



The Gospel According to Luke

Wk. 68 "Being Accountable for the Time You Have"

By Pastor Jody May

Luke 13:1-5 ESV

The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

⁶And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. ⁷And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?' ⁸And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. ⁹Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Background information:

Opening Illustration: I have several tree chopping stories that come to mind, and would you believe many of them make me laugh, but none as when my mother took our new lawnmower for a spin right over our new sapling...

This is the wrap up, to a walking and talking sermon w/ Q & A (see chapter 12). He ends with a parable/story; it is the period to this statement He's been making through Chapter 12. His last point is a metaphor, a picture, but unlike previous parables, or the more to come, He offers not an interpretation of it. It is as if to say, *let Him who has ears, hear...* (Mat. 11:15).

The last 2 verses point to an outcome that doesn't look to promising, at the least it is threatening.

Our task here today is to decipher the best we can, what this story is about, and then respond to it. When we do devotions at home, after discussing what the scripture is showing us, we always ask two things: **1st is the text asking us to believe something, OR 2nd is the text asking us to do something.** What type of command is it giving us? That's a good tip for all of us here today, any time you read the Bible, it will never leave you without something to do. God's Word never returns void (Isaiah 55:11) even if you are just sitting to read it to pass the time, it will challenge you on something.



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Today, we could feel a little challenged because **what do you do with a story about a fig tree?** Well, the clue comes from last week’s text when Jesus answered his own question about how one should think when calamity strikes. That is to see it not as a particular judgment for sin, but a byproduct of the fallen world. What we should understand is that when bad things don’t happen to us it is because we have Mercy.

Jesus made this statement twice: ***but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish (13:3 & 5)***. It is right after this statement in vs. 5 that Jesus tells the parable. This tells us that the story of the Fig Tree has got to be tied into, somehow, with Repentance; to change one’s mind that leads to a change of heart.... But first we need to **unpack this image of the Fig Tree**.

What’s so special about this tree?

Fig Trees are mentioned all over the place in the Bible, it was one of the trees that the Jews inherited from the promised land.

In the early good days of Israel, it was mentioned that every man would have one to sit under (1 Kgs 4:25).

And when Israel was judged it was said that they were the first to be eaten up by the invading armies (Jer. 5:17).

They produce a fruit that usually grows in clusters similar to grapes, producing a yield twice a year, meaning almost any time of the year you would see some semblance of fruit on the branches.

If one was so lucky to have a vineyard you most likely would have a fig tree amongst the vines as well so as to give it access to your best soil and water supply.

Its’ main job was to provide food, it’s secondary use was to give shade, it provided a place in the garden during the heat of the day you could eat your lunch or take a siesta.

Fig trees have these big leaves on them, and the fruit grows behind/under the leaves. So, one would have to walk up and closely inspect it to discover if it had any fruit on it.

BUT, what you would not do, if the fig tree did not yield fruit, is allow it to suck up nutrients and water from your good soil where other plants were trying to produce fruit for you.



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Here’s where we land in our story today. The man that had planted this tree, walks over to get a bite to eat. He pulls back the leaves to inspect the tree and NOTHING! And do you know how long this has been happening? **3 years!**

3 has a significant number in the Bible. One thing that the text may be showing here is that the tree has been given the full and complete time to bear fruit for 3 means it has come to its’ fullness of time. Last year in the spring I told you about a certain **Peach Tree in my yard**, and I jokingly said, “Please pray for my tree.” It had been with me for 4 years, and only one of those did it produce fruit worth eating. Guess what I did last summer when it produced a **disease laden crop on the 3rd year in a row?** Well, let’s just say your prayers didn’t work and it no longer sucks up my good soil in my garden.

The owner of this tree instructs the man who tends the garden to cut it down. The man that works the field, the vinedresser, convinces the owner give it one more year. The vinedresser wants to pull back the soil from the top of the roots, he wants to lay down manure/fertilizer around it. He then makes no guarantee but simply asks for one more year and if not, well we can cut it down. The worse thing that is going to happen is that they will plant another fig tree to take its’ place so they will have to wait a while to get fruit.

Now we come to the point in our text where we get to ask **how ‘do’ we apply a story about a fig tree to our lives?** AND you should want to know that, because this comes at the end of a very important sermon in Luke.

1st - What did this text (Sermon) mean for Israel?

Now, let’s tie this in to verse 5: ***but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish – that unless your repentance, the changing of your mind from the ways of the world, believing that you are owed because of who you are, unless it bears the fruit showing that such repentance is real you will be cut down,*** removed and put aside for disposal.



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For the people of that day and age this was certainly a sad thing to hear. (*Luke 6:32 these were the folks that Jesus said He came for*) That those that JB had spent the time to prepare a way for, that those that had been following Jesus around for 3 years listening to the Gospel, being healed of all sort of diseases, that demons were cast out from them. Those that Jesus was trying to get out of the hands of the false religious teachers. That unless they produced fruit, they too were done.

Even then, in that story Jesus is even quick to say there is still hope! Psalm 103:8 ***"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."*** Look we still have a shot, there is still some time. Jesus wants to give His people some more time to come around. But it is getting so short. What you don't know, is if you could but look in the future just a few short verses later we would see Jesus on His last approach to Jerusalem.

Then we see in Mat. 21:18 during that last week He uses the **fig tree as an object lesson** and because it did not produce fruit, He cursed it and it died. The tree would not do what it was created to do, the Jewish people would not do what they were entrusted to do, follow the Messiah.

Paul tells us in Romans 11 that the Jewish people have been put aside and we see finally in history Rome destroys the temple by 70 AD which eradicates the full practices of Judaism.

What can we do in light of that? **We are to continually pray for Jews** like any other lost person, that they would **see that Jesus as their Messiah**. Part of the signs of Christ's return is the growing belief that the Jews will return home (Deut. 30:1-5). We pray for them that they will see the only path of Salvation does not come through the Old Covenant but that it comes through Faith Alone in Jesus completing and replacing the OC with the NC.

2nd - What does this text mean for us?



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Again, we remember that Luke is writing this for Jews and Gentiles alike, this Gospel, is for us as well. So, let me just point out again succinctly if you did not pick this up yet:

- Those that have no fruit will ultimately be cut down.
- Judgement is closer than we think.
- We all are just living on borrowed time.

That means for the church just like Israel we need to realize **that unless our repentance bears fruit, shows that it is real, we too face being cut down.**

- Perhaps like our ancestors we too **have a hard time believing** that our lives are in **need of changing**?
- Perhaps we feel we are **ENTITLED** to God’s blessings because we lack earthly blessings just like our ancestors?
- Perhaps we are **STUBBORN** just like they were because **we think** that God will **graciously overlook** our **lack of honor** towards Him?
- Could it simply be that you have **mistaken Mercy/Kindness for Weakness**, could this be what is getting between you and a right relationship with God this morning?

It did for them back then, please don’t think you are smarter than they are.

GOSPEL: Please also know, it was exactly for people like this back then and for us now, that Jesus died. That through a cross, Jesus could show that **He was cut down for us**, to buy us the time in our lives (Mercy), so that we may **bear the fruit of repentance**. And through His resurrection He shows what true repentance will eventually lead to. A resurrected physical and spiritual life because that’s what Jesus was entitled to and He shares that with us!

Now, this is where we need to heed the words of Martin Luther well, **“We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.”** – Martin Luther

Our faith will show the signs/fruit of Repentance if it is real. I know that many of us may at this point want to run to Galatians 5:22-23, to prove to yourself you are ok:



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Galatians 5:22-23 ESV

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.

But here is where I also want to encourage and exhort us: The fruit of the Spirit, as dictated by Paul here, **is shown by a church, to the church**. As you go to that list here’s some big questions for you, “How are you doing at bearing the fruit of repentance **among this body?**” “Have you changed your thinking that what you produce in your life **is just for you?**” “Are you seeing that unless the fruit of repentance is plucked and consumed **it has no use?**” “Do you see that these fruits are different than the tangible gifts of the spirit for the work of ministry?” These things **are attitudes of the heart DISPLAYED** to others so that they may **benefit from them...**

How this works then is that the Spirit that helps produce this fruit, He is the one that bears the witness to us, to the one that owns the vineyard.

Romans 8:16-17 ESV

¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Our suffering is a light and momentary affliction, putting up with people that aren’t like us. For many of us it just means that we have got to learn to **not just live with each other but live FOR each other** as Christ has lived for us.

My family let me close with this. It is my prayer for us that we all understand that we are living with **borrowed time**. That our lives need to show the fruit of repentance and the good news is that **God has planted** every one of us in the fertile soil of this church **so use this field!** Grow deep roots, bear much fruit, and enjoy loving these folks around you, for it shall bring you much joy when you see one day that it helped sustain them through their suffering as well. All of us living with the goal of one day seeing the one that gave us His all, our Lord.



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PRAY

COMMUNION

BENEDICTION

Go in the name of the Father, that has delayed our time of judgment ensuring that all His children shall be saved.

Go in the name of the Son, that endured the blow from the axe of wrath for us so that we may share in His glorious inheritance with Him.

Go in the name and the power of the HS, that helps produce the fruit of repentance, so that we may help nurture those around us.