

Sunday Evening Service

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[0 : 0 0] For God's help and blessing, let us return back to the chapter that we read from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 13, and we can read from verse 6.

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. 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? 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, I'm good. But if not, you can cut it down. We shall this evening focus especially on the words found in verse 8, this year also.

They speak clearly of the beginning of another year, and so they are appropriate words to consider as we stand on the threshold of a new year in our life and in our experience.

[1 : 1 9] The past year is over and gone into the realm of history. So we can rightly say, as we begin a new year, this year also.

Now these words are found within a parable that Jesus spoke to the people. But I think that it is important for us to look at the context for a moment.

The chapter begins by reporting two disasters that took place, and there were shocking events that people were talking about and they were trying to understand them.

Some people reported to Jesus what had happened. A terrible massacre, brutally, and evil carried out by Roman soldiers against a group of worshipping Israelites.

We do not know anything else about this incident because this is the only place that it is mentioned in the Gospels, and there is no mention of it in any historical records.

[2 : 2 7] Apparently a group of Galileans had been offering sacrifices. Presumably they had done this at the temple at Jerusalem. And while they were engaged in this religious act of worship, they were murdered by soldiers under the governance of Pontius Pilate, the Roman ruler of Judah.

The Galileans were independent in those days, so perhaps Pilate saw these men as a political threat. In this massacre, the blood of the victims mingled with the blood of the sacrifices.

And it's not clear why the people brought this report to Jesus. But he replied, Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered in this way?

Jesus, who knows the motives and thoughts of every heart, and he knew that it was common in ancient Israel that when calamities visited people, they assumed that this was a proof that the people were exceptionally sinful.

And for that reason, God allowed them to be overtaken by such disasters. The disciples followed this type of reasoning.

[3 : 5 6] Remember when they met a man who had been blind from birth, they asked Jesus, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?

The disciples assumed that he had suffered because of either his own sin or his parents' sin. Whenever a disaster struck people, there's always the same question being asked, the same unanswerable question.

Why did God allow it? Why did the victims, what did they do to deserve such terrible sufferings?

There is a sense in which all calamities and tragedies are due to the curse brought about by sin. God created the world perfect and good.

It was man that spoiled it. The people who brought the report to Jesus for whatever reason, they assumed that the victims themselves were to blame.

[5 : 07] And Jesus knew this. So he answered them, Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered in this way?

No, I tell you. But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Jesus rejected their whole line of reasoning of those who brought the report to him for what happened at the temple.

He said, No one should think that these Galileans were any worse than anyone else. When their blood was shed, God was not singling them out to punish them for their sins.

But he directed them to think about their own sin and what it deserves. He says, Unless you repent, Jesus warned them, you will all likewise perish.

Then Jesus used a second example to make the same spiritual point. This example involved a tragic accident rather than a terrible massacre.

[6 : 25] But Jesus used it to give the same warning. We read about it in verse 4 and 5. Or those 18 on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?

No, I tell you. But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Once again, the Bible is the only place where this incident is mentioned.

And some have speculated that it was a construction accident. The tower may have fallen while workers were building at the famous pool of Siloam.

But in any case, the way Jesus referred to the accident shows that it was common knowledge. Everyone knew about it. Everyone knew where it happened.

And how many people were killed. Jesus again expressed here the need of repentance. Or those 18 on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?

[7 : 39] No, I tell you. But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. So Jesus makes an evangelistic appeal in response to the two disasters that people were talking about and trying to understand why it had happened.

And he made his appeal in the form of a parable that we have here in verse 6 to 9. This parable is set against crop farming.

There is the mention of a fig tree and a vineyard. Always in a cultural scheme, there is the year ending when fruit is harvested and the beginning when the ground is prepared for the harvest.

And these concepts are found within this parable. The parable focuses our attention on a tree and a thick tree.

The comparison of a man to a tree is a very common feature in the Word of God, especially in the book of Psalms, where you find that man is often likened to a tree, or a tree is a symbol of man.

[8 : 58] For instance, in the psalm that we have already sung, this evening psalm 1, where it says that the godly man shall be like a tree planted by the river of water that bringeth forth his fruit in his season.

His leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doth shall prosper. In Psalm 92, we have these words, the righteous are said to flourish like a palm tree.

He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. So in the Word of God, the godly are likened to various trees. It is worth noting that when the Word of God draws comparison between men and trees, that the focus is upon the spiritual condition of man.

And this is through not only regard to the saved, but also to the unsaved. In Psalm 37, that we shall sing later on, there we read the words, I have seen the wicked in great power and spreading himself like a green bay tree.

In the Word of God, the Lord employs the fig tree. And very often, when he sets out to reveal a spiritual state that is marked by that which is displeasing unto him.

[10 : 18] You will read at times of Israel being resembled to a fig tree. So in our parable this evening, we take the fig tree to represent a spiritual condition that is displeasing to God.

A spiritual condition that will bring the curse of God unless there is repentance. In our text, this year also, we are viewing certain sinners as God sees them at the close of one year and at the beginning of another year.

As one year closes and another year begins, that your spiritual condition before God is known by him.

And it is in full view of him. And it's revealed by him in his Word.

The Lord knows you how you are as one year closes and he knows you now as we turn into a new year.

[11 : 38] At the end of one year and the beginning of another year, your spiritual state is known to the Lord and you need to give heed to that very carefully.

That is one of the lessons that is brought before us in this parable. The parable is focusing upon your spiritual condition before God as one year closes and as another year it begins.

In other words, what this parable focuses upon is this mighty question and I call it a mighty question because it is a mighty question.

What is your relationship with God? What was your relationship with God as a year that is now past? What is your relationship with God in the year that now begins?

what is your relationship with God? The words this year also carries with it the thought of expectation. That's what we find in this parable.

[12 : 47] There was this expectation. What this situation was is revealed in the parable itself. It is the owner's expectation of finding fruit on that fig tree.

a man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And it was no different this year also.

He was coming to the same fig tree still seeking and expecting to find fruit. In the parable you will find the owner's forbearance, restraint and his patience and that he had been doing this for some time.

Look for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree. The Lord comes seeking spiritual fruits in the lives of men and women seeking to find the fruit of repentance.

And the fact that the man came for three years seeking fruit of the fig tree is a reminder to us that the Lord searches. He scrutinizes.

[14 : 05] He inspects your life constantly. It never stops. It never ceases. It goes on all the time.

At the beginning of this year it's no different. The Lord's eye is upon you. He is searching. He is scrutinizing. He is inspecting. He is seeking to find the spiritual fruit of repentance in your life.

The Lord is looking in your life for that which will please him. Just as this man came for these three years. He came with expectation.

He came expecting to find fruit on this fig tree. fig tree. And so the Lord searches and scrutinizes and inspects your life with the expectation of finding fruit, the fruit of repentance.

Now why did the owner expect fruit from that fig tree? He expected fruit from the fig tree because of its privileges.

[15 : 16] See where the fig tree was planted. A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard. It was a privilege and favoured fig tree for normally fig trees grew in open fields or by the wayside.

But vineyards were places where special attention and care were given to the vines that grew there. And there is no reason to doubt that this solitary fig tree would not have received the same attention and care as the other trees in the vineyard.

It was a privileged place, a favoured place. And this is a picture of those who have the privileges of the word of God.

We spoke in the morning of the importance of the word of God. God. And here in this parable this evening, we see a picture of those who have the privileges of the word of God, the privileges of the gospel, the privilege to be exposed to the means of grace, the privilege to be found in the circle of those who love the Lord, those who want to worship the Lord.

There are many within our community who have no thought of such a privilege, who have no time for the gathering together to worship the Lord.

[16 : 50] But in the providence of God, you are here, and you are under the gospel of God, you are under the word of God, you are like the fig tree that is planted in the vineyard, you are in the place of great privilege.

you are in the place where a great favor has been poured upon you. Because the fig tree in the vineyard had this favor shown, the man expected a response.

He came seeking fruit, because this fig tree was in such a privileged position and taking such care of that he expected to find fruit.

And since you have this privilege shown to you by the Lord, the Lord expects a response from you. Seeing you have this privilege of being under the word of God, under the preaching of the gospel, the Lord expects a response.

In fact, it is more serious than that. The Lord requires a response. He requires a response.

[18 : 09] He expects to find fruit from you because of the privileges that you have been exposed to, because of the privileges that you have experienced.

When the Lord gives men and women privileges, he requires and he demands a response. repentance. But what kind of response is the Lord expecting from you as you sit under his word and as you hear the gospel?

He is looking for the fruit of repentance, of true repentance, and of true obedience. Where there is true repentance, true obedience always follows.

Obedience is always part of true repentance. repentance. This is always at the heart of the gospel message, to repent and to believe, to repent and to be obedient.

When John the Baptist preached in the wilderness of Judea, his message was, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. He challenged the Pharisees and the Sadducees that came to hear him bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

[19 : 26] repentance. When Jesus, after his baptism, began his public ministry, his message was the same. From that time, Jesus began to preach, saying, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Repentance was the core of the preaching of the apostles, at the very heart of the preaching of the apostles. On the day of Pentecost, when the people who had heard Peter preach was pricked in their hearts and inquired, men and brethren, what shall we do?

Peter instructed them to repent. To those who marveled at the healing of the lame man at the temple, Peter said, repent therefore and turn back that your sins may be blotted out.

And the early church testified, now God calleth all men everywhere to repent. repent. So we see that repentance must be at the very heart of our preaching.

Repentance must be at the very heart of our calling to men and women. The gospel demands repentance.

[20 : 42] Philip Henry wisely said these words. He said, some people do not like to hear much of repentance. But I think it is so necessary that if I should die in the pulpit, I should decide to die preaching repentance.

And if I should die out of the pulpit, I should like to die practicing it. That's the value that he put upon repentance.

repentance. Well, what is it to repent? To repent is to confess the sinfulness of our sin against God.

David in Psalm 51 said, against thee, thee only, have I sinned. To confess the sinfulness of our sin against God.

To repent is also to be contrite. It is to be sorry for what we have done. It is more than to feel sad and remorseful.

[21 : 55] We may feel like that, sad or be remorseful, simply because we have been caught out or we are brought to face the consequences of our sin.

But to be truly contrite is to be grieved by our sin as an offence against God. It's not simply to be sad because we have been found out.

But it is more than that. It is to be grieved by our sin as an offence against God. To repent is to change our ways, to turn away from sin.

It is not enough to know that sin is sin, or even to shed tears of sorrow. If we are truly contrite, then we will leave our sin behind and we will follow God.

The true repentant person so grieves or unhates his sin as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavouring to walk with them in all the ways of his commandments.

[23 : 08] repentance. That is why for the Christian repentance is a daily thing. It's a daily thing. It is not something that happens at the beginning of your spiritual life or your Christian life and you leave it behind and you go forward.

No, repentance will be with you until the very last breath, until the very last moment of your time in this world.

there will be repentance. There will be repentance. Because we are still in this body of sin, still we are plagued by this body of sin, therefore we need daily continuous repentance.

But returning back here to our parable, as the owner of the vineyard expected fruit of the fig tree for its favoured privilege. So the Lord requires and demands fruit from you because of your great privileges.

You know, it's a great privilege to be under the gospel. It's a great privilege to be where the word of God is being explained, where the word of God is being expounded, where you are being entreated to come and to trust in Jesus Christ.

[24 : 34] you're in a very privileged position tonight. There are hundreds within this parish that hasn't got this privilege that you have tonight of being under the word of God, being under the gospel of God.

They have turned their back, perhaps some on these privileges. But for you tonight, this is your great privilege of being under the word of God, being in this favoured position.

And the Lord requires you to repent. The word this year also brings before us the owner's expectation to find fruit, and it brings before us the owner's forbearance, the restraint, and patience in that he has been searching and seeking fruit on this victory for some time and finding none.

How many years has the Lord been seeking the fruit of repentance in your own life? How many times has he said scrutinised your life, seeking to find the fruit of repentance because of your favoured position under the word of God, under the gospel?

And despite all your privileges, like this victory, it's remained barren. And your life may have also remained barren.

[25 : 59] How do you stand spiritually in the presence of God? Have you born fruit after all these years? Have you remained barren?

Have you remained fruitless? And this is what will be true of you. This is what is going to be true of you this year also. Like last year, you remained barren.

Are you going to remain barren again this year? because of the privileges that the Lord has given to you, there is the expectation of the fruit of repentance.

There is the expectation of obedience to the word of God. There is the expectation of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, of trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The fig tree has a very unusual feature, so we're told, regarding its development and growth. And it is that its fruit comes first, and then its leaves.

[27 : 04] So when you saw a fig tree full of leaves, you expect to find fruit upon that tree. There is an instance given to us in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 11, where Jesus and the disciples were coming for Bethany, and Jesus was hungry, and we are told that he saw in the distance a fig tree full of leaves, and he went to see if he could find anything on it, and when he came to it, he found nothing there at all but leaves.

Although there is no mention of leaves in this parable, the fact that the owner came and saw fruit may indicate to us that there were leaves on the tree, and that he had done this for three years.

And as he would lift up the leaves with great expectation of finding fruit, but we are told that he found none. If this fig tree had leaves, it professed much, but it produced nothing.

May I ask you, this is a picture of me and yourself, professing much, showing leaves, but producing no fruit. We noted earlier that John the Baptist challenged the Pharisees and the Sadducees that came to him and said, bear fruit in keeping with repentance, or bear fruit suitable for repentance.

The Pharisees and the Sadducees would both display the leaves of the profession of religion, but sadly there was no fruit to meet for repentance.

[28 : 41] There was no fruit in keeping with repentance, or no fruit suitable for repentance. They were circumcised the eighth day. They were a people full of zeal, outwardly blameless.

Some fasted twice in the week, others gave tithes of all that they possessed, and yet they did not bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

There was no repentance in their life. Outwardly, they fasted twice in the week, gave tithes, and yet there was no fruit of repentance in their lives.

Leaves only, but no fruit. Professing much, but bearing no fruit. Maybe this tree in the parable was completely barren, but with the privilege given, it should not only have leaves, it should have bore fruit.

well, how do you stand? In Matthew chapter 3, we read these words, Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

[29 : 54] And in our parable, the owner of the vineyard says, Look, for these 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?

The tree has not brought to fruition any suitable fruit of repentance, faith, or obedience. God requires and expects fruit of you because you are highly privileged.

God has been looking for this in the year gone by. He has required this of you perhaps for many years. And now this year also, he is looking for it.

There is within our text this year also the thought of limitation. Limited time. Sir, let it alone this year also until I dig it around and put on manure.

Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good, but if not, you can cut it down. The owner had done much for this fig tree, and yet it bore him no fruit, but remained barren.

[31 : 01] And a plague goes up, that the tree might be spared one more year. The plea was not for an indefinite time.

It was limited. One more year. Remember, friend, that you have been given enough time to repent.

You have heard enough sermons preached to you. You have been exhorted time and time again to be reconciled to God, to make peace with God.

And despite all those privileges, you have remained barren. You have remained spiritually fruitless. This year also is a limited time.

It cannot go on forever. The time is short. God's love for you to be to be a final plea.

[32 : 02] No more pleas. Leave it for this one year only. A final plea. No more pleas were to follow.

Friend, whatever time you may have left, remember this one thing. It is fast running out. I don't know how much time I have left.

I don't know how much time you have left. But this I do know that it is fast running out. Is there any concern or desire in your heart to do what God requires of you?

To repent and to obey. To repent and to believe. To repent and to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now God calleth all men everywhere to repent. We know not whether we will have another day granted us.

[33 : 05] Do not think that repentance is a deathbed duty. It is our duty tonight to be in repentance. repent now lest you be like Esau who sought the blessing with tears and it was too late.

Augustine once said how long shall I say I will repent tomorrow? How long shall I say I will repent tomorrow? Why not at this instance?

Delay brings danger. Today if you will hear his voice harden not your hearts such are God summons to repentance. When Satan tempts you you do not say to Satan well it's too soon but you immediately embrace the temptation that he sets before you.

But God summons you he says to you repent and believe. so many people say well it's too soon but you do not put Satan off like that but you put God off like that by saying it's too soon some other time.

When Satan tempts you you immediately fall into that temptation willingly fall into that temptation. You do not put it away and say come in another week some in another year come in another time.

[34 : 39] Today is not a convenient time. Today it's too soon. But what God summons you that's the way you answer him. Some other time. Not today.

Some other time. It's too soon. It's too early. The parable of the barren victory is a warning to me and to you.

For we are in the place of special privileges. And let us therefore use that privilege to the good of our soul. To the good of our eternal destiny.

See how this chapter ends. And I'm bringing up again a point that I brought up this morning. How people say that if they're lost they say well they blame God.

They blame Jesus. But the blame is not God. And the blame is not Jesus. For those who are lost they are willingly lost.

[35 : 50] They willed to be lost. That is part of the torment of hell. That they willed to be lost.

See how this chapter ends. There's God in Jerusalem. And he says, Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it.

How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings. How often I would have gathered. And ye were not willing.

Ye were not willing. My dear friend, Jesus is willing to take you tonight. Black as you may be with sin, whatever scars may be in your life, however deep you may have fallen or been sinned.

Jesus is willing to take you. Come unto me, all ye that labour and I will give you and those that come to me, I will in no wise cast them out.

[37 : 07] You are the unwilling party, not Jesus. You are the unwilling party. And dear friend, realise that truth tonight before it is too late.

I once heard, and I've never forgotten it, a preacher of the gospel who at an evangelistic meeting gave the definition of hell.

And he gave the definition of hell like this, truth realised too late. Truth realised too late.

Well, may that not be your experience after being under the gospel, after being entreated by your minister year after year, week after week, Sabbath after Sabbath, sincerely labouring among you.

May it not be true of you that you will be in that place where you will realise truth too late. May the Lord bless our thoughts that is praying.

[38 : 23] Eternal and ever blessed Lord, we pray that they would take thy word through thy spirit and apply it to the hearts of our people.

Oh Lord, that we would be concerned for lost souls, souls who are going on in the pleasures of this world, who are not concerned for their own eternal destiny.

May we be concerned for them and may we plead with thee and give our pleas to thee, oh that they would come in a day of thy power among us that this year may be the year of thy right hand, the year when thy right hand would be exposed in the salvation of souls within our community.

Bless the labours of thy servant here in this place, we pray that thy blessing will be upon all that he does in coming in and going out among the people in his preaching of the gospel that it may bear much fruit to the glory of thy name.

Know that we ask for the forgiveness of our sins, in Jesus' name, and for his sake. Amen. We shall conclude our worship by singing to the Lord's praise from Psalm 37, and that's in the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 37, at verse 34, that's on page 255.

[39 : 57] Psalm 37, verse 34. Wait on the Lord and keep his way, and thee exalt shall he. The earth to inherit when cut off the wicked thou shall see.

I saw the wicked great in power spread like a green bay tree. He passed, yea, was not him I sought, but found he could not be. Mark thou the perfect and behold, the man of uprightness, because surely of this man the latter end is peace.

shall sing these verses to the Lord's praise. Psalm 37, verse 34 to 37. Wait on the Lord and keep his way, and thee exalt shall heal.

Wait on the Lord and keep his way, and the exalt shall reap here to it everaine don have made it heart shall see.

I saw the wicked make word wash Let I the green tree He paths, yea, wants not in my sword But found he could not be Might thou the perfect hand behold The man of a bright head He goes the surely of this man The God of the remittance

[42 : 23] The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ And the love of God And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Be with you all now and forevermore Amen