

The Tragedy Of Barrenness

Luke 13:6-10 KJV He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. [7] Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? [8] And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: [9] And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down. [10] And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath.

I. INTRODUCTION—A FIG TREE IN MY BACKYARD

The winter before last (2011), Sister Lee gave me a fig tree that she had managed to root in a small pot. It was less than a foot tall when she gave it to me and she told me that it was ready to be planted. So found a spot over in the backyard near a place where I wanted to cover up a fencerow and planted it.

In those several weeks after I had planted it, I carefully watered it about every other day. On through the spring, summer and even into the fall, we gave careful attention to it. When winter came, what few leaves that were on it dried up and fell away almost overnight. This has taken place the last two winters and the small fig tree has almost had the appearance of just a stick that has been shoved into the ground.

But a few days ago, I noticed that there are small green buds that have began to push through the bark and it won't be too long before this small fig tree has leaves covering the little stem. In about eighteen month's time, this small fig tree has grown from less than a foot to right at three feet. I have expectations that it will continue to grow the same thing as the spring and summer progresses this year. I am uncertain as to when this tree will began to bear fruit but if it keeps up the pace it is on, I am expecting it to be a productive fig tree.

-That is the expectation that any man who plants a bush, shrub, or a tree has. He expects it to have some growth, buds, and fruit when it comes time for that to take place. This is not an unreasonable expectation for him to have considering all the time and energy that goes into taking care of what has been planted.

II. THE SETTING OF THE TEXT

A. Jerusalem and Galilee In the Time of Jesus

-The setting of this text is important to understand because this parable was prompted by an event that had taken place recently in Galilee.

-There was a lot of social and racial tension during this era of Israel's history. The Romans had come in and had been extremely heavy-handed in attempting to control the people. Because of this patriotic feelings and passions had been stirred among the people. These feelings had not been wasted in their minds but had led them to action.

-Once the feeling for revolution settles into the mind of a man, there is a demand for action to take place. Israel was literally a powder keg waiting for a match to be struck.

-Pilate in his position as the governor over this troubled province had matters complicated because he was so far from Rome. He could not immediately give a summons for help from the Roman army if he got into an unpleasant situation.

-Josephus, the Jewish historian, seems to indicate that the Galileans in the northern portion of Israel were susceptible to revolt (Life, 92 [17]). Any attack that came against the Jews when they were in the act of offering sacrifices would heighten the sense of antagonism they felt against the Romans.

-From what we can gather in reading this passage is that Jesus was not in Jerusalem when this tragic event took place.

B. Galilean Worshippers

-So the story pours out of the people to Jesus. They said that there were some Galileans who had recently come to offer sacrifices of worship to God. While they were involved in worship some Roman soldiers on the orders of Pilate came along and ruthlessly killed them.

-That same spirit is alive and well today! There are dark, hideous spirits that rove about and they want to kill every bit of the worship that is offered up to God in the church. Rogue, dark, and ominous is this spirit of the age that wants to shut down every bit of the devotion, loyalty, and desire that finds expression in the church.

-Suddenly the blood of the worshipers and the blood of the beasts they had brought to sacrifice are mingling in one common stream. Such an event would cause anyone who was loyal to God and to the act of worship to be stirred to anger. But it would also cause the human mind to begin to come to certain conclusions.

-That is exactly what happened to the men who were asking the questions. They came to the conclusion that the massacre took place because of the sin of the Galileans. What horrible sinners these men must have been!

-Jesus ferreted out their conclusion when He told them that they thought the Galileans were sinners because they had suffered much.

C. An Age-Old Question

-That is one of the age-old questions and conclusions that men having been making for centuries.

- John 9—Who did sin? This man or his parents? (The man born blind.)
- Job—Accused by his friends. “Your life is in ruins because of your sin!”

-There are many people who grapple with this kind of faulty thinking. They automatically attribute their troubles to some kind of sin or some kind of displeasure that they have caused God.

-But nowhere do we find that Jesus held those views. In fact, His own suffering was not because He was evil but because He was good! But Jesus knew that are some who suffer, not because they are evil but because they are good!

-Obviously there are some sinful actions that when men do take part in them there will be terrible consequences. There are certain sins of the flesh that will render us useless. In fact, the miracle in John 5 gives us a strong sense of this.

-The man at the pool of Bethesda had lain there for thirty-eight years and had lived out a miserable existence. This man was not a victim of misfortune because accompanying his healing was a very sharp warning from the Lord . . . Go and sin no more, lest a worst thing come unto thee!

-Sin has its fruit that will come back to haunt men. On the other hand there is a kind of sin that we often don't spend too much time thinking about . . . the sin of neglect.

- Prodigals that in the name of liberty waste their substance on riotous living.
- Men who fail in their duty like Amaziah who served the Lord but not with a perfect heart.
- Men who lose because of a lack of vigilance like Eglon who was more interested in eating and napping than doing what was required of him.

-There are tragic harvests that come to men of this nature.

III. THE MATTER OF THE FIG TREE

-That was a long introduction to get us to this matter of the parable that Jesus told them that day.

-There are inherent lessons and principles that come out of this text.

A. The Fig Tree Was Planted

Luke 13:6 KJV He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted . . .

-This certain man planted a fig tree. It had been a deliberate act to plant this tree. It was not some whim or fancy on the part of the owner.

-A passing breeze or a wayward bird had not just dropped the seed here and by chance it had taken root and began to grow. It was the intelligent choice of a man who owned a piece of land to come along and plant it.

-Nothing about our lives is happenchance. God in His merciful action, plants every life. This truth is reiterated all through the Bible:

Mark 13:34—To every man is given a work.

Romans 12:4—All members have not the same office.

Romans 13:6—They are God's ministers.

1 Corinthians 3:8—We are laborers together.

1 Corinthians 12:11—Dividing to every man severally as he will.

1 Corinthians 15:58—Always abounding in the work of the Lord.

John 20:21—So send I you into the world.

-Just as the fig tree was planted deep into the earth, we have been planted in a similar manner in the Kingdom of God.

B. The Fig Tree Was In a Vineyard

Luke 13:6 KJV He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard . . .

-Not only was this fig tree planted but also it was planted in a vineyard. It was placed somewhere that had a particular privilege about it. It was in possession of some favored circumstances.

-This fig tree had not been placed on the side of some roadside ditch. It had not been planted along some fencerow in a haphazard manner; it had been put into a place of special opportunities.

-The opportunities that came to this fig tree garnered both protection and culture. This is the case of many, many people that I know. We have been carefully placed in a sheltered cocoon of privilege even though we might not think so.

- Many have enjoyed the shelter of a Christian home.
- Many have been born into a system of righteousness that comes from parents who have served the Lord.
- Many have been safeguarded from the challenges of life because of the protection of fathers who feared the Lord and mothers who have been consecrated to God.
- Many have known what it is to have an environment where Bibles have flooded the home.

-You are like the fig tree that has been planted in a vineyard. You have been surrounded with many spiritual opportunities and blessings that only come from being planted in the vineyard.

-I implore you to take advantage of the spiritual culture that you now find yourself growing in.

-Far too often, we do not take advantage of the vineyard that we have been planted in.

Psalms 80:14-15 KJV Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; [15] And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself.

-The church is like a vineyard that God has planted.

- The Lord's vineyard has a wall or fence around it for protection.
- He has planted the Lord's vineyard.
- The Lord digs about the trees in His vineyard so that they are more productive.
- The Lord takes great pains to prune and cut off excessive branches that are not fruitful.
- The Lord knows that His vineyard is in jeopardy of the little foxes and so he sets a farmer, a watchman, in the midst of it.
- The Lord's vineyard requires a constant call for workers to be involved.

-Look at this vineyard . . . this church . . . and make a determination in your heart to get involved in what is taking place here.

-Periodically God helps me to see flashes of potential in this place and that has been the case all week long.

- I have watched a group of young men and young women lean into the projects that are going to help to get us to NAYC 2013.
- I listened to a choir this morning that filled the choir loft and sang for the glory of the Lord.
- I have seen multiple visitors come through our doors in the last several months.
- I have listened to many positive comments at the back door regularly as you exit the sanctuary.

I plead with you to take advantage of the vineyard that has been designed by God for us to be a part of!!!

- Take advantage of the prayer revivals.
- Take advantage of the youth programs.
- Take advantage of the Sunday school department.
- Take advantage of the call for holiness.
- Take advantage of the call for worship.

- Take advantage of the vineyard and get involved in something to suit your calling!

C. The Fig Tree Was To Bear Fruit

Luke 13:6 KJV He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon . . .

-The purpose of the tree being planted and being placed in the vineyard was for it to bear fruit. There was a showing to be given and that was to be demonstrated by the figs that were on its branches.

-This fig tree had not been planted here just to enjoy the water, the fertilizer that had been dropped at its base, or even the painful process of the pruning. The fig tree was placed there for one reason—to bear fruit.

-God never planned any of our lives to be lived and consumed on ourselves. A man who lives his life for himself will end up leading a very shallow existence. God never had an intention for my life to be useless or to be hurtful.

-We are not here to lean but to lift . . . We are not here to hinder but to help! We are not here to stand on the side lines and criticize . . . but we are here to get involved in the greatest calling of mankind . . . Doing the will of God!!!

-The fact that God has put us where He has means that we are be of the absolute greatest service that we possibly can.

D. The Fig Tree Was Barren

Luke 13:6 KJV He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.

-Despite the fact that the tree was planted in a place of special privilege where it was proper and right to expect fruit to be on the limbs, the tree failed in its whole purpose that it had been planted for.

-The owner worked and he waited but all of it was to no avail. He came a second time and was disappointed again and the second time he came there was still not fruit among its limbs. So he ordered it to be cut down.

-The very purpose that it had been planted, cultivated, and cared for was never fulfilled. That same failure can be activated in our own lives.

-Just because there is a plan that God has in our lives does not mean that He is going to carry out His plan. There has to be some faith and some works mixed in all of it. God is the architect but we are the builders.

-He has dreamed great dreams for all of us but we can fail and hinder and disappoint Him. That is what some are doing . . . The Lord comes every day looking for some worthy fruit at our hands and He cannot find any.

IV. THE RESULTS OF THE BARRENNESS

-Whenever we look at the condition of this tree, the question arises . . . What are the results of barrenness?

A. The Tree Is Useless

Luke 13:7 KJV Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none . . .

-The first thing is that this fruitless tree became useless. That is the tragedy that many find themselves in during our days. They have not committed some great, horrific sin. They have not viciously attacked someone or violated any laws . . . They have just become utterly and absolutely useless.

-It is almost as if they can stand with the call of greatness ringing in their ears and never seemed to hear it. They look at the needs of the church and

the Kingdom of God and standby and watch with never any thought of getting involved.

-As I made reference this morning, Hollywood is not our problem, Washington is not our problem, and the rulings of the Supreme Court are not our problem . . . Our problem is that we have become useless.

- Five foolish bridesmaids had the door shut in their faces not because they had become unclean . . . but because they did not have any oil in their vessel.
- The man who had one talent was flung upon the heap of the worthless not because he squandered his talent . . . but because he refused to invest it.
- The fig tree was ordered to be cut down not because it was bearing fruit that was poisonous but because it wasn't bearing any fruit at all.
- The man whom the unclean spirits had been cast entered into slavery that was seven-fold worse than before by virtue of the fact that he did nothing to replace the void. He never reached his hand toward the unclean . . . His sin was the sin of uselessness.

-That was the situation with Elijah when the Lord put to him a very hard question . . . "What doest thou here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:9, 13) He was whining and complaining and wishing that he was dead.

-That question posed to Elijah is one that we all should entertain! What doest thou here???

Sometime ago, I had the opportunity to pray with and for someone. They knew and I knew that God had invested a great and noble talent in their life. It was particularly that of being very gifted to sing and play and instrument. I implored this person to give up and surrender totally to God so that songs they could write and sing could pour out of their soul. But to this day (and it has been somewhere around 5 years or longer), they still sit frankly very useless in the condition they were back then. Little of nothing has been accomplished for the purpose and Kingdom of God in their behalf.

B. The Tree Became a Hindrance

Luke 13:7 KJV . . . why cumbereth it the ground?

-Not only was this tree useless, it became a hindrance. It was in the way.

Rotherham—Why doth it make even the ground useless?

Twentieth Century New Testament—Why should it rob the soil?

Moffatt's—Why does it take up space?

Goodspeed—Why does it waste the ground?

Knox—Why should it be a useless charge upon the land?

Berkley—Why does it exhaust the soil?

E. V. Rieu—Why does it clutter up the ground for nothing?

-It was frankly a parasite that had found a good host. Wasting sunshine, rain, and the rising of the dew and the soil was investing itself in this tree to no avail.

-The attention and care of the vineyard owner was consumed on itself and nothing was given in return for it. The sad fact is that the grapes that grew under it would have gotten on so much better if the tree had not even been there.

-Not only had it become useless, it had become a menace to the ground.

-This is the nature of indifference when it comes along and robs us. Indifference will cause men to wither their relationship with the Lord.

- Men often persistently neglect the church.
- Men often fall into the matter of making excuses.
- Men often take great measures to guard their own self-respect.
- Men go to great lengths to justify their actions in the eyes of those they think may be weighing out their actions.

-Suddenly that indifference turns toward the deadly sin of faultfinding. He will look for the worst in the church instead of finding the best. He turns stone after stone looking for the rascal who is worse than he is.

-With the looking, he will find things. The knowledge of these things causes him to get worked up into a righteous frenzy. With that grand display of passion, he starts to tell us the reasons that he has become harsh toward the things of God.

-He charges foolishly the very thing that he once pledged his loyalty to. But the plain truth is that this kind of man began his march down the path when he became useless and then he degenerated into a critic and a faultfinder to appease himself in his useless state.

C. The Tree Gets Cut Down

Luke 13:7 KJV . . . these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down . . .

-The final result of barrenness is that the tree will be cut down. Who is calling for the felling of this tree? Can I tell you that it is not an angry God that is calling for the felling of this tree . . . It is the overflow of the natural law.

- The muscle that does not get used will atrophy.
- The eye that does see will soon become blind.
- The ear that does not hear will soon become deaf.
- The right hand that refuses to serve will lose its skill.
- The family that refuses to produce children will die.
- The church that fails to evangelize will die.

-The nature of barrenness is that it very rarely results in an immediate judgment and destruction. The judgment and the destruction linger for a while. The mercy of God issues a plea . . . “Let me work with it for another year!” “Let me dig about it for another year. . . Let me put some fertilizer around it!”

-The fact that we have been spared of our uselessness does not mean that this law is forgotten. It only means that God is doing His very best to pull the potential out of us before it is too late.

-Whatever you do, don't be blinded by the mercy of God and think that God is pleased with the state of life that you are presently in! Here is a sobering passage:

Ecclesiastes 8:11 KJV Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

V. CONCLUSION—HOW SHALL WE ESCAPE?

-How do we escape this tragedy of uselessness, of being a hindrance, and of being cut down? Jesus gave the way of escape:

Luke 13:3 KJV I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

- This means far more than just to be sorry for your sin.
- It means more than just a frenetic busyness of life.
- It means more than running breathlessly from one task to another.

-It is very possible for you to be very busy and have never been converted but it is impossible to be a saint of the Lord and be given to idleness.

-Temptation never hinders men like Nehemiah who say, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down."

- Idleness invites temptation.
- Fruitlessness calls for destruction.

-If you will save your life, you will have to lose it in the Kingdom of God!