

Title: Am I really a Christian?ⁱ
Text: Luke 6.43-45
Theme: gospel fruit
Series: Luke
Prop Stmt: Genuine conversion is revealed in gospel fruit.

Read Text:

If you have ever been in a class when the teacher said, "This is going to be on the test." I suspect that most of you paid more attention at the moment. This text is not going to be on the test as much as this text is the test. Here is what I mean. The Bible describes God's purpose for creating the world and therefore, the purpose for your life. God made this world in order to make a kingdom for his amazing Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the perfect King who will, one day, reign over and enjoy a perfect, eternal kingdom made up of people who reflect him from every tribe, language and nation. But how can sinners like us be allowed to be part of a kingdom like that, without messing it up? The answer is: the gospel. Sometimes it is called the gospel of the kingdom because the gospel is the good news of how sinners like us can live with God forever and enjoy him. The gospel can be summarized by four points: God, man, Christ, response.

God – God created people in his image in order to enjoy us. As image-bearers, we were made to reflect him. In addition to being our infinitely, holy Creator, God is relational, loving, joyful, satisfied, giving, righteous, true, faithful, and generous.

Man - He made us to be like that but he did not make us as robots. He gave us the capacity to love, which means he gave us the capacity to reject and we did. We have rebelled against God. It started with Adam and Eve and was passed on to every person since. We wanted to be our own ruler so we could make our own laws and the result has been disastrous. Our sin has brought destruction to our souls, our bodies, our world and our relationships. God is righteous. He could have judged us as being guilty, because we are, but God is not only righteous, he is merciful and he loves to display his mercy. Therefore, God provided a way for our sins to be forgiven. Now, listen carefully, because here is where so many people are confused. Our sin can never be forgiven based on what we can do to earn God's favor or pay him back. Never! We have to be saved from our sin. We have to be rescued from our sin. We need a Savior. We need someone to pay for our sin in our place because we cannot do it for ourselves. Our best, is not good enough. That is shocking to hear. The best you could ever do is not good enough. On our own, we have no hope.

Christ – So, God sent his own Son, Jesus Christ to this world to become one of us. Jesus was God who became a man. As the GOD-man, he was absolutely perfect in every way. He lived a perfectly righteous life in our place. As the God-MAN he was able to die as a perfect substitute in our place. Jesus came to this earth to live a perfect life so that he could offer that perfect life as an atoning sacrifice for every single sin of every single person who would ever believe on him. So, while our best is not good enough to pay for our sins, Jesus is! Therefore, our hope for

forgiveness and to be citizens of his eternal kingdom is not based on what we do, but is based on what Christ has done.

Response – In order for the life and death of Christ to count for you, you have to renounce your claim to rule your life and you have to trust in Christ alone as your savior and submit to him as King. That is called saving faith. Saving faith means that I turn from my way of living however I please and I surrender my life to Christ. When you do that, your sin is no longer counted against you. The payment of Christ is applied to your account and the righteousness of Christ is applied to your account as well. You are declared righteous. You are forgiven. You are adopted into the family of God. You are made a citizen of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. You are baptized into one body, indwelt and sealed by the Holy Spirit. The people who do that, are called believers, or Christians. These people then get baptized in order to make their faith known to others and become committed to a group of other believers. These groups of believers are called a local church. A local church is intended to display the gospel and a local church is intended to be a preview of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Our lives together are held together by the gospel. We may or may not like the same kind of music, drive the same kind of vehicles, like the same college football team, like the same types of food, have the same kind of jobs, education, or taste in clothes. IN fact, we don't. But even as people who are naturally different from one another in so many ways, we are formed and forged by the gospel. We actually love one another and sacrifice for one another and we give generously and sacrificially so that others can hear the good news of the gospel as well. The gospel is the most important message that you could ever hear, but it is hard to hear. It is hard to face the truth about what you really are. But unless you are emptied of your self-reliance you cannot follow Jesus. Unless you realize the seriousness of your sin you will not trust in Christ alone to save you.

We are not unique in struggling with this. Everyone struggles with thinking that he/she is a little better than someone else. One of the most intense areas of struggle is "spiritual pride." Spiritual pride is the idea that I have some merit that I have earned before God that makes me a little better than others. It's just not true. So, in this sermon that Jesus is preaching where he is laying out a manifesto for his kingdom, he spends so much time and attention on trying to wring out all of our spiritual pride. He is trying to help us see what he sees. He wants us to know what he knows. The only people who can be in his kingdom, who can follow him are those who trust in him and don't trust in themselves.

People who think they are better than what they are actually deceived. They think they are the solution and they are the problem. They think they are authorities when they are ignorant. People like that are dangerous because they don't know what they don't know. They can't help anyone get a speck out of their eye because they are blinded by the log in their own. That is why spiritual pride is so bad. Jesus is trying to help us realize that spiritual pride is such a deadly issue. That is the first point in this text.

1. **Spiritual (and personal) Pride is a deadly serious issue.** (43-45a)

Four times the text says, “for.” The obvious point is that Jesus is making a connection between this example and what he just said. The person with the log in his eye is blind to his own sin, thinks he is better than what he is, treats people as if there is no hope for them, assumes motives, holds grudges, is bitter, is unwilling to create space in their heart for others, is dismissive of people who don’t agree with them are all symptoms of spiritual pride. “For” is the connecting word that links that description with this statement.

A. Spiritual Pride is specifically identified as bad fruit. (43)

The USDA has identified 5 exotic citrus pests and diseases that are here in the states and bring with them the potential to do great harm to every acre of citrus production if they are not addressed. 4 of the 5 threats are diseases; citrus black spot, citrus canker, citrus greening and sweet orange scab that reveal their presence on the fruit. The tree may otherwise look okay, but the fruit tells another story. No good tree bears bad fruit. If spiritual pride characterizes my life, I am not a Christian! I am not saying that if you struggle with spiritual pride that you are not a Christian. We all struggle with pride. I am pointing out that if your life is defined by spiritual pride, Jesus is saying that you are not one of his.

Do you believe that you are surrounded by idiots and that you are in some ways just a little better than others? Here is the irony in all of this. Jesus is the one who is teaching. I think we could actually make a case for the fact that Jesus was really surrounded by idiots. But when he prays does he tell his Father how these people are driving him out of his ever-loving mind? So, if Jesus, who really is holier-than-thou, doesn’t put on that air, and if Jesus, who really is better than everyone else and above everyone else, isn’t condescending, then dare we?

There is a pet shop that Cathi and I like to take our grandkids to because they let some of the pets roam around the store. They have a big rabbit, sometimes an old turtle, a parakeet or other bird that will land on you. It’s great for kids. If, however, you were in that store and one of the workers yelled out, “Hey be careful, one of our snakes got loose. It’s an inland taipan from Australia. Its venom is potent enough to kill 100 people. You might want to watch your step.” You would be terrified. That fear of danger is the fear that we ought to have about spiritual pride in our life. It is bad fruit and Jesus is giving a lot of attention to warning us about it.

B. Trees are identified by their fruit. (44)

You don’t get figs from thornbushes. You get thorns from thornbushes. Neither do you get grapes from a bramble bush. The kind of fruit will tell you the kind of tree it is. A person who is spiritually proud will produce more of that and we don’t need more of that. Here is a good question to ask: What kind of influence do you have on others? Do the people who spend the most amount of time around you grow in humility or pride? Your effect on others is part of the fruit of your life and if you produce a smugness and arrogance in others, then...

C. Spiritual Pride is damning evidence of an evil person. (45a)

The imagery of a tree now gives way to that of a treasure. Jesus is describing our hearts as our store of treasure that we share with others around us. If our treasure is good, it will have a good influence on others, but if we are having a bad influence on others, then our treasure is bad which means that our heart is bad.

When we think of an evil heart, we think of murder, rage, violence, rape, kidnapping, car-jacking, sexual abuse, molestation, human trafficking, etc. Pride? Spiritual pride? Spiritual pride is so sneaky. I am tempted to be proud about how well I crafted and delivered a sermon on pride. I can point out the dangers of “discernment bloggers” and their ilk who foster arrogance by exploiting and inflating the sins of others and be proud that I am not like that. There are evils out there that we need to be warned about, but when I focus primarily upon the sins of others then I will automatically grow in self-righteousness. So, here is our challenge. We need to see how evil self-righteousness is, but most of all we need to see how evil it is in us and not in the other person. How do I discern what kind of a tree or treasure I have?

2. **Your words reveal your heart.** (45b)

Peter Greer leads a non-profit ministry that seeks to address the spiritual and physical poverty of peoples through micro-finance. He spends a lot of time in the neediest places in the world and has a perspective that many of us in the west are not familiar with. He wrote, “...after I returned from Cambodia, I almost erupted in the grocery store. Having just spent time living in poverty, I entered the store and was overwhelmed by the excess of America. I hit my breaking point in the cereal aisle. For the past few months in Cambodia, I had eaten the same breakfast every day: leftover rice from the night before with a little bit of milk. My own version of Rice Krispies, albeit an extremely soggy one. It was a special day when I made Cambodian Raisin Bran – aka rains and sugar added to my leftover mushy rice. But back in the U.S. grocery store in the cereal aisle with all of its options, I saw a child complaining. Wanting a different type of cereal than her mom was willing to purchase, she was irritated and upset. I left the aisle before I exploded.... Full of self-righteous rage, I stormed out of the grocery store. People were starving. And she was a selfish, wealthy and entitled spoiled brat. My self-righteous indignation extended beyond this one child.” A little while later a friend from Burundi visited Peter here in the states. Peter took him to his home, where his friend marveled at his garage door opener. He could not believe that Peter had a machine that with the push of a button would open a door. His friend kept saying, “Peter, you are a rich man.” Peter realized that he had no basis to judge the child when he lived with conveniences most of the world could only dream about.ⁱⁱ

Jerry Bridges said that “one of the problems with pride is that we can see it others but not in ourselves.”ⁱⁱⁱ It's easy for me to point out the jealousy and hatred by some in the WNBA against Caitlyn Clark. It's hard for me to see the same insecurities in my own life. Those self-righteous eruptions tell us a lot about ourselves. We complain about the failures of our spouse so much that we justify our infidelity and immorality. What do your words reveal about you? Do you bless those who curse you? (v.28) Did you pray for those who seek to harm you and abuse you? (v.28) Are your words marked with kindness even to the ungrateful?

Struggling with spiritual pride does not mean that you are not a believer. It probably is an indication that you are, because you struggle with it. You know it is there, lurking to blind you and give you reason to feel better about yourself versus someone else. Jesus establishes the fact that spiritual pride is a serious issue. If I know that, and seek to be mindful of that in my life and open to correction and in fact invite correction, accountability and help in my struggle with it, then that is probably motivated by the Spirit of God. If, however, I simply assume that I am intrinsically better than everyone else and I live with this sense of self-assurance and smugness, then my words towards others or about others are going to reveal that. If that does not bother me, then I am probably not a Christian.

Becoming a Christian is necessary. Becoming a Christian involves knowing what that means but that is not sufficient. Becoming a Christian is a conversion. It is a change of heart. My old heart that treasures myself, where I sit on the throne and make the rules and utter the judgments is replaced by a new heart given to me by the Spirit of God. This new heart treasures Christ above all. He sits on the throne. I seek his glory and fame, not my own. From this heart, this good treasure, gifts abound to bless others and the fruit is humility, self-awareness and true affection for others. The abundance (overflow) of the heart is either good treasure or evil treasure. True change has to come at the heart level. So how do I know if my heart has truly been changed by God because Jesus is making it clear that this has to happen. Here is another way of asking this question. How can I engage with this text so that it accomplishes what Jesus intends in my life?

If you are interviewing for a job or applying to a college, you try to find out what questions the decision-makers are going to ask and what answers they want to hear. Your idea of being prepared is discovering what they want and giving it to them. That doesn't cut it with Jesus. Jesus is not interested in you telling him what he wants to hear, he demands a heart change. Just because you can answer the questions correctly does not mean that spiritual transformation has taken place. That is what Jesus is explaining here. All of these situations, where an enemy hurts you, a person curses you, someone demands something from you, someone sins against you, etc are situations that in the moment give you an opportunity to see, based on your reaction, what is in your heart. Planning my responses is like putting on a good face at church. It says nothing about my heart. If you look at this text and conclude that you have to do a better job of watching what you say otherwise people will think poorly of you, then all that you are doing is trying to control the opinions of others because you fear them. If that's all you get, you are missing the point. God knows your heart. He wants you to see it, not so that you can manage it so that you don't embarrass yourself. He wants you to know how much you need him, so that you trust him. How you respond to this (as we will see next week) is ultimately revealing the condition of your soul. Instead of trying to manage your behavior and the response of others to you, let the response of your heart reveal your heart. If your pride grieves you, praise God and work with that. If you do not think that you have a problem, then you need to be warned. You are probably not a Christian.

ⁱ Isaac Streetman was my research assistant on this sermon.

ⁱⁱ From Peter's book, *The Spiritual Danger of Doing Good*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Respectable Sins*, p.89