

Luke 13:6-9 – Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

PARABLES

At Antioch we have gone through: Ephesians, Acts and now Corinthians, and then in the evenings Joshua and Ecclesiastes, parables have not featured. I can remember Mike Rogers preaching on the parable of the Prodigal Son, but I can't remember any other parables. Before we get into the parable in Luke's Gospel, there are a few things to know about parables.

In Matt, Mark, and Luke – roughly about 35% of Jesus' teachings are in parables.

Jesus' parables are short, anything from 1 to 22 verses in length (the longest being the Prodigal Son) then shortest being just 19 words in the Greek.

Matthew 13:33

33 He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened."

2/3 of Jesus' parables are in Luke and 18 parables are unique to Luke (meaning only Luke recorded them)

Most of the parables have people in them who are un-named except one. Can you think = Lazarus and the Rich Man.

Most of Luke's parables are between Chapters 10-20, during which time Jesus is journeying to Jerusalem where He will be crucified. He is healing and teaching as He travels.

A few general principles when studying the parables. Many parables have been misinterpreted, misused and misapplied over the years. So we need to exercise caution in studying a parable.

- 1) Parables are not there to introduce new DOCTRINES, but rather they illuminate existing doctrines. They are like the windows in a building, that shed light on what is inside. We get fresh insight and

perspective on truths that the Bible teaches elsewhere.

- 2) Parables should be seen as a bucket into which Jesus poured meaning, and from which we must draw that same meaning. So the original hearers and the original context are vitally important, but it doesn't mean that, that is where the teaching is to stay, only for those hearers, but they do apply to us.
- 3) Ask questions of each parable:
 - a) What does it show us about God and His kingdom, Jesus and the Gospel, and our responsibility?
 - b) What question is answered? Either stated or inferred. Like the Good Samaritan. "Who is my neighbour?"
 - c) What is the punch-line, the main point?

Most of the parables conclude and the punchline is seen – what happened? Today's parable however doesn't conclude – but the point is definitely made.

When we study a parable, we must ask, where do I fight in, so that the parables are not just merely information, but result in transformation.

THIS PARABLE

Turn to Luke Chapter 13:6-9

Background – Jesus is at the end of one of His last sermons. En route to be crucified.

- 6 And He *began* telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any.
- 7 "And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?'

- 8 “And he answered and said to him, ‘Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer;
9 and if it bears fruit next year, *fine*; but if not, cut it down.’ ”

“A certain man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard.”

Vineyards were common in that area (even still are today) You may ask, why a fig tree in a vineyard. Well, in that climate they used every inch of good ground. Fig trees could handle that weather and were good for yearly fruit and shade in that climate.

John 1:48

- 48 Nathanael said to Him, “How do You know me?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”

In vineyards, fig trees were bigger than the vines and apparently were often used to put a support between them to grow the vine.

(Don't read anything into that in the parable 😊)

All this to say that this fig tree in a vineyard was not uncommon.

A Fig tree however are very symbolic. This is definitely referring to the nation of Israel. As we see in these following passages of Scripture:

Hosea 9:10a

- 10 I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your forefathers as the earliest fruit on the fig tree in its first *season*.

Joel 1:6–7a

- 6 For a nation has invaded my land, Mighty and without number;
Its teeth are the teeth of a lion, And it has the fangs of a lioness.
7 It has made my vine a waste and my fig tree splinters.

Jesus is clearly referring to the privileged Nation of Israel.

My Fictional childhood hero was “Spiderman”

- Batman = spoilt rich kid (gadgets)

- Superman (another planet, fly, bullets bounce, shoot laser beams out eyes) - Over the top.

But “Spidey” was the people’s hero. A line that his uncle told him just before he died was “With much privilege, comes much responsibility”.

Let us look at the nation of Israel for a moment:

The Jewish church of Jesus’ day is compared to this fig tree planted in a vineyard, not “Wild” but “Planted “= chosen.

They were separated from other nations by the Mosaic laws and ordinances. They were favoured with revelations of God which were granted to no other people. Things were done for them that were never done for Egypt or for Babylon or for Greece or for Rome.

Israel was the chosen nation. They had privilege, they knew God. They had the Scriptures, the Prophets, the Messiah. They had it all.

The nation, not only shirked its responsibility to God, but were actually in rebellion against Him. Even before Jesus began His earthly ministry, His cousin John the Baptist said these words to the Jewish people:

Luke 3:9

9 “Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

The Nation of Israel’s time was almost up. Another time in Jesus’ ministry he actually came across another barren fig tree and used it as an example. This is just after Jesus cleansed the temple and chased the merchants out. “House of prayer – den of thieves”

Matthew 21:19

19 Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only; and He said to it, “No longer shall there ever be *any* fruit from you.” And at once the fig tree withered.

Wiersby - “Just as this tree had leaves but no fruit, so Israel had a show of religion but no practical experience of faith resulting in godly living.”

Here we see a justifiable anger from Jesus at the tree – the listeners would understand that.

BUT – there was still time for them (some more teaching from Jesus, some more miracles), but the clock was ticking.

Luke 19 – moving closer to the crucifixion.

Luke 19:41–44

41 When He approached *Jerusalem*, He saw the city and wept over it,

42 saying, “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes.

43 “For the **days will come** upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side,

44 and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the **time** of your visitation.”

We know this happened from history in AD70. As a Nation - “THE AXE CAME DOWN” on them as an entire nation.

Rom 11 mentions that the Nation was set aside for a time, and some will be grafted back in.

They had much privilege, but they were ignoring their responsibility.

With all they had - It might reasonably be expected that there would be more faith, more repentance, more holiness, more godliness in Israel than among any other land. This is what God looked for. This is what the Owner of the fig tree came seeking.

Now maybe you are thinking, “SJOE!! That was a close one. I thought he was gonna say that the parable is talking to me.”

Well, like any good Varimark Ad, “But, wait there’s more!”

No doubt Jesus was speaking to the Jewish church, but we must see that in the parable the fig tree is singular and with that, the message also applies to an individual.

Other parables are singular in description too
– one lost coin, one lost sheep, and one prodigal son.

In the case of this parable, however, the parable’s lesson applies equally to the whole nation of Israel, and to each individual soul. We are not the nation of Israel and the church has not replaced them either. They have been put aside for a time, but God is not done with them.

So let’s look at the parable: for us – where do we fit in this teaching.

“And he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any.” – When you see a fruit tree, you expect to find some fruit when it is its season.

J.C. Ryle mentions in his day - “We live in a land,” he says, “of Bibles, liberty, and Gospel preaching. How vast are the advantages that we enjoy compared to the Chinese or to the Hindu! Never let us forget that God expects fruit from us”.

“And he came looking...” – not a blasé look, it is careful and close. The tree needs close inspection, sometimes under the foliage to see the fruit.

Is there fruit on your tree, under your leaves that everybody sees (under MY LEAVES)?

“And he said to the vineyard keeper, behold (Emphatic – “look here” surprised expression) for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down.”

We have all heard the statement: “Living on Borrowed time.” We don’t know when our time will be up. In the verses just before this parable (Matthews preached about 3 Sunday PMs ago) the tower of Siloam fell on 18 people and some other Galileans were murdered by Pilate. Just this last week was Leo’s dad’s funeral, reminding us once again that we are all “Living on Borrowed Time.”

During these times we are tempted to ask, “What kind of God lets this happen?” When the real question is, “Why am I still alive, knowing my sin?”

We don’t deserve to live and have more time.

Jesus’ whole sermon has been building to this climax parable. There will be a judgement.

While you are still breathing - you have time.

The most universal gift and blessing from God to all mankind **is** common mercy. We have rain, we have the sun, we can live and make money etc. **BUT** God’s Common Mercy is foremost displayed in His granting us **TIME!**

God is patient because He is merciful! I am going to mention quite a few verses, rather listen to them then write them down, I will put this manuscript on the web.

Listen to God’s declaration in Exodus 34:6

- 6 Then the LORD passed by in front of him (Moses) and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness (mercy) and truth.

Oh yes! That's the God people love, and rightly so but also keep reading the next verse:

Exodus 34:7

7 who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished...

Time will one day be up – for everyone

Likewise in Numbers 14:18

18 'The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; **but He will by no means clear the guilty...**

Jonah knew this about God. He didn't want to preach to the Ninevites because he knew these verses I have just read about God, and he didn't want them to be saved.

Jonah eventually went, under duress, in the first Submarine 😊. Then the Ninevites repented "IN TIME".

Jonah 4:1–2

- 1 But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry.
- 2 He prayed to the LORD and said, "Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? (I knew You would do this!) Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, **for I knew** that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness...

Sinners live because of the mercy of God. This is critically shown in us having **time** to repent.

But wait a minute, don't you know that over 20 times in - Ps 136, it says, "His mercy (lovingkindness) endures forever".

YES His mercy does endure forever but not for everyone.

Listen to Psalm 103:17–18 and we see the qualifier:

- 17 But the lovingkindness (mercy) of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children,
- 18 To those who keep His covenant and remember His precepts to do them.

God's mercy doesn't endure forever for everyone.

God's patience has a purpose, it is not "PASSIVE PATIENCE"
– "twiddling His thumbs"

Romans 2:4

- 4 Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

But notice it goes both ways though when you don't respond

Romans 2:5

- 5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

You have time to repent, but if you don't that time you have will store up more wrath.

The world in Noah's day was judged – by water. This will happen again, except by Fire the next time God destroys the earth

Noah preached repentance for 120 years – plus built the biggest OBJECT LESSON EVER in his back-yard! **That is God's patience on display.**

Genesis 6:3 shows God has a limit:

- 3 Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever..."
God closed the door of the Ark, the rain came and so fell His judgement.

One very important thing to note around the patience of God is that God's patience with sinners may run out, even before they die or Christ returns.

Hosea 4:17 (small, mostly unnoticed, prophecy)

17 Ephraim (referring to the Jewish people) is joined to idols; **Let him alone.**

This has to be one of the scariest verses in the Bible.

The next chapter: Hosea 5:6 builds on this

6 They will go with their flocks and herds to seek the LORD, but they will not find *Him*;

He has withdrawn from them.

Hosea 9:12

12 Though they bring up their children, yet I will bereave them until not a man is left.

Yes, woe to them indeed when I depart from them!

Peter sums this all up in 2 Peter 3:15

15 and regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation...

I don't know how much time you have: You better settle with God before you get to court (Judgement)

The nation of Israel (North and South) were judged.

One day God will send His Son to judge the "living and the dead"

Continuing in Verse 7 in Luke 13.

"...for three years I have come looking..."

How many of you have asked why 3 years?

Some say = times of the High Priest, Judges and the Kings
(but these time overlap each other)

Others say = Jesus' ministry on earth (technically the plant is not 3 years old, but 3 years from fruit bearing age"

Other still = The Law, the Prophets and then Christ

It is, however, safer, in this and in many of the Lord's parables, not to press every little detail for the completion of the picture.

Maybe you have been at Antioch for 3 years 😊 - mmmmmm

I know that God doesn't waste Words in the Bible, and I would lean more to the number 3 being something that is complete. There was a period of full opportunity given to the tree to have become fruitful. One Bible translation actually has "for a sufficient time".

The nation of Israel had ample time to become fruitful?
- Have you? Have I?

With all the light that the Lord has given you, with all the Gospel that the Lord has taught you, and you've heard it in your homes, you've heard it in Sunday School and Bible Hour classes, you've heard it in small groups, and in countless Sunday services on the Lord's Day both morning and evening, but have you repented and have you brought forth fruit?

Religions say: "We are saved by our fruit (works), that if you live a moral life, and you are a decent person, you will stand before God and He will find you pleasing in His sight."

This encompasses most World Religions
(Gr 4-7 begin their study on this today)

So you work hard, bear "fruit" and God judges on a curve, and you trust that you are better than the next guy and tadahhh - You make it.

For those who may be new here or visiting, we believe that Jesus did what we could do when He died on the cross to save sinners who trust in Him. Our lives therefore produce fruit because of the “work” that Christ did.

Once saved by grace, through faith - God has fruit for you to bear.

Ephesians 2:8–10 captures all of this

- 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is the gift of God*;
- 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.
- 10 For we are His workmanship (poema/materpiece), created in Christ Jesus (saved) for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Only when you are truly saved and in Christ can you bear fruit:

John 15:5

- 5 “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

Maybe by now you are asking – “What FRUIT are you talking about?” As I looked at this, this past week, I realized that this picture of FRUIT is much more than just a Galatians 5:22–23 (Fruit of the Spirit)

Many of us can rattle the Galatians list off (kids even know it in songs)

- 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

- 23 gentleness, self-control...

Let’s see JUST a few other places where this picture of bearing fruit is displayed.

We see FRUITS as the effects of repentance.

Matt 3:8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance,

FRUITS are Good works after salvation.

John 15:5 ND EPH 2:8-10 – passage I just read

FRUITS are seen in our Praising of God.

Heb 13:15 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

FRUITS are sharing the Gospel.

Prov 11:30 The fruit of the righteous *is a tree of life*, and he who wins souls *is wise*.

Go today, during Bible Hour on the outreach, bare fruit, win souls!

Suffice to say that there are plenty of FRUIT for believers to be bearing. Are you fruitful?

Let us continue in our passage in Luke:

“Why should it even use up the ground?” – We all need to ask ourselves this question. “Am I fruitful or just taking up space?” The original language here is not as passive as just taking up space and not “bugging” anyone, but it is actually causing a problem.

Unfruitful, so called, professing “Christians” are not only a detriment to their own souls, but also to the people around them.

--- **ILLUS – Babies in Bed**

I am not only referring to your “just taking up space” here in church, but also at HOME, in your FAMILY, in your MARRIAGE, at you place of WORK.

Are you fruitful in the areas of your life God has called you to, or just taking up space?

Are you first fruitful in Your Marriage, with your kids, in your workplace, at church.

I am so glad that the parable doesn't end here. From both a gardening point of view and from God's point of view, the parable could very well have ended here, and there would be nothing wrong.

“And he (vineyard keeper) answered and said to him, let it alone sir, for this year too.

“...sir...” - (Kuri-a = Lord). This term is respectful, but mostly used in reference to Jesus or God in the NT.

This parable is very clearly showing us that the Owner is God and the Vine-Keeper is Jesus.

Here we see the Vine-Keeper's petition the Owner on behalf of the tree.

Matthew Henry – “Truly, that had it not been for Christ's intercession, the whole world had been cut down.”

HIGH-PRIEST – Just saw 1 Tim 2:5 – Jesus = Mediator.

The Vine-dresser and Owner are not in opposition here. Both are perfectly together. The Owner accepts the intercession of the vine-dresser and the Vinedresser accepts the probable Judgement by the Owner.

“If there is no repentance, Sir! Bring Your judgement – Swing the AXE!”

Christ is always interceding for sinners until judgement day:
Luke 23:34

34 (On the cross) But Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”

Jesus' first disposition to sinners is one of appeal on their behalf.

Romans 8:34

34 ... Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

“... sir, let it alone for this year too.” – Greek is actually, “for this next time.” It is open ended, but it is not forever. This one year is enough to say that God’s patience is limited.

God’s mercy on us in giving us time is not because of our worthiness, we see the owner’s disgust at the tree – and God has every right to loath our very existence as sinners – but He is patient and compassionate

Maybe today is the beginning of “the year of reprieve for you”. Maybe God’s axe is not at the root of the tree like Matt 3:10. I certainly examined my heart this past week. I don’t want to take up space and be useless, and I certainly don’t want to see God’s axe-head swinging in my direction.

If you are here this morning and have maybe just been going through the motions with God and are just a leafy tree with no fruit, don’t spurn God’s patience with you, examine your life, maybe you are not saved and that is why there is no fruit in your life.

“... for this year too ...” shows us here that this is not something new the vineyard keeper is going to try.

It is not a - “Well I haven’t really done much, so let me give this a try!”
NO!

The keeper has been working on this tree and is now asking for “One More Year” – he is appealing to the Owner’s patience for Him to continue.

Has the Vine-keeper been working on you and you have been resisting?

V8 continues

Until I dig around it and put in fertilizer and if it bears fruit next year,

fine. But if not, cut it down.”

“... **fine!**” – in *italics*. Not there in the Greek. It is kinda like a “shrug” – how do you translate a “shrug”?

Gardeners know that digging serves to loosen the soil in order to allow water to sink down to its roots and allow room for the roots to grow. If no fruit appears after that, it is clearly a bad tree.

Don't mistake God's lack of judgment in the present, to be considered a sign that all was well. All was not well in Israel. They were just about to Crucify the Son of the Living God.

In this parable, the lack of judgement is a sign of God's mercy, not His approval.

In English we have the term: Conditional phrase – it is an “if... then...” statement

I learnt this week that there are 1st, 2nd and 3rd classes conditional phrases in the Greek.

Which one it is tells you the likelihood of the condition being fulfilled.

First “if” is third class conditional phrase – “unlikely”.

“... **if it bears fruit...**” Hence the “shrug”.

The second “if” is first class conditional phrase – “very likely”.

“... **if not**”

If Israel is given more time, the chances are that they **will not** repent and the chances are that they **will** be judged.

I play guitar – get calluses (Bible talks about this – hardening/ searing conscience). The more time goes by the less likely you are to repent.

The parable doesn't conclude. Just like the previous section (first 5

verses), Jesus doesn't solve the mysteries of the fallen tower and Pilate killing all those people.

The same here. He ends His sermon. But I think they got the point. Although the outcome of the barren fig tree is not concluded, the point is made. But what is that point?

ANSWER the QUESTIONS posed in the beginning about studying a parable

1) What existing doctrines does it illuminate?

God is patient, but not forever with everyone. God will judge the unfruitful BAD trees. This is the PUNCH-LINE

2) Jesus' meaning He poured into the parable – all of mankind is living on “borrowed time” – God will Judge

3) Ask questions of each parable:

- What does it show us about God (He is patient and Just)
- Jesus and the Gospel (Mediator, you still have time)
- our responsibility

unsaved = repent – God has given you still today,
saved = bear fruit

There is no second chance “cut down”

Judgement is always imminent – The tree had its whole life, but now the was not much sand left in the hour-glass.

J.C. Ryle – “There is a plainer warning still in the passage for all 'unconverted professing Christians'. There are many in every congregation who hear the Gospel, who are literally hanging over the brink of the pit. They have lived for years in the best part of God's vineyard, and yet borne no fruit. They have heard the Gospel preached faithfully for hundreds of Sundays, and yet have never embraced it, and

taken up the cross, and followed Christ. They do not perhaps run into open sin. But they do nothing for God's glory. There is nothing positive about their religion. Of each of these the Lord of the vineyard might say with truth, "I come these many years seeking fruit on this tree and find none. Cut it down. It cumberes the ground."

Isaiah 55:6–7

6 Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near.

7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him,

And to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

“Never has a generation been entrusted with so much, and never has a generation been so accountable before God.” – C.E.M. Joad

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Word. They are Jesus' very own words. They are powerful and penetrating and unforgettable. They are soul-stirring words. I know I have been intensely challenged by them. Lord, I am sure there are some here who are counting down the clock of Your mercy, and need to repent and run to the cross.

For those of us who know You, we are not living on borrowed, but on eternal time. Help us to be fruitful we pray, for Your glory. We are living with everlasting mercy and grace and compassion, that knows no bounds.

My prayer for my life is that my time, will be Your time. Help me to love You in a greater way, understanding more of Your grace to us in Christ.

Thank You for Your compassion that granted us time to repent, and still today does the same for others who may even be present here with us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.