

Ripe for Repentance

The Gospel of the Gadarene

May 29, 2022



Today we'll be examining our foliage for the fruit of faith!



So, **what's your life producing?** We're gonna look at Jesus' parable of the fig tree; the point being that **there's a season of grace for the fruit of faith ... and a deadline.** Both for a *nation* and an *individual*. And we'll look at all *this* in the *light* of that crazy naked Gadarene, the *first* Apostle Jesus sends out to perform *miracles* in His name! Did you *know* he did *that*?



We took a look at **Jerusalem's destruction in 70^{AD}** when Roman legions ignored *Caesar's command* to save the *Temple*, thus *fulfilling Jesus' warning* that **"Not one stone here will be left on another"**. (Mk 13:2) But the *Jews* ignored *Jesus command* to *flee* **"when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies"** with *catastrophic consequences* – even though these **"days of vengeance"** as *Jesus* calls them (Lk 21:22) were proclaimed from day *one*.



When [John the Baptist] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! **Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?** ... And even now **the ax is laid to the root of the trees.** Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is **cut down** and **thrown into the fire.** – Matthew 3:7-10 NKJ



Jesus had been contradicting the *Pharisaical* teaching that *all suffering* is God's *punishing* for *sin*. And He points to *Galilean rebels* massacred in *Jerusalem*, and *victims* of a tower collapse in *Jerusalem*, and basically says, **"Don't think their sin was abnormally horrible ... it was normally horrible – like yours!"** And *twice* He says, **"unless you repent you will all likewise perish"**. (Lk 13:1-5) And many *did*. Over a *million*. The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians after hostilities had begun, and shortly before the destruction; and the writer ponders this horrific thought:



How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God ... and has **outraged the Spirit of grace?** – Hebrews 10:29-31 ESV



The ancient Jewish, eyewitness and historian, Josephus records how the **legions surrounded the city with a 5-mile dirt mound as tall as the city wall, upon which they crucified over 500 people per day, month after month.** So I guess *that's* **"how much worse punishment"** came to those who demanded the release of the murderous rebel, Barabbas, and the crucifixion of Christ.

"What crime has He committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify Him! ... Let His blood be on *us* and on *our children!*" – Matthew 27:23-25 NIV

After Jesus said, “unless you repent you *will* all *likewise* perish,” He told ‘em 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! ... ‘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 moral is clear: when the Lord comes to *us*, **we better be ripe for repentance!** Whether as a *nation* or an *individual*. Which means: **1) Recognition of my sin** (no hiding or denying); **2) Remorse for my sin** (cuz it *hurts* our relationship); **3) Returning to Him** and **4) Re-surrendering control** (to *affirm* our relationship); **5) Receiving His grace**; and **6) Re-devoting myself**. The “fruit of repentance” basically means that I **grow up and stop trusting the promises of sin over the promises of God**. Did you notice that the fig tree was “planted in his vineyard”? Isaiah says:

The *vineyard* of the Lord of hosts is the *house of Israel*, [as a *nation*] and the *men of Judah* [individually] are His *pleasant plant*. [Hmm, I wonder *what kind of plant*] – Isaiah 5:7 NKJ

[The Lord said] “What do you see, *Jeremiah*?” [regarding the *hearts of God’s people*] And [he] said, “*Figs, the good figs, very good; and the bad, very bad*” – Jeremiah 24:3 NKJ

“A *good tree* does not bear *bad fruit*, nor does a *bad tree* bear *good fruit*. For every tree is known by its *own fruit*. For men do not gather *figs from thorns*, nor ... *grapes from a bramble bush* ... out of the abundance of the *heart* his mouth *speaks*.” – Luke 6:43-45 NKJ

[And when] There is *no one upright* ... the *best* of them is like a *brier*; the *most upright* is *sharper* than a *thorn hedge*; the *day of ... punishment* comes; – Micah 7:2-4 NKJ

“In the time of their punishment they shall be cast down,” says the Lord. “I will surely consume them,” says the Lord. “No grapes *shall be* on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree ... and *the things* I have *given* them shall pass away *from* them.” – Jeremiah 8:12-14 NKJ

And I will destroy her *vines* and her *fig trees*, – Hosea 2:12 NKJ



Jesus shared this story *just after* sending out the Gadarene, *one year* before the *cross*. And it’s a direct prophetic *threat*. That tree gets “one more year”. During which time *Jesus* and *Gad* do everything they can to break through *hard hearts* to get the *good seed* of God’s Word to *grow*. **Do you know the *other two* Gospel stories about our *Gadarene*?**

Jesus went throughout Galilee [of the *Gentiles*] (v. 15) ... preaching the Good News ... [and] News about Him spread ... Large crowds from *Galilee*, the *Decapolis* ... and the *region* [around the *Decapolis*] across the *Jordan* followed Him. – Matthew 4:23-25 NIV

And then, getting specific about Isaiah’s prophecy regarding a great light *dawning* on the *Gentiles* across the *Jordan*, on the *east side* of the Sea of Galilee, (Mt 4:12-16; Is 9:1-2) Matthew says, that ...

¹⁵ [These] Great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all. ¹⁶ Yet He warned them not to make Him known, [among the Gentiles, so] ¹⁷ that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah (42:1-4) the prophet, [regarding the Gentiles] saying: ¹⁸ “Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen ... He will declare justice to the Gentiles. [But] ¹⁹ He will not quarrel nor cry out ... till He sends forth justice to victory; ²¹ and [then] in His name Gentiles will trust.” – Matthew 12:15-21 NKJ



So Jesus warns the Gentiles to keep things hush-hush across the pond until He’s ready to fulfill Isaiah 42, 9, 65, and – hike! But at that time, Jesus “will declare” “Here I am!” (Is 65:1-2) “quarrel” with Legion, (Mt 8:31; Mk 5:10; Lk 8:31) and “cry out” “Go!” (Mt 8:32) and then “send forth” the Gadarene “to victory” “in His name”. And we know it’s the Gadarene, cuz he’s the one Jesus “sends forth” to declare His name to the Gentiles! **He’s reflecting the Light that dawned across the pond!** Legion is really just a side-note. The real story is Jesus **establishing us Gentiles**, who embrace and become the *body of Christ!* And He *initiates* it, *appropriately* I think, through a *crazy, naked, screaming outlaw, infamous* for ... *what?* Escaping Roman authorities! And **there’s a whole sermon to be had just from the fact that Jesus says, “That’s My guy!”**

Jesus sent him away, saying, “Go home to your people, return to your house [as Jesus came for the lost sheep of the House of Israel (Mt 15:24)] and report to them and describe what great things the Lord God [of the Jews] has done for you, and how He had mercy on [a wild Gentile like] you.” So he went away, *proclaiming* throughout the *whole city*, [of Gadara] and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus [the King of the Jews] had done for him; and everyone was amazed. – Mk 5:19-20; Lk 8:38-39 NAS

Because you’ve heard this guy’s *testimony*, right?! And we can use the Decapolis (lit. Ten Cities) as a key to unlock yet another story. Because Damascus was one of the ten cities of the Decapolis; and it’s region included the pagan countryside of Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus sent the Twelve; and when they regrouped, John reported a strange encounter.

[Jesus was saying] “He who is *least* among you *all* will be *great*.” Now John answered and said, “Master, we [all] saw someone [that fits that description] *casting out demons in Your name*, and we [all] forbade him because he does not [even] follow with us.” But Jesus said to him, “Do not forbid him, for [goodness sakes!] he who is not *against* us [even though he’s of those who are] *is on our side*. For no one who works a *miracle in My name* can soon afterward speak evil of Me.” – Mk 9:38-39; Lk 9:48-50 NKJ

He works miracles in Jesus’ name, under Jesus’ authority, and with Jesus’ endorsement! “Trust me, this guy’s gonna be *great*, cuz you *all* are gonna *greatly* need him!” And, it’s no wonder they couldn’t stop him. After all: “No one was strong enough to subdue him”. (Mk 5:4) One week to the cross, Jesus is on His way to cleanse the temple and condemn the fruitless Pharisees, and ...

Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to find out if it had any *fruit*. When He reached it, He found nothing but leaves ... [Are we talking about *figs* or *Pharisees*? And] In the morning ... they saw the *fig tree withered* from the roots. – Mark 11:13, 20 NIV



Ever since *grampy Adam* and *granny Eve* covered up in fig leaves, to hide their *privates* from their *Maker*, (Gen 3:7) we've been *tempted* to attempt the *same!* So **when it comes to our sin, don't run for cover – flee to a knee, and God's grace through faith!** This miracle isn't about a *fig*; it's a signal that *time's up*, and judgment's *coming*. Which it *did*, after a 40-year *grace period* to get as many ready to "**flee to the mountains**" (Lk 21:19-21) as possible – to **Pella, a city in the Decapolis, where Gentile believers received. hid, and protected Jewish believers;**¹ cuz they'd been *prepared* by those who shared the *Dawning Light* of the body of Christ, *beginning* with good ol' *God!*

The city of confusion is broken down ... and the gate is stricken with destruction. ...¹⁵ Therefore glorify the Lord in the dawning light ... **[Because]**¹⁷ **Fear** and the **pit** and the **snare are upon you** ... he who flees from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit, and he who comes up from the midst of the pit shall be caught in the snare; – Isaiah 24:10-18 NKJ



And they did. And they were. When they fled – *too late* – they fell into the 5-mile trench at the base of the berm; and as they came up, they were *caught* and *crucified*. So, **will you blossom before your deadline?** Or will He find church-going and good-deed-doing amounting to just so many *leaves*? As in every garden, **we need both Miracle Grow and Deadline.**

[So] Let [the wicked] be like a *snail* which *melts away* as it goes ... **[or like]** the *burning thorns* ... The *righteous* shall rejoice when he sees *the vengeance* ... – Psalm 58:8-10 NKJ

[... that Habakkuk describes, when]^{1:4} The wicked **surround** the righteous ...⁵ "Be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in *your days* **["of vengeance"]** which you would not *believe*, though it were *told* you. **[Which they didn't, though He did]** ...⁸ Their *cavalry* comes from *afar* ...¹⁰ they *heap up earthen mounds* and *seize* it. ...^{2:2} Write the vision ... that he **may run** who reads it.³ For the vision is yet for **an appointed time**; but **at the end** it will speak ...⁴ But **the just shall live by his faith**" ...^{3:16} in **the day of trouble**. **[Cuz he "runs" when he sees them "surrounding"!] [When he] will invade them with his troops. [i.e. legions]**¹⁷ **Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines** ... Though the flock may be cut off from the fold ...¹⁸ Yet I will rejoice in the Lord ... the God of my salvation. – Habakkuk 1-3 NKJ

That fig tree was given an extra year. And *Israel* and *Jerusalem* were given *40!* Because:

The Lord is *not slow* to *fulfill* His *promise* ... but *is patient* toward you, not wishing that *any* should *perish*, but that *all* should reach *repentance*. – 2 Peter 3:9 ESV

And we can't know if we've got a minute to spare! We can only know, if we *won't* bear *fruit*, He *must* ... eventually ... *uproot*. **Though, He welcomes late bloomers with open arms!**

So, whatever you do, don't just leave with just leaves.

¹¹ A free PDF version of a remarkable work, called "Fleeing Forward: The Departure of Christians From Jerusalem to Pella" by Van Houwelingen (2003), is available at: https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/wtj/62-2_181.pdf