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The Words, Works, and Person of Christ The Gospel of Luke

The Barren Fig Tree (Part 9)

February 26, 2023

Sermon Text: Luke 13:6-9

Scripture Reading: Genesis 4:1-17

As we continue in our study of the Lord Jesus' parable of the Barren Fig Tree, focusing this morning on that terrible finality of the fruitless professor being once and for all cut down, it is vital for those who are truly in Christ to remember that *there is therefor now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus*. His Spirit in us does indeed bear fruit and the Lord is

pleased when He comes looking for fruit. Listen to these great words of reminder for real believers from John Calvin:

“The only way to have a peaceful conscience and to be able to call upon God freely, is through having the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ applied to our souls. It is this very sacrifice by which he made satisfaction for our sins, enabling God to call us his children.

Firstly, we need to consider the benefits of the sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is here that we see reconciliation between God and ourselves, instead of the separation which formerly existed. Although at one time God hated us, he now deigns to accept us into his love. Why?

Because our Lord Jesus Christ has

atoned for all our sins and transgressions by the obedience he rendered throughout his sufferings and death. The sacrifice he offered has made satisfaction for our sins. His blood has brought us cleansing and has washed away all our sinful stains.

This is how we can be sure that God will accept us. How can we be so bold as to call upon God and take refuge in him? By fixing our eyes upon the sacrifice that our Lord Jesus Christ offered up to God.

If we do not do this, then we will surely remain fearful when we consider the awesome majesty of God. For, being poor sinners, how can we do anything other than fear our Judge, who is armed ready to execute the judgment we deserve?

However, the Lord Jesus Christ has put away our sin, and we can now boldly approach God without hindrance. We must bear in mind here that the sacrifice by which our Lord Jesus has reconciled us to his Father is *all-sufficient*. We are to place all our trust in it and not seek

any other means of salvation.”
[John Calvin, Commentary on Galatians, Banner of Truth, pp 21-22]

This is the glory of the gospel of Christ – that He has effected full and complete payment for the sins of His people, and we must never be led into thinking that we must add something of our own to the blood of His Cross.

But for the fruitless professor, for the hypocrite who has pushed himself into the vineyard of the Lord and who resists all efforts to bring him to repentance, there remains condemnation. It is a primary purpose of this parable to strike holy fear into the Barren Fig Tree. Hear it once again:

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 Barren Fig Tree is not a rarity in the Lord’s visible church. In fact, in many local churches the majority and sometimes all are in fact counterfeits, fruitless ones under a delusion they are approved of by the Lord. And so it has been even from Old Testament times:

Heb 3:14-19 For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. (15) As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.” (16) For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? (17) And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? (18) And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to

those who were disobedient? (19) So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

There are then Barren Trees, Fruitless Professors, who will be cut down and thrown into the fire, which of course, is hell. After all of the Lord’s attempts to bring them to repentance, after all of the patient grace He blessed them with, still they remain barren and hardened in heart. Therefore they perish forever.

Now, let’s look more closely at some examples from Scripture which reveals this truth to us which John Bunyan spent time to carefully show us:

God ends the day of grace with some Barren Trees before He actually takes them out of the world.

That is to say, there are people who are still living in this present world whose time to repent has ended. The editor of Bunyan’s treatise included a footnote in regard to this fact:

living, scalding lead.””

God ended the day of grace for Francis Spira, before He actually removed Spira from this world. This is the fearful truth we must consider and hear clearly.

The Case of Cain

Gen 4:8-12 Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. (9) Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?” (10) And the LORD said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.

(11) And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. (12) When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.”

Now, carefully consider Cain. Cain lived in a cursed creation, the son

“This is referred to in the Pilgrim, at the Interpreter’s house, by the representation of a man in an iron cage, who says, ‘I cannot get out, O now I cannot!’ The awful account of Spira’s despair [Francis Spira, 1548, an apostate and of whom a poem entitled ‘Fearful Estate of Francis Spira’ was written], must have made a strong impression upon Bunyan’s mind :

‘Here see a soul that’s all despair; a man All hell; a spirit all wounds, who can A wounded spirit bear?

Reader, would you see, what may you never feel, Despair, racks, torments, whips of burning steel!

Behold the man’s the furnace, in whose heart Sin has created hell; O in each part What flames appear;

His thoughts all strings; words, swords; Brimstone in his breath; His eyes flames, wishes curses, life a death;

A thousand deaths live in him, he not dead; a breathing corpse in

of the first couple and brother of Abel. Cain was a religious man.

Gen 4:2-5 And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. (3) In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, (4) and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, (5) but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

And yet, unlike the faith of his brother, Cain's religion was counterfeit and barren. Though he brought fruit of the ground for an offering, there was no heart-fruit in him. His heart was not right before God and therefore his religion and offering was repugnant to the Lord.

Two brothers coming to church. Two brothers bringing offerings. Yet only one was genuine, the other a counterfeit in the Lord's vineyard.

1Jn 3:12 We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

Now, consider this evident truth:

“In that day that he did this act the heavens were closed up against him... ‘And now you are cursed from the earth which has opened her mouth to receive your brother's blood from you hand.’” [Bunyan]

Of course there are no words of repentance still from Cain – his only concern was ‘My punishment is greater than I can bear....Behold you have driven me out this day from the face of the earth, and from your face shall I be hid.’ Cain became a man in the iron cage, yet while he still lived upon this earth.

Gen 4:16-17 Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. (17) Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the

name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch.

Cain accomplished great things. He lived for many years. He had a family. And yet he was finally cursed by God. The Barren Tree had been cut down.

What fearful and sobering truth we are warned by here. *Just because a person still lives in this world does not mean that their time to repent, their day of grace, still applies.* The Barren Tree can be successful in this world, can even appear to be blessed by God because of their prosperity, they can be accomplished intellectually and rise to eminent position – Cain built a city! And yet they are the man in the iron cage.

“Yet after this Cain lived long. Cutting down (removal from this world) was not come yet; after this he lived to marry a wife, to beget a cursed brood, to build a city, and what else I do not know of; all of which surely was not done in a short time, and therefore Cain most probably lived after his day of

grace had ended, several hundreds of years (Gen 4:10-17).” [Bunyan]

Worldly success is NOT a certain sign of God’s blessing! It is not a seal of His approval. Many blasphemers who have achieved high position and status in the world are just like Cain – doomed now to hell even as they live.

Do you hear this warning, Barren Fig Tree? Do you hear Cain’s words when grace was no longer his – ever again?

“My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth...”

Never again to have any hope of heaven. For all eternity – even right now at this very moment – Cain is in hell saying this same lament over and over and over – *my punishment is greater than I can bear.* And yet he *shall* bear it. Forever and ever and ever.

Does anyone listening doubt this? Do you question the Lord's justice? Do you entertain the thought that Cain's punishment is too cruel, too extreme? If so, be very, very careful. Repent of those thoughts – they come from Satan with the intent of sending you off to join Cain!

But then, is Cain the only example in Scripture of a Barren Tree cut down even while still living in this world? No, there are many more:

The Barren Fig Tree Named Ishmael

Gen 17:24-25 Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. (25) And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

Gen 21:8-21 And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. (9) **But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne**

to Abraham, laughing. (10) So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac." (11) And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son.

(12) But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. (13) And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring." (14) So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. (15) When the water in the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes. (16) Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, "Let me not look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her

voice and wept. (17) And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. (18) Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation.”

(19) Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. (20) And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. (21) He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Though Ishmael was in a favored position in many ways – he was circumcised and thus had the mark of God’s covenant, his father was Abraham – yet he despised his brother Isaac. We know from the Apostle Paul in fact that Ishmael persecuted Isaac:

Gal 4:25-30 Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. (26) But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. (27) For it is written, “Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.”

(28) Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. (29) **But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit**, so also it is now. (30) But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.”

Ishmael was a one who professed to be of the covenant people of God. But “for all of his religion, he would scoff at those who were better than himself” [Bunyan] And once more the Apostle Paul tells us that when Abraham and Sarah cast

out Ishmael, it was the Lord casting him out from among the true people of God – from those who were children of the promise. Ishmael’s people, like his mother Hagar, were the Egyptians.

Notice now when this casting out occurred. Ishmael was *13 years old when he was circumcised*. The next year, Isaac was born so that Ishmael was then 14. Isaac was weaned when Abraham gave the feast where Ishmael mocked Isaac and was cast out for it.

Therefore, Ishmael’s day of grace ended, he as a barren tree was cut down, when he was just no more than 18 years of age.

Like J.C. Ryle’s address to children “The Two Bears” – so we have here the Lord’s warning to children and young people again. Just because a person is a youth or even a child *does not mean that they are not capable of sinning with finality, of despising the Lord’s grace to the point that Ishmael did and like him becoming the man in the iron cage.*

Heb 3:12-13 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. (13) But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

And consider:

Rom 1:28-32 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, **God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.** (29) They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, (30) slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, **disobedient to parents,** (31) foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. (32) Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

We love to have children and

young people here to be able to hear the gospel and we pray that they all come to faith in Christ, and that is why we announce God's warnings from Scripture. Because we have seen, over these years, more than one young person – *even from their earliest years* – be mockers of the Lord, liars, disobedient to parents, despising the Lord Himself. Some the Lord has removed from this life by death, both physical and spiritual, while others He has handed over to their sin. They are Ishmaels and those who still live in this present life show every evidence of having their day of grace ended. They sat here in this church year after year, hearing God's Word, being urged to humble themselves before the Lord – but they would not. *Do not join them. Call upon the Lord to save you and make you a real, fruitful tree in His vineyard.*

Parents and grandparents – do not make the terrible mistake of communicating to your children and their children that *just because they are children, childish sins are somehow not serious and that God overlooks them like some kindly*

heavenly grandpa. He does not. Children need to know about hell and about God's wrath against all unholiness and wickedness just as much as they need to know about salvation in Christ.

One final note on Ishmael from Bunyan –

“Beware, you young barren professors! Now, Ishmael lived 119 years after this, enjoying great tranquility and honor with men. After being cast out, he fathered 12 great princes, even after his day of grace was past. But he was dead, though he lived.

Take care. Take care what people you admire in this life. Success in this fallen world is not something to be chased after. How many young people jealously crave after greatness just like they see in celebrities on social media. Listen, if we dress like the world, talk like the world, value what the world values, then be sure that we are on Broadway, the road to hell.

1Jn 2:15-17 Do not love the world

or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. (17) And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

And what of Esau? To the warning of his life we will plan to turn next time.