

The Parable of the Fruitless Fig Tree

The Story

Luke 13 verses 1 - 9

Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? "I tell you, no, but, unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. "Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." And He began telling this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it, and did not find any. "And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?' "And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.'"

People had reported to Jesus that Pilate had mixed some Galilean's blood with their sacrifices that is they had been killed in the Temple whilst offering animal sacrifices there. Galilean's were note for their fierce Nationalism and Pilate might have been crushing a potential rebellion. Then Jesus talked about the tragedy of the tower falling in Siloam and killing eighteen people. Siloam was built on sloping ground where earth tremors and bad construction could have combined to cause the tower to fall. The man who took care of the vineyard is literally a vine-worker in the Greek text. We would call him a farmer today.

The Interpretation

The character and symbols of the story and the people and things they represent are interpreted by:

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|---|---------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| 1 | The Owner of the Vineyard | = | God |
| 2 | The Gardener | = | Jesus or the Holy Spirit |
| 3 | The Fig Tree | = | Israel |
| 4 | The Vineyard | = | The World |

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The Parable of the Fruitless Fig Tree

The Condition of the Tree

Luke 13 verse 6

And He began telling this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it, and did not find any.

The Fig Tree represents Israel; it had leaves but no fruit on it. The Holy Spirit working through the Old Testament Prophets and Priests, Moses and the Law and including the ministries of Jesus and John the Baptist had carefully cultivated Israel over a long period of time. However, at the time of Jesus Israel lacked the true fruit of inward character. They only had the leaves of outward appearance. They were hypocrites!

Condemnation of the Tree

Luke 13 verse 7

And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?'

The fig tree had not borne figs for three years so the owner told the Gardener to cut it down. It just so happened that Jesus had been preaching repentance to Israel.

Matthew 4 verse 17

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

John the Baptist had the same message for them.

Matthew 3 verse 10

And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Still Israel did not repent; they rejected their Messiah and His message.

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The Gardener Pleads for the Tree

Luke 13 verses 8 - 9

And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.'

But in order to be fair he added that if it did not bear fruit then it was to be cut down. Jesus knew that Israel would continue to reject him and not repent. A little later he lamented over the people he loved.

Luke 13 verse 34 - 35

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it! "Behold, your house is left to you desolate; and I say to you, you will not see Me until the time comes when you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'"

The cutting down of the fig tree (Israel) could refer to the Temple and the Laws taking the place of God in the hearts of the people, or it could refer to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD70. There is also a personal application for this parable as well as a National or group application. The speech by Jesus, severe and full of rebuke, ends in a parable in which the merciful Son of Man appears as the intercessor for men before the righteousness of the Heavenly Father; as He who obtains for them repentance. This idea putting off the judgement of men runs all through the Holy Scriptures.

Genesis 6 verse 3

Then the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."

Genesis 18 verse 24

Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it?

The destruction of Jerusalem was not until forty years after the ascension of our Lord.

2 Peter 3 verse 9

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

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The parable of the Fruitless fig tree then, concerns both God's long suffering and His severity.

There are 3 important points:

1. The fig tree occupied a specially favoured position. Jesus reminded men repeatedly that they would be judged according to the opportunities that they had and what they did with those opportunities.
2. Uselessness invites disaster. If you feel useless in a situation, you will be useless. The very least that you can do is pray about the situation.
3. Nothing which only takes out can survive. You must be a giver as well as a receiver.

This parable also tells us of the gospel of the second chance. A fig tree normally takes three years to reach maturity; it is not likely to bear fruit after that. It is always Jesus' way to give a man chance after chance. God is infinitely kind to the man who falls and rises again when he asks sincerely for repentance. There is a final chance.

Also implied in this parable is that there is no personal conscience in the human heart, we gather or scatter, build up or tear down. The tree was using up the soil and not producing figs. Israel was taking up God's time, spurning His love, destroying His messengers and through them the name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles.

Romans 2 verse 24

For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.

Matthew 23 verses 13 - 15

But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretence you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

Likewise, the individual who makes a profession of faith in Christ and has an evil heart is taking the name of God in vain. He is claiming to be part of the Father's family without having the nature of the Heavenly Father. This is much worse than speaking the name of God in a loose or vain way. He has become a stumbling block for true seekers of God instead of a stepping stone to help them to find Him.

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Now is the time to change.

2 Corinthians 6 verses 1 - 2

And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain - For He says, "AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU", behold, now is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, now is "THE DAY OF SALVATION".

Central Truth

God is merciful; He gives us time to repent. God is also just; He will bring judgement to reprobates.

Conclusion

Let us invite the Holy Spirit to examine our hearts and pray with David this prayer from our hearts:

Psalm 139 verses 23-24

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.

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