**Good Fruit and Wise Builders**

Luke 6:43-49, Key Verse 6:48

“They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built.”

In today’s passage we finish the series of Jesus’ spiritual teachings to his disciples, Luke’s version of the Sermon on Mount. I pray we can really “take home” some new insight and new direction from these teachings that will genuinely grow us the next step. I believe this short concluding passage can help us do that, because when we look at it in context, it’s about how we can take the teaching Jesus gave us and make it work for good and lasting results.

1. Good fruit comes from within (43-45)

We’ve been studying Jesus’ teaching on what real holiness, or we can simply say goodness, looks like. Jesus showed us the qualities that “children of the Most High” should display. Children of the Most High love their enemies and do good to those who mistreat them. They do not judge and condemn others but forgive.

How can our lives display these extraordinary qualities? Where does such goodness come from? That’s the question today’s first verse is addressing. Look at verse 43. “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit.” The good qualities we have been studying could be seen as fruit. Fruit is the result, or output, of someone’s life. Here, Jesus wants to remind us that fruit can only come from the kind of tree that’s made to produce it.

He continues in verse 44: “Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briers.” If you go to a well-tended apple tree, you can be reasonably confident that what you pick off of that tree will indeed be edible apples. On the other hand, if you go digging through a thornbush looking for some delicious fruit, you will come out scratched, bloody, and disappointed. Jesus’ criticisms of the religious leaders of his time made me think that when Jesus was referring to briers and thornbushes, he was talking about the Pharisees. Maybe he was warning his disciples that they should not expect to be fed with good spiritual fruit from such people.

But, I think more importantly, it teaches us how our own lives can produce good fruit. Look at verse 45. “A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart.” The heart, or inner self, is what makes a person good or evil. It’s like a storeroom, and what comes out is no more and no less than what is currently inside there.

We might read this and initially think that each person is permanently fixed as good or evil and thus doomed to produce either good or bad fruit. However, the Biblical view of the heart is deeper than that. From the very beginning, the Garden of Eden in Genesis, we can see that human beings are easily tempted and fall into evil. And once we fall, it’s very difficult to get out. That’s how people wind up with evil hearts. Also in Genesis, we see that the evil that polluted the first human hearts spread and took root until, before the flood, God observed that “every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.” (Gen 6:5) Our hearts are inclined to evil, easily drawn into an evil spiral, and without God’s grace, we can’t get out of that.

However, the good news is that when we are convicted of our sinfulness, we can come to God through Jesus and God will cleanse our heart by his power. After King David sinned, he understood the depth of the sin in his heart, and in Psalm 51 he confessed, “Surely I was sinful a birth…” But then, believing the power of God, he prayed, “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” (Ps 51:10). I believe that David’s very ability to pray that was evidence that the Holy Spirit was working in him to cleanse his heart.

Now that we have the gospel, we can be confident that this is exactly what God will do. In the New Testament, the author of Hebrews writes, “How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” (Heb 9:14)

Have your heart and conscience been cleansed by the blood of Christ? If so, then you can be confident that you have the root of a good heart. However, it doesn’t mean that we have nothing to do with our heart after that, or that producing good fruit will be automatic. There is a path of growth that needs to happen from good root to good fruit. Also, as long as we are in this body, the corruptible sinful nature is still there. So, we have to take care of our heart.

We can get a clue for how we should take care of our heart from today’s passage, where in verse 45, Jesus says, “A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart.” A key word here is “stored up.” We already said that the heart is like a storeroom. So then, our job is to store good things in our heart, and not evil things. Whatever we think about or meditate on, whatever we expose ourselves to—that’s what ends up in our heart. The eyes and the mind are the gateway to the heart. In Proverbs 4:23 it says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”

To store up good things in our heart, we may need to work on our habits of thought. In Philippians Paul wrote “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” (Php 4:8) Most of all, we can store the word of God in our hearts. In Psalm 119 it says, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” (Ps 119:11). Jesus took that and made it even more positive, saying “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” (Jn 15:7-8)

As we learn from Jesus and remain in him, we have great hope of bearing good fruit that will bless others. Verse 45 ends, “For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.” Among the various kinds of fruit, here Jesus focuses on the words that come out of our mouths. In fact, the words we speak are a very important kind of fruit. We know how the wrong words can wound people deeply, like thorns. But also, good words can be life-giving, like a juicy apple or peach. Our words are not a minor kind of fruit; they are among the most powerful kind.

Even though I have been a believer for many years, when I find myself speaking thorny words, I realize how much I still need to grow in my inner self. But I still have hope, because as I thought about the concept of fruit, I also realized that good fruit is the *last* thing that a tree produces, often only after many years of growth and cultivation. Even after an apple tree starts to produce apples, the first batches are not very sweet. Though we may have served Jesus for many years and been used powerfully for his kingdom, maybe the real mature fruit is something that hasn’t come out of us yet. So I pray to keep working, not just to watch my mouth, but to store good things in my heart. Let’s remember Jesus’ goal and promise for us to bear good fruit from a good heart.

1. Digging deep for a strong foundation (46-49)

After giving all these teachings, Jesus concludes his message by giving a warning about only hearing his words without practicing them. Verse 46: “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” The word “Lord” means “master”, so to call Jesus that but not follow his teachings is dishonest. Clearly, Jesus did not speak all these teachings just to entertain us, but to lay down precepts that are to be followed.

To drive this point home, Jesus gives us a parable about the difference that practicing or not practicing his teachings makes over the course of our lives. The analogy is to building a house. As you know, a house is a building meant to provide shelter, in which people can live, being protected from the elements. Practicing or not practicing Jesus’ teachings can be seen as two ways of building the spiritual house of our life of faith.

Jesus gives the good case first. Verses 47-48a: “As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock.” To Jesus, the key point about the house is not how big it is or even what materials it is made of, but how the foundation is laid. In this way Jesus’ parable is different from another famous story about building houses called *The Three Little Pigs* (though that’s a good one too.)

Anyone who knows about building buildings will tell you that the foundation is critically important. The foundation is not the part of the house that’s the most visible, but it’s the part that supports everything else. What do you have to do to create a good foundation for a building? Jesus said the man who built his house well “dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock.” To get a solid base for a house, it’s necessary to dig deep, through many layers of dirt, until you strike solid bedrock. A house anchored to this rock will be as strong as it can possibly be.

You know, the bigger the building you build, the deeper you need the foundation to be. The largest buildings need the strongest foundations. I read that the foundation of the Willis Tower (formerly Sears Tower) in Chicago is a massive concrete structure 100 feet deep. In addition, this foundation is surrounded by 200 large cement-filled cylinders that extend another 100 feet down and are set in—yes, solid bedrock.

Not just in building buildings, but in all areas of life, the foundational parts are most important. When I try to teach the students in my classes, I emphasize the importance of fundamentals. The students are often impatient to build something visible that looks impressive, but I can tell them from experience that in Computer Science, without strong foundations in the theory, you can’t build good quality software systems.

But how does digging to lay a foundation relate to practicing Jesus’ teachings? Firstly, the rock that we should build the foundation of our life on is Jesus himself. In 1 Peter 2, Peter describes Jesus by quoting Isaiah’s prophecy about the Christ: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” (1Pe 2:6) So, we should build our lives on Jesus. How can we do that? Continuing with the analogy of this parable, it requires digging, and digging deep. What kind of digging do we have to do to build our lives on Jesus?

You know, digging might be the number one example of what people call “back-breaking labor”. In Jesus’ time, they did not have bulldozers or other powered earth-moving equipment. So, Jesus is telling us that building our lives on him is going to involve hard work, or spiritual discipline. Because digging a deep hole is so tiring, it’s very tempting to stop when the hole is still shallow and say “that’s good enough,” even though you know it’s not. However, digging a hole doesn’t require much cleverness, but only persistence. You can take breaks, but to finish the hole, you have to keep going back picking up that shovel again and again. But there is a reward at the end of the digging. When, after many hours of hard labor, the digger feels his shovel go “donk”, he feels so happy. He says, “Finally, I hit bedrock! Now I have something to build on.”

How is our spiritual life like digging? I think the dirt we have to dig through can be all the worldly things and sinful desires that can easily become the basis of our lives—money, position, pleasures. It’s very easy to try to build on those, because they capture our attention so readily. To cut through all that and build our lives on something solid, we have to keep remembering Jesus’ words and making them the basis of our thoughts and actions. Our heart easily fills up with the dirt of temporal things, we have to shovel it out by remembering what’s permanent. As we already made an analogy between meditating on the word of God and storing good things in s storehouse, meditating on the word of God and writing reflections can also be seen as digging. We actually talk about digging out the word of God. We should do daily bread with the attitude of finding that solid foundation. We can “hit bedrock” when we find one word to base our thought and life on for that day.

But don’t forget that in this section, Jesus is mainly talking about practicing—*doing* what he says. Doing something to practice a word of Jesus every day, coming out of our comfort zone, is so important. We recently studied about loving our enemies, so maybe we can regularly find a way to encourage or help out someone we don’t really like or who we don’t think is deserving. Like digging a deep hole, it requires persistence over a long period of time—actually, over our whole life. Maybe the best summary of this practice is given by Paul in Colossians 2:6-7. He says, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”

What, then, is the result of digging deep and laying the foundation of our life on the rock? About the house of man who dug down deep and built on the rock, Jesus said that in verse 48b, “When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built.” The flood with its destructive torrents of water can represent any kind of crisis in our life that tests us spiritually. Just as natural disasters reveal how well a house is built, times of crisis in our lives reveal whether our faith is built on a solid foundation.

One of the most moving stories of someone whose faith withstood the flood is that of Elizabeth Elliot. She was one of a group of missionaries to the unreached native tribes in Ecuador, along with Jim Elliot whom she married after arriving in the mission field. Just three years after their marriage, with a ten-month-old daughter, Jim was speared to death along with four other missionaries in the first contact with the Huarani tribe. However, this torrent did not destroy Elizabeth’s faith. She continued to work in Ecuador and made contact with the Huaranis through other tribes. Then, two years later, she and her then three-year-old daughter moved into the Huarani village, where she worked for a number of years. She truly practiced Jesus’ command, “Love your enemies.”

The purpose of telling this story is not to make us feel inadequate, as if God expects us all to do what Elizabeth Elliot did. The point is, Elizabeth’s response to the flood of tragedy in her life showed how strongly the house of her faith had been built. I don’t know exactly how Elizabeth Elliot built up her own faith until that point; as in many things, we only see the result after the flood came. But based on this parable, we know that the real strength of faith comes from what happens in the preparation, the work of digging deep that’s not so visible.

Jesus also told us what happens when a person does not build their house on the rock. Verse 49: “But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.” Can you imagine building a house with no foundation, just flat on the ground? Think how unstable that would be. Jesus says that’s what people are doing when they act like they are Christians without practicing his words. At first, it might look the same as the house with a good foundation, but the difference is bound to be revealed. Here, it’s important to know that the flood and torrent are not just referring to crises in this life, but also to the final judgment on each of our lives. That’s the final exam, so to speak. That’s when the destruction of everything built without a foundation will be complete and irreversible.

All of us have experienced big and small setbacks in life, when something we were trying to build has fallen apart. Thankfully, as long as we still draw breath on this earth, the destruction of what we have built is not complete. By God’s grace, we can learn to be better builders. And who knows? Maybe the visible part of some work we did has fallen down, but in the spiritual realm the most important part of it is still standing.

Thank God for Jesus’ teaching. In today’s passage we learned about two activities that can make our lives fruitful and strong: storing up and digging deep. May God bless your storing and digging projects, so you can be strong and bring out good fruit to bless the world.