

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

www.sermonaudio.com/crc

www.unholycharade.com (blog)

www.lightfordarktimes.com (blog)

Christ Reformation Church – YouTube Channel (Light for Dark Times)

The Words, Works, and Person of Christ

The Gospel of Luke

The Barren Fig Tree (Part 10)

March 5th, 2023

Sermon Text: Luke 13:6-9

Scripture Reading: Genesis
25:19-34

This morning we come to still another Barren Fig Tree which was finally cut down by the Lord. Though he was cut down, he still lived in this present world and accomplished feats which on their face would have appeared impressive. Yet he was a reprobate. He was damned while he yet lived. He was, as Bunyan pictured him, *the man in the iron cage*.

Now, said Christian, let me go hence. Nay, stay, said the Interpreter, till I have shewed thee a little more, and after that thou shalt go on thy way. So he took him by the hand again, and led him into a very dark room, where there sat a man in an iron cage.

Now the man, to look on, seemed very sad; he sat with his eyes looking down to the ground, his hands folded together, and he sighed as if he would break his heart. Then said Christian, What means this? At which the Interpreter bid him talk with the man. Then said Christian to the man, What art thou? The man answered, I am what I was not once.

CHR. What wast thou once?

MAN. The man said, I was once a fair and flourishing professor, both

in mine own eyes, and also in the eyes of others; I once was, as I thought, fair for the Celestial City, and had then even joy at the thoughts that I should get thither. [Luke 8:13]

CHR. Well, but what art thou now?

MAN. I am now a man of despair, and am shut up in it, as in this iron cage. I cannot get out. Oh, now I cannot!

CHR. But how camest thou in this condition?

MAN. I left off to watch and be sober. I laid the reins, upon the neck of my lusts; I sinned against the light of the Word and the goodness of God; I have grieved the Spirit, and he is gone; I tempted the devil, and he is come to me; I have provoked God to anger, and he has left me: I have so hardened my heart, that I cannot repent.

Then said Christian to the Interpreter, But is there no hope for such a man as this? Ask him, said the Interpreter. Nay, said Christian, pray, Sir, do you.

INTER. Then said the Interpreter, Is there no hope, but you must be kept in the iron cage of despair?

MAN. No, none at all.

INTER. Why, the Son of the Blessed is very pitiful.

MAN. I have crucified him to myself afresh [Heb. 6:6]; I have despised his person [Luke 19:14]; I have despised his righteousness; I have “counted his blood an unholy thing”; I have “done despite to the Spirit of grace”. [Heb. 10:28-29] Therefore I have shut myself out of all the promises, and there now remains to me nothing but threatenings, dreadful threatenings, fearful threatenings, of certain judgement and fiery indignation, which shall devour me as an adversary.

INTER. For what did you bring yourself into this condition?

MAN. For the lusts, pleasures, and profits of this world; in the enjoyment of which I did then promise myself much delight; but now every one of those things also bite me, and gnaw me like a burning worm.

INTER. But canst thou not now repent and turn?

MAN. God hath denied me repentance. His Word gives me no encouragement to believe; yea, himself hath shut me up in this iron cage; nor can all the men in the

world let me out. O eternity, eternity! how shall I grapple with the misery that I must meet with in eternity!

INTER. Then said the Interpreter to Christian, Let this man's misery be remembered by thee, and be an everlasting caution to thee.

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

Interpreter's words to Christian here clearly state the reason we are spending time on this subject of the Barren Fig Tree in our Lord's parable. *Let this man's misery be remembered by you and be an everlasting caution to you.*

Last time we saw two such sorry men – Cain and Ishmael. Those two refused God's blessing, God's covenant, and God's Son. They did so ultimately and finally so that the Lord of the vineyard cut them down. And so it was with this third one – this man named *Esau* –

Heb 12:15-17 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; (16) that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. (17) For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

What was Esau's final sin which brought the Lord's axe down upon him? It was this matter of the birthright and his trading it away for a bowl of stew.

Gen 25:30-34 And Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!" (Therefore his name was called Edom.) (31) Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright now." (32) Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" (33) Jacob said, "Swear to me now." So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. (34) Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he

ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Listen to Bunyan comment:

“Esau also was a professor (a claim to be a believer, a claim to be an heir of Abraham). He was born to Isaac, and circumcised according to the custom. Esau was a huntsman, a man of the field; also he was wedded to his lusts, which he did also strive to keep, rather than the birthright. He sold his birthright to Jacob, his brother. This birthright *had the promise and blessing annexed to it...And so the ending of Esau’s day of grace is to be reckoned from his selling of his birthright. But Esau sold his birthright long before his death.*

Twenty years after this, Jacob was still with Laban, and when Jacob returned home, Esau met him (see Genesis 31 and 32). Further, both Jacob and Esau buried their father Isaac when he died. And so it is quite probable that Esau lived for some 80 years after he sold his

birthright, and yet all that while his day of grace was gone.”

NOTE: [from the editor of Bunyan’s treatise]. “Bunyan himself had been haunted with the temptation to sell and part with Christ and under a fear that he had fallen under that temptation, so that the case of Esau made a dreadful impression upon his soul; extreme horror and anguish seized upon his spirit; he was like a man bereft of life and bound over to eternal punishment for two years. But at length, after an awful storm, he found peace in the promise, ‘his blood cleanseth from ALL sins,’ and a proof that he had not sold Christ. See *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*]

The Birthright

Just what was this birthright which Esau despised? It must have been far more than just the elder son’s right to be the father’s heir as far as some earthly estate goes. And so it was.

God had made *The Promise* to Abraham:

Gen 15:1-6 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” (2) But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” (3) And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.” (4) And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” (5) And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” (6) And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

And to help us understand further what this Promise was, the Apostle Paul writes:

Rom 4:13-25 For the promise to

Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. (14) For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. (15) For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

(16) That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, (17) as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

(18) In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” (19) He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred

years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. (20) No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, (21) fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

(22) That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.”

(23) But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, (24) but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, (25) who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

The Promise, in other words, *is the gospel by which we are saved*. It is God’s Promise to Abraham that through him, God would bring a “seed,” a descendant, through whom people from all nations of the earth would be Abraham’s descendants, *and thus, Abraham’s heirs*. The Promise in other words, *was the Lord Jesus Christ who would come and effect salvation for*

His people who would be His people by faith.

That is to say, the Promise to Abraham was that one day, the Son of God would come into this world, effect redemption and forgiveness of sins for all who believe in Him, causing them to be born again and made the children of Abraham. And guess what? Anyone who is a child of Abraham is *Abraham’s heir!!* That means we become heirs of the Promise. We become heirs because we are joined to THE Seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ.

Rom 8:14-17 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. (15) For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” (16) The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, (17) **and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ**, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Heirs of what? *Heirs of salvation, of forgiveness of sins, of the New Heavens and Earth, of Eternal Life, of all the blessings God gives us in Christ.*

That is why you have this language repeated over and over in the New Testament (and really in the OT too)-

Eph 3:6 This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow **heirs**, members of the same body, and partakers of **the promise** in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Gal 3:13-14 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— (14) so that in Christ Jesus **the blessing of Abraham** might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive **the promised Spirit** through faith.

Eph 1:13-14 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with

the promised Holy Spirit, (14) who is **the guarantee of our inheritance** until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Esau Despised it All

Now can you see the finality and wickedness of Esau’s sin? He trampled on the blood of Christ. He despised Christ. He considered the Promise to be a cheap, disposable thing not worth a bowl of stew. He knew. He knew about the Promise. He knew about being heir to it as eldest son of Isaac. But he could care less.

Can you now begin to see how a person can be an Esau today and why Hebrews gives us a sober warning not to be like him? Anyone who regards this present world to be preferable to Christ, anyone whose love is fixed upon indulging their own appetites and preferences instead of upon Christ, is headed down the same road as Esau, and it ends in hell. And it is only the patient mercy of God that the axe has not yet fallen upon

them – and upon some it already has. There are people in this world right now who are the man in the iron cage, who are Esau for whom repentance is impossible because God has withdrawn it from them.

“Ease and peace, and a prosperous life in outward circumstance is no sign of the favor of God to a barren and fruitless professor, but rather of His wrath; that thereby such a person might be capable of treasuring up more wrath against the day of wrath. Let his serve for the proof of the proposition: *That the day of grace ends with some people before God takes them out of this world.*” [Bunyan]

Think carefully on this. How many such people right at this very moment are thinking this:

Luk 12:19-20 And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” (20) But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’

This very night. *This very night...* No Barren Fig Tree, no hypocrite who has pushed himself into Christ’s vineyard, can dare presume he has time. Has he heard God’s Word for years? Has he tasted of the heavenly gift by being among Christ’s people? These are the blessings of the vinedresser who digs around the tree and fertilizes the ground *one more year*, and which if rejected only result in more condemnation. Right now, Esau *finds no chance to repent, though he seeks for it with tears – not tears of repentance, but tears of agony and torment. And he will continue in such a state forever and ever and ever.*

Therefore, just as the Lord Jesus told us soberly – *Remember Lot’s wife* – so He would have us *Remember Esau, the man in the iron cage.*

Heb 6:4-8 For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, (5) and have

tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, (6) and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

(7) For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. (8) But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.