

Cut It Down!

Why Cumbereth It the Ground?

Luke 13:

6 He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.

7 Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: **cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?**

8 And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it:

9 And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

Cut It Down! Why Cumbereth It the Ground?

Preliminary Reading: Psalm 78:17-38,53-64; Isaiah 5:1-7; John 15:1-8; Romans 11:13-22; Revelation 2:18-29.

Introduction

1. We know this parable does not refer to the final judgment, because there will not be additional time granted.
2. The context is of practical judgment on the church of God for living in sin without repentance (Luke 13:1-5).
3. We can see a possible application of this parable to Israel, which was violently cut down about 40 years after this sober warning, which might have come about 3 years into the Lord's warnings of judgment (Matt 3:10).
4. But it surely applies to the church as well, as an exchange between Jesus Christ and His ministers, for many parallels are seen (John 15:1-8; Rom 11:20-22; I Cor 3:4-7; 11:30; Heb 13:17; Rev 1:20; 2:1,14-16,21-24).

He spake also this parable

- A. The Lord Jesus Christ frequently made use of parables in preaching the gospel (Matt 13:34).
- B. A parable is an allegory or extended metaphor or simile, where we minimize details to grasp the overall lesson intended by the comparison between a natural event and the spiritual truth.
- C. The best example of this is the parable of the Good Samaritan, which answered the question, "Who is my neighbour?" Distraction with details there loses the lesson (Luke 10:25-37).
- D. We minimize details like a fig tree, vineyard, three years, digging, dung, and cutting down.

A certain man

- A. Here is the Lord Jesus Christ, Who strictly owns, manages, rules, and judges His churches.
- B. He is the Lord of the vineyard, as it is taught elsewhere about His kingdom (Matt 21:33-46).
- C. He walks among seven golden candlesticks and has seven stars in His hand (Rev 1:20; 2:1).
- D. The Lord Jesus Christ judges churches and individual members in them (Rev 2:23; 3:19).

Had a fig tree

- A. Here is a person in Christ's kingdom or church, like the naked wedding guest (Matt 22:1-14).
- B. The Lord of heaven allowed this situation to occur with either a reprobate or carnal Christian.
- C. Of course, there is no surprise with the Lord, for even Judas was ordained (Matt 26:24-25).
- D. Remember, the Lord knows beforehand the true nature or character of every church member.

Planted

- A. Reprobate false professors and carnal Christians can get deeply entrenched in churches.
- B. The Lord plans this to happen, though the pastor and church may not easily or soon detect it.
- C. They may spring up with joy at the sound of the gospel, but without any fruit (Luke 8:13-14).
- D. Even among His own disciples, the Lord Jesus Christ had a devil masquerading as a disciple.

In his vineyard

- A. This is the kingdom of Jesus Christ, represented visibly on earth by His churches (Rev 2:23).
- B. Local churches are churches of God or churches of Christ (Rom 16:16; I Cor 1:2; II Cor 1:1).
- C. He owns them in every sense, and He can do with His own as it pleases Him (Matt 20:15).
- D. The Lord left His vineyard, or kingdom, in the hands of others to care for it (Mark 13:34).

And he came

- A. The Lord Jesus Christ is not watching from a distance, as a foolish songwriter has imagined.
- B. He visits His churches to see how they are doing and to search individual hearts (Rev 2:1,23).
- C. There are warnings given to the saints of God to know the Judge is before the door (Jas 5:9).
- D. There is nothing hid to the eyes of the Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 4:12-13).

And sought fruit thereon

- A. The Lord of heaven expects His saints to bear fruit with kingdom privileges (I Chron 28:9; John 15:8; I Cor 6:20; Eph 2:10; Phil 1:9-11; Titus 2:11-14; 3:8; Heb 10:24; I Pet 2:12).
- B. He did not save us for our comfort and leisure; He saved us for His glory by good works.
- C. It is the height of profanity and rebellion to have a fruitless life (Deuteronomy 28:47-48).

And found none

- A. There are fruitless trees in every church that have no growth or benefit (Philippians 3:18-19).
- B. They are belly worshippers in spite of good words and fair speeches (Romans 16:17-18).
- C. If God's elect by some invisible work of grace, they are ungrateful and fruitless (II Peter 1:9).

Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard

- A. The Lord addresses His preachers about His churches (Revelation 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14).
- B. Remember, the dressers are ministers like Paul, Apollos, and Peter (I Cor 3:4-7,21-23).
- C. It is the job of ministers to feed the sheep of Jesus Christ and perfect them (Col 1:28-29).
- D. It is the job of ministers to build rightly upon the foundation of Christ Jesus (I Cor 3:11-17).

Behold!

- A. Are you taking notice of what is going on in my vineyard? Do you recognize the problems?
- B. The Lord Christ has perfect vision and memory to know those who bear fruit (Heb 4:12-13)!
- C. The man of God must be vigilant, not only of enemies without but also within (I Tim 3:2).

These three years I come

- A. As with all proverbs and parables, the details are not as important as the overall lesson.
- B. There is no necessity to presume the three years of Christ's earthly ministry, because the one year and cutting the tree down did not occur until 40 years later in 70 A.D.
- C. The longsuffering and patience of God are here indicated (Ps 78:38; Isaiah 48:9; Lam 3:22).
- D. However, His longsuffering and patience do not last forever (Prov 29:1; Rev 2:21).

Seeking fruit

- A. God has saved us unto good works, and He expects us to have them (Ephesians 2:10).
- B. Jesus Christ, the husband, loves the church for the purpose of a glorious bride (Eph 5:25-27).
- C. The blessed hope we have should bring forth good works (Titus 2:11-14; I John 3:1-3).

On this fig tree

- A. The Lord deals with churches at large, as we can tell by the church at Ephesus (Rev 2:1-5).
- B. But He also deals with each member in a church, as we can tell by Ananias and Sapphira, saints at Corinth, and the prophetess Jezebel (Acts 5:1-11; I Cor 11:29-31; Rev 2:20-25)!

And find none

- A. Tares do not have any fruit – they are reprobates that sneak into the church (Matt 13:24-30).
- B. There are carnal Christians that mind earthly things without fruit (Phil 3:18-19; II Peter 1:9).
- C. There are four kinds of ground, and it is your duty to hear in a way to bear fruit (Luke 8:18).
- D. The seeker sensitive movement, with its obsession with the unregenerate, is mostly here.

Cut it down!

- A. Here is the sovereign Lord Christ, far different from the other Jesus preached in most places.
- B. Rather than packing the vineyard with the unregenerate and carnal, Jesus calls for a thinning!
- C. The Lord Jesus Christ does not take kindly at all to fruitless trees in His glorious vineyard.
- D. Here is the severity of the God of heaven: judge the fruitless tree, and get it out of the church.
- E. There is a determined time beyond which God will not wait in longsuffering for sinners.
- F. If a man opposes the church or apostolic gospel, throw him out (Matt 18:17; II Thess 3:6).

Why cumbereth it the ground?

- A. It is a waste of space in this productive ground and an ugly thing in my eyes, for I seek fruit.
- B. The Lord wants fruitful vines in His vineyard, which makes this barren tree all the uglier.
- C. Such a tree wastes the labor of the dresser, soaks up rain and nutrients, and blocks sunshine.
- D. It takes up precious prayers, repetitive labors, much forgiveness, and long patience from the fruitful vines; it creates an example in the church that discourages within and defiles without.

And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone

- A. Here is the intercessory work of the ministers of Jesus Christ, who labor for every soul.
- B. As Noah, Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Job, and Daniel, God hears their intercessory prayers.
- C. Paul warned that a minister's prayer for his people can be either good or bad (Heb 13:17).
- D. God's true ministers have a compassionate and merciful heart, even for barren members.

This year also

- A. Here is the dresser's cry for more time in order to apply more labor to the tree for fruit.
- B. Again, we do not get distracted with the details of digging and dunging, but rather the lesson.
- C. True ministers have hearts of compassion and patience; they willingly spend and are spent.
- D. He appeals to the longsuffering and patience of God, which is great, but not nearly infinite.

Till I shall dig about it, and dung it

- A. Here are the ministerial labors of the dresser to give the tree every opportunity of survival.
- B. He hopes by more preaching, more private warnings, or a better example, he can provoke it.
- C. The goal of gospel ministers is the salvation of every one possible, not just the fruitful vines.
- D. He uses every means at his disposal to get nutrients to the roots to foster and provoke growth.

And if it bear fruit, well

- A. If I can apply my gifts and labors and get it to grow, then we will have success, Lord!
- B. There are those in a church that sometimes deserve "most improved" as growing saints.
- C. The goal, even in church discipline in turning sinners over to Satan, is salvation (I Cor 5:5).
- D. Even Nebuchadnezzar could have preserved his tranquility by forsaking his sins (Dan 4:27).

And if not, then after that

- A. Since the goals are the same, the dresser is willing to have it cut down, if it is fruitless.
- B. Notice the wording: only after the further effort of ministerial labor should judgment come.
- C. Every minister knows his imperfections, therefore he begs for more time for his inadequacy.
- D. When the kindness and longsuffering of God does not avail, then severity is just (Pr 1:24-31).

Thou shalt cut it down

- A. God's longsuffering and the dresser's intercession eventually ends, and the tree comes down.
- B. The dresser shows his reluctance to cut it down himself, but he will give it over to the Lord.
- C. Here is where God's pastors turn fruitless trees over to the Lord of the vineyard for removal.
- D. How does the Lord cut down fruitless trees in a vineyard – fruitless members in a church?
 1. He sends heresies to reveal and reward the righteous within a church (I Cor 11:19).
 2. He takes them out by death, such as the carnal members at Corinth (I Cor 11:29-31).
 3. He exposes sins, so the church can throw them out, like the fornicator (I Cor 5:1-13).
- E. How do you know, fruitless member, that time has not ended for you to repent and bear fruit?
- F. Jesus had told His disciples that every foreign plant would be rooted up (Matthew 15:12-14).
- G. John the Baptist had declared that the axe would cut the tree down for the fire (Matt 3:10).
- H. Jesus cuts off fruitless branches and burns them and prunes fruitful ones for more (Jn 15:1-8).

Conclusion:

1. It is time, sinner, to wake up to the preaching and hear it with the focused goal of fruit (Luke 8:18).
2. Lord, for those who have used up their three years and their extra year, we pray Psalm 144:7-8,11.
3. Lord, for those who have used up their three years but not this next year, we pray Luke 13:8-9.
4. Lord, for all others in this church, we pray for an extra measure of your Spirit to bear more fruit.

For Further Study:

1. The Proverb commentary, "[Proverbs 29:1](#)," which warns sinners that God's longsuffering and patience will end.
2. The sermon outline, "[Fruit of the Spirit](#)," defines and illustrates the real measure of a Christian's life.
3. The sermon outline, "[Few There Be that Find It](#)," compares Christ's strait and narrow way to the world's way.
4. The sermon outline, "[Perilous Times](#)," exposit and applies II Tim 3:1 – 4:5 to American Christianity today.
5. The sermon outline, "[Carnal Christians](#)," defines and warns carnal Christians about being worldly minded.