

Living on Borrowed Time

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Date: 20 November 2022

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[0 : 00] Well, friends, we can turn back to the chapter that we read together, the Gospel of Luke, chapter 13. We can read together verses 6 to 9.

Luke 13, verse 6, where we read of the parable of the barren fig tree. And he told this disciple, And he answered him, Sir, let it alone this year also until I dig around it and put on manure.

Then, if it should bear fruit next year, well and good. But if not, you can cut it down. It's nice to see young ones with us here tonight.

Before we look at this parable together, I have some questions. So you need to be listening carefully through the sermon just to see if you can find the answers to these questions.

Question number one. What was the name of the tower that fell on 18 people?

[1 : 42] That's question number one. The name of the tower that fell on 18 people. Question number two. We're going to be looking at the fig tree.

What does the fig tree represent? What is the fig tree a picture of? Or who is the fig tree a picture of?

And then the last question. Name three parts of the fruit of the Spirit. Three parts of the fruit of the Spirit.

And don't worry, I'll give you a little clue. Hopefully, I'll remember to give you a little clue when we're coming up to the answers to these questions. So tonight, friends, we're going to think about the parable of the barren fig tree.

A parable that is as relevant to us here tonight as the day it was inspired by the Holy Spirit. God's Word is always relevant and speaks to us where we're at and when we're at, whatever age or generation we find ourselves in.

[2 : 54] And of course, different generations have different focuses. Different generations even have different ways of expressing themselves.

There are many sayings nowadays that even myself wasn't familiar with when I was young. People tell us that we should be living our best life.

People say that we should try and be the best version of ourselves. We're to live our best lives.

We're to be the best version of ourselves. And how are we to do this? Well, the media would portray that we're to achieve all of our dreams and all of our aspirations.

When we do all of these things that we've aspired to do, perhaps from a young age, we're then living our best life.

[3 : 56] Others would say that we are the best version of ourselves by lifting our heads high, by being proud of who we are and what we are.

And this is how we are to be the best version of ourselves. But friends, I would like to argue that if this is how we're trying to be the best version of ourselves, we're missing a trick.

And in fact, I would say that society as a whole tonight is not only missing a trick, but missing the whole point of life.

You see, really, to live our best life out, a reference point, it simply has to be the one who gives us life in the first place.

To be the best version of ourselves, we need to be in tune with the one who created us, who made us ourselves in the first place.

[4 : 58] And you know, tonight, friends, although it might not on the surface appear this way, Jesus, in this parable, what he does is, this short parable, he shows what needs to happen for us to live our best life and be the best version of ourselves.

And who doesn't want that? Who doesn't want that? So what I'd like us to do is just very briefly think of this very short parable under three headings.

Firstly, the context that the parable finds itself in. And then the care that the writer of the parable shows towards the listener, and also to you and to me tonight.

And then lastly, the conclusion for the person who reads this parable, the conclusion for you and for me.

The context, the care, and the conclusion. Firstly, then, let's look at the context of this parable. And what we see here in this section of Luke is that Jesus, as he often did, he's addressing the crowds, the masses, those who are gathering around him, who are looking to see him perform miracles to heal the sick, and so on and so forth.

[6 : 19] But what we see here is that Jesus is specifically addressing the Jewish people, Israel itself, his own chosen people.

They were, of course, a blessed people. A people who were saturated in religious privileges. A people who have had the Word of God, growing up with a Word of God in their heads, but perhaps not in their hearts.

And we see that the Word of God hasn't made its way to their hearts, because they are an actual fact. And the main part, those who've turned their back on Jesus.

And not only turned their back on Jesus, but are actively seeking to trip him up and bring him down. Now, we might not be in that category tonight, friends, but the reality is, as Scripture tells us, if we're not for him, we are against him.

There is no middle ground. And what we see here, friends, is that, as we look from the beginning of the chapter, chapter 13, we see that as Israel, they were a people who had such a distorted view of who God was.

[7 : 36] How do we know that? Well, we see that as they reflect upon the Galileans there, they are thinking that somehow the Galileans were killed because they were worse than other Galileans.

They adopted this idea that bad things happen to bad people. And here's an answer to one of the questions, that the 18 people on which the Tower of Siloam fell, that somehow they were deserving this more than anyone else.

And there's a problem, there's a big problem with this way of thinking. And it's a way of thinking that's infiltrated, even dare I say it, the church. That when natural disasters happen in some countries, and so on and so forth, that this is punishment on a country for some particular sin.

Perhaps God does do that. But that's not our place to judge. Because with such a way of thinking, friends, by implication, if we think that bad things happen to bad people, by implication, what we're saying is that there are good people.

That we ourselves are good. And somehow we are abdicating ourselves from that category of those who are bad.

[9 : 07] And of course, that is not only a distorted view of God, but also a distorted view of ourselves.

Because if we were to take this way of thinking to its logical conclusion, the reality is that every single nation should be punished every single day, because every single person in that nation is sinning against a holy God.

We are all sinners by nature and by practice. And that's why Jesus responds in the way that he does. Let's look at verse 2.

And he answered, Do you think that Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered in this way?

No, I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those 18 on whom the town in Siloam fell and killed him, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?

[10 : 14] No, I tell you, unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. In other words, it doesn't matter who you are or what you've done or not done.

Unless you and me with you, unless we repent, we are all going to eternally perish. And it's at this point we refer back to that phrase, living our best life.

We might be tempted in our hearts to say, well, it's no wonder that people tonight do not believe in God, because all we see in him is judgment and death and destruction.

There's no life. There's no joy. There's no hope. And of course, again, that's nothing but a distorted view of God. And that's where our parable comes into play.

Because in order to illustrate the actual nature of who God is, yes, God is a God of judgment. That is true. But that comes under the greater bracket of him being a God of love.

[11 : 25] And in order to illustrate who he is, what Jesus does is he shares the parable of the fig tree. A parable that when we read it, we might be discouraged by it.

A parable whose language may fill our minds with wrong views of who God is. This language of cutting it down.

It seems harsh. It seems drastic. But of course, again, there's such a view of God, even in this parable, it keeps coming back to the fact that we have such a wrong view of ourselves.

What do I mean by this? This is important just for us to understand who God is. You might be here tonight or online, and you're not a Christian.

And yet, what part does Jesus have in your life? Let's just think about it. He has given us a place.

[12 : 25] The Lord has given us a place in this world. He's given us opportunity to live and to thrive. In our corner of the world, we're blessed so far at least with food to eat and clothes to wear, homes to live, and all these temporal blessings.

And more than that, he's given us free access to the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. He's given us that opportunity to see beyond time to the endless ages of eternity and to share in that ourselves.

And as we find ourselves in this world, we might reflect upon ourselves as good people.

We're those who are kind to our neighbors. We don't break the law. We're no way indulgent in our lives. Our lives aren't out of control. And so we formulate, we might not be professing Christians, but we formulate this view that we are good people.

And so when we look around and we see natural disasters, we wonder, we wonder, why do bad things happen to good people?

[13 : 40] And of course, we need to pause there, friends, just for a moment. And we need to get perspective. Because as we reflect upon the opinion of the majority of people tonight, we begin to get a glimpse into the sinful heart of man and woman.

And as we get that glimpse, we ask the question, as you live your life in creation, as you enjoy all these blessings that are yours, where does the Creator fit into your life?

This is where perspective has to come in. Where does the Creator fit into your life? In the fabric of your life, where is God?

This is a searching question. But it's good to have searching questions, friends, because if we don't have that which challenges us, we never grow.

I was a teacher before I was a minister. And of course, for the children to be better at maths or better at English, you give them something that is slightly trickier for them to understand.

[14 : 55] And so it is with God's Word. It's always challenging us. It doesn't leave us in one place, but rather it seeks to enable us to grow in knowledge and in grace.

And so this question tonight, where is God? It's a challenging question, but it's a truth spoken in love. Where is God in your life?

Our solemn reality is that for the majority of our nation tonight, we are biting the hand that feeds us. How are we biting the hand that feeds us? Well, we're doing that by saying in our hearts, I'm not going to have this man to rule my life. I'm not going to do it.

We'll come so far. We'll come to church. We might watch services online. We'll do X, Y, and Z. We'll come so far. But when it comes to the matters of the heart and actually humbling ourselves and submitting ourselves before God and seeking to give our lives to Him, we say, no, it's too much.

[16 : 03] I can't go there. So we wonder, why do bad things happen to good people thinking that we ourselves are good when we turn our back on the only one who's good?

When actual fact or question should be this, why do good things happen to bad people? Why?

I'm not bad, you might say. I'm not bad. But the reality is this, friends, as we reflect upon who we are and our view of God, if we are continually taking from God from one end of the day to the next, from one end of the week to the next, from one end of the decade to the next, taking, taking, taking from the Lord, and yet we fail to have any meaningful interaction with Him.

In terms of praise and thanksgiving, our silence speaks volumes. You know, there's something that is leading so many to a lost eternity, and it's empty, cold religion.

This is easy. This is so easy. It's easy to put our Sunday best on and come out on a Lord's Day evening and come to church and be seen to be doing.

[17 : 31] That is easy. It costs us very little and out of our time. What is difficult as this, or in our own minds as difficult as this, is submitting our whole lives to Jesus.

He wants a faith-fueled relationship with Him. That's what He longs from you tonight. Yes, it's good for you to be here, but don't be satisfied just with that.

That is not what Christianity is. It's not just about taking the box and doing that which is seen by man. And Christianity in its real sense is being in a relationship with Christ.

You see, you may love your neighbor, but you don't love your Creator. Can't you see how sad that is? Your heart is unrepentant.

And because of this, the reality is that God has every right to say, well, it's not fair. It's not fair. You lavishly, you take from my hand.

[18 : 43] You take, take, take. You live your life separate from me, if the truth be told, and I'm the one who can see into your heart, He would say.

You live your life separate from me. You don't love me. You don't want to know me. You don't want to publicly profess my name. You are a Sunday Christian.

I want nothing to do with you. He's got every right to say that, friends. But He doesn't. And that brings us to our second point, care.

Because as we reflect upon who God is and who we are, we see this so clearly in the parable before us, that God, He wants to show us tonight afresh who He is.

Verse 6, And He told us, Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure.

[20 : 16] Then, if it should bear fruit next year, well and good. But if not, you can cut it down. By nature, we should all be cut down.

We are not worthy of the least of His marshes. Those who heard this parable, just by way of context, again, they'd have been able to identify with the language that was being used in it.

The reality was that a farmer, he wasn't permitted to get any figs for himself from the crop until the fifth year of the crop. Five years had to pass.

So the first three years, the crop would be left. So year one, two, and three, the crop would be left. It would be untouched. And then on the fourth year, the farmer would offer, if you like, the first fruits to the Lord.

And then on the fifth year, the crop could be enjoyed. And just as an aside, what we see there is a principle that ought to feature in all of our lives if we're the Lord's.

[21 : 31] That we are to give the first fruits of all that we have to God. This is where we get the principle of tithing. That when we get our wage at the end of the month or wherever we get it, before we do anything else with our money, we give the Lord the first fruits of it.

When we get up in the morning before we do anything, we give the Lord the first fruits of our day. That we seek to give the Lord the best of what we have.

Why? Because it is Him that has given it to us. It is His in the first place. Our money, our time, whatever else, it is all His. And then on the fifth year of the crop, the farmer would be able to enjoy the crop, the benefits of the crop himself.

It's always better to give than to receive. And we see this in Leviticus 19. When you come into the land, this is verse 23, and have planted all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised.

Three years it shall be as uncircumcised to you. It shall not be eaten. But in the fourth year, all its fruit shall be holy. A praise to the Lord.

[22 : 46] An offering to the Lord. And in the fifth year, you may eat its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase. I am the Lord, your God.

But in this parable here, there is no fruit. The tree is barren. Year after year after year goes by, and still there's no fruit.

It's not as if there's fruit there that's ready and waiting to be offered as the first fruits to the Lord and then to be enjoyed by the people. No, there's none. Absolutely none.

And so the obvious thing is to cut it down. It makes sense. Get rid of it. To move on to harvesting fruit from other trees. It just makes sense.

And it's at this point we ask the question, young ones, you might want to listen, who of what does the tree represent? Represent, sorry.

[23 : 48] Well, immediately, it represents Israel as a nation, the Jewish people, those who've been planted in the vineyard of God's spiritual blessings with a knowledge of that great plan of

redemption, but still have turned their back on him.

But the tree also represents you and me. Isn't it true, friends, that for all of us, we've been planted in the vineyard of the privileges of God for many years, perhaps some of us.

We've been brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord going to Sabbath school. We've had family worship. We've had the testimony of godly parents, grandparents, neighbors.

We've been under the sound of the gospel perhaps for decades. We are rooted in those privileges. Privilege after privilege after privilege.

We know the way of salvation. We know that great plan of redemption at least in our heads. But yet the question remains, is there fruit?

[25 : 12] Is there fruit in your life? Is there the fruit of repentance? Is there the fruit of submission to God?

the fruit of worship to God? We look on this fruitless tree and the owner of the vineyard wants to cut it down to get rid of it because it's serving no purpose.

And the shorter catechism, of course, reminds us that man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. And so, if we are not glorifying God, we're not going to enjoy Him forever.

And really, we deserve to be cut down. But that's not the gospel. That is not the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And in the care and mercy and love of God, even here tonight, that has not happened to you.

Because as this parable shows, we see that the one who's tending to the vineyard, he has other ideas.

[26 : 28] And he said to the vindressor, look for three years now, I've come seeking fruit in this fig tree and I find none, cut it down, why should it use up the ground?

That's our attitude, perhaps, even one to another, sadly. we're so unforgiving, we're so unloving, we're so uncaring, we just want to cut each other down.

Even when there's no fruit in our lives, we want to cut each other down as the Lord's people. And he answered him, sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure.

then, if it should bear fruit next year, well and good, but if not, you can cut it down.

That, dear friends, is the care of the tender vineyard keeper. That, dear friends, is the care of the Lord Jesus Christ, the patience, the long suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who came to seek and to save the lost, the one who died so that we might live, the one who, as we have even seen in this parable, doesn't strike us down immediately when we deserve it, but gives us chance after chance, year after year after year.

[28 : 00] I wonder how many years he's given you. You've been under the word. What have you done with it? And to use the slang saying, the buck stops with you, not with your minister, not with the Lord, not with the congregation or other Christians, it's on you.

What have you done with all that you have heard? You've been hearing the word of God for decades, what have you done with it? The Lord in his mercy has given you another year, what have you done with it?

We read in 2 Peter 3, 9, the Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness, but is long suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

And you know, tonight, friend, he is giving you that chance once again. He is saying the same thing about you. Leave him alone. Leave her alone until I dig around and fertilize.

What is a fertilizer? It's the word of God. Leave them alone and let's see if they will respond to the fertilizer. Let's see if they will respond to the word of God.

[29 : 27] Leave them alone. For now, he's giving you that chance, friends, to bear that spiritual fruit.

He's giving you the chance to live your best life, to be the best version of yourself, and the only way that that is ever going to happen is by you being rooted.

What are you rooted in tonight, I wonder? As you reflect upon your life honestly, what is it that roots you and grounds you? Is it the word of God?

Is it the person and work of Jesus Christ? What is it that you're trying to root yourself in in order even to be right with God?

Is it this church? Friend, nothing will give you the growth of the fruit that you need other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

[30 : 27] Absolutely nothing. And unless you are rooted in him, coming to church, and all these things are of course a product of that and good and proper, but unless you are rooted in him and him alone, you will never bear fruit.

And that's where the humble submission comes in. That's why we find it so hard to let go. The besetting sin of pride, the fear of man, all the rest, we know what it's like, we know what stops us from committing.

We might even use other Christians as our measuring stick as to why we're not coming to know the Lord. We say, well, look at that Christian, they're certainly not being the best version of themselves, they're not showing any fruit.

And you know, friend, that might be so, that may well be so, and it shouldn't be for any of us, and shame on us if we're in a prolonged state of fruitlessness.

None of us as God's people should be content with that. Yes, we have seasons, we have dry spells in our spirit, undoubtedly that is true, but we should strive after fruit.

[31 : 47] And as a word to the Christian tonight, friends, the only reason that we don't bear fruit as the Lord's people is that we are not rooted in the truth. We are not in his word.

We are not in prayer. We are not in fellowship. And that's our own fault. We can be so, and I include myself in this, friends, we can be so, we just sort of gloss over our lack of commitment to the Lord and say, oh, well, I'm not what I should be.

And we look lightly upon it as if it doesn't really matter that much. And because of our light attitude towards not being what we should be with the Lord, it's evident that we're not really going to try and do anything about it.

Oh, well, if only I was the way I was 40 years ago. And we coast along just in this state of fruitlessness, quite content in a way, because it's not costing us anything.

What does Galatians 5 say? And this is a test. This is a test of what it is to be a disciple of Christ, visibly.

[33 : 00] The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, young ones might want to listen, peace, long suffering, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, against such there is no law.

Friends, when we don't have these fruit, that, these aspects, this is one fruit, it's the fruit of the Spirit, and these are all, if you like, segments of that one fruit.

If we don't have these in our lives, it's because we are not rooted in Christ, in His Word, as we ought to be. I don't know if I've told this story here, before, forgive me if I have, but a good example of this is when I was teaching in Laxdale School many years ago, there was what looked to me like a dried-up piece of heather on the windowsill.

It was just, I'd got a new classroom and it was the beginning of term, I was getting the classroom ready, and there was what looked like a dried-up, closed-up bit of heather.

It was grey, it was brown, it was dead-looking, and I was just about to put it in the bin when the cleaner stopped me. She said, no, no, no, put water on it, you put water on it, and come back in 20 minutes and see what's happened.

[34 : 31] So I did that. I watered it and I went back later, only to find that it had completely opened out. water. It was called the rose of Jericho.

And what looked dead to me was an actual fact alive, but just needed water to be at its best. And I thought instantly, that is a picture of me as a Christian and every other Christian.

We need to be fertilized. We need to have that water in our lives. otherwise, we are nothing but gray and dry-looking Christians with no joy and no life.

We're certainly not the best version of ourselves in terms of those who reflect the beauty of the holiness of the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to be rooted, rooted in him.

So what happens to the fig tree? Time is gone. This brings us just very, very briefly to our final point, the conclusion. What happens to the fig tree here?

[35 : 46] What's really interesting about this parable is that we don't know what happens to the fig tree. It doesn't tell us what happens to the fig tree.

There's an open ending to the story. Did the tree bear fruit? Was it spared or was it cut down? We simply do not know.

And I think there's a reason for this. 2 Peter 3 9, as we read, the Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness, but is long suffering toward us. Excuse my croak, I've got a bit of a cold.

Not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. He is long suffering, but he is not all suffering.

And so the question tonight isn't what happened to the fig tree, but the question for all of us here tonight is what is going to happen to me?

[36 : 48] What is going to happen to me? We're on mercy's ground, alive and well, and the Lord is giving us the chance to grow in the knowledge and in the grace of him to be rooted in him and him alone so that we can bear that fruit of saving grace so that we can live our best life.

Friend, today is the day of salvation. Now is the appointed time. But if we are a fruitless tree, if we are not rooted in him, the solemn reality is we will be cut down.

And none of us can turn around and say, well, it's not fair. It's not fair. It is fair. Do you think you'll see tomorrow?

I don't know. I hope you do. many of that person in this church over the years and decades sat here and didn't see the next week. That's the reality of humanity.

It'll be said of us all that we died. And that's why the message of the gospel is so urgent. And we must never lose our urgency as God's people with the message that we can become so sidelined and sidetracked by that which doesn't matter.

[38 : 24] We can be so issue-driven when we should be gospel-driven. Today is the day of salvation. Now is the appointed time. You come to Jesus.

You ask him to anoint. You plead with him to anoint your soul with his spirit so that you too will be a tree of righteousness rooted in Christ and numbered amongst his people.

Don't close your eyes and sleep tonight, friends, before you have prayed that prayer by faith. Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner. Let us pray. Lord, we come and we seek that thy Holy Spirit would work mightily in our midst.

We know that it is not by might, it is not by power, but by my Spirit alone, saith the Lord of hosts.

And so we pray that your Spirit might be pleased to apply all that has been said this evening to our hearts, effectually calling us from darkness to light, from death to life, so that we can truly know what it is to be those who bear much fruit in the name of Jesus Christ.

Be with any who are perhaps haltering between two opinions, who have a desire after you but still have a drawing to the world that you would enable them to take that step of faith, to turn their back to those things that are slowing them down and holding them back, turning their face towards Jesus, the one who promises to give life and life eternal.

[40 : 22] Go with us then we pray and forgive us for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well before we come to our last singing we'll get some answers to our questions. I'm sure they were too easy for you.

I know how smart you are in Barvis. number one, what was the name of the tower that fell on 18 people? Any ideas?

Siloam, well done, excellent, good, Siloam, the tower of Siloam. Number two, what does the tree in the parable represent?

Or I'll make it easier, who does the tree in the parable represent? Absolutely, you and me. What a lovely, loud, clear voice. And then the last question, name three parts of the fruit of the spirit.

You can name more if you want. Anyone know three parts of the fruit of the spirit? Love, joy, gentleness, good, excellent.

[41 : 31] And that's something we should all be striving for as we go into a new week on life's journey. You've listened really well. Well done, good job. Well friends, we're going to bring our meeting to a close.

And again, apologies for my croak this evening. I hope I was clear enough. Psalm 37, Psalm 37, this is in the Scottish Psalter, reading at verse 3, this is on page 252.

Wonderful promise at verse 3. Now this is key.

Delight thyself in God, he'll give thine heart's desire to thee. There's no one who wants to be a Christian who won't be a Christian if they truly delight themselves in the Lord.

Delight thyself in God, he'll give thine heart's desire to thee. Thy way to God commit him trust, it bring to pass shall he. We'll sing down to the end of the verse of Mark 7.

[42 : 39] To the praise of God, set thou thy trust upon the Lord. Lord, and be thee, thou doing good.

And so thou with the land, shall dwell, and verily have food.

delight thyself in God, he'll give thine heart's desire to thee.

Thy way to God commit him trust, it bring to pass shall hear.

And like unto the light he shall thy righteousness display, and he thy judgment shall break forth, like noontide of the day.

[44 : 15] Rest in the Lord and patiently wait for him to not fret.

For him who prospered in his way shall be shall be shall be shall be shall be shall be been asked to intimate that there is a sign-up sheet at the door for the woman from mission cookbook I think it is, so please feel free to sign up for that on your way out.

We'll close with a benediction. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest on and abide with you now and forever more.
Amen.