

The Sheep in the Wolf in the Sheep's Clothing

Matthew 7: 15-19

The Living Law (no. 19 in the series)

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Video and audio versions available online:

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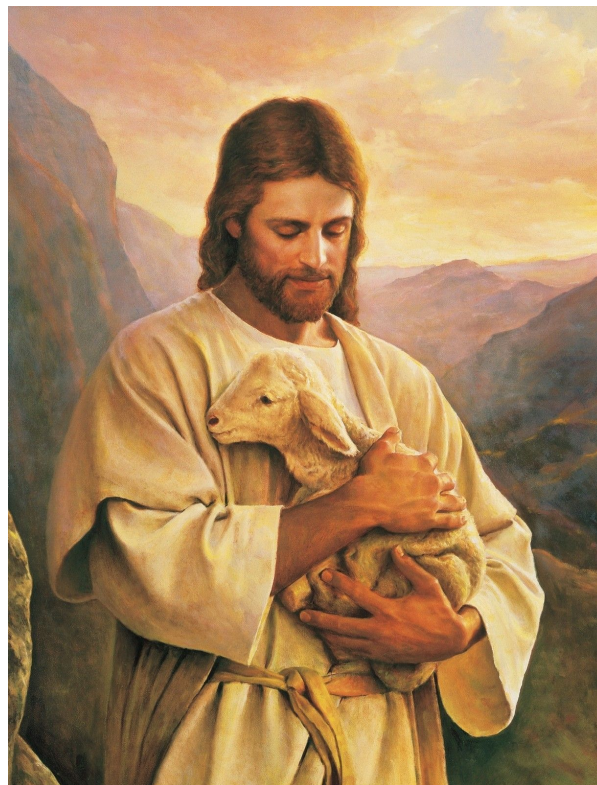
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This document was prepared by Heather Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Heather know. Thank you!

Prayer

So, Lord, I thank you for Mount Sinai; I thank you for Mount Zion in which your temple was built; I thank you for Mount Moriah, where Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac and you provided a lamb. I thank you for that mountain that you climbed, Lord Jesus, and preached that sermon; and I thank you for Mount Calvary, the mountain where the New Jerusalem comes down. I thank you, Lord, that on every mountain you were preaching the same sermon. Jesus, you are that sermon. And so, I pray, Lord God, that through the power of your Spirit, you'd preach it to our hearts, because it's too much for me—I can't comprehend it; I can't describe it—but, Spirit, you can apply it to our hearts. We ask that you would cause us to preach, Lord God. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Message



I grew up in a pastor's home. And to me, this picture (above) never seemed all that accurate. In the Bible, "pastor" and "shepherd" are the same word. Pastoring looks pretty pleasant in this picture of the Good Shepherd.

But a while ago, I stumbled across a little video of an actual shepherd at work, and well, it seemed a little more accurate.

Video clip: Phil Johnson Channel: "Shepherding is Hard"
YouTube (2017)

Clip shows a shepherd trying to herd sheep across a German mountain road, and the sheep bowl the shepherd over knocking him to the ground as they cross the road. Once the sheep are all across the road, the shepherd slowly begins to get back up, but a ram comes and charges him back down flat on the road.

Person in the car filming the scene, waiting for the sheep to cross, observes the pummeling by the ram and shouts: "Sheisse!" and drives forward honking and yelling at the sheep, scaring them off, away from the road and the shepherd.

I love that: "scheisse." I think that means "Golly" in German.

Matthew 7:15 · **"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."**ⁱ

A prophet can refer to someone who foretells events in the future. In the Old Testament, through Moses, God tells the Israelites, "When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him. [...that same prophet shall die]"ⁱⁱ

My wife has an amazing prophetic gift, and I know several others that do, but I often warn them, "Don't say, 'God says...,' unless you're entirely sure that God says. Otherwise, you may be taking God's name in vain, destroying people's lives, and doing the work of the Evil One. I don't think we'd need to kill you... but just don't do it."

So, if you've heard someone say something like, "God told me that the Rapture will happen in 2019," and you notice that it didn't happen... Moses now commands you to not fear that person—you must not take them seriously anymore. Jesus says, "Beware of false prophets."

But now, prophecy isn't simply "foretelling," so much as "forthtelling."

Revelation 19:10 · "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

That can mean that when you testify of Jesus, you're actually prophesying through the power of His Spirit. Or that when you prophesy, Jesus is testifying *through you* by the power of His Spirit.

I think it means both. And Paul tells us that we should all desire to prophecy.ⁱⁱⁱ But at the same time, we are to beware of false prophets, wolves in sheep's clothing. They look like sheep, talk like sheep, act like sheep, walk like sheep, but devour the lives of others like wolves.

Growing up in church, I watched people talk like sheep and then bite my father like a wolf. But I think I was most surprised in 1982, when I watched some of his fellow shepherds turn and devour him like a wolf, for no other reason, in my mind, than that he had started to bleed like Jesus.

Of course, Jesus is the great shepherd, and every pastor is also a sheep... or a wolf in Sheep's clothing.

Wolves are carnivores; they eat sheep, and shepherds, and sometimes even their own kind when they're hungry and their own kind begin to bleed. Paul Harvey used to tell how Eskimos would kill wolves by putting a little blood on the blade of a knife tied to a pole planted in the snow.^{iv} When a hungry wolf would lick the knife, that wolf would begin to bleed. And in their own thirst for blood, they'd consume their very own lives—the life is in the blood.

As a young pastor in California, I worked at two mega-churches pastored by shepherds known for books and sermons on integrity and the family. Around the same time, it was discovered that both had been participating in multiple adulterous relationships and had been continually lying about those relationships. It wasn't the affairs that hurt me the most, but rather how they lied their way through the whole process, talking like a sheep and still devouring like wolves—devouring both women in the church and the heart in my own chest.

As I told you a few weeks ago, the same thing that happened to my father happened to me. I won't go into details, and really can't go into details, but suffice it to say that I was shocked and appalled at how some who had acted like sheep, turned and devoured my life, my psyche, like wolves.

It's no wonder that werewolves are so prevalent in pop-culture. Just like zombies and vampires, they're creatures that look human, but inside lust for body broken and blood shed. They consume The Good in order to be the best. They devour the Life in order to live... but everything dies.

[Matthew 7:15-24]

¹⁵ "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy [*agathos*: good] tree bears good [*kalos*: beautiful] fruit, but the diseased [*sapros*: corrupt, rotten] tree bears bad [*poneros*: evil] fruit.^v ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.^{vi}

I should probably mention that "good fruit" in Scripture is not what most folks consider to be "good fruit" in our society—it's not possessions and power. In fact, the first person said to have done "the beautiful thing, *kalos ergon*," the beautiful fruit^{vii} in the gospel of Matthew is a prostitute who dumps a fortune of scented oil on Jesus's head at a dinner party the week before he's crucified...

In Galatians 5, Paul describes good fruit and bad fruit—but he doesn't really call the bad "a fruit," he calls it "a work," not something living, but dead... like fruit that's been picked or fruit on a tree that's dying and is now rotting.

Galatians 5:14--16 · For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, [that's what wolves do.] ...if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. ¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

You know the problem with my flesh is not that it's physical, but that it only feels its *own* pleasure and pain; it's cut off from the flesh of others.^{viii} But the Spirit of Love, "weeps with those who weep and rejoices with those who rejoice." Love feels the pain of each and the pleasure of all, as if my neighbor were actually myself. When a wolf eats a sheep, it feels its own pleasure but not the pain of the sheep... it literally makes the sheep its own self, its own flesh and body.^{ix}

(Continuing in Galatians 5)

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh [your own body].

¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit [the breath, the life, in the blood that flows through the whole body, the One Body], and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do [would do]. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality [uncontrolled desire], ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries [competitions], dissensions, divisions [factionalism-like going full on Democrat or Republican], ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

"You will recognize them by their fruits," said Jesus.

And so, this is pretty simple:

If you've ever loved someone, you're *not* a wolf.

And if you've ever been jealous or competitive, you *are* a wolf.

If you've ever desired to beat your neighbor rather than love your neighbor—you are a wolf.

In John 2, we read that Jesus didn't entrust himself to people, for, "...he knew what was in all people... he himself knew what was in man." Sounds like the great Shepherd could smell a wolf.

In John 10, Jesus says, "All who came before me—[that would include Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David and all the prophets]—are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them... I am the good shepherd."

Jesus is saying, "Every prophet until now was a false prophet who didn't love the sheep or lay their life down for the sheep... but used the sheep to build their own ego." That's a wolf.

In Acts 20, Paul describes wolves as those that speak in order to draw "followers" after themselves,^x ...which I think pretty much describes every pastor I've ever known... including myself.

Jesus just told us, "The judgment you pronounce is the judgment you receive." So maybe I'm so aware of wolves because I am one. I mean, the more I compete with others, the more I notice them competing with me.

Maybe I was shocked when the wolves turned on me, *not* because they were wolves, but because they were so bad at hiding that fact in sheep's clothing.

You do realize that:

- We define ourselves as winners by defining others as losers?

- We think we're first by considering others to be last.
- I feel better about my own sermons when others' sermons suck.
- I think I'm more righteous when I discover that my neighbor has sinned.
- It's tempting to think I'm saved just because others are damned... and that's pretty damned evil, when you stop to think about it.
- I feed my psyche with the failures of others.

I'm a carnivore... and so are you, whether you eat meat or not. We're all werewolves, zombies and vampires. We are the monsters of which we are most terrified.

You do realize that your own individual and isolated body of flesh literally eats the flesh of other lives—we call it food: plant or animal. In order to live our lives, we eat life and excrete death—we call it *scheisse*.

I'm just saying that your sin may be far greater than you ever imagined. I think Jesus is breaking it to you slowly, but you're like a wolf and you can't fix it.

You know, "the law"—"*the knowledge of Good and evil*"—can only teach wolves how to *act* like sheep; it can never turn a wolf into a sheep... or anything else.

v. 16 ...Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

So, maybe you've recognized this fact: you've got a wolf in you. And yet, if you've got any Love, Joy, Peace, or Patience in you, there's something other than a wolf in you... or even a sheep in you. Good stuff isn't called "the fruit of a sheep," but the fruit of something else.

Whatever the case, each of us is divided between good and evil. And if we don't recognize the division in ourselves, we'll project the division on others, labeling some groups as good and other groups evil. And we'll even project the division on God, describing him as Love and the opposite of Love; or Jesus, the Good Savior and God, the Wrathful Tyrant Father.

But God is not two. God is one. And each of us is two.

Well, Jesus makes a contrast between two trees... as if you have two trees in the garden of your heart, and one tree explains the wolf, and the other explains something like a sheep but more than a sheep—something that can prophecy.

Two trees... or maybe it's one tree, because he goes on to describe a corrupt tree, like a healthy tree that's dead or dying, so all its fruit has gone bad.

In Matt. 12, Jesus says something really weird about a tree:

"...Make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit"

The Bible says all kinds of crazy things about trees—more crazy things than you realize—for in Hebrew there's one word that can be translated as “tree,” “timber,” or “wood”—that's the Hebrew word, *ates*.

- So, Noah is saved in an ark made of “*ates*.”^{xi}
- Isaac is prepared for sacrifice on a bundle of “*ates*” on Mt. Moriah, also known as Mt. Calvary, or Mt. Zion.
- The Law—knowledge of Good and evil on stone—is placed in an ark, or coffin made of “*ates*,” and the Lord who is the Good and the Life would manifest on top of that coffin between two cherubim like those that guarded the way to the “*ates* of life” in the middle of the Garden of Eden.

In Greek, there's this word “*skylon*,” that can also be translated “tree,” “timber,” or “cross”—Jesus was crucified on a *skylon* in a garden on Mt. Calvary^{xii}. The “*skylon* of life” stands in the middle of the New Jerusalem on Mt. Zion. The New Jerusalem is the temple of God, and so are you.

In Scripture, trees can be men, like Nebuchadnezzar, as well as their kingdoms, like Babylon. Israel is also a tree.

In Isaiah 6, God appears to Isaiah above the Ark and tells him to chop Israel down with His prophetic word—chop Israel down to a stump. And then he says, “The Holy Seed is [Israel's] Stump”—that's Jesus—“the holy seed,” and “the root of Jesse.”^{xiii}

You'll remember that just before he was crucified, Jesus cursed a fig tree on Mt. Zion... Maybe that was about more than “grumpy Jesus” missing his breakfast.^{xiv}

In Luke, he tells about a tree that won't grow fruit and the master wants to cut it down, but the gardener says, “No... just throw some *sheissa* on it.”^{xv}

So, a tree is like a man, and a kingdom, and a system of thought. A kingdom is the dominion of the king's judgments or commandments.

“I know that [the Father's] commandment is eternal life,” said Jesus.^{xvi} And we all know that Jesus is the commandment of God and “*the Life*.”^{xvii}

A tree is a system of living cells that absorbs light through its leaves and mixes that light with *sheissa*—dirt and decay from the earth^{xviii}—producing fruit, and in that fruit, seed, which results in more trees.

A tree is a *miracle* called grace.

But of course, you can also take the life of a man on a tree... and, “cursed is a man that hangs on a tree, an *ates*, a *skylon*,” that is, “a dead tree.”^{xix}

Matthew 12:33 · “Either make the tree good and its fruit good [beautiful], or make the tree bad and its fruit bad...”

Now most would say, this *simply means* that we can recognize a tree by its fruit.

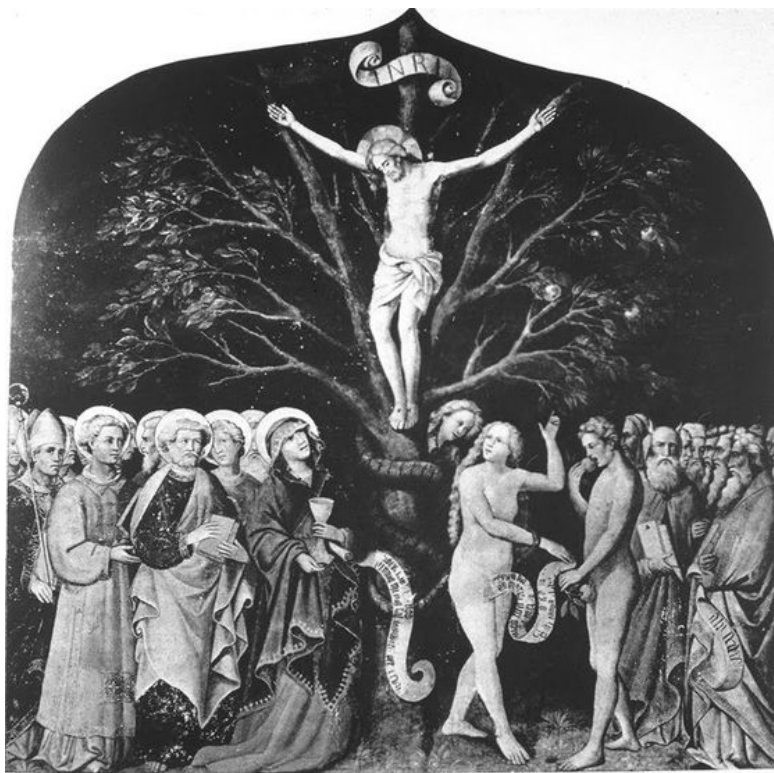
But Jesus doesn't say “a tree,” he says, “*the* tree.”

And he doesn't simply say, “*recognize* the tree,” but “*make* the tree.”

And now, you all know that history begins with a really weird story about a really strange tree in the middle of a garden.

Genesis 2:9 · And out of the ground [*Adamah*] the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst [the middle] of the garden, and [or “that is”] the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The Hebrew letter “*waw*,” translated “and,” can be what scholars call a “*waw explicativum*”— a fancy way of saying that “and” can mean “that is.”^{xx} Which is just the way we sometimes use the word “and” in English: “*I am Peter Hiatt and Mr. Wonderful.*” I’m not saying there are two of me, but two names for one of me.



There are several other reasons for thinking Gen. 2:9 describes one tree:

- ...Including the fact that Genesis goes on to speak of “*the tree...* in the middle of the garden,”^{xxi} not two trees in the middle of the garden.
- ...As well as the fact that wisdom is a tree of life, according to Solomon, which provides him with the knowledge of Good and Evil.^{xxii}
- ...As well as the fact that Jesus is Wisdom, and Jesus is the Life.
- Jesus is the knowledge of the Good, which is the will of God, and so taking his life would certainly be knowledge of evil.
- ...And beside all of this, there’s one tree in the middle of the New Jerusalem.

There are lots of reasons to think the two trees are one tree, except for this apparently glaring contradiction: One tree appears to kill, and one tree appears to make alive. One tree seems to bear evil fruit, and the other bears good—so was it one tree or two?

[Image shown of Jesus on the cross from the film *The Passion of the Christ*]

Well how about this tree? ...In the midst of another garden, that happens to be the same place where Isaac was to be sacrificed, the Ark was kept in the temple, and the New Jerusalem comes down.

What do you know of this tree?

It's one tree. So, is it Good or is it evil? Does it take life or make alive?^{xxiii}

Is this tree evil? Well, the tree itself isn't evil... Like the famous poem, and like Genesis reveals, "*Only God can make a tree.*"^{xxiv} Maybe we can kill a tree, or corrupt a tree, but *only God can make a tree.*

The Tree may not be evil, and yet at this tree, do we learn about evil? What happened at this tree is the very definition of evil.

Think about it: What could possibly be more evil than the children of Adam taking the Life of Love who is our Lord, on a tree. Taking it, like you might take an apple because you thought it was good for food, or desired to make one wise like a bit of knowledge from a book—a law you could apply to yourself to make yourself better than your neighbor?

What could possibly be more evil than what we did when we took the body and blood like a wolf, ate the life like one of the walking dead, and drank the blood like a vampire?

What could be more evil than what happened at this tree? And what could possibly be better (more good) than what happened at this tree?

Do we learn what the Good is at this tree?

Well, yes! Absolutely!

Do we receive Life at this tree?

Well, yes! We die and live forever at this tree!

But didn't God command us not to take the life of this Good man on this tree?

Well, yeah!, He told us not to murder.

But didn't this happen according to God's plan?

Well, yes!, This is the very point of God's plan from the foundation of the world.

What could possibly be a greater good than the moment in which our Creator, who is Love, forgave every sin and gave each of us His own life?

From our perspective, this appears to be the worst of all trees—the place we take the life of the Good and damn ourselves and all things with us. But from the perspective of eternity, this appears to be the best of all trees—the place where God gives us himself and all things with him... the place we are born from this age and into eternity, our home.

This tree is the Judgment of God.

If we view this as simply our judgment, it's absolute evil and everything dies, for like ravenous wolves, we just ate the Life and made ourselves evil. But if we see that our judgment is encased in God's Judgment, like the law was placed in the Ark under the Mercy Seat, then we see that our decision to sin is encased in God's decision to save, sanctify, and create.

We see that the story of our sin is part of the eternal story of God's Grace. We see God's Judgment—and so our judgment—the wolf—dies, and something else begins to rise within the tomb that is our selves... our old selves... our wolf selves.

Our judgment is death and evil. But God's judgment is Life and endless Grace... the meaning of all things.

So, the way you judge this tree is literally the way you judge everything else.^{xxv} What you make of this tree and what this tree then makes of you are literally reality—for what is it that's hanging on this tree?

The Way, the Truth, the Life, the Good, the Word of God, Love which binds everything together, the Righteousness of God, and "I Am" in human flesh.

So, look at the fruit on this tree, [Peter points to the image on the screen of Jesus on the cross from *The Passion of the Christ*], while I ask you a few questions:

- Is "the Way" something that you can comprehend and control, like a map you acquire and keep in your pocket?
- Or is the Way someone you follow, like a sheep follows a shepherd?
- Is "the Truth" a thing you can use, perhaps, even twist into a lie? (What would that look like?)
- Or is the Truth someone for whom you'd be willing to die?
- Is "the Life" your own—in other words, would you take the body and blood to assimilate that life into your own life, like a wolf eats a sheep or even a shepherd?
- Is it your life *or* is it "*The Life*?" Which means, it is not simply part of you, but you and every living thing are actually a part of it, or of him who gives himself to you—not like food that dies in you, but food that comes to life in you—rises within you?
- Is the Good something you can acquire, to which you are entitled—like the wolf feels entitled to eat the sheep?
- Or, is the Good someone that is entitled to you... like a shepherd is entitled to his sheep?
- Is the Good something you can know and use to justify yourself like a law in a book?
- Or is the Good someone that knows you? Perhaps, even like a husband knows a bride, and so she bears his fruit, his life.
- Is "the Word" something you can speak as you see fit?
- Or is the Word someone that has spoken you and all things into existence, someone living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit... discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart... and even giving you his own heart?
- Is Love something you make?
- Or is Love someone that is making you all the time?

Would you judge the fruit on this tree? Or is this fruit judging you?

You see this is God's Judgement, his Decision, his free will, Righteousness.

- So is righteousness simply a decision you can make?
- Or is righteousness God's decision *planted* in you, and *making you* into who it is that you truly are?
- Is righteousness a score in a book that God keeps on a shelf somewhere?
- Or is righteousness a decision that God makes in his temple that is you?

I had a pretty wild experience that I expect most will find very hard to believe... and yet, I can't *not* believe, for it really happened. Susan and I were praying with a dear friend with whom we've prayed many times before—a friend I've known now for about 25 years.

Like a handful of other people that we've prayed for, she knows and loves Jesus but has also suffered some serious trauma in her past, and so at times wrestles with evil spirits in rather dramatic ways.

I began praying with a few people like this years ago when they were unable to find help in other places, and I figured it would look good on my spiritual resume—in other words, I'm a bit of a wolf.

But time and time again, I'd find myself in terrifying situations, entirely in over my head, and reduced to desperately crying out for Jesus, like a lost sheep looks for its shepherd.

Well, a few months ago, toward the end of this truly outrageous episode of prayer, I began praying in tongues, because I honestly just didn't know what else to do. It's something that I began to do as a kid in my friend Ricki's room when the Charismatic movement blew through town in the early 1970's. For years, I found it rather embarrassing; I had always wanted to prophesy or turn water into wine, but tongues just seemed kind of silly—but I did it, hoping that it might actually mean something.

Well this night, a few months ago, I was praying in tongues, and after a time, my friend began answering me in tongues, even as a little girl. And after more time, she began answering me in English, or I should say *arguing* with me in English, or I should say *arguing with Jesus in me* in English.

I'd say something in tongues... And she'd say something like, "*But why did you leave me? You always leave!*"

And I'd answer in tongues. She'd say something like, "*What do I do? How will I know?*"

And I'd answer in tongues. At one point she said, "*Pray!?! What do you mean, 'pray'? I'm talking to you right now!*"

And I'd just answer in tongues, thinking, "*God I have no idea what I'm saying.*"

At another point, something evil manifested and mockingly said, "You don't even know what you're saying." I laughed and kept praying in tongues.

At another point, my friend came back around and also laughed, and said, "You don't even know what you're saying." ... And I didn't know what I was saying. All I knew was that I loved her and was thrilled that Jesus was speaking.

The next day, she sent me an email with some of what she remembered that Jesus had said to her through me. She gave me permission to read it to you. I'll read most of it. Jesus said:

*I know what you felt and felt it with you.
You know my heart; you're a part of mine, and I'm a part of yours.
I live and breathe in you and through you.
You are hiding me from people who need me by staying in the dark.
You keep your lips tight, afraid of being too much or annoying.
I want to hear your heart, and I want you to see things through me.
I understand. I am with you always. I was there always. My love is a part of you.
It's what loves your kids and loves people when you don't even know them.
You let it beam with strangers. You see and feel others' pain.
It is a gift that I've given you, but you run from it. Come sit with me.
Everyday, come and sit with me...
Come be with me and see you, as I see and as I know, you. You are not bad.
You feel broken, but I can heal you. I am strong for you, and if you will let go, you will grow to be strong and not walk away from me and my heart.
I am with everyone, and it doesn't keep me from being with you.
Everyone is my "one." You don't need to understand. Just sit with me every day.
Everyday, share with me, and listen and look for my heart in you and around you.^{xxvi}*

Isn't that beautiful? "Everyone is my 'one.'" I didn't write that. That's the Great Shepherd. You see, I—Peter Hiatt, insecure, self-centered, often quite wolfish—I *prophesied*. Those weren't my words; that was Jesus.

That was the lamb that was slain: That was "the Sheep" in "the Wolf in Sheep's Clothing" ...The Sheep, but not simply a sheep. To be more precise: that was "the Shepherd" in "the Wolf in Sheep's Clothing," shepherding one of his sheep—How did the shepherd get in there?

We'll answer that in a minute, but this is what I earnestly want you to hear:

- I was utterly amazed that Jesus was talking through me, because I was *me*.
- I remember thinking "Oh man, I hope I don't screw this up!"
- I was utterly amazed that Jesus was speaking through me, for I was so obviously still me—confused, insecure, little old me.
- I remember thinking, "That was so entirely unusual."
- And then I thought, "No! Maybe that was entirely usual."

That's the thought I've been chewing on for six months, and I want you to get.

- Maybe anytime you tell someone about Jesus, not because you have to, but because you want to... you're prophesying.
- Maybe anytime you say something kind to someone, something loving, something good, it's not simply you that's speaking—your lips are moving, your brain is working, but they're not your thoughts or your word.
- Maybe Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Gentleness, Faith, and Control of yourself... is *not* simply yourself.
- Maybe you could call it "your fruit," but not because you chose it or chose Him, but because He chose you and chose to manifest His Life in you, even for the good of your neighbor.
- Maybe all righteousness is His righteousness, imputed to you, given to you.^{xxvii} ...ALL of it.

But now, what would it mean if you began to feel proud, or boast ever so subtly, or felt that you deserved a little credit for that righteousness? What if you began to feel a little self-righteous, and so began to compete with your neighbor, and so envy your neighbor's righteousness? What if you picked the fruit and took the fruit as if it were your own?

Well, I think it would mean that you just crucified our Lord to feed your own flesh, and all the fruit would begin to rot, ...and you'd smell a wolf.

Matthew 7:20 · **“Thus, you will recognize them by their fruit,”** rotten fruit, the work of the flesh-- enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions....

When you smell a wolf, it could be the wolf in you, or a wolf in your neighbor, or probably both, for the judgment we pronounce is the judgment we receive—I mean wolves inspire other wolves. Well, when that happens, you can't just fix things by trying, because it's all your trying to fix things that turned you into a wolf in the first place.

You have to return to the tree, stop judging God's Judgment, and let God's Judgment judge you.

Who is it that's hanging on the tree?
The Good Shepherd.

Communion

He took bread and broke it saying, “This is my body given to you.”
And in the same way, he took the cup saying, “This is the covenant in my blood.”

When we come to the table:

- We confess our sin;
- We expose the wolf to the judgment of God;
- We surrender the life we stole, and all our stolen knowledge of good and evil;
- We surrender all our judgments to God's judgment;
- We expose it to the fire.

- We confess our sin and we ingest God's Mercy.
- We confess our bad judgment and we receive God's Good Judgment.

How did the Good Shepherd get into the Wolf dressed in Sheep's clothing? The Shepherd said, “Take and eat. Take and drink.” You see there's seed in the fruit. Even in stolen fruit there's seed.

And check this out: He fore-gave you the fruit, long before you took the fruit. What you take, has always been given. You can't take it like a wolf, if you receive it like a sheep.

He knows that you're not really a wolf—it turns out that your false self is the product of your own bad judgment, which means, it's a temporary illusion. You're not a wolf, and you're not really even a sheep—sheep just follow shepherds, rather than eat them.

It turns out that you're not a sheep; you're the very Body of the Great Shepherd^{xxviii}

You know, a body constantly feeds itself—each member bleeds life into the next member, none of the members die and all are happy. That decision to bleed for your neighbor is called Love. And it's not simply your decision; it is the Judgment of God. It's given to you at a tree in a garden.

So, the Good Shepherd says, "Take and eat. This is my body, given to you. Take and drink. This cup is the covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins."

BENEDICTION

So you see, the Cross is not the story of how "the bad God" beats up on "the good God," in order to feel better about you. So, that if you have enough knowledge of good and evil, he just might not torture you.

The Tree is the story of how, God, who is one, makes you in his own image by giving you his very own heart; He is the Good Shepherd.^{xxix}

Make the tree good, and all the fruit will be Beautiful. Amen.

If you're proud of the fact that you've been to this tree, you haven't yet truly seen this tree. If you're grateful for the fact that you've been to this tree, start preaching and never stop.^{xxx}

Endnotes

ⁱ Now this isn't an option this is a command, and by neglecting this command, I think I've really hurt some people.

ⁱⁱ But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.' And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken?'— when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him. —Deuteronomy 18:20-22

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Corinthians 14:1

^{iv} Radio personality Paul Harvey tells the story of how an Eskimo kills a wolf. The account is grisly, yet it offers fresh insight into the consuming, self-destructive nature of sin.

"First, the Eskimo coats his knife blade with animal blood and allows it to freeze. Then he adds another layer of blood, and another, until the blade is completely concealed by frozen blood.

"Next, the hunter fixes his knife into the ground with the blade up. When a wolf follows his sensitive nose to the source of the scent and discovers the bait, he licks it, tasting the fresh frozen blood. He begins to lick faster, more and more vigorously, lapping the blade until the keen edge is bare. Feverishly now, harder and harder, the wolf licks the blade in the arctic night. So great becomes his craving for blood that the wolf does not notice the razor-sharp sting of the naked blade on his own tongue, nor does he recognize the instant at which his insatiable thirst is being satisfied by his own warm blood. His carnivorous appetite just craves more-until the dawn finds him dead in the snow!"

It is a fearful thing that people can be "consumed by their own lusts." Only God's grace keeps us from the wolf's fate. - Chris T. Zwingelberg

^v I include the Greek here, so you might realize that Jesus is using words that have some pretty significant theological connotations.

^{vi} From a historical perspective, the Bible is really hard to explain (not so with other religious books in my experience). The Bible, particularly the New Testament and the things Jesus said, are so contradictory, that you wonder why anyone even wrote it down. It only makes sense if you postulate that Jesus actually performed the miracles that Scripture says he did, and even more, that he actually died and was raised from the dead. That fact must have made people remember and record empowered by the presence of his Spirit in them which helped them remember as he said it would.

But once you take a chance on believing in something like Divine authorship an astounding picture begins to emerge; once you have a little faith that Jesus was describing something real, you find a remarkable synthesis, where there had once been glaring contradiction.

Jesus has just said “Judge not, that you not be judged” and now tells us how to judge (or recognize) wolves in sheep’s clothing. He then says some bizarre things about trees and bad fruit. And he will say some things even more bizarre in a few chapters. It forces us to make a decision:

A) We don’t need to take any of this seriously because, Jesus didn’t really mean what he said—he’s making poor analogies. Or Matthew just pasted together some loose memories. (I think this has been the predominant choice of the church for 1500 years. It means that we judge the word and then fit it into a paradigm that seems reasonable to us) OR

B) Jesus sees something we don’t see. Jesus is looking at reality from a different perspective. He’s describing an Elephant, to blind people that have never seen an elephant, but at some point, touched a trunk or a leg or an ear. (This means we approach it as a scientist approached the physical world. We accept it as true—a scientist doesn’t run and experiment and then decide that his evidence is false because it doesn’t fit his theory; no, he readjusts his theory.) In the same way, Jesus is describing bits of the Elephant and on Easter morning—the day we rise from the dead with Christ—we see the Elephant: God is absolutely all powerful and free Love; God is Grace... and he has revealed this on a tree at the edge of time and eternity.

^{vii} In the Gospel of Matthew at least, Matthew 26:10. “The fruit was good,” so she must’ve “made the tree good.” Read the story and ask: how did she make the tree good, even as others made the tree evil?

^{viii} ...except of course for one very special instance in which two people become one flesh. This instance is sacramental—it’s communion in the sacrament of the covenant of marriage bearing fruit that is life. No wonder God cares about marriage and sexuality.

^{ix} “There is one body and one spirit” writes Paul in Ephesians 4:4. A wolf doesn’t know that.

^x I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. –Acts 20:29-30

^{xi} This is the first place the word shows up after the garden. Next it shows up as the place where Abraham meets the three messengers, that are also, somehow, the Lord... “rest yourselves under the tree (18:4). And the next place is on Mt. Moriah and under Isaac, who will be spared by a substitute, a grown lamb (22).

^{xii} Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. – John 19:41

^{xiii} Isaiah 6:13, 11:10 It’s as if something went bad with this tree called Israel and you can trace the problem back to a stump related to the first and last Adam, and a tree in a garden.

^{xiv} Matthew 20:19

^{xv} Luke 13:6-9 *Koprion* is translated manure, but it means “shit.”

^{xvi} John 12:50

^{xvii} John 11:25, 14:6

^{xviii} You may remember that in the Gospel of Luke Jesus tells a wonderful story about a landowner that wants to cut down a tree because it’s not bearing fruit, but the gardener argues with him, saying “well let me throw some *kaprion* on it.” *Kaprian* is Greek for *sheissa*, that is, shit. Next time you exclaim, “What’s with this shit?!” Consider this answer, “Perhaps

God is fixing to grow some fruit—Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Gentleness, Faith and self-control. That stuff grows on trees planted in broken shitty soil, watered and exposed to the light of the sun.”

^{xxix} Deuteronomy 21:23, Galatians 3:13

^{xx} Along with this reading it's also important to note that “also” (*gam*) in Genesis 3:22 can be translated “again.” The idea being that Adam and Eve are kicked out of the garden, such that they would no longer eat of the tree in the same way. And yet, if we are believer's, we have eternal life, which clearly implies that we have already died and are beginning to eat of the tree in a new way (We do Eat of the tree again or also and we have died, with Christ, and we do rise with him also)—we don't take the body and blood as wolves desiring to make God's life our own life; we take the body and blood as worshippers, surrendering our lives to God's life, that we might become his body and blood; we don't make his psyche part of our own individual psyche, we lose our psyche in his psyche then find ourselves made new. “It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” wrote Paul, “chief” of all wolves, but now the body of the Great Shepherd.

^{xxi} Genesis 3:3,11 and for 3:22 see previous endnote.

^{xxii} ¹⁸ She [Wisdom] is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed. ¹⁹ The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; ²⁰ by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew. – Solomon, Proverbs 3:18-19

⁹ Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?” ¹⁰ It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. – 1 Kings 3:9-10

⁹ O LORD God, let your word to David my father be now fulfilled, for you have made me king over a people as numerous as the dust of the earth. ¹⁰ Give me now wisdom and knowledge to go out and come in before this people, for who can govern this people of yours, which is so great?” ¹¹ God answered Solomon, “Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked for possessions, wealth, honor, or the life of those who hate you, and have not even asked for long life, but have asked for wisdom and knowledge for yourself that you may govern my people over whom I have made you king, ¹² wisdom and knowledge are granted to you. – 2nd Chronicles 1:9-12 describing the same event as 1 Kings 3

Solomon doesn't take Wisdom but asks for Wisdom and this pleases the Lord. Wisdom is also described as knowledge of Good and evil. And it's with Wisdom (logos) that God created all things. We discussed these things in great detail in our sermons from Ecclesiastes. (<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/?filter-by=series&filter-term=ecclesiastes>) Wisdom is a living person. The law, “knowledge of Good and evil” written on paper or stone and placed in an ark or coffin is like dead Wisdom.

^{xxiii} When the movie, *The Passion of the Christ* was released, the reviews were so mixed that one critic commented, “Watching this movie was like taking a Rorschach inkblot test.” And he was right; it is the judgment of this world.

^{xxiv} I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.
A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the sweet earth's flowing breast;
A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;
A tree that may in summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;
Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.
Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree. –Joyce Kilmer

^{xxv} Years ago a psychologist showed me this picture (a Rorschach Inkblot), and asked what I saw.



I said, “Two monkeys playing basketball and getting shot at.” Then he asked me all sorts of bizarre questions about my sexual orientation (I still don't know what it all meant; it was a bit silly). But the cross is actually like that: make the tree

bad and everything will go bad; make the tree good and you'll find yourself surrounded by Heaven. The way you judge the tree, is the way the tree judges you, and the way you relate to everything around you.

^{xxvi} I know what you felt and felt it with you. You know my heart, you're a part of mine and I'm a part of yours. I live and breathe in you and through you. You are hiding me from people who need me by staying in the dark. You push my words away and hide in the dark thinking you are safe and better that way. Those are lies and I have light to show you and light to show through you. When you go to work my heart wants to be known for others. You keep your lips tight afraid of being too much or annoying. I want to hear your heart and I want you to see things through me. I understand. I'm with you always. I was there, always. My love is a part of you. It's what loves your kids and loves people when you don't even know them. You let it beam with strangers. You see and feel others pain. It is a gift that I've given you, but you run from it. Come sit with me. Everyday come and sit with me like the Wemicks in the story you read to [your daughter]. Stop putting dots on yourself in order to hide. Come be with me and see you as I see and as I know you. You are not bad. You feel broken but I can heal you. I am strong for you and if you will let go you will grow to be strong and not walk away from me and my heart. I am with everyone and it doesn't keep me from being with you. Everyone is my ONE. You don't need to understand. Just sit with me every day. Everyday share with me and listen and look for my heart in you and around you.

^{xxvii} Theologians and Bible students argue over what is imputed righteousness and what is not, as if there was anything other than imputed righteousness, as if we could be our own uncreated creators. Everything is gift, which means our ego is a lie, and a prison, and the hell in which we each become entangled. And every Good Choice in me, is the Judgment of God in me—he sits on the throne in the Sanctuary of my soul.

^{xxix} "He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man ... might become the son of God."
"Through a tree we were made debtors to God; so through a tree we have our debt canceled." – Irenaeus

^{xxx} If you think that righteousness is your own doing, you're a wolf, a Zombie and a Vampire... and you need to go back to spend some time with Jesus at the foot of the tree,
But if you're grateful, for the righteousness in you, Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, kindness, Goodness, Gentleness and self-control—you're the body of the Great Shepherd and your free to start dancing, and your dance is the New Creation.