

Jesus' Greatest Hits

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 13:1-9 NIV*

This has one of the most fascinating set-ups of all the parables. While Jesus is teaching, He receives news of a Jewish massacre.

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. - *Luke 13:1 NIV*

Apparently, Pontius "Pilate" (*the Roman governor who would later authorize Jesus' crucifixion*), ordered the murder of men from "Galilee" (Jesus' hometown), while they were worshipping. We don't know why this was done. But, the first-century historian Josephus indicates that Galileans were susceptible to revolt.¹

The Pharisees were teaching that suffering was punishment for sin; the worse the calamity, the worse the sin must've been.

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. - *Luke 13:2-3 NIV*

They wanted Jesus to confirm what they believed, because they looked down on the Galilean Jews as a mixed race. But instead, He tells them to repent, and offers an example *closer to home*:

¹ Frank E. Gaebelin, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Zondervan Publishing House).

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.” - Luke 13:4-5 NIV

In other words: don't think their sin was extraordinarily horrible ... it was *ordinarily* horrible, just like *yours*.

Remember the blind man hero (from last week), who was thrown out of the synagogue because he refused to renounce Jesus? He was healed while Jesus was in Siloam.



[Jesus] spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" ...
- John 9:6-7a NIV

Big discovery in 2004: The Pool of Siloam!



It was near here that the tower fell on those men. These are the remains of the tower of Siloam. The lesson for Jesus' listeners was that instead of wasting time trying to figure out what the victims did to deserve their fate; they'd best focus on repenting before they met their own. The point of Jesus' argument is: Repent! The point of His parable is: Repent NOW!

Twice He says: "But unless you repent, you too will all perish"

There're two ways to interpret this: On one level, it was a call to the Nation of Israel to repent and receive their Messiah.

Q: Did you notice that the fig tree was planted in a vineyard?

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

This isn't an orchard, it's a vineyard. That means that this tree was special to the owner, and planted for his pleasure. It was intended to produce something unique. *Israel* was specially chosen, deliberately planted, and uniquely commissioned to remain separate and unstained by the world in order to declare the Messiah, and draw the world to Christ. But they persecuted their prophets and rejected their Messiah.

And Jesus' warning was prophetic for that generation of Jews. The Galilean massacre and Siloam tower tragedy were minor compared to the siege of Jerusalem (in 70 A.D.), when the Romans crushed and slaughtered over a million Israelites.

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

This warning was also aimed at the individual. Because 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*

We’ve been intentionally planted in God’s vineyard (this world), and uniquely commissioned as ambassadors of His Son. And we’re expected to produce the fruit of repentance. I’ll give you the “Six R’s of Repentance”:

1. Recognition of sin (*no longer hiding or denying it*)
2. Remorse for sin (*realizing how it hurts Him and me*)
3. Returning to Him (*reestablishing that relationship*)
4. Re-surrendering (*giving up all the controls to Him*)
5. Receiving grace (*allowing His holiness to cover me*)
6. Re-devoting myself (*to live for Him, point forward*)



Faith and repentance are inseparable. When I repent I turn *from* trusting other things *to* trusting in the Lord. To be fruitless is to be faithless. That’s why unfruitfulness is simply not allowed in God’s garden.

The fruit on the fig tree doesn’t *just* represent good works; it represents what naturally grows where true repentance is found: A thirst for righteousness, for His Word, for intimacy with Him, and for fellowship with His body; and a continually *growing* gratitude and adoration for the grace I’ve been given.



I’m sure that fruitless fig tree had big ol’ green leaves. And I know how easy it is to come to church and live the “leaf-life”. But, God is looking for the fruit of faith.

There’s a tension in this parable; first God 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?” **[Then Jesus says]** “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 13:7-9 NIV*

The point here isn’t that God is mean and Jesus is nice. It’s highlighting the tension between God’s perfect justice and His perfect mercy. If you heard that a drunk driver had killed someone, you’d want justice! But if you then discovered that driver was your son or daughter – your only child - you’d want mercy.

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

Ultimately our Father knows what has to happen: If no fruit ... uproot!

Remember how the Galileans' blood was "mixed with their *sacrifices*"? These Galileans were *not* temple priests. Sacrifices were *only* offered in the temple at Jerusalem, and Passover was the *only* time laymen slaughtered their own animals. So, this incident most-likely happened *during* Passover. And it was one year later – during Passover – that Jesus was crucified.

"Sir," the man replied, "leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it." - *Luke 13:8 NIV*

Jesus most likely said this one year before His own death! And we know that He spent that time doing everything He could to woo and to win His people, Israel. But, with less than five days before His death, and just after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (immediately *after* He visited the temple, and immediately *before* He cleansed it):

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*

Jesus was signaling that judgment had begun. The night before (on Palm Sunday), He had wept over Jerusalem. They had rejected the One who had come to nurture them.

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*



There is a sobering message in this passage and this parable. There comes a point when grace is no longer extended. And the eternal life or death question is: Will I blossom before my deadline? The Lord may be on the brink of saying, "Enough." We must recognize the time of God's coming to us; and act on it!

Let's see how well you've been listening; answer *true* or *false* when I ask the questions. In this passage, we've learned that:

1. "Unless you repent, you too will all perish."
2. As long as I *plan* on repenting it's okay to put it off.
3. We're left on our own to force out the fruit!
4. You and I may have less than a year to bear our fruit.