

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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The Words, Works, and Person of Christ

The Gospel of Luke

The Barren Fig Tree (Part 6)

February 5, 2023

Sermon Text: Luke 13:6-9

Scripture Reading: Psalm 80

This morning I would like us to continue to consider this very searching parable of the Lord Jesus. As you know, John Bunyan – our friend from Pilgrim's Progress – wrote quite a long treatise which is really a pointed sermon, on this very Scripture. And I know why he did so. You see it all through the journey of Pilgrim through the wilderness of this

world to the Celestial City. Counterfeits (Talkative and the like). Deceivers such as Legality.

- Obstinate
- Pliable
- Worldly Wiseman
- Formalist
- Hypocrisy
- By-ends

All of these, along with Apollyon and Giant Despair are set against us still today. Satan is still at work doing all he can to prevent people from hearing the Christ:

2Co 4:3-4 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. (4) In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

And again-

Mat 13:19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.

Satan is doing all that he can to cause YOU to stumble. To get you off the narrow way and onto Broadway. To even work within your own mind to convince you that all is well, that surely God is pleased with you because you are so pleased with yourself. And each day, each month, each year, we are all coming closer and closer to that hour when we will depart this life – either with Christ and into His presence, or without Christ and cast away into outer darkness forever.

There is no more important matter for us to think seriously about than this subject – Are we a fruitful fig tree or a barren one. Do we belong to Christ, or is the Lord's axe laid right now at our root?

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.’”

The Fruits of Repentance

Mat 3:8-10 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. (9) And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. (10) Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

The owner of the vineyard is the

Lord, and He comes to His own seeking fruit. We have seen that this fruit is *love*, and not just the generic love which the world speaks of, but love for God and love for His people. Now, related to this fruit of love for God is the fruit John the Baptist speaks of – *repentance*.

“A good tree brings forth good fruit. A man must be good, or else he can bring forth no good fruit; he must have righteousness imputed in order to stand good in God’s sight. He must have this perfect righteousness [of Christ] in his soul or he will never bring forth good fruit. The Christian’s fruits are called ‘the fruits of the Spirit, the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ.’” (see Gal 5:22-23; Phil 1:11).

The fruits of the Spirit, and therefore the Spirit must be there, the fruits of righteousness, therefore righteousness must first be there. But to particularize briefly –

First, God expects fruit that will

answer and be worthy of the repentance which *you profess to have*. Everyone who crowds into the vineyard of the Lord pretends to have repentance, and therefore when God comes looking for fruit, He expects that the fruits of repentance be found.

Every person who professes to believe in Christ, claims to say, ‘I feel my sin and its evil.’ Are you then living a life which evidences that you feel your sin and its evil? Every person who professes to believe in Christ, claims to say ‘I am sorry for my sin.’ Why, then, are you living a life which declares the truth of this claimed sorrow? Every person who professes to believe in Christ, claims to say, ‘I am ashamed of my sin.’ Does your life show this shame? Have you left off and turned from that sin and now become an enemy of every appearance of evil?

Take heed, barren fig tree, lest your life demonstrate that your profession is a lie, for God Himself is coming for fruit. Repentance is not only a sorrow, but a turning from sin to God; it is called

‘repentance from dead works.’”

Joh 15:8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

The Vineyard of the Lord is Fruitful

Isa 5:1 Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.

When the Lord takes us from this world, when He takes a sinner whom He elected to holiness from the foundation of the world, He plants that saint on a very fertile hill. The vineyard of the Lord, the true people of God, the true church, is a very fertile hill where much fruit is borne. It is not a vineyard like the Old Covenant Israel –

Isa 5:1-7 Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. (2) He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of

it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. (3) And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. (4) What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? (5) And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. (6) I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briers and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. (7) For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

No, this vineyard has as its Vine the Lord Jesus and His people are the branches, vitally joined to Him so that they ALL bear fruit.

Now, what this parable of the

barren fig tree is presenting to us is the circumstance in which, right in the midst of this fruitful hill, in the middle of this fruit-bearing orchard laden with heavy clusters, stands a tree that is barren. Void of fruit. This barren tree stands amidst –

- Abel offered the more excellent sacrifice (Heb 11:4)
- Enoch walked with God 300 years (Heb 11:5)
- Noah, by his life of faith, condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith (Heb 11:7)
- Abraham left his country, and went out after God, not knowing where he was going (Heb 11:8)
- Moses left a kingdom, and ran the wrath of the king, for the love he had for God and Christ.

The Apostle adds –

Heb 11:37-40 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats,

destitute, afflicted, mistreated— (38) of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (39) And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, (40) since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

This is fruit. This is the fruit of faith, the fruit of love, the fruit of repentance. It is the fruit which is found in the vineyard of the Lord –

- Peter left his father, boat, and nets (Matthew 4:18-20)
- The people of Ephesus brought their goods and possessions and cast it down at the apostles' feet (Acts 19). Others brought their books and burned them, occult books, though worth 50,000 pieces of silver.

This is fruit, it is the fruit of the Spirit. It is the fruit the Lord seeks and require.

Bunyan issues this sobering

challenge-

“Barren fig tree, the vineyard of the Lord has been a very fruitful place. *What are you doing here? What fruit do you bear? You are a cumber-ground.*”

Christ's Church is not Vanity Fair

Christ's church is not the world. It is not a social club where the various booths offer their wares to which barren fig trees are attracted. Think of it. If you removed from the typical local church:

- Parties for the youth
- Valentine's day dinners
- Christmas pageants
- July 4th picnics
- Campouts
- Cowboy Sunday
- Sportsmen's dinners

What would be left? Of course in themselves these activities are not sinful, but *when they become the thing that draws and keeps people in church, barren fig trees are going to be planted.* That is, unsaved people who are Christians

in name only will populate the church and eventually overrun it.

Lest you think I exaggerate, let's turn to God's Word. What is the church, the real body of Christ, like?

Act 2:42-47 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (43) And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. (44) And all who believed were together and had all things in common. (45) And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. (46) And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, (47) praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

And again-

Eph 2:19-22 So then you are no

longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, (20) built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, (21) in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. (22) In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

1Ti 4:11-16 Command and teach these things. (12) Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. (13) Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. (14) Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. (15) Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. (16) Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Act 6:4-7 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” (5) And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. (6) These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. (7) And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Act 20:18-20 And when they came to him, he said to them: “You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, (19) serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; (20) how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house,

Act 20:7 On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.

2Ti 4:1-2 I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: (2) preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

And we could go on and on and on. What must always be the focus of the local church? Do we see anywhere in God's Word that the Lord Jesus, or Paul or Peter or the rest of the apostles....well that they did this-

... And they devoted themselves to dynamic youth ministry, special event dinners, patriotic Sundays, summer campouts, barbeques....

A true church, a church that is a fruitful vineyard to the Lord,

bearing the fruit of the Spirit, is characterized by:

- The preaching of God's Word
- The observation of the ordinances of the Lord's table and baptism
- Church discipline

And you cannot read these Scriptures we have just quoted and not realize that these early believers gathered together out of love for the Lord, love for one another, and particularly *love for God's Word*. Central to the church, that instrument which the Holy Spirit blesses to the good of the body of Christ is, the ministry of God's Word. Paul told Timothy to give himself to it.

The barren fig tree is barren because such a person, the counterfeit, does not hunger and thirst for the Word of God. And when we as the church allow ourselves to be manipulated by such barren ones and we give in and start dishing up dainties that they find delectable, that feed their flesh but not the spirit, we put

ourselves on broadway and depart from the narrow way.

Listen carefully as I read just a portion of the 119th Psalm (it has 176 verses) and take special notice of what is the central theme:

Psa 119:97-136 Mem Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. (98) Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. (99) I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. (100) I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts. (101) I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word. (102) I do not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me. (103) How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (104) Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.

(105) Nun Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (106) I have sworn an oath and

confirmed it, to keep your righteous rules. (107) I am severely afflicted; give me life, O LORD, according to your word! (108) Accept my freewill offerings of praise, O LORD, and teach me your rules. (109) I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law. (110) The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts. (111) Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart. (112) I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end.

(113) Samekh I hate the double-minded, but I love your law. (114) You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in your word. (115) Depart from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commandments of my God. (116) Uphold me according to your promise, that I may live, and let me not be put to shame in my hope! (117) Hold me up, that I may be safe and have regard for your statutes continually! (118) You spurn all who go astray from your statutes, for their cunning is in vain. (119) All the wicked of the earth you

discard like dross, therefore I love your testimonies. (120) My flesh trembles for fear of you, and I am afraid of your judgments.

(121) Ayin I have done what is just and right; do not leave me to my oppressors. (122) Give your servant a pledge of good; let not the insolent oppress me. (123) My eyes long for your salvation and for the fulfillment of your righteous promise. (124) Deal with your servant according to your steadfast love, and teach me your statutes. (125) I am your servant; give me understanding, that I may know your testimonies! (126) It is time for the LORD to act, for your law has been broken. (127) Therefore I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold. (128) Therefore I consider all your precepts to be right; I hate every false way.

(129) Pe Your testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them. (130) The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple. (131) I open my mouth and pant, because I long for your commandments.

(132) Turn to me and be gracious to me, as is your way with those who love your name. (133) Keep steady my steps according to your promise, and let no iniquity get dominion over me. (134) Redeem me from man's oppression, that I may keep your precepts. (135) Make your face shine upon your servant, and teach me your statutes. (136) My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law.

You cannot miss it. A genuine Christian, a fruitful tree *craves for and loves the Word of God. Serve up anything else to him and he will be empty and the barren trees, the counterfeits, will increase.*

Here is a challenge in all this for self-examination. Why are you here? We must be honest – the Lord knows our hearts and motives already. Think of the parable. *Why was the barren fig tree in the vineyard of the Lord?* Well, he was a pretender. He professed to belong to Christ, but his lack of God's fruit betrayed his disguise.

Over the years, the Lord has been faithful to prune us so that we would be more fruitful –

Joh 15:1-6 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. (2) Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

(3) Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. (4) Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

(5) I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

(6) If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

We used to have “ministries” that in themselves were not sinful, but

nevertheless they were at least in part booths in Vanity Fair. They did not bear fruit. But as the years have gone by, the Lord pruned us. Increasingly He removed the barren fig trees and made us a place which is only going to be appealing to those who know Christ and hunger and thirst for His Word and for fellowship with His people.

And so He would ask us – *why are we here? Why are we in the vineyard of the Lord?* The barren fig tree has no good answer to that question. Such a person is there seeking prestige, seeking to disguise their sins, some even seeking to destroy.

I hope that each one of you here and all who are joining us from a distance can honestly say, “I love the Word of the Lord. I hunger and thirst for it. Christ is my light and my salvation. His words are sweet to me. God’s Word is a light to my path and a lamp to my feet to keep me in His way until I arrive safely home.