

**Lessons from the Barren Fig Tree:
Luke 13:6-9**

Franklin Church of Christ
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AM Worship

Introduction:

What would we expect a farmer to do with a plant that did not produce any fruit? We would expect him to cut it down and try again with a different plant. That only makes common sense. Jesus recognized the sense of such an approach and used this very same concept in a parable on repentance in **Luke 13:6-9**. Jesus' parable is frightening but also comforting. Examine the parable and learn the lessons from the barren fig tree.

Discussion:

I. Lesson #1: *The Master expects fruit.*

- A. This story reminds of another parable. In **Luke 8:5-8**, Jesus told the parable of the sower. He explained the parable in **vss. 11-15**. When the seed is sown in good ground, the result is fruit. However, there are obstacles. Some will hear the word but not believe it. Some will hear it and accept it, but they will not put down roots. When trouble arises, they die out and never produce any fruit. Others will hear, believe and obey, but they are distracted by so many things that they never bear fruit for the Lord. Finally, some few are sown on good ground and they produce for the Master, some thirty, some sixty, some a hundredfold. The long and short of it is that the Master expects us to bear fruit.
- B. The parable of the sower demonstrates that the Lord has not put us in competition with one another. We do not need to be concerned about our comparative fruit production. We must simply produce what we can produce. However, we must produce.
- C. Most of us may already know what the fruit is we are to produce. However, by way of reminder let's look at two passages. First, look at personal fruit. **Galatians 5:22-23** describes the fruit of the Spirit, which we must produce in our lives to glorify God—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Second, look at fruit in the lives of others. In **Matthew 9:36-38**, Jesus, looking at the masses, said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few." Jesus saw the salvation of others as fruit to be harvested.
- D. Finally, we recall **John 15:8**. "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples." We want to be Christ's disciples and we want to glorify the Father. We can only accomplish this through bearing fruit. God does not want barren trees, He wants fruitful ones.

II. Lesson #2: *The Master is patient with us.*

- A. In the parable, the master had passed by the barren tree for three years before he said anything about it. Then, he was willing to wait another year while the vineyard keeper fertilized the tree before exercising final judgment on the tree. Our Master is patient.
- B. There are two sides of this: a frightening side and a comforting one. The comforting side of this patience is the knowledge that God is not looking for the opportunity to simply wipe us off the face of the earth. He is patient with us as **II Peter 3:9, 15** explain. God recognizes fruit-bearing is a growth process. He does not expect an immediate hundredfold harvest from new Christians. He does not want any to perish, therefore He waits patiently.
- C. The frightening aspect addresses the complacency that some have. How many times have Christians justified ungodly behavior by saying, "I have been doing this for a long time and God has not zapped me yet." Some believe that because God has not brought down immediate judgment, their actions must be alright. They are like the mockers of **II Peter 3:3-4**. Remember that God is patient. He rarely brings down immediate judgment. Rather, He waits and gives time for repentance. If your actions violate God's word, do not view God's lack of judgment as approval, rather view it as patience giving you time to repent. This need for repentance is what caused Jesus to teach this parable in the first place. Read the context of **Luke 13:1-5**. Jesus was speaking to people who needed to repent. They needed to know that God was being patient with them, but patience was running out, which leads to the next lesson.

III. Lesson #3: *A time is coming when the Master's patience will run out.*

- A. As patient as the Master is, His patience will run out. He will come back searching for fruit for years. He will allow the keeper of the vineyard to persuade him on to another year. But eventually, the unfruitful tree will be cut down. He does not want it using up the ground.
- B. If I understand the gardening practices correctly, vineyard keepers would sometimes plant fig trees in the corners of their vineyards where grapes were not growing. They would do this to keep from wasting any part of their property. However, there was a trade off. The fig tree would use some of the ground's nutrients. As long as the fig tree bore fruit, the trade off was fine. But why would a vineyard keeper maintain a fig tree that was leaching out the ground's nutrients from the grape vines if it would not even bear any fruit?
- C. This calls to mind Jesus' statement in **Matthew 12:30**. If we are not gathering to Jesus, we are scattering abroad. If we are not bearing fruit for the Lord, then we are simply using up the ground and leaching the nutrients away from the fruit bearing vines. Our Master is patient. He will allow this for some time, but He will not allow it forever. There will come a time when He will cut down the unfruitful tree so it will no longer be a bad influence on the rest of His vineyard.
- D. What each of us must recognize is that we really have no idea where we are on this time frame. I do not believe there is a standard four-year waiting process after you become a Christian. I have no idea what factors God takes into account as He bears with us patiently. Are we in our first year, second year, third year? Or are we in that final year in which God has about had enough. The fact is, we just do not know, which is why we need to be working and fruit-bearing all the time. The point is very similar to Peter's in **II Peter 3:11**. We never know when the Lord's judgment may come on us individually or on the world as a whole. Therefore we need to be people conducting ourselves in holiness and godly conduct bearing fruit.

IV. Lesson #4: *The Master will help us bear fruit.*

- A. The final point we need to notice in this parable is God's grace. Not only is the Master patient with us, the Master helps us bear fruit. He has the vineyard keeper dig around us and provide fertilizer to stimulate growth. God has not just planted us here on the earth and then said, "Get to it." He helps us.
- B. As we recently learned in **II Peter 1:2-3**, God has helped us by providing all that we need for life and godliness through knowledge of His Son, which we gain through reading the word, which He also provided (**II Peter 1:20-21**).
- C. Further, God has provided our relationships with one another to help us. According to **I Corinthians 12:18**, God has placed the members of His body where He wants them. **Hebrews 10:24** explains that we are here to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. God has provided this help to get us going, to get us growing and to get us bearing fruit.
- D. What an amazing God we have. Do not feel alone and abandoned. Do not feel there is no hope for bearing fruit. Lean on God's help and bear fruit to His glory. Remember, we can do all things through Him who strengthens us (**Philippians 4:13**).

Conclusion:

As we conclude this lesson, I want you to remember that God is the judge and His patience will run out at some time. However, I do not want you to focus on that. I want you focus on the grace God has granted through His Son, His Spirit, His word and His people. Look for the help with which He has blessed you and lean on that help. Through God's help you can grow in your fruit bearing, whether you are going from barren to bearing or from thirtyfold to sixty. God is helping you, lean on Him and grow.