

Saved By Grace Lutheran Church

Sermon by Pastor Tim Bartels

Trinity 12, 2014

Matthew 12:33-37<sup>1</sup>

### Part I

If you have been out on the roads this week, you have noticed a change. School buses are back on the road. They are busing children back to school. To be sure, school has started up again. That means those of you who are students are back in class. You see your class mates again; meet new ones; get new teachers.

Not only has school resumed, but in the church we are resuming Sunday and Wednesday school. Some of you children will be sitting in those classes; and, some of you adults will assist their parents as teachers. Later in the service you will be installed as teachers.

When you think about teachers, the job description is in the title. The teacher teaches; and, *after* learning, the teacher gives a test. It might be a math test; a spelling test, or some other test. In Sunday and Wednesday school that test is often in the form of memory work. Today's text also talks about a test. We will call it "The Fruit Test."

Jesus put it this way, "a tree is known by its fruit." The fruit will tell you what kind of tree you have. It will tell you if the tree is good; or, if the tree is bad. You have to examine the fruit, its leaves, its flowers. If they pass the test, the tree is good. If they don't the tree is bad.

It reminds me of when our family lived in Chile. One day one of our children broke out in a terrible itchy skin rash. Dawn and I were perplexed. We had no idea what could have caused it. Then, in a conversation with a friend, Dawn mentioned the rash. The friend told her that the rash was likely from the litre tree.

The litre tree is a small tree found only in central Chile. Its a tree that kids can easily climb. The trouble is, litre has a toxic substance. People who are allergic to it, get a severe skin reaction from it. Before touching a tree

that resembles litre, then, it is important to test the fruit; to take note of its leaves and flowers.

Of course, Jesus isn't telling you and me to be horticulturists. His words get to a more profound type of testing. The fruit test is a *picture* of testing what teachers teach. You do that by looking at the fruit, their teaching...so lets apply the "fruit test."

### Part II a

We will do that by beginning with those in Jesus' audience, the Pharisees. The Pharisees were highly regarded people. They were outstanding citizens and model church goers. Some of them were teachers of the people. Lots of what they said sounded good. "God is merciful," they said. Then, they added, "He shows mercy to those who are *good* people." They prided themselves in being good.

Because they did they had a *problem*; a problem with Jesus. Just before our text, Jesus had cast out a demon. The action said that he had power over the devil and his demonic host. It got under the Pharisees' skin. It did, because time and time again Jesus called them out on their sinful pride.

...so they fought him. When he cast out the demon, then, they accused him. The accusation was that Jesus was in league with the devil. They were evil words that came from the evil treasure in their hearts. In short, the Pharisees *failed* the "fruit test."

### Part II b

...then, there are modern day teachers; teachers that the church's children are exposed to. Many of these modern day teachers take a *different* approach than the Pharisees of Jesus day. They do, because Pharisees believed in the authority of God's word. Today that is not the case for many.

So, some of them say that the Bible is *unreliable*. They claim it is not historically accurate. The miracles are just legends. The church made

them up to make Jesus bigger than life. You have to get to the real Jesus by peeling through all those layers.

Others say that there is *no proof* of God. There is nothing beyond what you see. The only reality is the world. What you see is what you get. Religion is just superstition. Since it is, it is up to man to figure out what is best for man.

Still others say that Christianity is the *source* of the Western world's evil. It pretends to have good morals, but the church is all about power. Those in power keep others under their thumbs. It doesn't let them live the life they want to live.

These arguments and more have been popularized in our time; arguments that our children hear in our cultural setting. They sound *logical* to the unsuspecting; and, many have been led astray by them. Led astray, there has been a mass falling away in our day.

The thing is, these arguments *twist* the truth. They do, because those who make these arguments have a *problem*; a problem with Jesus. In that way they are like the Pharisees.

Luther got to the heart of the problem when he wrote, “(The world) wants to abolish sin (and) to merit eternal life. This the gospel condemns. But the world cannot bear (that). Therefore it charges the gospel with sedition.”<sup>2</sup> That's the same as entertaining evil thoughts about Jesus in the heart. In short, many *modern teachers fail* the “fruit test.”

### Part II c

We've spent some time talking about teachers whose fruit is bad. Before we go on, we need to do some self-reflection. What about you and me? Is our fruit any better? What kind of words come out of our hearts?

Well...think about it. When bad things happen to us, our hearts treasure up *doubt* towards God. “God must not love me. If he did love me, he wouldn't let this happen. He wouldn't, but he did.” When we feel guilt, our hearts treasure up doubt again. “God can't forgive me. My sin is too big. Its no use.”

...or think about what you and I treasure up in our hearts toward our neighbor. They treasure up *bad feelings*. They keep score. Then, when our buttons get pushed, we say things we regret. We can't take them back. Once out, it is too late. Our hearts treasure up *pride*. We judge one another. We jump to conclusions. We talk about how bad they are. We do before we know all the facts. Our hearts treasure up *greed*. We see what others have. We wish we had it. We see what we don't have. We feel bad for ourselves. We end up grumbling. When you apply the fruit test to ourselves, *we fail* the test, too.

### Part III

No. We have nothing to hold over anyone else. Our hearts aren't anymore pure than those of others. Jesus hit the nail on the head, "An evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil things." That's how it is with our fallen nature. The things stored up in the heart of a sinner are evil. When the sinner thinks evil he can only speak evil; his actions will only be evil. That's true of us all, you and me included. That leaves us in a bad place. Jesus put it this way, "I say to you every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it on the day of Judgment." That's to say, all have to appear in God's court. All have to stand before him. All have to give account. All will have to give account of every idle word.

Jesus is thinking of the idle words the Pharisees spoke. They accused Jesus of being in league with the devil. They did, because they remained in unbelief. In unbelief, outside of Jesus, they remained in sin. In sin, the Judge will find them guilty as charged.

You and I deserve to be in that same place. We deserve to be found guilty as charged. Our nature is no different. Sinful hearts think and say sinful things; and sin brings condemnation. That's the end result of failing the fruit test. The tree is cut. It is cast into eternal fire.

### Part IV

...but there is a good tree known by its good fruit; “a good man who, who out of the good treasure brings forth good things.” That good man is Jesus.

Jesus stored up good in *his* heart. When he was a boy, he stayed back at the temple after his parents left for home. He did because he wanted to dig into God's word with the best teachers of the day. When he was a man, he did not have a formal education of the religious elite. No. He didn't. Yet he knew the Scriptures. He knew them because Mary and Joseph taught him; his home pastor taught him. He pondered the word. He treasured it in his heart.

Not only that, but Jesus' heart, unlike ours, was good through and through. There was *no* sin in him. The apostle put it this way, “He committed no sin, nor was deceit in his mouth.”<sup>3</sup> No. There wasn't. Jesus passed the fruit test.

Because he did, God laid all your sins on Jesus; all the evil treasured up in your hearts; all the unkind, judging, grumbling words; all the doubting thoughts and words. Shouldered with your sin, Jesus did time for you. You are no longer found guilty. You are justified. God declares you innocent of all charges against you. He credits you with Jesus' goodness.

## Part V

It was all given to you at the font. At the font, baptism grafted you, like a branch, into Jesus. On your own, you were a dead branch; your fruit was bad. Grafted into Jesus, you are nourished by the gospel. The gospel puts forth good fruit in your life. It's good not because of any worthiness on your part. It is good because of Jesus. Your good is sanctified by faith in him.

It all goes to say that God calls you to use your tongues to speak good; to give the gospel to your children; to tell others what great things God has done for you; to contend for the truth in a time a place that contradicts the faith.

You parents, grandparents and teachers have a special privilege to do that. Of all the things you could give your children; the church's children – one thing, and one thing only will serve them *forever* – Jesus. You...*you* get to give them Jesus. To be sure, Jesus may not be popular; there may be many who put down the faith; the faith life may be messy at times. All that may be true, but in the end *only* Jesus can give them what they need. In order to give them Jesus, God gives you Jesus by means of his word. He puts Jesus, your treasure, into your hearts. By means of that treasure, God will bring good things to your lips; the good news of Jesus. He is the good tree that brings forth good fruit; and he brings it in your life. He does, because he passed the fruit test for you. Amen.

[1](#)References to the text (NKJ) will not be cited in the sermon

[2](#)Luther's Works, Vol. 26, American Edition, p. 13

[3](#)1 Peter 2.22