

Don't Get Cut Off

- Intro:

Thank Pastor and pray for them.
Encourage people to take notes.

Reference Text: Luke 13:6-9 NRSV

- Then He told this parable: "A man had a fig tree in his vineyard, and He came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years, I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

- Pray

- The Parable of The Fig Tree

- Picture the scene:

There's this vineyard, carefully carved into the rocky hills of Judea. Rows of vines stretch across a field, and each one has channels of water flowing. It is guarded all around by stone walls. And there, right in the middle of the prime real estate, stands a fig tree.

- This is all very intentional. Fig trees are precious. You plant them in the richest ground, where the irrigation flows steadily, where the walls keep out thieves and beasts, where the surrounding grape vines have nourished the ground. It is nurtured with **patience, protection, and provision.**

And yet, year after year, the master of the vineyard comes looking, seeking through its branches for figs... and finds nothing but leaves.

- **Three years he's checked it.** For three years, he's been disappointed. Now the law, according to Leviticus 19, says that the first three years of a tree's fruit were untouchable, consecrated to God. By the fourth year, the harvest was holy; by the fifth, the people could eat. But here, after three years of inspections, still nothing. This tree has wasted its privilege and is now headed toward peril.
 - So, the master makes a hard decision: **"Cut it down." He asks, "Why should it waste the soil?"** **Do you feel the sting of that?** The master has gone beyond simply saying "it's unproductive." No, He says, "it's wasting the dirt." Imagine being so barren and unproductive that someone looks at the **dirt of your life**, the very circumstances in which God has placed you, and says, "That ground deserves better."
 - And yet, **here comes the Gardener.** He's pleading, "One more year. Let me dig around it. Let me fertilize it. Let me give it every last resource and chance possible."
 - **Jesus is trying to show us something here.** He is giving us a glimpse into one of the conversations that He and the Father were having. You see, the gardener in this parable represents the Son, who is interceding with the master, the Heavenly Father. He is pleading to buy more time. He is watering with His mercy, fertilizing with His teaching, and digging into the hard soil of the heart to stir up some hope. Doing everything in His power to try and revive some REAL life into this fig tree!
 - **Throughout the Old Testament**, and especially in the prophets, the fig tree was a symbol or metaphor for Israel, the people of God, and the religious system.

- Some of you are like this unfruitful fig tree. Your perception is that the vineyard you're planted in is the problem. You look at your surroundings, your job, your city, your church, and you say, "If only I were planted somewhere else, then I could grow. It stinks here. It always smells like fertilizer. There's always somebody or something picking and prodding, or cutting away at me, as if they want me to move or adjust. But I'm stubborn. I'm all hardened up." Let me tell you, church, the problem may not be the soil. Yes, certain environments and leaders can become toxic, but a vast majority of the time, the soil is just fine. And the Master is still watching you. Could He be thinking that you're wasting your potential?
- From a different point of view, some of you are basking in the vineyard privilege. You see all of the good soil, the good water, the good protection, the good worship, the good teaching, and the good leadership. God has surely poured blessing after blessing around you. And you think this comfort is proof of you doing something right. But you are still not truly producing a harvest. God is giving you every last resource, not for a cushion, but for your cultivation. And He is still looking for His fruit.
 - I came across a theologian who said, "Could it be that all these things we pride ourselves in are really just so much manure, piled on us because otherwise we would be such lousy fruit trees?"

• The Cursing of The Fig Tree

- In Mark 11, we see that Jesus goes beyond just teaching a parable and into real-life prophetic fulfillment.
- Take a look at the context of Mark 11. Jesus is in His third year of ministry and has just made His final entry into Jerusalem. This is called His "triumphal entry." Shouts of "Hosanna" fill the

air as crowds of people gather around Him, singing Psalms 118. Palm branches are waving in and robes are laid on the ground in celebration as Jesus is welcomed into the city as a hopeful declaration of him as their messiah and king.

- Verses 12-14 tell us what happens the next day: “On the following day, when they came from Bethany, He was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to see whether perhaps He would find anything on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. He said to it, ‘May no one ever eat fruit from you again.’ And His disciples heard it.”
- Notice the correlation between this and the parable in Luke 13. pleading for more time. Here in Mark 11, Jesus has been ministering for three years. And after all the work and labor, He comes looking one last time for fruit and finds nothing. So, He curses it, and it withers up and dies.
 - And here’s the question every reader asks: *“If it wasn’t the season, how is that fair?”* I’m glad you asked.
 - The fully ripe harvest time for figs is in the fall. But in Mark 11, Jesus has come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover, which is in the spring. In the springtime, a fig tree that is bearing leaves should carry at least a hint of something. It should have one of two options:
 - “Brebas” are late-ripening leftover figs from the previous season that are growing on old wood. They are not as flavorful as the peak-season figs, but still edible and somewhat sweet. This would have symbolically been a sign to Him that the “old wood” still had potential to yield something.
 - “Paggim” refers to the small, green, early-budding nubs that emerge alongside new leaves. These unripe figs are edible for a quick snack if needed,

but they have an unpleasant, earthy, and bitter taste. But at least it would have been a sign of new beginnings.

- Jesus had hope for some type of fruitfulness. The problem is that the fig tree was much like the hypocritical religious system. It had the appearance of fruitfulness, but no reality of Godliness. All show, and no substance. All religion, and no relationship.
- The symbolism behind all of this is amazing. I believe Jesus' true desire was to correct and salvage the system, if there was any sign of fruit at all, that maybe things could have been a little different.
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- But like that fig tree,
Many of our churches today look alive, but lack resurrection life.
We've got streamlined services scripted down to the second.
We've got algorithms mastered for social media.
We've got the lights shining, the aesthetics appealing, the charisma captivating, and the sermon series catchy.
We've got everything to look leafy and green at a distance,
But if you look closely enough, we lack the fruit that proves the Spirit.
 - Many won't admit that we hide behind all of these efforts in an attempt to cover up the fact that we don't have the power we used to have. We don't have the same fruit we used to have.
- One phrase that stuck out to me was in verse 12, where it says Jesus was hungry. It reminded me of an old sermon by a minister named Mark Hanby. He brought up Psalms 50 verse 12, and posed the question, "What if God Should Get Hungry?"
 - Oh, how shameful it would be if on Sunday morning our Lord God, Jesus Christ, were to walk to and fro through the streets of Tennessee looking for a church, with a hunger in the pit of His stomach, aching for the real fruit of His people. Pacing up and down the rows of this church, searching between the

branches, trying to find even a small bitter nub, only to have Him pass us by in disappointment. Or even worse, to have Him proclaim His judgment upon us for our barrenness.

- The Curse

- Jesus, having become fed up in verse 14, cursed that fig tree, and it withered up and died. In that moment, that fig tree represented God's judgment on hypocrisy. This was the final fate of fruitless religion.
- For ages, humanity had tried time and time again to use religion as a way to cover itself. Reaching, as Adam and Eve did in the garden, when they tried to cover themselves with... fig leaves. And Jesus cursed it, forever making a new way for us.

- Closing

- As I get ready to close, I just want to say this: there is a time frame in which God will expect you to be fruitful with what He has given you. Just as the parable stated, the master looked for three years, and the ministry of Jesus lasted for three years. Whether that is in ministry, as a parent, as a spouse, as a leader, or just simply as a Christian in general. God will expect a harvest, and it has a time stamp.
 - John the Baptist, in Luke 3 and Matt. 3, said, "even now the axe is laid at the root, and every unfruitful tree will but cut down." **Don't Get Cut Down.** (STAND)
- I'm going to open the altars for anyone who needs prayer tonight. Maybe you feel the need to repent, or you feel like you've tried all you can, but you just can't seem to be fruitful, or you are away from the Lord, and you are ready to give your life

to Christ tonight. Right now, come. Let one of our prayer team members minister with you.