

41.

Jesus Said a Tree is Known by its Fruit

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain to others that Jesus offers eternal life to all who will come to Him in repentance and faith. We saw that the Pharisees were choosing to reject that offer and were even claiming that Jesus cast out demons by the power of Satan. In this topic, we will see that Jesus went on to teach that a tree is known by its fruit.

The scribes and the Pharisees had accused Jesus of casting out a demon by the power of Satan. Jesus chose to show that the real problem with these men began in their hearts. Matthew 12:33-37 says, “‘Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by *its* fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.’” Here, Jesus compared the hearts of the scribes and the Pharisees to a fruit tree.

Jesus gave two illustrations of the hearts of the scribes and Pharisees. First, Jesus showed that a fruit tree has a very interesting way of showing when the inside of the tree is rotten even though the fruit tree may look beautiful on the outside. If the inner core of the tree is rotten, the tree will bear rotten fruit. The fruit may even look good on the outside, but when you cut the fruit open, it will be rotten in the center. Jesus used that as a very interesting illustration of the scribes and Pharisees in this verse. Just like the inside of a fruit tree can be known by its fruit, the scribes and the Pharisees were showing the condition of their hearts by their refusal to admit that Jesus was from God, even though they had seen His power over demons. Matthew 7:20 says, “‘Therefore by their fruits you will know them.’” Jesus said the Pharisees could be known by their fruit.

Second, Jesus compared the scribes and Pharisees to a family of snakes. Jesus said they could not speak good things because their hearts were full of evil. The phrase “the abundance of the heart” means *the things that fill the heart*. Here, Jesus pointed out the fact that the hearts of the scribes and Pharisees were filled with evil. They were like the generation in the time of Noah. Genesis 6:5 says, “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.” Psalm 119:11 says, “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.” This verse illustrates a person with a good heart because such a person will bring forth good things. In contrast, Jeremiah 17:9 says, “‘The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?’” This verse illustrates the heart of an evil person and such a person brings forth evil things.

The word translated “idle” means *lazy or one avoiding work which he should do*. An “idle word” means *an evil word that is spoken*. Revelation 20:13 speaks of all those who reject Christ. That

verse says, “The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.” Here, we see that their works will include their evil words. In contrast, the words of the righteous will be rewarded. A person who is right with God will speak words of love because he or she is motivated by the love of Christ. A person who is in rebellion against God will speak evil words because that person is motivated by fear out of a desire to please self.

The scribes and Pharisees did not like to have their works described. As a result, they tried to change the subject by asking a question. Matthew 12:38-40 says, “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’ But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.’” Here, we see that the scribes and Pharisees said that they wanted to see a sign from Jesus to prove that He was from God. Jesus had just done many miracles and they had seen the change when Jesus cast the demon out of the man that was demon possessed but they refused to believe those signs.

In fact, they wanted a sign from the heavens, because Luke 11:16 says, “Others, testing *Him*, sought from Him a sign from heaven.” Instead, Jesus gave them a sign from the Old Testament after He described their character. Jesus said that there were two characteristics of that generation, especially of the scribes and Pharisees. First, Jesus said that generation was an evil generation. The word translated “evil” means *that which is sinful or bad in its nature or condition* and is translated “wicked” in some places. The word is translated “just” a few verses later, in Matthew 12:45, where we read, “Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation.” In this verse, we see that Jesus described those with whom He was talking as “this wicked generation”.

Second, Jesus called that generation an “adulterous generation”. The word translated “adulterous” means *to be unfaithful in marriage or to be unfaithful to God*. Jesus made a very similar statement again to the Pharisees in Matthew 16:4, where we read, “‘A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.’ And He left them and departed.” In both of these passages, Jesus was talking about the fact that the Pharisees were unfaithful to God; in both places, He gave a sign from the Old Testament by speaking of the prophet Jonah. Here, we see that Jesus reminded these men of the fact that Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights. Then, Jesus said that the Son of Man would also be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. As a result, the sign that Jesus gave was His own coming death and resurrection.

The many miracles Jesus did were all signs of the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. John 20:30-31 says, “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” However, the greatest sign, of the fact

that Jesus is God, was His own resurrection from the dead.

Then, Jesus went on to warn the scribes and Pharisees that they would face judgment if there was no repentance on their part. Matthew 12:41-42 says, “The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah *is* here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon *is* here.” Here, we see that Jesus used two illustrations to show that the generation of His time here on earth would face greater judgment.

First, Jesus said that the men of Nineveh would condemn that generation. They had repented when Jonah came and preached to them. Jonah 3:5-9 says, “So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered *himself* with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he caused *it* to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, ‘Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell *if* God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?’” The people of Nineveh believed God. Then, they repented and showed their repentance by their actions. Jesus said that there was One among them that day who was greater than Jonah, but the people that day were not repenting.

Second, Jesus said that the Queen of the South would also condemn that generation. The Queen of Sheba had heard about the wisdom of Solomon but she did not believe such wisdom was possible and came to test Solomon with hard questions. 1 Kings 10:3 says, “So Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing so difficult for the king that he could not explain *it* to her.” Then, in 1 Kings 10:6-7, we read, “Then she said to the king: ‘It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. However I did not believe the words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard.’” The queen believed when she heard the wisdom of Solomon and saw the greatness of his kingdom. Then, Jesus said that there was One there that day with greater wisdom than Solomon. However, the Pharisees did not believe, even though they heard and saw Jesus.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand how to explain to others why Jesus is the One who is greater than either Jonah or Solomon. We also want to help our children learn to explain why Jesus warned the scribes and Pharisees that they would be condemned by both the people of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba because of their unbelief. In this way, we are equipping our children both to explain the love of Christ and also warn of judgment for those who fail to believe. May the Lord richly bless you as you equip your children to explain the Word of God.