

**Jesus on Bearing/Hearing/Doing**  
**Matthew 7:15-29; Luke 6:43-49**

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.” And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes. (English Standard Version – ESV)

**Background:**

- Although most educated Jewish people did not believe that prophets had continued in the Old Testament sense, they believed that false prophets continued (Jeremiah 2:8; 5:30). Josephus mentioned many of them in the first century. The contrast between vicious wolves and harmless lambs or sheep was proverbial.
- Like wheat and barley, grapes and figs were among the most valuable and widely consumed fruits of the earth. Thorns and thistles were worthless and troublesome to harvesters, as the Old Testament often mentions. For a figurative use of “fruits” in the OT, see Isaiah 5:6.
- The repetition of “know them by their fruits” (verses 17, 20) brackets the illustration of fruit bearing. Such bracketing was used as a literary device (called *inclusio*) to mark off a paragraph. Prophets were known to be false if they led people away from the true God (Deuteronomy 13), or if their words did not come to pass (Deuteronomy 18:21-22). Rabbis might suspend a certain teaching of the Law temporarily, and allowed prophets to do the same, but if they denied the Law itself or advocated idolatry, they were regarded as false prophets. Jesus teaches that if a prophet does not live rightly, he is false (verses 21-23).
- It is possible to prophesy by the Spirit’s inspiration and yet be disobedient to God and unsaved (1 Samuel 19:20-24). The admonition to depart comes from a psalm about the vindication of the righteous (Psalm 6:8; 119:115; 139:19).

- Rabbis debated whether hearing or doing the Law was more important. Most concluded that hearing it was more important, because someone could not “do” the Law without hearing it first. Yet, they insisted that both were necessary.

- The idea of being judged for hearing, but not obeying was familiar (Ezekiel 33:32-33). Yet, no Jewish teacher apart from Jesus claimed so much authority for his own words. Such authority was reserved for the Law itself. With regard to Jesus’ parable, his biblically literate hearers may have thought of Proverbs 24:3 (“by wisdom a house is built”) and the contrast between wisdom (which builds a house in 9:1) and folly in Proverbs 9.

### **Questions:**

- + How can you know for sure whether a prophet (i.e. spokesperson for God) is true or false?  
What does Jesus mean when he says, “You will recognize them (false prophets) by their fruit?”  
What false prophets of modern times have led Christians astray? Why were they successful?  
How can you guard yourself from false teachers of God’s word? How will you refute them?
- + Based on what Jesus says in Matt. 7:21-23, does salvation come by faith or works or both?  
If only those who do the will of God can enter heaven, but all have sinned, who can enter?  
What does Jesus mean when he says, “I never knew you,” to those who do mighty works?  
What does it mean to be known by Jesus? Does he know you? How can you know?
- + How does the parable found in Matt. 7:24-27 relate to what Jesus taught in Matt. 7:21-23?  
With regard to hearing God’s word and doing his word, which is most important, and why?  
How would you describe the foundation of your life with images of rock and sand in view?  
What must you do to ensure that your works come from a rock-solid faith in the Lord Jesus?