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Parables: Fruit

By Bryan Hodge

"Bear fruits worthy of repentance." ~ Luke 3:8

"The ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word... keep it and bear fruit with patience." ~ Luke 8:15

"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away." ~ John 15:2

"I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now) that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among other Gentiles." ~ Romans 1:13

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

"True fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth." ~ Ephesians 5:9

"This I pray... that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness." ~ Philippians 1:9-11

"We... do not cease to pray for you... that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work." ~ Colossians 1:9-10

"Let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of our lips." ~ Hebrews 13:15

Let us consider one parable and one miracle on "fruit".

The Barren Fig Tree (Luke 13:6-9)

The setting: Jesus rebuked the multitude for their being great forecasters of the weather, but totally unable to see the coming judgment (Luke 12:54-56). He urged them to get things right, before the coming judgment (Luke 12:57-59). It seems clear to me that the coming judgment which Jesus has in mind is judgment upon Israel.

Some spoke of the recent news. Pilate's soldiers had killed some Galileans at the temple (Luke 13:1). Some may have felt that these were exceptionally bad people, but Jesus warned, "unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:2-3). Then, he explained that one does not have to be exceptionally bad to have bad things happen to him (Luke 13:4-5).

The parable (Luke 13:6-9): A certain man owns a vineyard (orchard). Space is valuable. He plants a fig tree in his vineyard. A fig tree is an investment. Note - The man no doubt understood that under Israelite law it took time to reap the fruit of a fruit tree. The first three years of fruit were unclean to them. The fourth year's fruit was to be dedicated to God. It was not until the fifth year of fruit bearing that the fruit could be consumed (Leviticus 19:23-25).

The man for three years searches this tree, expecting to find fruit, but finds none. He says to the keeper of the vineyard "cut it down; why does it use up the ground?" The keeper asks for one more year. He promises to give this tree some special attention. He concludes if it bears fruit, well. But if not... cut it down."

The application: The immediate application is that time was running out on Israel. Judgment was soon to come.

John warned, "even not the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire (Matthew 3:10). He added, "He who is coming... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11). The Holy Spirit refers to Pentecost (Luke 24:48-49; cf. Acts 1:4-5:8; Joel 2:28-29 cf. Acts 2:17-18). Fire refers to punishment (Matthew 3:12), Israel's destruction (Joel 2:30-31 cf. Matthew 24:29). Franklin Camp commented, "Matthew 3:11 has Joel at its background, and Pentecost and what follows in the foreground" (The Work of The Holy Spirit in Redemption, p. 78).

The more general application is that God expects us to be fruit-bearers. One need not be extremely wicked to displease Him, not bearing fruit is enough.

The Cursing of The Fig Tree (Mark 11:12-14, 20-21)

The setting: Jesus triumphantly entered Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-ff). He wept over Jerusalem (Luke 11:41). Destruction was coming (Luke 11:42-44). He briefly visited the temple and then retired to Bethany with the twelve (Mark 11:11).

The miracle (Mark 11:12-14, 20-21): The next morning, Jesus and his disciples began to travel the short distance from Bethany to Jerusalem, a distance just under two miles. He was hungry and spotted a fig tree in the distance. It wasn't yet the time for figs. It was a perhaps month or so early. However, this fig tree had leaves. In this variety of figs the fruit appears before the leaves. Jesus went to the tree but found no fruit, only leaves. He then pronounced a curse, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again."

The tree immediately began to wither (Matthew 21:19). The disciples did not notice this for they with Jesus continued towards Jerusalem.

The day in Jerusalem was full. Jesus cleansed the temple, answered questions, and taught parables. It was evening when Jesus and his disciples left the city. They did not notice the fig tree.

The next day they started once more towards Jerusalem. We are told, "Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter, remembering, said to Him, 'Rabbi, look! The fig tree which you cursed has withered away.'"

The application: The immediate application concern the nation of Israel (cf. Matthew 21:43). Israel was expected to bear good fruit. Note - Israel is many times compared to a vine or fig tree (Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; 12:10; Ezekiel 15:5-6; Hosea 9:10; 9:16; 10:1; Joel 1:7; Psalms 80:8-ff).

The greater application for us is that we should be fruitful and not hypocrites. J.W. McGarvey commented, "The fact that it was not yet fig-time made it the worse for this tree. On this kind of fig tree, the fruit forms before the leaves, and should be full-grown when the leaves appear: so this tree, by putting on its foliage before the time for figs, was proclaiming itself superior to all other fig trees. This made it a striking symbol of the hypocrite, who, not content with appearing to be as good as other people, usually puts on the appearance of being a good deal better" (Matthew and Mark, p. 336). The tree boasted that it was fruitful when it was not. C.E.W. Dorris commented, "It was an emblem of the hypocrite, and particularly of the Jewish people with their high professions, their show of ritual and formal worship, without the fruits of righteousness" (Gospel

Advocate Commentary on Mark). Let us not merely profess Christianity, but let us truly practice it!

Notice that the cursing of this fig tree occurs in close proximity to Jesus' parable of the two sons (Matthew 21:18-20 cf. Matthew 21:28-32). The point of that parable is clearly that professing is not enough. Even so, it seems here. This cursing of the tree was not about the tree itself. It was done to teach a lesson on hypocrisy.