

LESSON 12

Parable Of The Barren Fig Tree

By J.R. Graves

“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. 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? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it. And if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down,” Luke 13:6-9.

This parable is generally interpreted from the pulpit to refer to the probation offered to impenitent sinners or the fate that awaits the barren Christian.

I cannot think that Christ intended it to be applied to impenitent sinners, for reasons, viz.:

1. This was not a thistle or a thorn bush, but a fig tree, in itself a good tree. It needed no change in its nature for it to bear good fruit, as every impenitent sinner does.

2. Nor can I think Christ intended it to be applied to individual Christians, since He would by it teach that Christians are under the

covenant of works, and their salvation depends upon the fruit they bear - their good works. But Christians are not under the law, but under grace. With them it is not do and live; but Christ says to His children, "Because I live ye shall live also." And the inspired apostle said to Christians in his day: "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God; and when He who is your life shall appear, ye shall appear with Him in glory." (Col. 3:3.) The Christian's life is secured - depends not upon his bearing fruit, much or little - good works - but upon the existence of Christ, who is his life. He must therefore live so long as Christ lives.

Nor can it be supposed that a Christian can live here all his life without bearing some fruit to the glory of his God. His very existence as an illustrious example of God's love and redeeming grace is fruit to the glory of God's saving grace; and his very life is an evangel. But that a Christian never yet lived, nor ever will live, who did not or will not bear those richest and most excellent fruits of the Spirit - faith, hope, love, the spirit of obedience, etc.

Christ says: "If ye love Me, keep My commandments; and if any man love Me he will keep My commandments." The spirit of Christ was the spirit of obedience; and "he that hath not the spirit of Christ is none of His."

Love for the children of God is an inseparable mark of the child of God, as good works are of the existence of saving faith; for faith without works is dead - *i.e.* not a living, but a dead, false faith.

With these and many other considerations that might be mentioned, I dismiss the idea that this fig tree was intended to represent a child of God; and to so teach and preach it is to make this parable miss-teach God's word.

Meaning of the Parable¹

I think Christ referred to the Jewish nation. God was the planter of this fig tree. The dresser and intercessor represents Christ.

The Jewish nation was, as a vine or fig tree, brought up out of Egypt, and planted in God's land - the goodly land of Canaan, comparable to God's vineyard - and was unto God a peculiar people. They were as peculiarly situated to bear fruit as this fig tree, planted in a vineyard where it was sure to have the best cultivation. And this the Jewish nation received. God had a right and every reason to expect fruit of this nation under the ministry of John the Baptist, Christ and His seventy missionaries and the twelve apostles. And the personal ministry of Christ continued three years, so that it was literally true that for three years He had come seeking fruit, and had found none to justify the continuance of the tree to occupy and shade the ground that could be devoted to a better use.

God would have been just in the sight of all His angels had He dealt with the Jews as He did with the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah and Nineveh, when they rejected His counsels

1 Heading added to assist with study of this lesson.

against themselves, by rejecting, as they did, the ministry of John the Baptist; but the Dresser interceded for God's forbearance for one more year - yet a little while longer - consenting that if at the end of that time the tree did not bear fruit it should be cut down without a word of remonstrance. We have a right to conclude that the fig tree was spared another year. The Jewish nation was likewise spared, and the gospel preached in all their cities and villages with the demonstration of the Spirit, in the performance of untold and most convincing miracles, wrought before their eyes, until they willfully rejected it, and crucified Christ Himself.

This parable is fully pre-interpreted by Isaiah:

“Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching His vineyard. My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill; and He fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a wine press therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt Me and My vineyard! What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it? Wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to, I will tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof and it shall be eaten up, and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down. And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned nor digged, but there

shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant. And He looked for judgment, but behold oppression, for righteousness, but behold a cry,” Isaiah 5:1-7.

THE CURSED FIG TREE WITHERED

THE SENTENCE OF DEATH AGAINST THE JEWISH NATION EXECUTED

We see the prefigured execution of the sentence of the owner of the vineyard upon the barren fig tree in Christ’s treatment of a barren fig tree that mocked His hunger with leaves only, as He and His disciples were returning one morning from Bethany to Jerusalem:

“And when He saw a fig tree in the way, He came to it, and found nothing thereon but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward forever. And when the disciples saw it they marveled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!”
Matt 21:19-20.

The fate of the Jews and their proud city, Jerusalem, is plainly foretold by Christ in this prophecy, and the cause of it - their rejection of His offered ministry for their salvation:

“And when He was come near He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy

day, the things which belong unto thy peace - but now are they hid from thine eyes! For the days shall come upon thee that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another, because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation,” Luke 19:41-44.

This prophecy was literally fulfilled in less than forty years afterwards in the complete destruction of Jerusalem, and the unparalleled slaughter of the Jews, and the destruction of their nation.