

The Parable of the Fig Tree; Healing a Crippled Woman

Luke 13:1-17

Luke 13:1-9: There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? 3 I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. 4 Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." 6 He also spoke this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. 7 Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?' 8 But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. 9 And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.'"

Background Notes

At the end of Luke 12, the Lord placed a great emphasis on the importance of getting right with God before it's too late. This is true for everyone, but in the context the Lord was addressing the Jewish people, many of whom were religiously proud and innocent. All have sinned. All need to repent. In fact, tragic events should be a wake-up call for people to repent and self-righteous like the scribes and Pharisees, thinking that they did not need to repent.

The Lord refuted such thinking with His comments on two tragic events that had recently happened in Israel. One was the atrocity in which Pilate, for an unknown reason, had slaughtered some worshipers who had come to Jerusalem from Galilee to sacrifice at the Temple. The other tragedy was the collapse of a tower, and 18 people were killed. To the self-righteous person's way of thinking, the people who were killed in such a way were not innocent - they certainly must have been killed as a punishment for being greater sinners than everyone else!

Many people make that same judgment today when tragic events happen. What's the Lord's answer to such thinking? No one is to get right with God before it's too late. Most of the people whom the Lord was specifically addressing here did not repent. Along with the rest of the nation, they did indeed perish in the tragic event of Rome's destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. The Lord illustrated this teaching with the Parable of the Fig Tree.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Parable of the Fig Tree predicted the future of Israel.

It doesn't take much to thinking to correctly interpret the overall meaning of this parable. Remember this is a parable, not just an illustration. In a parable, the different items represent specific things. In this parable, the fig tree represents Israel. In the Old Testament, the fig tree often was used to represent Israel. Hosea 9:10 - *"I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first fruits on the fig tree in its first season."*

As the man in the parable came looking for fruit on the fig tree but did not find any fruit, so the Lord came looking for spiritual fruit in Israel but did not find any fruit. The three years in the parable obviously represent the three years in our Lord's ministry. The extra year probably represents the extended period of grace that was given to Israel even after they crucified their Messiah. They now had the evidence of the resurrection, and the gospel was preached to the Jews first before going out to the Gentile nations. Peter preached to the Jews in Acts 3:19-20, *"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before."* In other words, Peter was telling the nation of Israel: Even though you rejected the Messiah at first, if you show the fruits of repentance now, God in His grace will send Christ back - and the times of refreshing and restoration will come! But as a nation, Israel continued to reject Jesus as the Messiah, and in 70AD the "fig tree was cut down."

In context, of course, the parable refers specifically to Israel and their rejection of Christ at that time, but it certainly has a practical application for today as well. Every individual who does not exhibit the fruit of repentance by coming to Jesus Christ for salvation from sin will be judged and cut down by the Lord Himself. The Parable of the Fig Tree predicted the future of Israel.

2. The healing of the crippled woman exposed the hypocrisy of Israel.

Verses 10-17: Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. 11 And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up. 12 But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, "Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity." 13 And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. 14 But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd, "There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day." 15 The Lord then answered him and said, "Hypocrite! [b] Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? 16 So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?" 17 And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.

The healing of this crippled woman exposed the hypocrisy of Israel, but the miracle also portrayed the spiritual condition of Israel. All the miracles of the Lord Jesus were demonstrations of the power of God, but they were also designed to teach. Usually the context of the miracle helps determine the teaching of the miracle. The context here is the sinful hypocrisy of the nation of Israel. The nation was spiritually fruitless and thus was spiritually crippled. So in the context of this chapter, the nation of Israel is not only represented by the parable of the fruitless fig tree, but also by the crippled woman of this healing miracle.

The good news here is that the Lord referred to the woman as a “daughter of Abraham,” and she was healed. Thus she specifically represents the future “godly remnant” of Jews who will turn to the Lord out of crippled Israel. There was a godly remnant of Jews during our Lord’s day. They repented and turned out of crippled Judaism to the Lord. In a coming day there will be a spiritual restoration of Israel, when many people in the crippled nation turn to the Lord in faith and prove that they are *true* children of Abraham.

Notice again, by the way, that demonic forces can be involved in certain physical problems - not just psychological and emotional problems (v11,16). But don’t jump to the conclusion that all physical problems are caused by demons. That is not taught in the Bible.

Notice, too, how the sovereign grace of God is emphasized in this miracle. The Lord saw the woman, called her, and healed her by speaking just the word. The fact that she was called a “daughter of Abraham” shows that she had responded in faith to the sovereign grace of God. So it is in our salvation, and so it will be in the salvation of Israel in the future.

The Lord used this wonderful healing miracle to expose the hypocrisy of the proud and self-righteous opponents in the synagogue. They cared more for the welfare of their animals than for a poor woman who had been handicapped for 18 years! The healing of the crippled woman exposed the hypocrisy of Israel.

Practical Application

1. Use tragic events as an opportunity to teach the Word.

Our Lord used tragic events to teach, as we see here in the tragic events of Pilate’s slaughter of the innocent Galileans and the tragic event of the people who were killed by the collapse of the Tower of Siloam. Whenever tragic events occur, people will ask “Why?” - and the “why” is ultimately directed against God. Thus Christians will be called on to give an answer. Isn’t that exactly what happens after an earthquake, or a tsunami, or the terrorist attack of 9/11? People ask “Why?” It happens all the time, and generally speaking, they’re really asking, “Why did God allow it?” So Christians are called upon to give an answer. The Bible gives a number of answers, including the one that our Lord gave here in Luke

13. Tragic events are a wake-up call for unbelievers everywhere to get right with God. Use tragic events as an opportunity to teach the Word.

2. Don't be a space waster!

In the Parable of the Fig Tree, the owner said to the vineyard keeper, *"For three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?"* Why waste the ground? The Living Bible vividly captures the situation: *"A man planted a fig tree in his garden and came again and again to see if he could find any fruit on it, but he was always disappointed. Finally, he told his gardener to cut it down, 'I've waited three years, and there hasn't been a single fig! Why bother with it any longer. It's taking up space we can use for something else.'"*

In the parable, the fig tree represented fruitless Israel that had to be cut down – and indeed Israel was cut down in 70AD. We also saw that there is a personal application for "professing" Christians - unbelievers who prove their unbelief by no fruit.

There's a personal application here for believers as well. If we're not bearing fruit for the Lord, we're just taking up space. The Lord may have to shelve us, or even take us home to heaven early if we're just getting in the way. Others will have to do the job the Lord called us to do. So don't neglect your spiritual gift. Use it or lose it! Don't just take up space in the Kingdom. Don't be a space waster.