

“BY THEIR FRUITS YOU WILL KNOW THEM”

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEARING FRUIT AND DOING WHAT JESUS DEMANDS

ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

1. John the Baptist defined “repentance” by demanding that those who pretend to repent should prove their sincerity by producing “fruits worthy of repentance,” i.e. the characteristic deeds of a changed life. Unless these deeds were forthcoming, punitive judgment would overtake the unfruitful, despite all pretenses and claims to the contrary (3:1-12).
2. The Messiah Himself insists upon being baptized by John “to fulfill all righteousness,” i.e. to do what God defines as right for any man (3:14, 15). The plan of God can be brought to fulfillment only in this way, not by fleeing one’s responsibility, but by accepting it completely.
3. The Sermon on the Mount is packed with blessings, admonitions and teaching to underscore the importance of deeds:
 - a. The active “peacemakers” are the sons of God (5:9). Only those who ardently desire to do the will of God will truly be satisfied in the Kingdom (5:6).
 - b. The true “salt and light” are useful to God (5:13-16).
 - c. Doing and teaching is God’s standard of greatness in the Kingdom (5:19).
 - d. Worshiping (5:24), almsgiving (6:2-4), praying (6:7ff.) and fasting (6:16ff.) are assumed to be part of the normal activity of the godly disciple, but are not more important a part of personal piety than active reconciliation (5:21-26), personal self-denial (5:27-32), absolute honesty (5:33-37), merciful generosity (5:38-42), and actively blessing one’s enemies (5:43-48).
 - e. The same judgment threatened against imposters is the standard for unfruitful disciples (7:19).
4. Real union with Christ is to be enjoyed, not by family relationship to Him by blood or by accidents of birth in the right family or people, but by obedience to the will of the Father (12:46-50).
5. The Sermon in Parables (chapter 13) links the disciples’ fruit-bearing to his understanding the word of the Kingdom (13:19, 23) as well as to his moral character (13:21, 22). Interest is shown, further, in the differing quantities of fruit borne even among the fruitful disciples. The Kingdom demands total commitment (13:44-46).

"BY THEIR FRUITS YOU WILL KNOW THEM"

6. Only total commitment to the will of God, even in the prospect of suffering and death, will be rewarded with life in its highest and best sense (16:24-28). Every man will be repaid for what he has done.
7. Instead of commanding the rich young ruler to trust Him, Jesus told him something to do (19:21). Although this implicitly involved total trust in Jesus to know what must be done to inherit eternal life, the deed is in the foreground. (Contrast John 6:29.) Life is to be had in doing what God wills (19:17).
8. Men will be rewarded on the basis of what they have given up for Jesus' sake (19:29).
9. The cursing of the fig tree because it had no fruit, just leaves, becomes an enacted lesson on the destiny of the fruitless, pretentious Israel that refused to believe Jesus (21:18-22). It is also a warning to every believer concerning the damnation of uselessness and the punishment of proud promises without performance. It applies to Jesus as well, because He too has made tremendous promises which could only be kept by going to the cross.
10. The Parable of the Two Sons emphasizes actually doing the will of the Father, as opposed to merely professing obedience without really doing it (21:28-32).
11. The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (21:33-46) explains that the Kingdom of God will not remain the private possession of those who do not produce the results God intends. Rather, it will rightly pass over to those who will (21:41, 43).
12. In all the lessons on vigilance during the eschatological wait for the Lord's return, the emphasis is laid upon usefulness in the Lord's service, doing the job He assigns, making the preparation that is needed for His return, utilizing the goods He entrusts to our custody, and caring for the people made in His image (24:45—25:46).
13. The Great Commission (28:18-20) includes the order to "teach them to observe all that I have commanded you." The teaching has as its goal the production of the results Jesus desired.