

Fruit Inspector

Luke 6:43-45

Introduction

Context: In this extended sermon by Jesus in Luke, he continues to illustrate the disconnect between “his way” and “their way,” between “his Kingdom” and the “kingdoms of the world.” But before they can follow his path, they must admit they are lost on their own path. And that is often the hardest part.

- There was a day before GPS on our phones, before GPS in our cars, before we’d even print off Mapquest directions. When you had to *know* where you were going. Inevitably you’d end up lost but, sometimes, you’d keep driving around because acting like you knew where you were because you’d rather be lost than **admit** you’re lost.

Shocking Illustration: He uses a shocking illustration to force his listeners to examine their own hearts and ask, essentially, “Who are you, and how do you know?” Or maybe you could ask more clearly, “Whose are you?”

- Transformation in Christ changes your heart producing good fruit. The fruit of your life (1) is the natural result of your identity, (2) cannot be faked, and (3) really matters.

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1. The Fruit of Your Life Is the Natural Result of Your Identity

⁴³ “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴ for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Who Am I?: Outside of the Bible and my family, few things shaped my understanding of the world more than 90s kids movies. One of the standouts was “Cool Runnings.” Essentially, the main character (Derice) thinks he needs to win an Olympic gold medal to prove he is “somebody,” to validate his purpose. After failing to qualify for the Summer Olympics as a sprinter, he embarks on the hilarious attempt to make the Winter Olympics by recruiting a bobsled team (Jamaica is not exactly a bastion of winter sports). In a pivotal conversation, the

¹ ⁴³ Οὐ γάρ ἐστιν δένδρον καλὸν ποιοῦν καρπὸν σαπρὸν, οὐδὲ πάλιν δένδρον σαπρὸν ποιοῦν καρπὸν καλόν. ⁴⁴ Ἐκαστὸν γὰρ δένδρον ἐκ τοῦ ἰδίου καρποῦ γινώσκειται· οὐ γὰρ ἐξ ἀκανθῶν συλλέγουσιν σῦκα οὐδὲ ἐκ βάτου σταφυλὴν τρυγῶσιν. ⁴⁵ ὁ ἀγαθὸς ἄνθρωπος ἐκ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ θησαυροῦ τῆς καρδίας προφέρει τὸ ἀγαθόν, καὶ ὁ πονηρὸς ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ προφέρει τὸ πονηρόν· ἐκ γὰρ περισσεύματος καρδίας λαλεῖ τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ.

coach (John Candy) tells Derice this: “A gold medal is a wonderful thing. But if you’re not enough without one, you’ll never be enough with one.” In the end, the team finds their true identity not by winning a gold medal, but by crossing the finish line with integrity.

- We think our accomplishments will define us. That is putting too much weight on your accomplishments. Be proud of your accomplishments! But they are not you (e.g., Hammock, weight).
- The dirty secret of church growth (Atlantic Article, Ryan Burge stats). Some of the most godly pastors and impressive communicators preach to tiny crowds each week, while some of the most “trash” (technical term) pastors/preachers fill up former stadiums each Sunday. I can’t explain why God works as he does, “the wind blows where it wishes” (Jn 3:8).
 - Lots of things outside of our control influence our accomplishments (e.g., natural ability, upbringing, particular psychology, etc.). Don’t compliment someone on their height (or beard, etc.). Or make fun of them for those things (outside of their control).

Image Management: The human heart is desperately addicted to image management. We would rather “look the part” than “be the part.”

- Many of us spend a lot of time and money hanging paper on our walls to have a bullet point on our resumé. That’s the game, and we might have to play it, but the goal of education should be competency and character formation, the starting line rather than the finish. The sad truth is that many degrees don’t prove you are something, just that you once memorized something. It’s crucial to distinguish between real success, which involves character and integrity, and apparent success, which might look impressive but lacks substance.

Root or Fruit: The foundational question being proposed is what kind of tree are you? The most obvious way to tell is your fruit. How do I know the tree in my backyard is a lemon tree? It grows lemons.

- How do I know you belong to Christ? Because your life produces the fruit of Christlikeness, or what Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23).
 - Or elsewhere the fruit of light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth (Eph 5:9).
 - And elsewhere, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God (Phil 1:11).
- “The fruit a tree produces cannot be different from the character of the tree itself” (Bock).
- The fundamental issue is not our behavior but our nature. The former is downstream from the latter. An apple tree doesn’t have to consider whether it wants to produce apples or oranges each morning. It will, if healthy, produce apples.

Two Kinds of Trees: There really are only two kinds of people in the world. You are either a good tree with good fruit or a bad tree with bad fruit (Lk 6 language).

- Ps 1 calls it righteous or wicked. The first step is to figure out which tree you are.. The problem is, only Jesus is righteous. We are wicked. Ps 1 makes this point that there is only one “blessed **one**” and the wicked many. In that psalm, there is a choice offered between “the way of the righteous one” and the “way of the wicked.” Jesus says he is **the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through [him]**” (John 14:6)”
- “Perhaps there is no anthem so genuinely American as “My Way” (Frank Sinatra or Elvis). **We want to be self-made, self-sufficient, and self-confident.** But, if we are honest, we are not the “righteous one” but the wicked ones. The road of our own choosing, leads only to our self-destruction. “And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me”” (Luke 9:23). In Jesus, the righteous one, God offers a “free and better way.” He offers a life that is firmly planted by God’s refreshing rivers rather than the emptiness of the world’s temporary pursuits (e.g., chaff that the wind blows).
- **Step 1 requires figuring out if you grafted into the tree of Christ, belonging to him, abiding in him.**

Death to Life: What Jesus says in Luke 6 aligns with the broader biblical narrative of transformation through Christ. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2 Cor 5:17). It’s not a superficial change but a fundamental transformation of our identity and nature. The old self (sin and death) is gone, and we are reborn as new creatures in Christ capable of producing sincere, good fruit.²

2. The Fruit of Your Life Cannot Be Faked

⁴³ “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴ for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Behavior Modification: The solution cannot simply be behavior modification. You can’t simply tie some oranges to your pear tree and pretend you have an orange tree.

- Doing good things for wrong reasons is still sin, it’s just a more insidious sin because it looks good on the outside (the solution isn’t to stop doing the right things but to allow God to transform your heart and do them for the right reason). Reading Bible, helping an old lady cross the street, etc.
- **The gospel doesn’t simply transform our behavior (laws can do that), it transforms our hearts.**
 - Don’t just be nice to each other but love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 1 Pet 1:22).
 - Don’t just tolerate others (coexist) but love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you (Lk 6:27-28).

² Cf. Eph 2:1-10, Jn 3:3-7.

Hypocrite: This connects with the preceding instruction (duh!; it obviously is one whole sermon in one continuous book). Last week, Pastor James addressed the idea of hypocritical judgment when Jesus said: ⁴¹ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴² How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You **hypocrite**, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye (Lk 6:41-42).

- The term "hypocrite" (ὑποκριτής) comes from two words meaning "under judgment," implying something hiding beneath the surface (a discrepancy between appearance and reality), a facade or pretense.
 - "Hypocrite" is a transliterated word (cf. baptize, apostle).³
- It originally referred to play actors. In Greek theater they would wear masks to show feelings of sadness, happiness, etc. It didn't matter what they felt like underneath. It became a negative term in the NT and elsewhere to describe someone who is a fraud or deceiver, pretending to be someone they are not.
 - This is all well and good for an actor (a.k.a. "professional liar"). But it's a problem for the real world, especially your Christian life.
- There's something quite beautiful about someone who, for good or bad, is true to themselves.
 - John Wayne is one of the more famous actors of the "Golden Age of Hollywood." His roles, for the most part, don't really hold up. He's been maligned, and rightly so, for some problematic takes. But there's one thing you have to say about him. For good or bad, when you saw a John Wayne movie, you got John Wayne. Whether he was a Green Beret, and Irish Boxer, Genghis Khan, or a Roman Centurian, you got John Wayne!⁴ "Truly this man was the Son of God." Whether a cowboy hat, Roman armor, or a Fu Manchu, you got the same cadence, accent, and persona (cf. Dwayne Johnson, or Kevin Costner in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*).
- We all struggle with hypocrisy. The whole point of Jesus' log and speck analogy is to pay attention to yourself! Hypocrisy is not always intentional.
 - It is more prevalent to fool yourself than to fool others. Other people often have a more clear assessment of you because they don't have a biased opinion (e.g., hearing your voice through your own bones vs. hearing a recording). Cf. also body dysmorphia, looking in the mirror.
 - There's this weird delusion of hypocrisy in which we are often willing and unwilling hypocrites at the same time.
 - There's a story of the liberation of the first concentration camp that was liberated in Ohrdruf, Germany in 1945. Famously, the townsfolk were forced to visit the camp to see its horrors. Soon, the mayor of the town and his wife were found having hung themselves.

³ Transliterated words: baptize, apostle, angel, Christ, Satan, Amen, epistle, deacon, Pharisee, Sabbath, Hallelujah, abyss, alpha, omega, Gehenna, hosanna, maranatha, paraclete, rabbi, Messiah, cherubim, seraphim, etc.

⁴ *Greatest Story Ever Told, Quiet Man, The Conqueror, etc.*

- If they'd known what was happening, they wouldn't have done it because they wouldn't have been shocked.
- If they hadn't known, then they wouldn't have done it because they would have been truly ignorant.
- The truth was they knew and they didn't know. They knew the horrors but deliberately feigned ignorance.
- To confront our hypocrisy we have to admit straightforwardly our complicity in our own sin. It's not simply that "I'm not perfect" but that I am sinful!

Why Are We Hypocrites?: We are afraid if we admit who we really are we will be rejected. We are scared of people knowing the truth. We are uncomfortable with the reality of who we really are, so we hide from the world, ourselves, and God (cf. Adam and Eve).

- "(1) To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. (2) To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. (3) But to be fully known and truly loved is a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us" (Keller).
 - When you are known and accepted by God, it frees you from having to lie about yourself to others (true self, false self HT Benner).
- The only way to **not** be a hypocrite is to unite the reality of your internal self with your external behavior. The only way that can happen is when your life is truly generated by Christ and not your own performance.

Shine Through: Who you are will eventually shine through! In this case we see it often in words (out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks).

- I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matt 12:36-37)
- ⁵ So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. ⁷ For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰ From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. ¹¹ Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water (Jas 3:5-12)
- Our words reveal our character. Our words reveal our heart. Hot Mic Moments (different than our previous president who didn't seem to mind when the mic is on). Times when someone *didn't* know their words were heard:
 - George Bush and Dick Cheney didn't realize the mic could hear them trashing a New York Times reporter.

- Obama trashed Kanye in a 2009 interview assuming his comments were off the record — they weren't.
- In the end, we can't speak good when evil is on the inside. At best we have **hypocrisy** at worst **evil words**. Our hypocritical shield will eventually fail us and we will speak words of malice, lies, vulgarity, etc. Be sure your sin will find you out (Num 32:23).
- The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden (1 Tim 5:24-25).
 - Some sins are easy to see (so these men should not be ordained). Others will only be revealed with time (so take the time you need). Nothing can remain hidden forever. And if we miss it now, God will judge it in heaven (which will probably be even worse).

3. The Fruit of Your Life Matters

⁴³ “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴ for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Behavior Does Matter: If what you hear me say is your behavior doesn't matter, you are wrong. Your behavior is essential because you are called to obey God and reflect his character.

- But your behavior does not earn you status as a child of God, it reflects your status as a child of God.
- So you're godly fruit becomes an act of worship rather than a personal accomplishment.

Conditions for Fruit: Do you know that not all apple trees produce fruit? They need to reach a certain **maturity**. They require cross-**pollination** with other apple trees. They need healthy **conditions** (e.g., sunlight, soil, water, temps). Proper **pruning** and care (including pest control and mitigation of disease) maximize fruit. In the same way, if we truly belong to Christ, we will not bear much fruit if we do not pursue maturity and health, including Christian community, feeding on God's word, accountability and discipline, etc.

Grocery Stores vs. Orchards: We live in a day and age when you can get any fruit at any time at the grocery store. It's not natural. You shouldn't be able to get a cantaloupe in January.

- The NT speaks about **cultivating** fruit. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing (Jn 15:4-5).
- Are you abiding in Christ or simply mimicking Christian behavior?
- Are you feeding your soul with the gospel or starving it from the Word of God?

Evidence: Fruit doesn't matter as proof of your hard work, or horticultural expertise but as evidence of God's transformation of your life and generous work in your heart. The fruit of your life is also the external evidence of the gospel that the watching world sees (JW conversation yesterday, didn't understand Jesus or the Trinity but knew that church folk would cuss you out in their Sunday best).

Conclusion

The Temptation: The insidious temptation is to become a **Fruit Inspector**, looking at everyone else's life. That is precisely *not* the point. If you get anything from Jesus' discussion of hypocrisy is to **examine your own life**. "The unexamined life is not worth living" (Socrates).

- We like to divert our attention from our own hearts by pointing out other people's problems. I'm happy to talk about your faults but not mine.
- This is why Jesus said (earlier in Luke 6) that being judgmental is the primary sign of hypocrisy.
- A sign of gospel impact is when you become more critical of yourself than others and quicker to correct your own misplaced love than that of other people.

Does your life bear the fruit of the gospel? If not, then your heart might not have been changed by the gospel. Don't confuse the evidence of salvation with earning salvation but also, don't act like you somehow can be saved yet show no evidence of it.

- **Repentance** is a **change of heart** (love, trust, allegiance) that leads to a **change of behavior** (the fruit). The heart is the root, the behavior is the fruit.
- If there is no changed behavior (no fruit) then there might be no transformed heart (no root), but you don't fix it by tying some fruit on the tree (e.g., tying apples to a lemon tree). You fix it by admitting your brokenness, allowing Christ to dig up the rotten root of your sinful life and transplant his life-giving Spirit into your heart.