

## PARABLE OF THE BARREN FIG TREE

**TEXT: LUKE 13:1-9**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

1. The parable of the barren fig tree is peculiar to the Gospel of Luke.
2. The figures of the fig tree and the vineyard were well-known to the people of Israel at that time (cf. Isa. 5:1-7; Matt. 21:18-22).
3. Our Lord refers to two national calamities in verses 1--5. Further details of these events are not known beyond the few words recorded here for us by Luke.

### **I. GOD DEMANDS REPENTANCE (LUKE 13:1-5)**

1. The longer I serve the Lord, the more convinced I am of the need for preachers to emphasize repentance. Our churches are filled with people who give no evidence of the new birth.
2. As I said, two national calamities form the basis of this passage. The first was the brutal massacre of some Galileans who had come to Jerusalem to worship. Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, had ordered them to be slain while they were offering their sacrifices (13:1).
3. Some of the Jews in Jerusalem, due to the influence of Pharisaical teaching, were thinking that these Galileans must have committed some unusually terrible sins and that their death was an evidence of the judgment of God.
4. However, our Lord corrected them by warning them that "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (13:2, 3).
5. No matter what happens down here in this old wicked world, we should always keep in mind that this day is the day of probation and the day of God's wrath is still future.
6. There is coming a day when God is going to pour out His hot wrath upon this dirty, perverted, sin-crazed, Christ-rejecting world – but that day is not here yet.
7. In the meantime our message remains the same: "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (13:3, 5).
8. The word "perish" means to spend eternity in hell (cf. John 3:16).
9. Sometimes this same Greek word is translated "lost." Jesus said in Luke 19:10, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."
10. The other tragedy referred to here concerned the collapse of a tower in Siloam which caused the death of eighteen persons (13:4). Again, our Lord emphasizes that this catastrophe should not be interpreted as a special judgment from God in response to some particular sin.

11. Rather, it should be seen as a warning to every man that unless they repent, they "shall all likewise perish" (13:5).
12. The people in Jesus' day thought that surely God must have seen some terrible wickedness in the slain Galileans – if not, why did He allow them to die in such a horrible manner?
13. Our Lord responded that this was not the case. The Galileans were not killed because they were guilty of greater wickedness than anybody else (13:3).
14. Our Lord is declaring here that the judgment of God is hanging over all unrepentant sinners. Like the sword of Damocles, it hangs over the head of every lost sinner.
15. On the island of Sicily in the fourth century BC, there ruled a tyrant named Dionysius. He had in his court a certain flatterer named Damocles who was always buttering him up. One day Damocles extolled the alleged virtues of Dionysius so eloquently that the tyrant proclaimed a magnificent banquet in his honor. In the midst of the festivities, however, Damocles happened to look up and discovered that a sharp sword hung suspended over his head by a single hair. And so it is with each and every lost sinner and each and every unsaved hypocrite who claims to be a Christian but has never been genuinely born again. God demands repentance.
16. Repentance is not penance, i.e., an effort to atone for our own sins.
17. Repentance is not remorse, i.e., feeling sorry over the consequences of your sin.
18. Repentance is not reformation. There may be reformation without repentance, but there can never be true repentance without reformation. When you truly repent there will be some changes in your life.
19. Repentance is a change of mind which leads to a change in direction.
20. Repentance is a change of mind which results in a change of attitude.
21. When a worldly, indifferent sinner confesses his sin – and judges his sin— and seeks to be cleansed from his sin – when he turns from his old ways and starts to go the right way – this is genuine repentance.
22. The apostle Paul said, "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21; cf. 26:15-20).
23. God demands repentance. There are many phony conversions and shallow professions and unsaved church members today because oftentimes there is no real repentance.
24. Repentance and faith go together – they are two sides to the same coin.
25. A sick man cannot get well until he acknowledges that he is sick. Likewise, a lost man cannot get saved until he acknowledges that he is a lost sinner.

26. The prodigal son climbed out of the pig pen (Luke 15:14-19). But today many churches are letting sinners stay in the pig pen and they're telling them, "Repeat this little prayer after me and you'll be saved."
27. There has to be repentance – God demands repentance.

## II. GOD DEMANDS FRUIT (13:6-8)

1. I said earlier that today is the day of probation; the day of God's judgment has not arrived yet. Of course, if you are not saved you are condemned already and your day of judgment could be today if you leave this world without Christ.
2. Remember what our Lord said to the certain rich man in Luke 12:20, "But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."
3. During this time of probation, God is seeking fruit (13:6, 7).
4. In the Bible, the fig tree symbolizes Israel, planted in God's vineyard, i.e., the world. God expected them to bear fruit but they did not.
5. However, the principles apply here to everyone – Jew and Gentile – God is expecting fruit – God is demanding fruit.
6. If you claim to be a Christian, God demands fruit.
7. The fig tree was not planted for decoration – it was planted for fruit.
8. The fig tree was not planted for firewood – it was planted for fruit.
9. In this parable, the "certain man" is God Himself (13:6). "The dresser of his vineyard" (13:7) is the Lord Jesus Christ. He intercedes on behalf of the fig tree; and He asks for more time (13:8, 9).
10. God is patient and long-suffering and He gives sinners time to repent (13:8, 9a).
11. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9).
12. He gave this fig tree "three years" to produce fruit (13:7) but found none.
13. There are many professing Christians that haven't produced any fruit in more than three years. They should be careful not to wear out God's patience!
14. Israel exhausted God's patience and forbearance and Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70. Many individuals exhaust God's patience and forbearance until finally God says, "Enough!"
15. Today man is always demanding his so-called "rights." Now we have civil rights, women's rights, abortion rights, homosexual rights, transgender rights, homeless rights, animals rights, etc.
16. I want to quote the great Bible preacher from the past, G. Campbell Morgan: "A man has no rights apart from the rights of God. The only right man has is

to be damned! That is not the only thing. We have no right to expect anything, except for the mercy and grace of God. God's rights are the absolute rights of proprietorship. We are His by creation...we are in His vineyard. The world is His. We have lived in it so many years. We have breathed His air. We have known His sunlight. We have benefited by His laws. Here we are, living in His world, His creation, His property, and deriving all the resources of personality from that which is His."

17. God demands fruit. God expects fruit. Are you producing fruit? Our Lord said, "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:16-20).

### **III. GOD DEMANDS JUDGMENT (13:9)**

1. As the owner of the vineyard, God has the perfect right to demand fruit. And, as the owner of the vineyard God has the perfect right to destroy that which fails. God has the perfect right to say, "CUT IT DOWN" (13:7) and "THOU SHALT CUT IT DOWN" (13:9).
2. God asks, "Why cumbereth (use up) the ground?" (13:7b).
3. This is an expression of disgust -- "Why cumbereth it the ground?"
4. Why rob the soil of its riches?
5. Why use up good ground? Why take up space?
6. God says, "I cannot find any fruit – cut it down!"
7. Not only was the fig tree not bearing fruit, it was taking up ground that might otherwise be productive. This is something God cannot put up with.
8. God demands judgment and God will exact judgment. There is a limit to God's long-suffering and patience.
9. After God's patience wears out, the fig tree is cut down – this is what is called "divine retribution."

### **CONCLUSION:**

1. God's patience is not permanent.
2. He gave the fig tree three years.
3. The point is clear -- if a man has no fruit, he will be cut down.
4. A fruitless man is living on borrowed time. According to the Bible, his judgment is near, and it is by the grace and mercy of God that he lives another day.