

**June 7, 2009**  
**Riverside Covenant Church**  
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**Luke 13:6-9 – Be Fruity**

As we have done with the other parables that we have looked at, the first thing we want to do here is look at the context. **In what context is Jesus telling us this parable.** At the beginning of chapter 13, it says that some came to Jesus and told him about some Galileans who Pilate had killed and then mixed their blood with the sacrifices that were being made. It is not entirely clear why they bring this up to Jesus, but they wanted some sort of reaction from him. Historians don't know exactly what incidents are being discussed here, but the atrocities of Pilate during this time were very well known. The point though, is that these folk wanted some reaction or opinion from Jesus.

**We do that this celebrities all the time.** We want to know what famous pastor's opinions are on every issue that pops up.

**In this case it seems that those in the crowd want to know Jesus' opinion of the Roman government or at least his stance on the relationship between catastrophe and sin.** There was a common belief in the ancient world, and this is important for understanding our passage, that the circumstances of one's life, for instance, if a tragedy happened to you, that this was caused by one's personal sinfulness.

Basically, if you did good things, life would be good. If you did bad things, life would be bad. Jesus rejects this notion. Many in our world hold this verse too. That if someone finds themselves in bad circumstances, it must be because they did something bad or did not do something well enough. This understanding of the world actually stems from our overemphasis on individuality. We want to be able to say that we are 100% in charge of our own destiny. So if you have lots of money and a nice house, you worked really hard for it. And if you are poor and don't have much, then you must not have worked hard enough, etc. The natural progression of this thinking leads to the idea that everything that happens to us, good or bad, is based upon whether we are good or bad.

**It is true that sins do often lead to negative circumstances.** That if we sin, we will generally have to deal with some consequences of that choice. There are, however, other things that happen to us that do not happen because of anything we did or did not do specifically. Car accidents, certain diseases, being killed by a ruthless dictator, being born into a family of abuse, or that lives on the streets are all more random atrocities that have no direct correlation to specific actions. So Jesus rejects this notion that if a

catastrophe happens to someone that their sinfulness is to blame.

We saw an example of people trying to link catastrophe to sinfulness during Hurricane Katrina. After **hurricane Katrina** devastated New Orleans, many argued that it was God's wrath poured out upon their sinfulness. The same arguments have been made about lots of tragedies in our world.

**Jesus addresses their suggestion with an emphatic "no."** He says, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?" **"I tell you, no." "But unless you repent, you too will all perish."**

**Then he gives them an example.** "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? I tell you, no!" And then he again says, "unless you repent, you too will all perish." We don't know much of this tower. Just that it existed and what Jesus says about its collapse, which obviously was not good.

**Here is the thing about Jesus, don't go up to him and want to talk about other people.** It is a good lesson for us. When anyone went up to Jesus and said, you know those folk over there, look at all that sin in their lives . . . Jesus looked straight at them and said, "what about you." Jesus says twice, "unless *you* repent, *you* too will all perish."

**We do this a lot.** Whether it is our marriages or in our community life, wherever we find ourselves we are quick to point a finger at the bad guys and tell how messed up they are. Jesus says, "look in the mirror."

**This is the context from which he tells our parable.** An owner of a vineyard had a fig tree planted in it too. And he comes to check on the fig tree and look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he says to the caretaker, **"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?"** He is ready to tear it out of the ground for it is not producing any fruit.

But the caretaker says, **"let's give it one more year. I will dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit, next year, fine! If not, then cut it down."**

In the opening portion of the passage, Jesus says twice, **“unless you repent, you too will perish.”** In the parable the unproductive fig tree is told, “you get one more year, produce fruit or you will be cut down.”

**There are two things clearly emphasized in this passage. First, judgment will come. Second, it has not come yet and you still have a chance to repent.**

The conversation that Jesus and the crowd have immediately before he tells the parable is **a warning and call for repentance.** In a sense the explanation for the parable comes before it.

**Judgment is not canceled in the parable, but merely postponed.** If the privilege of being God's people does not lead to productivity, it leads to judgment. Especially for Luke, **conversion involves both a break from sin and production of fruit, that is, life lived in obedience to the will of God.**

**While Jesus is no doubt pointing at individual's in this passage, he is also addressing God's chosen people, Israel.** With this parable Israel is depicted as in a perilously similar position to the fruitless vineyard. Israel should have been like a fruitful fig tree, the very symbol of divine prosperity; instead she was fruitless and faced judgment. Rather than immediate destruction, which would be justified, a delay is in effect to provide a last chance to produce. There is still time, but not much.

**We don't know exactly what this judgment looks like from this passage.** The point is not to describe the judgment, but to make it abundantly clear that it will come.

**God promises to judge the righteous from the unrighteous. God will separate those that love Him from those that do not . . .**

**The cause of judgment is lack of productivity.** In our day we have little awareness of judgment and certainly no sense of the time of judgment or any sense of crisis.

**We do not know when we will be called to account for our lives.** We need to recover some sense that our actions really are significant and remember that the gospel includes judgment, mercy, and a call for repentance and productive living. Lack of productivity still stands under indictment before God. If the

privilege of being God's people does not lead to productivity, it still leads to judgment.

**Every year a tree remained barren was a loss to the owner.** It took moisture and nutrients away from the nearby vines. The fig tree was a debt and became increasingly so as the years went by. God's mercy is great, but in the end the day of judgment comes. The time of grace that God grants sinners must be used to repent and to turn to him.

**The other day Adelaide and Miriam were jumping on the couch together** and Miriam got a little too much into Adelaide's territory so she pushed her out of the way. And so I went over and scolded Adelaide for pushing Miriam and told her that she needed to stop jumping, give Miriam a hug and tell her sorry or she was going to sit in time out. And Adelaide starting throwing a fit and saying that she did not want to sit in time out. So I started counting down from 3 – 2 – 1. And Adelaide says, “wait, wait, I will tell Miriam sorry.” I stop counting and she says, “mommy coming how soon?” “can I go outside.” And I said, “Adelaide, you need to tell Miriam sorry for pushing her or you will sit in time out.” And she looked over at Miriam and said, “Miriam want a bottle.” And I picked her up and put her in time out.

**The time of grace that God grants sinners must be used to repent and to turn to him.** The time we get is not just for kicks. It is an opportunity to change our lives.

The clear idea that Jesus conveys in this parable is that we are to be like a healthy fig tree that produces fruit. **But what exactly is the fruit we are to produce.**

**The primary word for fruit in the Old Testament appears over 100 times.** Fruit shows up in the New Testament over 65 times. 24 of the 27 New Testament books refer to the idea of fruit in our lives in some clear way. It is clear that the Bible uses the imagery of fruit to convey that God wants more from us than just our heart. God also wants our thoughts, words and acts.

**While it is clear that we are to produce fruit, the Bible is also clear that the source of the growth is not us but the work of the Holy Spirit within us.** As God is the source of all physical creation, He is also the source of our spiritual life and fruit. We are trees that are watered by rains from God and should produce fruit. God is the source of the life through us.

**Luke 3:7-9, "John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? *Produce fruit* in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."**

**Genesis** says be fruitful and multiply meaning physical reproduction. Have kids and fill the earth.

**Galatians 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."**

**Colossians 1:6, "All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth."**

**Two believers who go through virtually the same set of motions may convey the impression that they are equally fruitful, yet one may be fruitful and the other unfruitful.** The acts of one are products of God's authentic life freely released through them, while the acts of the other are counterfeits with no quality higher than the performance of fleshly ability. God, who sees through the externals to the essence, unerringly distinguishes the fruit from the fake.

**We have to be careful too, because it is possible to mislabel outward success with being fruitful. An Indian missionary, William Carey** is a good example. During his first 7 years in India in the late 1700's, he labored without a convert to Christianity. Later, many became Christians. Any careful study of what is known about Carey's attitude and service during those seven seemingly blank years will reveal that his life was quite fruitful, though it is true that for a time he was not successful and fruitful in terms of one specific area – converts.

It is important to remember too, that **you can be fruitful in the nondramatic areas of ministry.** Many ministries for Christ are comparatively less dramatic. For instance, working in the nursery or teaching Promiseland classes, or office tasks like stuffing envelopes. None of these tasks makes the news but they may very well be used by God to be fruitful in multiple ways.

We must remember also, that though we often speak of imitating Christ as essential in our Christian walks.

**The point is not simply do what Christ did, but do what he did empowered and driven by the Spirit.**

Christian life is not a human project of self-improvement. The life of Christ or some fruitful saint is the authentic product of supernatural power.

**This parable is left without resolution.** It does not tell us what happens. We don't know if the following year the fig tree produced fruit or whether it continued to be barren and then was cut down. That is what Jesus wanted his hearers and us to see. For many whether the tree of your life will produce fruit or not is to be determined.

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