

Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

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Luke 13:1-9

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 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. 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."

Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree growing 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.'"



Commonly referred to as the Parable of the Barren Fig Tree, this story represents all of us in that God expects us, each in our own way, to be fruitful in our lives by helping God grow His kingdom.

The fig tree was a very familiar sight in antiquity, and since there were many of them, this provided the perfect opportunity for Jesus to use them in his teachings in a variety of illustrative ways.

The fig tree, according to one early church historian, was the most valuable of all trees. It was very productive, producing three crops per year. It was in fact normally in fruit for 10 months of the year, producing fruit every month but two, April and May.

Fig trees were also helpful in that hot, arid part of the world in that its dense foliage provided much needed shade. Shade, which, was often thought of symbolically as the shade that God provides for us. It was also a symbol of peace and prosperity. (see 1 Kings 4:25).

Thus, fig trees were often used as symbol for God's people, both in the OT and the NT. So it is not surprising that Jesus would choose to use the fig tree to make his point in the Parable of the Barren Fig Tree.

The man who had the fig tree planted in his vineyard was disappointed with the tree. Why? Because it had not done what it should for ten months out of the year, it was unproductive.

The man had waited the appropriate amount of time for the tree to become productive, it had not. So he wanted the tree removed. God can grow tired of our ongoing lack of productivity. Look at the history of Israel in the OT. Think about all the times God almost given up on His people. Do you remember Moses begging God to have mercy on the people when God was ready to give up on them?

Yet, in spite of all this, God is merciful to us and will give us another chance, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9).

All of us know that when we do not use our physical bodies or parts of our physical bodies, they tend to atrophy. The principle is the same in our spiritual lives. If we do not use our spiritual talents, we tend to lose them. Even though we are God's children, it is necessary for us to put effort into exercising the gifts we have.

We can become useless, just as the fig tree in our parable was useless. We can lose our spiritual strength if we are not actively seeking to follow Christ.

The good news is - we all have a season of fruitfulness. Each of us has the ability to produce fruit. We may become discouraged when we struggle, we may become uncertain when we doubt. But if we will persist in cultivating and fertilizing our lives with the teachings of Christ, we will be given a fertile future in serving God.

Or, to say it another way, serving God, in all of our tomorrows, is what truly makes us Christian.