Apostle Paul Sounded a very similar warning when he was speaking with the elders of Ephesus in Acts chapter 2 up on the screen here for you. It says I know Paul said that after I leave Savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth why? Here's why in order to draw away disciples after them.

They like that That following they like having people clamor Around them. So what does Paul say? He says be on your guard And he says I want you to remember that for three years I never stopped warning you Each of you night and day with tears Paul knew this was going to happen. How do they get into the body of Christ? And there are always going to be well-meaning believers in the body who don't have the kind of discernment that is needed and there That's the way they're they're going to receive a warm welcome some of them Into the body of Christ and by the time we figure out who they are the damage will have been done But there are a lot of warnings actually in the New Testament about false prophets and false teachers Enough that we know this is a very real threat to the body of Christ enough that we should be asking ourselves What then do we do about this situation since Jesus has gone to the trouble of making us aware?

That this is a very real threat What are we to do Jesus tells us how to recognize them in verse 16 and following in your Bible? It says by their fruit you will recognize them. You see this is this is the thing Remember he told us inwardly they're ferocious wolves. Well, how do I know what's inside a man? Well, I have to wait for it to come out and it's going to come out in What would be referred to as his fruit and so what Jesus is doing now, you'll notice he's changing the metaphor from a metaphor of the flock to a metaphor of the forest because you see people can lie and People can deceive and they can look and they can say one thing while completely meaning another But there's something about trees that you just can't they're just eventually they're gonna give themselves away What I mean by that is that God put a Law Into effect in his creation and it is basically this every tree will bear fruit after its own kind The Human heart is very similar to that in the sense that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart come the Issues of life it becomes a wellspring the Bible says that feeds the rest of our lives Eventually, even though you and I can't look into a human heart Eventually we can see what is there by what comes out we can't look in but we can see what comes out and So over a period of time in

the life of this individual We are going to see what we need to see and Jesus asked the question Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes and it's a great question In other words, you know, if you want to pick an apple, you know, do you walk up to a thorn bush?

So I gotta go try to find an apple here no, obviously not you wouldn't do that And that's because a tree is always true to its fruit That's important a tree is always true to its fruit and Jesus is making us aware That because these guys are rotten They're going to produce rotten fruit And there's really no way they can get around it ultimately, although they might say Initially the right things their hearts are not right before God and what this means for you and I is that we've just been We've just been given a job it's called a fruit inspector and So we are given the the the task Whether we like it or not of inspecting fruit you'll remember we brought up we referenced this verse back when we were dealing with the issue of You shall not judge lest you be judged remember earlier in this sermon And we we said that we talked about that judgment that was being forbidden us was a condemning and hypocritical judgment but however, we must make judgments in some cases to find out if something is true or false and Jesus is telling us here that we must make a judgment related to the fruit of Those who would presume upon us to be our leaders in the body of Christ Just because someone has Education Doesn't mean that they are a Good leader Doesn't mean even that their heart is right before God just because they've got PhD behind their name or or or whatever else Doesn't mean that you and I should submit to their ministry Jesus is telling us here that We must inspect their fruit now, this doesn't give us a license to be overly critical or judgmental We're still to show mercy because we know that Even godly people are going to make mistakes from time to time But even then when they make a mistake, you're gonna see good fruit You might you might kind of that that verse might where Jesus says a good tree cannot bear bad fruit It might kind of you'll wonder about that. You think well, is he saying that they'll never make a mistake or never sin? No, you're not saying that saying that even when they do the good fruit comes out They're gonna make a mistake from time to time, but you know, you're gonna see as a result of it you're gonna see good fruit and What that means is they're gonna when they when they do make mistakes and they will they're going to apologize They're gonna confess it. They're gonna be upfront and humble You know, and that's good fruit Good fruit isn't always perfection Good fruit is just good fruit. And when I apologize for saying something stupid or doing something stupid, that's good fruit Right when you do it the same way, you know when you apologize for things that you've you know messed up on That's that's the good fruit in your life.

That's coming forth and so forth So, you know, we're still to show mercy But it does you know but but what this means to be a fruit inspector is that we ought to Expect to see the fruit of the Holy Spirit operating in their lives. We need to expect to see it frankly, that's what makes TV preachers and stuff so

difficult You know, I mean a lot of these words were given to us Before the advent of television or anything like that and you got to ask yourself the question how in the world can I expect the fruit? You know of someone on the television Television unless I unless I I happen to know them or maybe I know someone who's known them For a long time and been able to inspect their fruit so many times. We just we get taken You know by somebody who's who's on television that looks all good, and you know Oh Quiet so-and-so show is coming on You know we're gonna watch this and he's preaching the word and and we just love it, and then we then we come to find out All these horrific things about this person's life you know they're absconding with all kinds of ministry funds and there's homosexual and other sexually perverse behavior going on in their life and their family is a train wreck and And you said and and people get devastated I remember years ago when I was a fairly new believer walking with the Lord I remember Hearing about the fall of some pretty big names in the in the Christian in the Christian electronic community shall I say and I remember I remember Going to bed at night thinking about it and just feeling a Shaking in my heart, I mean I felt I was shaken and I Had created such a Aura of respect and awe For some of these people and I I remember at the time as a fairly young ish believer it it shook me to the point of wondering if they can't stand under the the work of Satan how could I possibly stand and And it really I mean it was something that the enemy I think used effectively in my life to kind of scare me And not in a good way in a bad way And it was only later as I got more into the Word of God and studied through the scriptures That I realized that This is the fruit of the person's life and this tells something about the tree. I mean fruit doesn't lie You know, I mean Fruit doesn't lie.

If you see an apple hanging on the limb you can bet your bottom dollar That's an apple tree It doesn't lie Same with pears peaches or whatever Fruit doesn't lie. I Hope that doesn't sound condemning So, what are we supposed to be looking for exactly in people's lives, well, I think that we ought to be able to see the fruit of the Holy Spirit Because God is the one who actually plants the tree and if he's done the planting then the fruit should be his That is hanging off our limbs. Look at Galatians. I'll put this on the screen Galatians chapter 5 Paul outlines the fruit of the Spirit you guys some of you memorize this since childhood The fruit of the Spirit is love joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness jealous and self-control Here's the problem with looking at the fruits of the Spirit we've memorized them many times as children or helped our children memorize them and They just became kind of this sing-song II kind of a the fruit of the Spirit is And we probably all have a different tune that we can sing to the fruit of the Spirit, right? You know, I'd let you do it, but it would be embarrassing And we forget that what Paul is laying out for us here in the word is the guideline by which we are to discern The truthfulness the genuineness of someone's life And I'm talking about those who are in leadership over you do you see the fruit of the Spirit Or Have you been taking or have you or have you been giving Leaders the benefit of the doubt and just in

we do that, you know We we love people so much Sometimes that we try to give them the benefit of the doubt and we stop inspecting fruit You know But we really can't afford to do that we really can't afford to sit back and just give people a free pass when they When they flesh out and what are the fruits of the flesh?

These aren't biblically called the fruits of the flesh, but you could call them that it's actually from the same chapter in Galatians 5 beginning In verse 19, it says the acts of the sinful nature You could call it the fruit of the sinful nature of the flesh Paul says, you know, they're rather obvious sexual immorality Impurity of just about any kind debauchery, which is basically living to please the flesh I dolletry which is idolizing something whether it's money or power or whatever and Immorality oops, excuse me and witchcraft Hatred Discord Jealousy fits of rage Selfish ambitions dissensions factions and Envy drunkenness orgies and the like now doesn't mean you have to see every single one of these things But if you're seeing some of these things in someone who is otherwise Calling you or calling themselves a leader in the body of Christ. That's a problem, you know That's a problem. You know, I got to take something else And I've already made reference to this when I was talking about apologies but I really think that there's another element that we we don't look for enough in the body of Christ because we've We've kind of applied the same Celebrity status to our church leaders as we have people in the world And you know, it's it's funny. Have you ever noticed that in the world? People are celebrities regardless of their character Regardless of their behavior regardless of their attitudes.

It really doesn't matter When I was watching and I'm sure you noticed this when the Olympics were on here just a few weeks ago It was really amazing wasn't it when they did these little quick interviews after some of these people won their events how some of them were just still so humble and They would thank their trainer or their coaches and some of them who were believers would give glory to God Which was you know, very cool to see And then we got to see the opposite during the Olympics, too We got to see just that that preening, you know Fluffing their feathers kind of look at me I'm the man sort of a thing and some of some of the greatest athletes, you know did not show us an example of humility of any kind and Didn't you find as a believer watching that it kind of just put a bad taste in your mouth I mean, it's kind of like yeah, they're amazing, but they know it and They're it's kind of sickening actually because they know how good they are and All they want to do is talk about themselves, you know Instead of thanking other people or giving the glory to God. I Believe in the body of Christ that characteristic of humility is something that we don't look for enough again The reason is because we've applied the same celebrity status to church leaders as we have to people in the world and we'll forgive them Just about anything any kind of character defect as long as they produce what we think is success Long as we got people coming

the church coffers are filled, you know We got comfortable chairs to sit on and so forth, you know, we'll forgive them a myriad of sins, but I think one that we ought to look for in our leaders is is humility and I Think that humility Well, I see it in the word and I've learned it in my own life that humility is best seen when someone is attacked When someone is challenged How do they respond, you know, we're not going to take time to turn there this morning but there's just there's this powerful passage that frankly I've always loved and It's in the book of Numbers But it's the passage where you'll remember There was this guy by the name of Cora Who Was kind of a jerk and he got about 250 of The leaders of Israel. This is while they're in the wilderness to come up against Moses and Aaron and challenge them for their role of leadership and So Cora brought these 250, you know other men Who again had been chosen as leaders and he brought them and they are they approached Moses and Aaron and they basically Kind of just said, you know, you guys you guys take too much upon yourselves You you know being the leaders of of this whole group of people and keep in mind They're probably some 2.5 million people perhaps we think That's a lot of people that's a big church and And but these 250 guys are all like You guys, you know, you think you're such hot stuff and you're always telling people into this man No, you know meeting with God and we're just like you then they and here's what they said They said the whole nation is holy Didn't that sound good? I mean, isn't this not like a great argument? The whole nation is holy Why do you guys think that you're such hot stuff?

You can do this and do that Stuff like that, and they just, you know, they're pointing the finger thing, you know. I, how do I say this? Being challenged as a leader is, shall I say, very challenging. But I am so impressed with what Moses and Aaron did. You know what they did?

They didn't point back the finger and say, oh yeah? Which is the greatest comeback in the world. Oh yeah? Well, who died and left you in charge or whatever, you know, sort of a thing. Moses responded by falling on his face before the people.

Isn't that amazing? He got down on the ground, he put his face to the ground before these people. And did not speak a word in his own defense. I just think that's amazing. And you know, I think about how Jesus was constantly confronted with an attitude among his disciples.

They were always trying to, they were arguing about which of them was the greatest. And so Jesus had to rebuke him on several occasions over that particular argument. But he said, listen guys, you know how people in the world do leadership, don't you? Haven't you watched how the Gentiles do it? They love to lord it over people.

They love to just get out a baseball bat and beat people over the head and make them submit. And that's the way it works in the world. But then he said to his disciples, you're not to be like that. You want to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Really, truly?

Are you sure you want to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Because I'm going to tell you how to get there. Be the least in the kingdom of heaven. Be the servant of all. Get down on your feet, wash the feet of the saints.

Get down on your knees, rather. Wash the feet of the saints. Love the least. Be willing to deal with any situation, any person, no matter how lowly it may appear. I think that that is a powerful demonstration of some of the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

And I think it's something that we need to start looking for in our leaders. Are they humble? Are they humble? Are they humble enough to say when they're wrong? Are they humble enough to do things when others won't?

Or to do what would be considered lowly and that sort of thing? Those are things that we ought to be looking at. Because, and the reason is, God has given us this scripture here in Matthew chapter 7 as a warning. He's sounding a legitimate and true warning. And we need to know how to deal with these things.

One last thing. One last thing. There's a passage in 1 John that I want to share with you this morning that I think gives another important key. Well, it's not really another important key. It's kind of an elaboration on a key that we've already really expressed.

But let me put it on the screen for you. It's from 1 John 4, 6. And John writes this. He says, we are from God. And he's speaking of the body of Christ.

And whoever knows God listens to us. But whoever is not from God does not listen to us. Then look what John says at the end. This is how we recognize the spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood. Now, this is very close to what Jesus said.

Related to people hearing, when they're of God, they hear the voice of God and they respond. When they are not of God, they do not listen. And so forth. But John is giving this statement from the perspective of the body of Christ, which is what you and I live in. And he's saying to us that if people will listen to us.

And by the way, that phrase, listen to us, refers to the teachings of the apostles. That's what you and I have in our Bibles. We have the teachings of the apostles. So we could say it this way today. Those who know God are going to listen to the word of God and they're going to respond to it.

But those who don't know God, they are not going to listen to the word of God. They're not going to take it in. They're going to bristle when they hear the word of God and so forth. Now, here's what John says. This is how we've learned to discern the spirit of truth from the spirit of error.

And once again, we see this beautiful sort of a test of true leaders in the body of Christ from false leaders, whether they be false prophets, false teachers or whatever. Do they themselves listen to the word of God? Are they living the word of God in their own life when they hear the word of God? Do you see them responding to the word? Are they growing in the word?

Are they embracing the word or are they all the time just kind of giving the word to other people? Do you know how easy that is to do from an exterior sort of a perspective to always be talking to people about the word of God, but never embracing it in your own life? It's a very easy thing to do, you know. But John says that a test is do they themselves embrace the word of God? Are they embracing the revelation of God's word in their own lives?

This is the test that they used in the early church to determine whether someone was speaking by the spirit of truth or by the spirit of falsehood. You know, it's kind of in 21 and a half years of pastoring this church, do you guys even know how many invitations or not invitations, that's wrong, requests I've had from people to come in and speak at our church that just send me an email or used to be letters before email or they'll call. I don't take those kind of calls much anymore. I don't have to, which is kind of nice. But I used to get calls and requests and people saying, yeah, I'd like to come.

And, you know, this is kind of my, they give you their little resume and they want to come and they want to speak to the church. And I know that there are some churches that just basically let anybody and everybody in to speak, but I don't. If I don't know them, they're not going to get up here and exhort you. Because how do I know? How can I have applied any of these tests to somebody who just sent a piece of paper in the mail or by email?

I mean, how can you do that? How can you know their fruit? How can you know whether they have embraced the word of God in their own lives or whether they just like to exhort people? Because it can be kind of a trip, you know. And there's always adoring fans, even in the body of Christ, for people who come through and teach.

And boy, coming through and teaching in an area, that's easy because people don't, they don't ever get to see your lives. You know, those times that I've, when I've had an opportunity to do like a men's conference or something like that for another church. Those are fun because they don't know who you are. They don't know what kind of a jerk you are or whatever. I mean, you know, they don't, they just, they watch you come in and share the word of God and then float out after you're done, you know.

And they think, whoa, he's really spiritual. And you just kind of let them think that, you know, but it's not true, you know. But we should be seeing the fruit of the Holy Spirit in people's lives. And we should wait to see that fruit before we truly open our hearts to what they have to say. You know, if the body of Christ applied the tests that we're seeing and hearing about here in Matthew chapter 7 and these other passages, we would be healthier today than we are.

We would be stronger today than we are. And this is one of the reasons why we've been weakened. Because we have not applied the discernment that we've been given in the word of God, you know, for those who share it.