
3 Nephi 14 — By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them — Doing the Sayings, Not Only Hearing Them

3 Nephi 14: the close of the Sermon at the Temple. Christ turns again to the multitude and teaches the disciplines of the heart toward others and toward God. Judge not, that ye be not judged — for with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you; and before you pull the mote from your brother's eye, cast the beam from your own. Give not what is holy to dogs nor pearls to swine. Ask, and it shall be given; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened — for the Father who, being good, gives good gifts, far more than an earthly father. Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them — for this is the law and the prophets. Then the warnings that close the sermon: enter at the strait gate, for wide is the way to destruction and narrow the way to life, and few find it. Beware false prophets in sheep's clothing who are inwardly ravening wolves — but 'by their fruits ye shall know them,' for a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit nor a corrupt tree good. Not everyone who says 'Lord, Lord' enters the kingdom, but he that doeth the will of the Father; to many who prophesied and worked wonders in his name he will say, 'I never knew you.' And the closing parable: whoso heareth these sayings and doeth them is the wise man who built his house upon a rock, and the floods could not move it; whoso heareth and doeth them not is the foolish man who built upon the sand, and great was the fall of it. The chapter is the sermon's call to action — that the whole of it must be not merely heard or professed but done; the heart known by its fruit, the disciple by his obedience, the house standing or falling on whether the sayings are lived.

This is the close of the Sermon at the Temple, and its great theme — the theme that gathers the whole sermon together and seals it — is *doing*. Not hearing, not professing, not saying *Lord, Lord*, but *doing* the sayings of Christ. The chapter is full of vivid warnings, all pointing the same direction: that a person is known not by what they claim but by what they *produce* — *by their fruits ye shall know them* (v. 20); that the kingdom belongs not to those who *say* but to those who *do the will of the Father* (v. 21); and that the whole magnificent sermon, the Beatitudes and the higher law and the treasure in heaven, is worth nothing to the one who *hears* it and does not *do* it — for the house built on the rock and the house built on the sand differ in exactly one thing, whether the hearer of these sayings also *does* them. The sermon ends by refusing to let anyone walk away having merely admired it. It must be *lived*, or it saves no one.

Hebrew Word Studies

peri (פֶּרִי) — "fruit, produce, offspring, result" — **peri**, the fruit a tree or plant bears; by extension, the produce, yield, or result of anything — the offspring of a womb, the outcome of a deed, the visible product of an inward nature. What a thing brings forth reveals what it is vv. 16–20 (ye shall know them by their fruits... a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit... by their fruits ye shall know them). The test Christ gives for discerning truth from falsehood — *by their fruits ye shall know them* — runs on the Hebrew *peri*, "fruit," and it draws on one of the most consistent principles in all of scripture: that the inner nature of a thing is revealed by what it *produces*. *Peri* is the fruit of a tree, but the word's reach is wide — it is the *fruit of the womb* (offspring), the *fruit of the ground* (harvest), the *fruit of the lips* (words), the *fruit of one's doings* (the consequences of deeds). And the governing idea everywhere is that *the fruit reveals the root*. A tree's nature is hidden — you cannot see its inward life — but its *fruit* makes the hidden nature visible: a fig tree bears figs, a vine bears grapes, and *a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit* (v. 18). The kind of fruit infallibly reveals the kind of tree. This is why *peri* becomes scripture's great test of authenticity. The heart is invisible; the tree's root is underground; the false prophet wears sheep's clothing — but the *fruit* cannot lie. *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith* (Gal. 5:22) — the Spirit's presence in a life is known by what it produces. *The tree is known by his fruit* (Matt. 12:33); *every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire* (v. 19). And the Old Testament roots this deeply: the blessed man is *like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season* (Ps. 1:3), while God's complaint against unfaithful Israel is that he looked for the fruit of justice and found only the wild grapes of oppression (Isa. 5:1–7). The principle cuts in two directions, both vital. First, it is a tool of *discernment*: do not judge a teacher, a movement, or a doctrine by its appearance, its claims, or its sheep's clothing — judge it by its *fruit*, by what it actually *produces* in the lives it touches. Fine words and impressive works can deceive; the fruit, over time, cannot. Does this influence grow love, humility, holiness, peace — or pride, contention, corruption? *By their fruits ye shall know them*. Second, it is a sober test of *oneself*: for if the tree is known by its fruit, then *my* true nature is revealed not by what I profess but by what my life produces. This is the deep link to the chapter's climax — *not every one that saith Lord, Lord... but he that doeth the will of my Father* (v. 21). Saying is leaves; *doing* is fruit. A person may be covered in the foliage of right words and even religious works, but if the *fruit* — the actual obedience, the love, the changed life — is missing, the tree is barren or corrupt, and *I never knew you* (v. 23) is the verdict. The whole sermon's demand that the sayings be *done*, not merely heard, is the demand for *fruit*. A hearer who does not do is a tree with leaves and no figs, a house with no foundation, a profession with no produce. And the final mercy in the image is its hope: barren trees can be pruned and fed and made fruitful, and a heart that is rooted in Christ — *planted by the rivers of water* — will, in its season, *bring forth good fruit*, not by straining but by the natural overflow of a good root. The command *by their fruits ye shall know them* is finally a call to *be* the good tree — rooted in Christ, watered by the Spirit — so that the good fruit comes of itself, the visible produce of an inward nature made new.

From the Chapter's Architecture

``cross-references Matt. 7 (the Sermon on the Mount — the Galilean parallel of this chapter throughout); Matt. 12:33 (the tree is known by his fruit — the test of vv. 16–20); Gal. 5:19–23 (the works of the flesh... the fruit of the Spirit — the fruit that reveals the root, vv. 16–20); Ps. 1:3 (like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season — the good tree, vv. 17–18); Isa. 5:1–7 (God seeking the fruit of justice and finding wild grapes — the corrupt tree, vv. 18–19); Luke 6:46 (why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? — the saying without doing, v. 21); James 1:22–25 (be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves — the doer versus the hearer, vv. 24–27); James 2:14–20 (faith, if it hath not works, is dead — the profession without the fruit, vv. 21–23); Tobit 4:15 (do that to no man which thou hatest — the golden rule, v. 12); 3 Ne. 11:39–40 (the doctrine of Christ as the rock, the change of it as sand — the frame this chapter closes, vv. 24–27); 3 Ne. 12:48 (be ye perfect — the wholeness that the doing of the sayings produces); Hel. 5:12 (the rock of the Redeemer, the sure foundation whereon men cannot fall — the rock of vv. 24–25); 3 Ne. 18:12–13 (built upon my rock... but whoso... the gates of hell are open to receive them — the rock-and-sand teaching repeated to the disciples). ``