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Sermon Title

Bible Reference: Matthew 7:13-27

**A disclaimer from Pastor Stuart**

*My role in the church here is to feed and care for God’s people the best I can. Key to that, in my opinion is teaching and preaching from the Bible; but that is not all a pastor has to do! In fact after the emails, staff admin, hospital visits, community visits, leadership meetings, etc, etc, there sometimes seems to be little time for sermon prep! Years ago I used to agonise over trying to come up with two, often three, totally original sermons each week. But I’ve found that, for me at least, that is impossibility. I’ve learned to be grateful for and to use the gifts God gives to help me – not only the Holy Spirit, but other Bible teachers and preachers.*

*Over the years I’ve discovered that if something teaches, inspires and excites me it’s likely to do the same for those I speak to. So I admit that sometimes I find myself depending heavily on other people’s ideas, at least to ‘prime the pump’ and therefore I claim originality for very little in these sermons. If you look hard enough and wide enough you’ll probably find who I’ve been reading and learning from! I never knowingly plagiarise, but if you find I have, then I apologise. It must have been that what was said was just too good not to use!*

*I am particularly indebted to the likes of John Piper, Sam Storms, Wayne Grudem, John Ortberg & Rick Warren. The Lord regularly uses them to get my spiritual pulse racing. I’m also indebted to many who kindly make their sermons available on the likes of sermoncentral.com and preachingtoday.com. Others who help me include ‘The Doctor’ (Martyn Lloyd-Jones), C.H Spurgeon and any of the Puritans.*

*These sermons are not made available because I think they’re good but in the hope and with the prayer that they may be used by the Holy Spirit to bless others as they have blessed our own church here in Ipswich, UK.*

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**Harvest Sunday 2016**

It’s been a bad year for runners and carrots! We plant with high hopes of a crop.

Causes? Sometimes poor seeds; or weather too cold for germination; or too wet or too dry! We rejoice in the good years (food prices low!) and sometimes suffer in the bad – though in truth not really significance. At most a few more £’s. We have so much to be grateful for even in our town and suburban living where we may not work the ground or gardens.

Let’s always remember those for whom drought or flood really is life threatening disaster

This is why I maintain it’s good to take one day a year when we pause and simply stop to say thank you to God for the things we normally take for granted. This ought not to be a country tradition - (and many of us have wonderful memories of decorating the church at harvest and the sales of produce or gift boxes for poorer families afterwards). As lovely and quaint and somehow comforting that is this day of thanksgiving and acknowledgement of God’s goodness in our provisions is really good for us *all* – especially when we couple it with giving away and showing compassion on others.

So grateful for those of you who’ve already taken interest in prepping a shoebox and or sponsoring a child.

Such kindness is part of what the Lord has saved us for. Of all people we, the Lord’s people, God’s people should be people of compassion – because it’s what our Father God is like!

**Ex 34:6** - The Lord! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness.

**Neh 9:27** - From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies.

**Ps 51:1 -** Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. (compassion was the basis and plea of his prayer)

**Is 30:18** - Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!

These all from OT but of course when we look in the NT we have the life of God himself in Jesus to look at. Want to know what God is like? Simply look at Jesus. Was there ever anyone as compassionate as him?

**Matt 9:36** - When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

**Matt 14:14** - When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed those who were ill.

On and on it goes, time after time – Jesus heart moved to action by the plight of the people he saw. **Always action followed** – that’s the point of compassion, it’s not simply feeling sorry and sad, it’s acting, it’s doing something. And Jesus always acted.

And so must we! Jesus himself says to us in **Luke 6:36** ‘*You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate*’.

**If we take this back to the gardening analogy – God has sown compassion and mercy into us in saving us and he’s looking for a harvest of the same.**

**In Matt 7:15f** Jesus talks about good trees and bad trees, - good trees bear good fruit and bad trees bad, etc.

If Jesus has truly changed our hearts then it will be natural and normal for good fruit to flow from it. In **John 15** Jesus pictures us like grape vine branches, attached to Jesus the vine, with Father God as the farm owner and vintner. If we’re really connected by faith to Jesus then *it will be natural that good fruit will follow*, for what’s on the inside will come out in our words and lives.

**What is the fruit of a changed heart?** When he talks about fruit he’s not talking about being religious. This was the point and what lay behind Jesus comments about good trees bearing good fruit and bad trees bearing bad fruit. In the context Jesus was talking about people who everyone knew had an outward show of being religious and did many of the right things – but actually the general tenor of their lives showed it was a sham. Some were involved in temple/church, they even preached and even seemed to do some miracles – they claimed to pray prayed for the sick and cast out demons. But the rest of their lives, the way they treated and talked to other people, showed there was actually no depth to what they said.

Jesus was saying that it really doesn’t matter what you say or do on Sundays or in the church – it’s what you’re like when you’re not in church, what you’re like the rest of the week – that’s what really reveals what you are. Who are you when no one’s looking! Or perhaps we could ask – ‘*Who are you when you’ve had a couple of glasses of wine or pints of beer*?’! They say it’s beer talking, but it’s not, it’s the person talking but the beer has loosened the tongue! Those things wouldn’t come out if they weren’t in there! Normally those things are kept under control, but drink loosens the tongue and gives everyone a window into the person’s life!

Now, let’s be honest we all say and do things at times we regret – I don’t think we need think that one slip in temper or frustration shows us to be thoroughly bad. **But** if bad language, profane or course jokes are the norm rather than the exception then they show something is wrong. Likewise if others feel they have to tread on egg shells around us because we have a reputation of being grumpy, irritable, grumpy, short tempered or critical when we talk then something is wrong.

Sure, we all have those times of stress, anxiety when things come out the wrong way; it’s part of being human! But if that is our general and regular demeanour then something is wrong! We shouldn’t, as God’s children - saved and with a new heart, be like that; we should be improving, changing, getting control.

**So what is He talking about when he speaks of bearing fruit?** The way we talk and live and treat him and other people. **Galatians 5:22 -** Compassion, patience, forgiveness, etc.

**So what about if our fruit is in low yield**? If people look at you and see bad fruit coming from a good tree – what’s to be done?

Give up? Not a bit! What do we do if we have a fruit tree or garden that has a poor year? What we don’t do is give up! We look to do whatever we can to make sure it doesn’t do it again. We may prune it, we manure the ground, we keep the weeds down, we water it and do whatever else is necessary.

Same spiritually: Number of things we can do.

* **Stay closely connected to Jesus** – do that and you will change, you will bear fruit. *‘If a man remains in me he will bear much fruit*’ (Jon 15). Not as a result of trying hard but simply as a result of his work in you, but simply this is what H/S does. But how do we stay close to him? Well lets answer that with a question: have you noticed how if you stop coming to church regularly, stop reading the Bible, stop praying, stop helping other people you tend to end up bearing bad fruit?

So the opposite is also likely to be true – take time read Bible (properly, not just a grabbed minute on the run), be in church, and make sure you engage with it. No use just being present you need to ‘*be here’* in mind and attention; so come expectantly, listen and respond to what He says. Talk to him at home as well as in church. Talk to him all the time, about anything, ask his advice – and then obey him! Do what he says - the key thing here is not to admire Christ, it’s to obey Christ.

Do these things and he’ll produce the crop of good fruit in you (it’s called ‘fruit of the Spirit because it’s what the H/S produces in you, even without you trying!). Language will improve, compassion will improve, patience will improve, thoughtfulness, etc, etc.

* **Practical things you can do:**

Get rid of the pests (snails and slugs and aphids, etc) pests that get in a spoil – sins, attitudes, wrong priorities that eat away at youunder cover of darkness!

Sometimes gardens just need a rest – lying fallow.

* So make sure you **rest** regularly. Sunday is God’s gift to you, nothing wrong with having it as a switch off day! (men, help your women in this – take a role in food!).
* **Sleep** – cant burn candle at both ends.
* **Work** – work is a gift, (any kind of work – I’m not just thinking paid work) but it shouldn’t be your master.
* **Eat and drink** wisely. What we put into ourselves will affect our moods. Constantly grumpy? Maybe look at your diet!

But above all the spiritual things are most important – staying close to Jesus, praying, being quiet, reading, listening, worshipping, focussing on him, etc.

Last question: What sort of tree are you?