

The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

Luke 13:1-9

Introduction

- a. The parable of The Barren Fig Tree is found only in Luke 13. Although there are mentions of other Barren Fig Trees in the Gospels, (Matt. 21:18-20; Mar. 11:12-14. Also, Matt. 24:32; Mar. 13:28; Luk. 21:29) they have no parallel connection with this parable found in Luke 13.
- b. Preceding this parable there are two events mentioned about some Galileans that were killed at the Temple, and eighteen men who were killed by a tower in Siloam that fell on them. The first question asked seemed to be a political question, but the Lord avoided that form of conversation and challenged them to consider their own condition.

- **The Galileans (Luke 13:1-3)**

Some say that these Galileans were associated with the group of Judas Gaulonita, called also *Judas of Galilee*. When the Apostles were arrested, Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, made reference to this sect:

Act 5:35 “And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. **Act 5:36** For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. **Act 5:37 After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.** **Act 5:38** And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: **Act 5:39** But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.”

- This man rebelled against Caesar's and Pilate's authority and refused to pay tribute to him and encouraged many in that same way. It was recorded by Flavious Josephus, an unregenerate Jewish Historian in his books, that riotous behaviour in the Temple grounds during the time of the Passover was a common thing. A purposed revolt against the soldiers

that were there present would force the authorities to respond. The Galileans were Herod's subjects, but it is said that Pilate was the one that retaliated in this instance and executed these Galileans and mingled their blood with their sacrifices. This act appeared to have brought tension between himself and Caesar, but there is a Scripture that indicates some sort of reconciliation thereafter. Luk. 23:12. "And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves."

- **The Tower in Siloam (Luke 13:4-5)**

It is said also that Pilate wanted money from the temple treasury to finance his project to build an aqueduct to the Pool of Siloam. The *eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell* were said to be workmen that were helping Caesar with his project which was partly funded by the money from the temple—The "Corban-money" or gift (Mar. 7:11). Others say that these men were just doing their job and innocently working when the tower fell. They were not protestors or troublemakers.

c. **Question.** What's the main truth the Lord was conveying to the people?

Answer. Although there might be some people that are "sinners above all men" as you say, the fact of the matter is that if you do not repent, ye will one day perish just like those "sinners above all men" that did not repent, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. With this in mind, let consider the parable that the Lord goes on to speak—The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree.

Luk. 13:3,5 ...except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

d. We will consider two things:

1. The DEFINITION of the parable
2. The DESTRUCTION of the people

A. The Definition of the parable

- a. There are different characters and details which are mentioned in the parable that have no definite meaning in the sense that the Lord did not define the specifics that are here mentioned. This parable is one of the parables that haven't been explained by the Lord. Let us seek first to define the parable.

➤ **Luke 13:6** “He spake also this parable; A certain *man* had a fig tree planted in his vineyard;”

- Some say that the "certain man" is God the Father, who is sometimes called an husbandman; others say that the owner of the vineyard is speaking specifically about the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The Scripture indicates to us that the LORD refers to Israel as His vineyard.

Isaiah 5:7 “For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts *is* the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.”

- If the vineyard is representative of Israel as a nation, then the context may seem to indicate that the Fig Tree is a symbol of the individual soul as the parable seems to isolate the Fig Tree though it be in the vineyard. Some even say that the fig tree is specifically referring to the Pharisees and rulers of the day.
- One commentator says that “The peculiar privilege of the fig tree illustrated the Jewish nation (Isaiah 5:1-7); and the vineyard, the enclosure of the privilege.”
- Another commentator indicates that a vine is a more winsome emblem of Jewish national life than a fig tree, and that Jesus employed the latter symbol for the purpose of lowering the pride of His hearers.
- Either way, the parable is clearly addressing Israel as God's chosen people, separate to any other nation, and is therefore addressed to them.

➤ “and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.”

- This, if understood of God the Father, in times past came to His chosen nation by His servants, and prophets, time after time, and at lastly now by John the Baptist, and Jesus Christ, and his apostles, seeking and requiring fruits but finding none.

➤ **Luke 13:7** “Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard,”

If the owner of the vineyard is God the Father, then the dresser of the vineyard appears to be Jesus Christ. Some say it's the child/children of God.

- Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none:
- Some think these three years is referring to the Patriarchs, the law, and the prophets. Some think Christ here refers to the three years of his public ministry, which he had now gone through among the Jews with little success.

Matthew Henry said: “It is, however, safer, in this and many of the Lord’s parables, not to press every little detail which was necessary for the completion of the picture. Here the period of three years in which the Lord of the vineyard came seeking fruit, represents by the number 3 the symbol of complete-ness—a period of full opportunity given to the tree to have become fruitful and productive.

- The choice of words of our Lord in saying “I come seeking” indicates to us that it was time after time He sought after fruit that was expected to be there, and found none. The Lord had given more than enough time and care to the tree that it would bring forth fruit, yet still nothing.

➤ “...cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?”

- Therefore, the rightful and just conclusion of the matter is to cut down the tree: why let it take up space if it's unfruitful. Why waste the ground with an unproductive tree when another could perhaps be planted and become fruitful.

➤ **Luke 13:8** “And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also,”

- Again, this could be referring to our Great Mediator and Intercessor, Jesus Christ; or, the saints of God interceding on behalf of others. Nevertheless, the request here is for more time

➤ “...till I shall dig about it, and dung it:

- More time to nurture the fig tree again. Commentators say that farmers would carry dung into their gardens to moisten the earth, and dig about the roots of the trees, and lay them bare, and cover them again, and prune them, and smoke them to kill the worms. And by these phrases may be signified the various means Christ made use of by his own ministry, and by the ministry of his apostles, to make the Jews a fruitful people.

- It seemed necessary at this point to get right down to the roots, for it is assumed that therein does the problem lie.

➤ **Luke 13:9** “And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.”

- The last verse leaves an open-end conclusion to the parable. The listeners may have questions as to the specific details with the parable but can only assuredly know what would be the end of their own personal lives.

-The Owner of the Vineyard	God the Father, the LORD of hosts/The Lord Jesus Christ
-The Vineyard	Israel as a nation/Enclosure
-The fig tree	Israel/Individuals
-The fruit	In the context, the fruit of repentance
-The dresser	The Lord Jesus our Mediator/The saints of God
-Three years	Completeness/sufficient time
-One year	More time
-Dig it and Dung it	Get to the roots and nurture it
-Cut it down	Let it be removed

- b. In seeking to define any parable, especially one that the Lord himself did not explain, one must not miss the main point of the parable by putting all the focus on every detail of the parable.
- c. The main point of this parable was the warning given in the preceding verses that "...except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luk. 13:3,5) Therefore, the whole point of the parable is to convey this one truth.

B. The Destruction of the people

1. The Warning the Jews

➤ *Luke 13:2-15* "And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? Vs 3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Vs 4 Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? Vs 5 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

a. The main point of the parable.

- The Lord was communicating to the people that although there might be some people that they think are "sinners above all men", the fact of the matter is that if you do not repent, ye will one day perish just like those "sinners above all men" that did not repent.

b. Some say that the Lord here was referring to their physical perishing.

- That as these men physically perished, in like tragic manner, so will the Jews who He is speaking to. Some commentators believe that the Lord was making reference to the destruction of the Temple that was to come in AD70 by the hand of the Romans.

c. The part of the problem were the people.

- They would think that if something tragic or bad would happen to someone, it was because there was a sin issue that has caused it. He made it clear to them that human tragedies are not always divine punishments.

d. Divine punishment was administered in some cases:

- Pharaoh and the Egyptians (Exodus 14:17)
- Nebuchadnezzar made to eat grass (Dan 4)
- The Jews being exiled to Babylon

e. In other cases it was not Divine punishment:

- The story of Joseph and what he went through (Genesis 37-50)
- The story of Job (even his friends thought he had sinned against God)
- The man that was born blind (John 9)

f. The Lord does not tell them what the case actually was with these men but identifies and exposes their false thinking (v2,4) and brings their attention to the reality (v3,5). The Lord gets to the heart of the matter.

g. Question: What Fruit was the Lord referring to in the parable that He sought for?

- **Answer:** In the context, he was looking for the fruit of repentance

➤ **Luke 13:3,5** “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

h. John the Baptist preached repentance.

Mat 3:1 “In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, vs 2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Mat 3:7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

Mat 3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

Mat 3:9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

Mat 3:10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

- Some say the parable of the Barren Fig Tree is simply an extension from what John the Baptist was saying in Matt. 3:10. There are some grounds to parallel the two for in essence they are declaring the same thing in that if there is no genuine fruit, the “tree” will be cut down, and in John’s description, cast into the fire.

i. Israel was exhorted to repent many times even before John.

Eze 18:30 Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn *yourselves* from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.

Eze 18:31 Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

Eze 18:23 Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: *and* not that he should return from his ways, and live?

Eze 33:11 Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; **but** that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

- The Lord may have dealt with Israel as a nation, but in final judgment all will be dealt with individually. Not only will all Jews be dealt with individually at the judgment, but all men will one day individually and personally face a judgment before Almighty God.

2. The Warning to all men

a. The warning to repent in this parable was specifically to the Jews.

- However, in like manner, the warning to repent in the Bible is given to all men. The gospel came to the Jew first, and because of their rejection, then to the Gentiles.

Act 13:46 “Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.”

Act 11:18 “When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”

Acts 26:20 “But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”

Romans 1:16 “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

Luke 24:47 “And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

b. Peter preached repentance.

Act 2:38 “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

Act 3:19 “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;”

c. The Disciples preached repentance.

Mark 6:12 “And they went out, and preached that men should repent.”

d. Paul preached repentance.

Acts 20:21 “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”

e. Jesus preached repentance.

Mar 1:14 “Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,”

Mar 1:15 “And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

f. What repentance looks like.

Act 17:29 “Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.”

Act 17:30 “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:”

2Co 7:9 “Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.”

2Co 7:10 “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”

3. The Waiting

a. God always gives time for people to repent.

- That woman Jezebel

Rev 2:21 “And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.”

- Nineveh

Jonah 3:4 “And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”

b. Nineveh will stand at in judgment against the generation in which the Lord is speaking to.

Mat 12:41 “The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas *is* here.”

- Here stands a wicked people that are not the people of God that repented at the preaching of one of God’s messengers, yet the chosen nation of God who are supposed to be the people of God would not only refuse to hearken to messengers of God, but also refuse to hearken to a greater than Jonas—God manifest in the flesh.

c. God takes unrepentance seriously.

Mat 11:20 “Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:”

Mat 11:21 “Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.”

Mat 11:22 “But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.”

Mat 11:23 “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.”

Mat 11:24 “But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.”

- *Note:* Although we understand that all men are without excuse, yet those who have rejected the light of the truth of the Word of God will stand in that judgment day having heaped upon themselves a greater condemnation.

Conclusion

a. God is longsuffering.

2Pe 3:9 “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.”

b. God rejoices over that one that comes to repentance.

Luke 15:10 “Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”

- Don't get stuck trying to work out the open end conclusion of the parable.
Like Warren Wiersbe said: “The question is not “What happened to the tree?” but “What will happen to me?”
- There may be many that have sinned greater than me, but except I repent, I will likewise perish.

Memory Verse:

Luke 13:3,5 “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”