

STUDY ON THE PARABLES OF JUDGMENT

The Parable of the Fig Tree

Read Luke 13:1-9

Events Leading to the Parable

“There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.” (v1)

We do not have a record in history about the specific incident mentioned here. Pilate had done something abominable and had killed some Galileans and mixed their blood for some sort of sacrifice. However, it was Jesus’ response that was striking.

“Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things?” (v2). I tell you, no.

In analysing the issue, Jesus turned His focus from the question “why did this happen?” and turned it to the question, “what does this mean to me?”

We normally think of some people as good and some people as bad and find it easy to believe that God should allow good things to happen to good people and bad things to bad people. How do you see it?

But Jesus’ point was not that the Galileans in question were innocent; His point was that they were simply not more guilty than the others (perhaps, including you and I). We are all guilty. Rather than answer in relation to Pilate, Jesus focused on the judgment to come from the Lord.

“... but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” (v3)

It means that we all may die at any time, so repentance must be a top priority. Those who died in both instances, that is, the Galileans and the story of the tower of Siloam did not think they would die soon, but they did, and we can suppose that most of them were not ready.

Are you ready?

The Parable

After the warning unless you repent you will all likewise perish, Jesus used this parable to illustrate principles of God’s judgment.

The three entities in the story all have clear symbolic significance. The vineyard owner represents God, the one who rightly expects to see fruit on His tree and who justly decides to destroy it when He finds none. The gardener, or vineyard keeper who cares for the trees, watering and fertilizing them to bring them to their peak of fruitfulness, represents Jesus, who feeds His people and gives them living water. The tree itself has two symbolic meanings: the nation of Israel and the individual.

As the story unfolds, we see the vineyard owner expressing his disappointment at the fruitless tree. He has looked for fruit for three years from this tree but has found none. The three-year period is significant because for three years John the Baptist and Jesus had been preaching the message of repentance throughout Israel. But the fruits of repentance were not forthcoming. John the Baptist warned the people about the Messiah coming and told them to bring forth fruits fit for repentance because the axe was already laid at the root of the tree (Luke 3:8-9). But the Jews were offended by the idea they needed to repent, and they rejected their Messiah because He demanded repentance from them. After all, they had the revelation of God, the prophets, the Scriptures, the covenants, and the adoption (Romans 9:4-

5). They had it all, but they were already apostate. They had departed from the true faith and the true and living God and created a system of works-righteousness that was an abomination to God. He, as the vineyard owner, was perfectly justified in tearing down the tree that had no fruit. The Lord's axe was already poised over the root of the tree, and it was ready to fall.

However, we see the gardener pleading here for a little more time. There were a few months before the crucifixion, and more miracles to come, especially the incredible miracle of the raising of Lazarus from the dead, which would astound many and perhaps cause the Jews to repent. As it turned out, Israel as a nation still did not believe, but individuals certainly did (John 12:10-11). The compassionate gardener intercedes for more time to water and fertilize the fruitless tree, and the gracious Lord of the vineyard responds in patience.

The Gospels & the Fig Tree

No Mercy Fig Tree

“Now in the morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, “Let no fruit grow on you ever again.” Immediately the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, “How did the fig tree wither away so soon?”” (Matthew 21:18-20)

In this reference to this fig tree, Jesus cursed it immediately because it had no fruit.

Fig Tree & End of Times

“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So, you also when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.” (Mark 13:28-31)

In Jesus' discourse about the end times, Jesus points to the fig tree and say learn from it. In this instance, Israel is the fig tree and events happening in Israel is the clearest indication of Jesus' coming.

Lesson

The lesson for the individual is that borrowed time is not permanent. God's patience has a limit. In the parable, the vineyard owner grants another year of life to the tree. In the same way, God in His mercy grants us another day, another hour, another breath. Christ stands at the door of each man's heart knocking and seeking to gain entrance and requiring repentance from sin. But if there is no fruit, no repentance, His patience will come to an end, and the fruitless, unrepentant individual will be cut down. We all live on borrowed time; judgment is near. That is why the prophet Isaiah wrote, *“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon” (Isaiah 55:6-7).*

