

Red Chairables

The Barren Fig Tree

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[VIDEO: SUMMERSUN NURSERY]

Have you ever bought a fruit tree that didn't produce? You took it home and planted it and cared for it, and then waited ... but when spring came, all you got were leaves! It didn't produce the produce! In the parable of "The Barren Fig Tree", Jesus compels us to ask ourselves the question: What is my life producing?

Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' "'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'" - *Luke 13:6-9 NIV*

The message of this parable is simple: There's a season of grace to produce the fruit of faith before your deadline comes. And this is one of my favorite parables because the more you dig, the more you discover, and the more fascinating it becomes.



Southern Temple steps

These are the original steps Jesus climbed on His way into the temple in Jerusalem. A group of Galileans were murdered here, under the order of Pontius Pilate (*who later condemned Jesus*). Jesus was from Galilee, about 60 miles north of Jerusalem. But, the term "Galilean" often referred to a specific group of Jewish insurgents (or zealots) who openly opposed Roman rule.



Pool of Siloam

Remember when Jesus rubbed spit-mud on the blind man's eyes? (*John 9:1-11*) This is the remains of the Pool of Siloam where the man washed away the mud and regained his sight.

The Tower of Siloam stood nearby. In Jesus' day it collapsed, killing 18 men.

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." Then he told this parable ... - *Luke 13:1-6a NIV*

Jesus sets up His parable with a couple of things:

- A. He's contradicting the teaching of the Pharisees, who were claiming that suffering was God's punishment for sin.

He says, "Don't think the sin of the suffering is *extraordinarily* horrible ... it's *ordinarily* horrible - just like yours!" All wrongdoing deserves judgment and punishment.

- B. He warns them to stop wasting time pointing fingers at the sin of others, and focus on the fruit of their own faith.

Twice He says: "Unless you repent, you too will all perish."

They were looking to confirm their self-righteousness. But, Jesus says it's better to have confessed your wretchedness. Instead of trying to decipher what someone else might have done to deserve their fate, simply repent before you meet your own!



Don't chase your tail with endless points of theology that accomplish nothing but postponing your own point of decision and repentance. The message of the Barren Fig Tree is this:

We're expected to yield the fruit of repentance.

1. Recognition of sin (*no longer hiding or denying it; but, a willingness to bring it out in the open*)
2. Remorse for sin (*realizing how it hurts our relationship, and feeling genuine sorrow for the pain I've caused Him*)
3. Returning to Him (*reconnecting and repairing the relationship that my sin has injured*)
4. Re-surrender (*giving up all the controls to Him, which means walking in obedience to His Word*)
5. Receiving grace (*allowing His holiness to cover me and cleanse me - this is the power of forgiveness*)
6. Re-devotion of myself (*to live for Him, point forward. Basically, it means that I stop trusting the promises of sin over the promises of God*)



Did you notice where the fig tree was planted? It wasn't planted in an orchard.

A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. - Luke 13:6 NIV

What would a fig tree be doing in a vineyard? Pleasing the owner. It's a *chosen* tree planted for the farmer's personal pleasure.

Jesus is speaking on two levels:

A. He's revealing Himself as Messiah to the nation of Israel.

Israel was specially chosen, planted, and commissioned to remain separate and unstained by the world so that when the promised Messiah came they'd recognize and proclaim Him. This parable is a direct threat and a prophetic warning for the generation of Jews who were rejecting Jesus. The master says:

"For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?" "Sir," the [caretaker] replied, "leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down." - *Luke 13:7b-9 NIV*

The point here isn't that God is *mean* and Jesus is *nice*. Jesus is emphasizing the tension between His justice and His mercy.

[He's] not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. -
2 Peter 3:9 NIV

But, if a tree *refuses* to bear fruit, at some point you uproot!

Remember the Galileans' blood was "mixed with their sacrifices"? That gives us a reference for the time of year. Galileans were *not* temple priests, but they're offering sacrifices at the temple. And the only time *laymen* were allowed to slaughter their own animals was during Passover. So, this news was given to Jesus shortly after Passover. And it was one year later - during Passover - that Jesus ended His ministry, rode into town on a donkey, and was crucified.

"Sir," the man replied, "leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it." If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down." - *Luke 13:8 NIV*

Jesus most likely said this one year before His own death! A year He spent doing everything He could to persuade His people. And then, a year later, less than five *days* before the cross, Jesus rides into Jerusalem and cleanses the temple.

And, have you ever wondered about *this* weird little miracle?

Early in the morning, as [Jesus] was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" they asked. - *Matthew 21:18-20 NIV*

Mark's commentary makes it seem even stranger:

When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. - *Mark 11:13b NIV*

Mark is saying that this miracle is not really about *figs*. It seems to be a signal that the year has expired, the uprooting has begun, and that Jesus has the authority to bring judgment. Just the night before, He lamented over Israel:

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace — but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you." - *Luke 19:41-44 NIV*



Southern Temple steps

And that's exactly what happened. About 40 years later, in 70^{AD}, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, and executed the priests.

Some of the original temple stones still lay where they were toppled to the street below.



Arch of Titus, 82 A.D.

The Arch of Titus was constructed 12 years later to commemorate the crush and slaughter of over one *million* Jews.

It was similar in fashion, but far worse in scope than the "Galilean massacre" and the "Siloam tower collapse" tragedies combined.



The confiscated menorah, pictured on the arch, served as a model for modern Israel's state emblem. Jews won't walk under the arch, but in 1948, when Israel became a state, a procession of Jews marched under the arch in the opposite direction that the triumphant Romans had.

The Roman's retribution was indiscriminate. Jews who *cooperated* with Rome (like the Sadducees) perished right alongside the Jews who *rebelled* (like the Pharisees, Zealots, and Galileans). There was only one group of Jews who survived in mass: those who had repented and received Jesus as their Messiah. Only *they* heeded His prophetic warning in the Gospel of Luke:

When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. - *Luke 21:20-22 NIV*

Twice Jesus had warned His people before the parable:

"But unless you repent, you too will all perish"

And it had an all too literal and physical application for His nation. But, He was speaking on another level as well:

B. He was calling each *individual* to eternal life.

The word “perish” means the opposite of “eternal life”.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not **perish** but have **everlasting life**. - *John 3:16 NIV*

You are a unique tree that the Lord has planted in His vineyard (this world), for *His* eternal purpose and pleasure.



The fig tree (and nation) were given an extra year. But, like those Galileans, or the 18 who were crushed by the tower, you and I can't know if we have an extra year, a day, or even a minute. There comes a point when grace is no longer extended. And the eternal life or death question will be: Did you blossom before your deadline?

Or, will He find only leaves? Church-going, Bible-reading, good-deed-doing, even praying can end up amounting to so many leaves. The fruit the Lord desires is a thirst for righteousness, a hunger for His Word, a longing for intimacy with Him and His people, and ever growing gratitude for His grace.

These are the “figs” that naturally grow from true repentance.