

PM Luke 13:1-17

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 April 2025

Preacher: Dr Jenson Lim

[0 : 00] This evening is taken from the Gospel according to St. Luke. Luke chapter 13. Luke chapter 13. Page 1051 in your pew Bibles. Luke chapter 13.

! Luke chapter 13 and I'll be reading the first 17 verses in Luke 13. Here is the word of the Lord. There was some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

And 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.

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 live in Jerusalem?

No, I tell you. But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. And he told this parable. A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard.

[1 : 21] And he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vine dresser, 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 and good. But if not, you can cut it down. Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.

And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for 18 years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, Woman, you are free from your disability.

And he laid his hands on her. And immediately she was made straight. And she glorified God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, There are six days in which work ought to be done.

[2 : 29] Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day. Then the Lord answered him, You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it?

And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for 18 years, be loose from this bond on the Sabbath day? As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame.

And all the people rejoice at all the glorious things that were done by him. Amen. May the Lord be the blessing to the public reading of his holy and inspired word.

Lord, please turn me once again to the Gospel according to St. Luke. This evening, the Lord helping us, we'll be looking at the parable of the barren fig tree, as we see in verses 6 to 9.

The Word of God goes like this, And he, that's Jesus, told his parable, A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it, and found none.

[3 : 43] And he said to the vine dresser, Look, for three years now, I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down, or 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, that if it should bear fruit next year, well and good.

But if not, you can cut it down. Well, the parable of the barren fig tree, you probably heard of this, saying that a parable is an earthly story, with a heavenly meaning.

A parable is an earthly story, with a heavenly meaning. Jesus taught in parables, though he's not the only one who taught in parables, it's quite a common tool, in the time of Christ, and before, and even for today as well.

Parables are used to teach people, some morals, using some short stories. It's a teaching aid, and parables are usually, involve real people, or maybe fictional characters, but not kind of fanciful characters.

[5 : 06] So we're not talking about unicorns, Santa Claus, and so on, but we're talking about real people, perhaps people who are working in the fields, people who are doing something called regular, like, you know, attending a wedding, farming, sweeping the house, looking for things, things that are common in those times, and perhaps even today as well.

And Jesus used those parables to, not just to teach them about farming, or sweeping, but to use those stories to teach them something spiritual.

Okay, so that's why it's a, it's an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. There are about 25 parables in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And this particular parable, interestingly, is the only one that's recorded in the Gospel of Luke.

You don't find it elsewhere. So that's quite interesting. Now, what you notice about this particular parable is a sandwich between two incidents.

One of it is the calamities that the Galileans faced, and also those who perished under the falling of the Thao Siloam.

[6 : 26] That, and also the woman who is crippled by a spirit for 18 years. So it's sandwiched between those two incidents. And what's interesting about the former, which is the calamities, is the need for repentance.

There's a need for repentance. The challenge that, do you think that these Galileans who were who were perished under the Pilate, do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered in this way?

No. I tell you, unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. And then the Thao Siloam, the 18 who died, when the Thao Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that these are worse offenders than all the others who live in Jerusalem?

No. I tell you, unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. He was teaching them about the need for repentance there. It's pretty obvious. It's about the need for repentance.

And later on, there's going to be the woman who's been crippled by a spirit for 18 years. Now, if you think about it, if you were to be standing there in the time of Christ and you were listening to what he was saying about the Galileans and the people who died under the Thao Siloam, you might go away thinking, okay, there's a need for repentance.

[7 : 47] But, well, maybe, maybe these people deserve, these Galileans and these people died in the Thao Siloam, maybe they're the ones who were perhaps worse sinners than we are.

Perhaps there are some who are thinking that way. And perhaps they may be thinking, well, you know, maybe they died because they were not as well favoured as we are. We are still alive.

They are not. We've been spared. So, perhaps we've been highly favoured by the Lord. And that would be, obviously, you'll fly in the face of what Jesus is teaching.

but, the Lord, in addressing those thoughts that may be going through their minds, he used the parable of the barren fig tree.

One writer puts it this way, that the lesson, repent or perish, suggested by the two recent incidents, and illustrated by the parable of the barren fig tree.

[8 : 47] Okay, there's a lesson there of to repent and all perish, and that's going to be followed up and illustrated by the parable of the barren fig tree.

So, he's going to tell these hearers, well, before you start thinking about repentance and thinking that you are spared and so you're well favoured, you must remember what repentance leads to. What repentance genuine repentance what it leads to. And so, there's a couple of challenges there already at the onset of this parable.

There's repentance, but there's also God's slowness to punish. These people who were listening, they were spared, yes, but not because of any good in them, but because God is very patient with them, and so they are not judged there and then.

and also, if we say, another lesson there is if we say repent and believe in the gospel as Jesus instruct us elsewhere in the other gospel, Mark gospel for example, then what would be the fruit of our repentance?

[10 : 07] Are we showing forth fruits of repentance? Are we showing something, is our repentance showing forth something tangible?

Or is this, or is our repentance just words only? And so, the question is, are we therefore fruitful before the Lord? Are we fruitful post-repentance?

Are we fruitful before the Lord? Or do we just live for ourselves? Do we even need to be fruitful before the Lord? These are all questions that we need to be asking ourselves.

And the parable of the barren fig tree addresses those questions. So, we come to this parable of the barren fig tree. So, fig tree, we can say something about the fig tree and its fruit.

A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard. Now, you know vineyards are quite common in the Middle East, apparently. They're usually walled for protection against the elements and against thieves.

[11:13] This fig tree is planted in the vineyard and it's very likely that the owner who grew the fig tree in the midst of the vineyard is a rich owner.

To be able to grow a fig tree in the midst of the vineyard suggests that he is a rich owner. Now, a fig tree is meant to bear fruits twice a year, apparently.

At the beginning around June time, this is in that part of the world, in around June time and in September time. And, a fig tree is meant to be able to produce fruit in as early as the first year, as early as year one itself.

However, this particular fig tree growing in this vineyard has been growing for three years. In verse 7, it says, look, for three years now I've come seeking fruit on this fig tree and I find none.

So, the tree has been growing for three years. It's not too unreasonable to expect fruit by then, by year three.

[12:25] Now, I think we can ask ourselves, why was this fig tree in the middle of the vineyard? I said already that this owner is likely to be quite a rich owner.

Fig trees growing in the midst of the vineyard suggest, it's like a status symbol. It shows that the vineyard is quite an established vineyard and so this owner can have the luxury of growing a fig tree which can be quite tall, up to 20 to 30 feet high and about 2 to 3 feet in diameter.

So it can be quite a big tree and to grow in the middle of the vineyard, it stands out and it's a bit of a status symbol, a bit like having a Bentley in your driveway, it's kind of a status symbol.

Another reason why the fig tree is in the midst of the vineyard is it could be to draw away birds from eating the grapes. You've got grapes, a vineyard with grapes and the fig tree could be there to draw away the birds from eating the grapes.

Very likely. But finally, fig trees are, well, figs themselves, the fruit, they are quite tasty. Those we've eaten like fig bars and so on, they're quite nice to eat.

[13:51] But not only are they tasty and useful, they are also sometimes used as a medicinal product. Okay, so it's quite a commodity to have a fig tree on the land, let alone in the vineyard.

Now, remember I said that the parable is a heavenly, it's an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Jesus wasn't going to teach us about how to grow fig trees, okay, that's not the point of it.

But he's trying to point out something about the fig tree. We are like the fig trees. We are like the fig tree in the sense that we are created, we are all created in the image and likeness of God.

Those of you who know your catechism, how did God create man? Question 10, God created man, male and female, after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, holiness, with dominion over the creatures.

We are created in the image and likeness of God, we share some attributes with God, what we call the communicable attributes. And we're meant, we are, because we are created image and likeness of God, we are meant to be God's crowning glory.

[15:13] We are meant to be his status symbol. Put it this way, you might think this sounds a bit odd, but we're meant to be his status symbol. We are not created like the animals, the plants, animals, we are created in his image and likeness.

God put Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden to have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the fowl of the air, over the cattle, over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

That is what we are meant to do. That's what we're meant to do. We're meant to have dominion over the creatures, and we're meant to be happy, as we summarized in the Westminster Confession.

We're meant to be happy in communion with God. That's what we're meant to be. Adam and Eve were meant to be happy in their communion with God, and so should we.

We're meant to be happy in our communion with God. We're meant to be happy with God. God. However, like the fig tree, we're also meant to bear fruit for the Lord.

[16:26] We're meant to bear fruit for the Lord. And so we can ask the question, well, are we fruitful for the Lord? And also, more importantly, what is this fruit we're talking about?

It's a question that people have asked over the years. What is this fruit? You know, if Jesus is using the fig tree to show us who we are, well, then we're supposed to produce fruit, and then we can ask the question, well, what fruit are we talking about?

Some say that this fruit is about making converts, leading people to Christ. That could be a nice fruit to have, you know, to bring lost souls to the Savior.

That's a good fruit to have. If we're good at that, you know, we thank the Lord for that wonderful gift, or being able to bring people to Christ. But I think it's a bit broader than that.

Okay, I'm sure the Lord is not just referring to that, but it's probably broader than just bringing people to Christ, making converts to Christ. I suggest it's more about obedience, obedience about worship, true worship, perfect obedience, communion, relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

[17:47] These are the fruit that we're meant to show. Prayer, a prayer life, our time in the Word, reading the Word of God. Those are fruit which we ought to exhibit in our lives.

Now, the world doesn't understand this. Okay, society doesn't understand this. They think the Christian faith is all about fairy tales, on par with Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny.

Either they think of Christianity as that sort of thing, or they think of the Christian faith as somebody being put in a straitjacket. Sometimes you hear the accusation of Christianity holding back progress in society.

Of course, there's blindness in the part of those who believe that, to imagine that Christianity is holding back progress in society.

That's blindness. We must never forget that we are made for better things. We are made for better things. Because we are made in an image likeness of God, then we ought to be happy in communion with God.

[19:04] We ought to be that. And if we are Christians this evening, then we ought to have put on the new man, as we read in Colossians chapter 3, we ought to have put on a new man, which is renewed in knowledge of the image of him that created him.

We're meant to be renewed in our minds, in our thoughts, in our speech. We're meant to be different and renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.

We're made for better things. We are meant to be a fruit-bearing fig tree. We're meant to be a fruit-bearing fig tree.

However, what do you see the Lord Jesus Christ saying in this parable? What was the owner's verdict on the fig tree?

We see the owner said to the divine dresser, look, for three years now, I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and I find none. Cut it down. Why should they use up the ground?

[20:09] The owner was expecting a great harvest of figs. Not surprising, after three years, you expect that. But what did he find? Nothing. Was he disappointed?

I suggest to you, yes, he would be disappointed. He sounds disappointed. In fact, I think he sounds rather cross. After planting the tree, after maintaining it, after looking after it, nothing has happened. There is no fruit. And if you read what he is saying, this tree is taking up space. Taking up space that other plants could have grown in its place.

Other plants could have grown in its place. He could have had several more rows of vine growing in that place instead of the fig tree.

Instead of this useless fig tree. He could have grown more vines and have greater crops. Now, I think you can kind of guess where the parable is going.

[21:15] Somebody once said that a parable is a novice preacher's dream and an experienced preacher's nightmare. A parable is a novice preacher's dream and an experienced preacher's nightmare.

I think I consider myself a novice because I think that the parable just speaks for itself. I don't think we need a lot of imagination to know where this is going.

What is the fig tree representing? Well, perhaps if you fall in the category of being an experienced preacher, then this might be a bit of a nightmare because some have said that this is prophetic of Israel in Jesus time.

Some may say that this is about Israel because of passages like in Hosea, like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. The first fruit on the fig tree in the first season, I saw your fathers. Maybe that could be it. I think the obvious explanation of what is the fig tree representing is us. It's us.

[22 : 26] in the secondary sense, the fig tree symbolizes every individual who remains unrepentant. The fig tree symbolizes every individual who remains unrepentant.

If we are here this evening and we are unrepentant, well, the fig tree is us. That's what it is. We are created in image and likeness of God.

God put us in this world. He's given us air to breathe, food to eat, clothes on our backs, roof over our heads. Why?

For what reason? So that we can feed our own nest, do our own thing? No. So that we can look after His world, His creation? Yes. But more importantly, so that we can love God.

So that we can show gratitude towards God. We can show love towards God. thankfulness, gratefulness towards God.

[23 : 30] We ought to read His Word, obey His Word, love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ. But if the fig tree, the barren fig tree symbolizes every individual who remains unrepentant, that means, in other words, we are unfruitful before God.

And you know, just like the barren fig tree, if we are not Christians this evening, then we have turned our backs on God. We barely love one another, if we are honest enough, and perhaps we do not love our Lord.

And you see, the fig tree was taking up space. The fig tree was enjoying the nutrients from the soil. We read that I come seeking fruit and I find none, where is it?

Why should it use up the ground? I think it's obvious what the owner is saying. It's taking up space. It's sucking up nutrients from the ground. And you know, it's taking up when it rains. It's taking up the rain from the sky.

[24 : 40] It's taking up the sunshine. But it's not producing fruit. And perhaps if we are like that, then we are also enjoying God's gifts of nature, of health.

We're enjoying God's provision of food, our memories, our mind, our talents. We're enjoying all the good gifts from God, but we're not reciprocating, we're not returning anything back to the Lord. We're not obeying his word, we're not worshipping him, we do not pray to him, we do not have fellowship with other believers. I'm not sure, have you heard of this new phrase, cultural Christianity.

I'm not sure you've heard of that before. They're basically those who claim to believe in God's word and even identify as Christians, but their lives do not reflect the transformative work of God.

That's how one writer puts it this way. Those who like the Christian faith has to offer in society, but not and actually identifying themselves as Christians, but not actually being one.

[25 : 58] That very famous Richard Dawkins, the atheist, he is a self-proclaimed cultural Christian. Just last year, I think it was last year, he doing one of the interviews, he called himself a cultural Christian, not because of the Christian faith that we read in the Bible, but because he did not like the idea of having Ramadan celebrated in London during the time of Easter.

And neither did he like the idea of constructing mosques across Europe. And so he said that if he was offered the choice between Christianity and Islam, he would choose Christianity every day. Now, that is in society. We like the idea of being protected, being given all the good things from the Lord.

We like the idea of celebrating various so-called Christian festivals. We like the idea of that. We like the idea of exchanging gifts during Christmas and so on.

Now, those are all nice and good things. But we are not actually being Christian about it. We are not seeking the Lord.

[27 : 22] We are not giving back what the Lord has given to us in the first place. That's not biblical Christianity. Being a cultural Christian is not biblical Christianity. And you know, like the owner of the fig tree, God is not pleased with us.

When he sees! And he sees the broken law, when he sees our unbelief, when he sees our selfishness, the fact that we have no fruits, we're producing no fruits, well, the Lord is not pleased with us.

But you know, there must be some good news in this. This parable, like I said, lends itself so easily, so straightforward, you can see where this is going.

There is some good news. There must be some good news. We have the vinedresser. What is the vinedresser saying? Look at what the vinedresser is saying.

The vinedresser's plea and action. The vinedresser obviously is a picture of Christ. The vinedresser comes in and says, Sir, let it alone this year also until I dig around it and put on manure.

[28 : 38] Interesting. The vinedresser is going to plea with the owner one more time, just for one more chance. Please don't cut down this tree. You know, the Lord Jesus Christ picture of the vinedresser came into the world to save us from our sins, from the judgment to come, from the broken law, the enmity against God.

Christ came to save us from all of that. And interesting, the vinedresser's plea with the owner to leave it alone for one more year and I'll dig around it and add manure.

Interesting. Why dig around it? Why add manure? Remember, this is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

Now, some have suggested that the point of digging around it is to expose some insect infestation which could possibly lead to the fig tree not producing fruit.

Now, that is very possible. It is very possible. to dig around it to expose and see if there is any infestation of some sorts.

[29 : 55] Of course, when you add manure, I think you don't need to be a scientist to know what is going on. It is about fertilizing the area. It is to boost the nutrients.

Now, both digging around the fig tree and adding manure to fertilize it both will allow or the hope is that by doing both figs will be produced in due course.

Now, it is the same with Christ coming into the world. He came into the world as it were to dig around our lives. Painful it may be, but it is to expose the sin in our hearts.

Not to expose the insect infestation, but to expose the sin that is in our hearts. That's what Christ coming through does, is to expose sin in our hearts.

And then he's going to, as it were, figuratively speaking, to fertilize our hearts with grace and mercy and love. You know, the spiritual blessings, the spiritual food that we need.

[31 : 08] food that we need. When we see the love of God, when we see Calvary, when we see the resurrection of Christ, that is spiritual food given to our souls.

And the whole point of doing both of these things, exposing sin in our hearts and fertilizing our hearts with spiritual blessings, both will hopefully lead us to produce fruit.

You see what's going on there? What the Lord is saying there? It's to produce, to help us to produce fruit in our life. But you see, notice there's a warning there.

God will not continue to overlook our fruitless life. You see, after what the vine dresser said, so let it alone this year also, until I dig around it, and put on manure, then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good, but if not, you can cut it down.

This suggests that even God has limits to his patience. I think this is something that people take it for granted. People seem to think that, well, I don't need to become a Christian now, I want to enjoy my life, I'm still young, I still got years ahead of us, or whatever, and so, you know, I wait, till I'm much, much older, then I will come to faith in Christ.

[32 : 40] Well, we shouldn't have that approach. We do not know if the Lord is, his patience is run out on us. Isaiah chapter 5 verse 4 says, what could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done to it?

Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes. Even as far back as the book of Isaiah, 700 years before Christ, God has been looking at his vineyard, in this case, it's about the nation of Israel, and he's looking at it and he's saying, I've done whatever I can, I've nourished it, I've done so much for it, but when I'm looking for fruit, I don't get the good fruit.

This same idea is carried on into the New Testament. Jesus imposes the warning, every branch in me that beareth not fruit, what?

He taketh away. John 15, again, in Matthew chapter 7, every tree that brings not forth good fruit is cut down, hew down, and cast into the fire.

But, so this whole idea that if it bear fruit next year, well and good, but if not, you can cut it down. It says that there is a limit.

[34 : 17] It says that there's a limit to God's patience. We do not know that limit and we shouldn't tempt God to when this end point is.

We shouldn't do that. We mustn't do that. Interesting that the vine dresser says if it doesn't bear fruit, well you can cut it down.

Why not the vine dresser himself? Why is he leaving it to the owner to cut it down? Now again, please don't read too much into it. Please don't read too much into it. I think the point is, as one writer puts it, the fact that evil is not punished here and now does not mean that God approves of what sinners are doing.

It means that to the end God is merciful. Okay? The fact that evil is not punished here and now, God is merciful.

God is merciful. God is merciful. God is merciful all the way to the end.

[35 : 38] But there is an end. there is an end. The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ still saves. He still saves. Today, today we are still in a day of grace.

We know in the book of Hebrews, today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in a rebellion. If you hear the voice of God calling you this day, if you see that you are like the barren fig tree, and you know that you are fruitless, well, seek salvation.

Seek salvation from the Lord Jesus Christ. And let him, as it were, work his work in you, digging around your heart, exposing the sin in your life, when you confess that, he forgives.

Let him add the spiritual food in your life, that you need, that we all need, all of us, we need this. And in due course, we will bear fruit for the Lord.

Well, just some thoughts about the parable of the barren fig tree, some lessons there for us this day. May the Lord bless these few thoughts to our hearts.

[36 : 58] We'll pray for