

Are You Bearing Fruit?

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Luke 13:1-9 1 Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? 3 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 4 Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them-- do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." 6 Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. 7 So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 8 "'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

This week a political candidate stated that he thought Jesus would be appalled at the selfishness of Americans and our willingness to go to war. There was no mention that we have legalized abortion for the sake of convenience or destroy embryos for stem cell research or practice so-called mercy killings on those we deem not worth living. He was invoking the name of Jesus to support his political ambitions and further his agenda.

So that begs the question: **Whose side is God on?** We ask ourselves that before an election, don't we? Or what about when we consider the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Whose side is God on? Is it God's desire that anyone perish?

Six weeks ago in India, I stood on the shores where the water went inland almost a mile from the beach – I thought of the devastation that occurred on the other side of the Bay of Bengal in Indonesia. Somewhere in the neighborhood of 300,000 people perished in that Tsunami. Did God hate them? Did He have it in for them? Were they such terrible sinners that God decided to wipe them out with this natural disaster. Or what about the 3000 who died five years ago when those towers fell in New York City? Were they being punished? [Examples for Headlines of today's paper???] Should we conclude that God was punishing these people? Why did they die and you are still alive?

People are often quick to assume that an untimely death is punishment for evil or that your own long life is a reward for goodness. That ain't necessarily so!

The truth from God's Word tells us that all have sinned and fallen short of what God desires. All sin deserves eternal condemnation. The sins of those who die in tragedies are no worse than any of yours. You are just as deserving of death and punishment.

Sometimes when things go wrong in your life you may have asked, “What did I do wrong to deserve this? Why is God punishing me?” Those were the same kinds of questions being asked and considered at the beginning of today’s Gospel lesson. Why are some punished and others are not? It was as if they were trying to compare themselves to those who had died tragically, like the child who describes the bad behavior of another child in hopes that, by comparison, he or she will look much better. Did Jesus answer their questions? No, He wasn’t about to play that game. Instead, He told the askers to **REPENT** or they would perish. He brought up another instance when bad things happened to good people, a tower falling on them, and repeated His earlier warning: *unless you repent, you too will all perish!*

I think one of the lessons here is for us not to assume we know the mind of God in matters about which He has not spoken in His Word. Don’t try to analyze God or declare you know what He thinks about things.

Isaiah 40:13 Who has understood the mind of the Lord, or instructed him as his counselor?

We need to be very cautious before we attempt to put words into God’s mouth! What we can do, however, is share and discuss and talk about what God has already said, what He has shared with us in His Word. Today we are considering what Jesus said in Luke 13. I already mentioned that he said, “**Repent** or you will perish.” But then He tells a parable about a fig tree that encourages patience. **How do these two things, REPENTANCE and PATIENCE, go together?** Let’s consider the parable and then we’ll come back to that question.

A vineyard owner planted a fig tree in order to have something other than just grapes. It was taking up valuable land, so naturally the owner expected a crop, a return from this tree. It says there was no crop for three years. The owner was obviously an impatient man. In Leviticus, there was a warning about this.

Leviticus 19:23-26 When you enter the land and plant any kind of fruit tree, regard its fruit as forbidden. For three years you are to consider it forbidden; it must not be eaten. In the fourth year all its fruit will be holy, an offering of praise to the Lord. But in the fifth year you may eat its fruit. In this way your harvest will be increased. I am the Lord your God.

Even if there was fruit, you were not supposed to eat it. And the fruit in the fourth year was supposed to go to God. But this owner was not going to wait that long. He had little patience for an unproductive tree occupying valuable land, and orders it cut down.

Despite being a servant, the gardener defends the tree and requests one more year. However, this year would not be the same as previous years. This would be a year of special care and attention. The gardener offers to nurture the tree by digging around it and putting manure on it. He concludes with this practical advice, ***“If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.”*** (Luke 13:9) He is asking for patience. Not unlimited patience, but a little more time.

In this parable, the owner is God the Father. The fig tree is people. The Gardener is Jesus, pleading for and tending to the trees that have not borne the fruit of repentance. Jesus has every right to plead for mercy for you. He has already paid the penalty your sins deserve. He earned forgiveness for you and everyone else when He offered His perfect life as the final and only acceptable sacrifice to appease God’s anger over sin. That is why He can plead your case, asking for mercy and patience. And there will be patience, but it will not last forever. There will come a time when that patience runs out – the unrepentant will perish, the tree will be cut down.

What is at the heart of the matter here is for you to consider your relationship to God! You have a daily need to repent, to admit and acknowledge your sins, to turn from them, and to trust God’s promise of forgiveness. Lent is a time for repentance. It is not a time for you to judge others. It is a time for you to evaluate your own life! How are you doing? Are you living the new life? Are you living for Jesus? To repent is to change direction, but that can be difficult. Old habits can be difficult to break, even when the new behavior might bring health and vitality. Change is difficult. And ultimately, fruit is expected.

But as we all know, change takes time. Clearly, Jesus expects repentance and changed behavior. John the Baptizer had told the people to “bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matthew 3:8). Lent is a reminder to change your ways so you might bear fruit which pleases God. But change is difficult, even if it God who is guiding the change. Fortunately, God is a patient God.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

That is how REPENTANCE and PATIENCE go together.

However, don't be lulled into thinking that you have plenty of time to bear fruit. You don't know how much time you have left. God has called you, each of you, to produce fruit. So what are you doing?

- **What fruit are you bearing here at Grace?** Are you involved in one of the ministries, some area of service, or are you a pew sitter? What would God have you do to bear fruit here at Grace?
- **What fruit are you bearing outside of this congregation?** Are you part of a group or organization that is trying to bear fruit for your heavenly Father? I can let you know of one need in particular. The Texoma Pro-Life association is trying to provide an ongoing Pro-Life witness outside Planned Parenthood when they are open. Could you stand (or even sit) out there one or two hours a week with someone else, holding a sign reminding people that God wants them to choose life for their children? If you think you'd be willing to do this, let me know and I'll put you in touch with the right people.
- Are you bearing fruit by providing a witness through your daily living, actions, speaking? If you were put on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?
- And don't forget to nurture your faith. Attend a small group study to be fed and filled and strengthened for living for Jesus. If you are not part of a small group, start one. Volunteer to let them meet in your home. Get together to be fed spiritually.

Here is what Jesus wants each of you to ask yourself and consider: **How is your life different because of your faith in Christ?** Are you bearing fruit for him?

As we look at this parable today, and a few more parables in the coming weeks, there is another question I want each of you to consider. **With whom do you identify in this parable?** Do you see yourself as a fruitless tree, or one that is bearing fruit? How do other people see you? How would the owner of the vineyard see you?

Hear God's call to repent. Acknowledge your failures and sins. Own up to them. Only then will you truly and fully appreciate what Jesus did by coming to this world, taking all sin upon Himself, and paying your penalty with His perfect life hung on a cross.