

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

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The Words, Works, and Person of Christ

The Gospel of Luke

The Barren Fig Tree (Part 2)

December 4, 2022

Sermon Text: Luke 13:6-9

Scripture Reading:

Genesis 25:19-34

We know with certainty that this is going to happen:

Mat 7:21-23 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (22) On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name,

and do many mighty works in your name?’ (23) And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

And again:

Luk 13:23-27 And someone said to him, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” And he said to them, (24) “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. (25) When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ (26) Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ (27) But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not

know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’

On that day, *many*. *Few* will be saved. “But we ate and drank in your presence, you taught in our streets.” Depart from Me.

Many, many people who claim to be Christians do not want to hear these words of Jesus. They want to hear pleasantries – words that assure them that all is well with them. Preachers who speak on these scriptures are judged too harsh and narrow. But I ask you – do YOU think that? Do YOU really believe Jesus? Or do we fashion a different Jesus for ourselves who is more agreeable to what we want to believe?

I do not think it an exaggeration to say that many if not most people who claim to be Christians, in reality, do not believe the Bible. We can deceive ourselves and think that we believe God’s Word when in fact we do not. So let’s think very carefully now.

This parable of the Barren Fig Tree is still another occasion when Jesus warned people about this terrible trap of *presumption*. “Of course I am saved. Of course I am one of the people of God. Of course I am on my way to heaven.” *Presumption*, you see. He was addressing presumptuous people among the Jews who He had just warned twice - *I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*

So this is a very sobering subject and it is why John Bunyan spent so much time preaching on this parable. It is not God’s will that any of you perish, but unless we repent and believe with real authentic faith, we will perish in hell – we will not “rest in peace.”

Luk 13:6-9 And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. (7) And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’

(8) And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. (9) Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

This Scripture you recall, is a parable told by Christ, and it is the text which John Bunyan chose to write an article long ago in 1682. The extended title of this sermon (and we will call it a sermon), is this:

The Barren Fig Tree;
Or,
The Doom and Downfall of the
Fruitless Professor:
Showing, that the Day of Grace
May be Past with Him Long
Before His Life is Ended

He had a FIG Tree

It is fruit that the Lord is looking for. He is the owner of the vineyard and He comes looking for fruit. You will remember that the fruit He seeks is *love*. Not just the love which most people fancy they

possess, but the love by which God is love. The love which is only possible by the fruit-bearing work of the Spirit in the hearts of Christ’s true people. The unregenerate boast about their love and yet they despise Christ and His people. We challenged ourselves last time by asking by way of self-examination – *just what do we really think of the people of God? What do we really think about Christ and about the Word of God?* Unless we are born again, it is impossible to love God or to love His people. The natural man hates God and regards Christ’s people as fools. This fruit, this love, *cannot be manufactured by man. Man’s “love” is a counterfeit love.* Inevitably and eventually the counterfeit Christian will not be able to tolerate any longer the stench of Christ’s people – separation will happen.

“Fruit is not so easily brought forth as a profession (a claim to be a Christian) is to make....to be fruitful, to bring forth fruit to God, this not every tree that stands in God’s garden does....God’s church may be cumbered with

fruitless fig trees, with barren professors.” (Bunyan)

He had a Fig Tree. This barren fig tree was not an olive tree, nor an apple tree, nor any other kind of tree. It was, like the rest of the trees in the vineyard, a FIG tree. Its leaves were the same. Its wood was the same. There was only one difference – it was fruitless.

We were reminded also last time that *it is quite possible and in fact quite common, for a “cumber-ground”* (worthless, fruitless) “*Christian*” to be present in the visible church of Christ. Creeps creep in. Wolves in wool. And these fruitless ones *are not harmless*. Listen to J.C. Ryle on this point and I think Bunyan will have more to say later on the same subject:

There is a plainer warning still in the passage for all unconverted professing Christians. There are many in every congregation who hear the gospel who are literally hanging over the brink of the bottomless pit! They have lived for

years in the best part of God’s vineyard and yet have borne no fruit. They have heard the gospel preached faithfully for hundreds of Sundays and yet have never embraced it and taken up the cross and followed Christ. They do not perhaps run into open sin, but they do nothing for God’s glory. There is nothing positive about their religion. Of each of these the Lord of the vineyard might say with truth, “I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down!”

Ryle, J. C.. Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of Luke: A Commentary (Updated Edition) (p. 291). Aneko Press. Kindle Edition.

And Ryle continues:

“Unfruitful members of God’s church are not merely injuring themselves and periling their own souls. They are an injury to the church generally, and do public harm. The common idea that an unconverted person does no harm – ‘is no man’s enemy but his own’ – and the like, is a miserable man-

made delusion, based on no warrant of Scripture. To be unfruitful is to be a cumberer of the ground. We are always doing either good or harm.” [Notes, p 88, Expository Thoughts on Luke]

Judas, as Bunyan notes, was one of the 12 and yet not one of the other 11 mistrusted him. They in fact asked, ‘Lord, is it I?’ when told of the upcoming betrayal. And the foolish virgins were mixed with the others, yet turned out to be fruitless professors.

The Fig Tree was PLANTED

Like the other trees in the vineyard (we would say “orchard”), this fruitless tree had come to be planted. It was no longer, for appearances, in the world’s orchard. It was in the Lord’s vineyard. “It had been carried from the world to the church; from nature to grace; from sin to godliness” (Bunyan). *Or so it seemed.*

“This professor, it must be concluded, though remaining

fruitless, as to appearances to the church, had been rightly brought in. That is, by confession of faith, confession of sin, a show of repentance, and yet was a false brethren crept in unawares.” (Bunyan)

There is a foot-note by the editor of Bunyan’s sermon which is well worth out notice:

“The mode of admitting a member to church membership, among the Baptists, was and now is by introducing the candidate to a private meeting of the whole church, that they may hear why he or she is seeking membership, how they first came alarmed (ie, under conviction of sin), and fled to Christ for refuge. The church made inquiries prior as to the person’s Christian character and godliness. *If, with all of these precautions, a counterfeit, a barren fig tree, gains admittance, the punishment is not upon the vineyard, but upon the barren tree.* Reader, do not imagine that this was peculiar to Bunyan’s days; look not upon your neighbors to find an example, but

search your own heart. ‘Lord, is it I?’” [p 4-5 note, Barren Fig Tree]

“It is one thing to be in the church by profession; and another to be *of the church.*” (Bunyan)

Planted in HIS Vineyard

The barren fig tree is a hypocrite. A pretender. He or she is present in the Lord’s vineyard, partaking of the Lord’s gracious blessings, and yet fruitless. Loveless. Faithless. And without repentance.

Jud 1:12 These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted;

There is no means whereby a person arouses the wrath of the owner of the vineyard than to presumptuously, contemptuously, and rashly enter into the Lord’s house as pretender. You see it in another of our Lord’s parables:

Mat 22:11-14 “But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. (12) And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. (13) Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ (14) For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Listen once more to Bunyan on this:

In HIS vineyard. Hypocrites, with rotten hearts, are not afraid to come before God in Sion. These words therefore suggest unto us a prodigious kind of boldness and hardened fearlessness. For what presumption higher, and what attempt more desperate, than for a man that lacks grace, and the true knowledge of God, to crowd himself, in that condition, into the house or church of God; or to make profession of, and

desire that the name of God should be called upon him? For the man that makes a profession of the religion of Jesus Christ, that man has, as it were, put the name of God upon himself, and is called and reckoned now, howsoever fruitless before God or men, he is reckoned now, I say, as a man that has to do with God, the man that God owns, and will stand for.

This man, I say, by his profession, suggests this to all that know him to be such a professor. Men who are merely natural (that is, unregenerate people in general), I mean men that have not got the devilish art of hypocrisy, are afraid to think of doing this. [Bunyan means that even unregenerate people, for the most part, fear this façade. How often we hear them say, “the church roof would fall upon me.”]

‘And of the rest dared no man

join himself to them (ie, to the apostles); but the people magnified them’ (Acts 5:13).

And, indeed, it displeases God.

‘You have brought,’ says he, ‘men uncircumcised into my sanctuary’ (Eze 44:7).

And again,

‘When you come to appear before me, who has required this at your hand, to tread my courts?’ saith God (Isa 1:12).

They have therefore learned this bold hypocrisy of no one in the visible world, they only took it of the devil, for he, and he only, with these his disciples, attempt to present themselves in the church before God.

‘The tares are the children of the wicked *one*.’ The tares, that is, the hypocrites, that are Satan’s brood, the generation of vipers, that cannot escape the damnation of hell.

And yet, you see, here is this fruitless, barren fig tree planted in the midst of the Lord's vineyard.

The Scripture here does not say that the Lord planted this barren tree – but simply that it was there.

Mat 15:13 He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up.

As with the false wedding feast guest without wedding garments, so the barren fig tree is "so cunning and crafty that he beguiled all the guests; he kept himself in the church until the King himself came in to see.

The Lord's question to such a fruitless one is an important means of self-examination for us – "*Friend, how did you come in here?*"

Do you remember Formalist and Hypocrisy in Pilgrim's Progress? -

And as he was troubled thereabout, he spied two men come tumbling over the wall on the left hand of the

narrow way; and they made up quickly to him. The name of the one was Formalist, and the name of the other Hypocrisy.

So, as I said, they drew up unto him, who thus entered with them into discourse.

CHR. Gentlemen, where did you come from, and where are you going?

FORM. and HYP. We were born in the land of Vain-glory, and are going for praise to Mount Zion.

CHR. Why came you not in at the gate which stands at the beginning of the way? Know you not that it is written, that he that comes not in by the door, "but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber?" [John 10:1]

FORM. and HYP. They said, That to go to the gate for entrance was, by all their countrymen, counted too far about; and that, therefore, their usual way was to make a short cut of it, and to climb over the wall, as they had done.

Bunyan, John. The Pilgrim's Progress - Unabridged With Original Illustrations .
www.graceflow.org. Kindle Edition.

And so it is with the barren fig tree, the fruitless professor. Such a one did not come into the vineyard by the Door (who is Christ) but by their own means, creeping into the flock in disguise.

“This man did not come in by the door, yet he got into the church; he got in by climbing; he broke in at the windows; he got something of the light and glory of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in his head; and so, hardy wretch that he was, he presumed to crowd himself among the real children.

There are many ways to get into the visible church of God besides entering in by the Door:

1. By lying and deception, as did the Gibeonites.
2. Through negligence and lack of care by the people of God,

3. By the aid of the devil who, as one who himself comes as an angel of light, provides disguises for his wicked children” [Bunyan]

Therefore we must not be surprised, nor must we be careless. Paul warned us plainly

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2Ti 2:19-20 But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.” (20) Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable.

Let’s conclude with still another sobering challenge then from Bunyan —

“Barren fig-tree, fruitless professor, have you heard all of these things? Have you considered that this fig tree is not acknowledged by God to be His, is

not of His planting, and not brought to the wedding by Him? Do you not see that you are called a thief and a robber, because you have climbed up and crept in by some way other than the Door? Do you hear that the Lord's church will only prepare you for hell – and that more intense than for others? Barren fig tree, do not your ears tingle?" (Bunyan)

Now, all of this is put forward with the prayer that any fruitless tree who hears might tremble at Mt. Sinai's terrible rumblings and thereby be driven to call out to Christ for mercy. Now, before it is too late. The Son of God from whose lips this parable came to us, desires that all be saved. That none should perish. He is ready and willing to hear from the worst of sinners –“Lord, be merciful to me, the sinner.”

But He is also the holy, holy, holy God before whom every single unrepentant barren fig tree will be cut down and cast into the fire of hell on that Day. The axe is already laid at the root. The axe-bearer has raised it and at any moment it will swing.