

The title of this morning's sermon is, *"Bear Fruit in Keeping with Repentance."*

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's gospel verse by verse and we find ourselves at **Luke 13** verses 6 through 9.

Recently I shared with you that while I enjoy going verse by verse, because we look at verses in sections, it is easy to ignore what comes before or after those sections. In other words, it is easy to look at the verses out of context.

With this morning's verses it is particularly important to notice how they flow from verses one through five, which we looked at last week.

The main point of verses one through five is that we must repent. Jesus says...

"You are looking at the people who died in these two tragedies and you are wondering if they died because they are worse than everyone who lived. You are asking the wrong question. Instead, you should be asking whether you have repented, because they perished physically, but if you don't repent you are going to perish spiritually, or eternally."

Now Jesus adds to this in verses six through nine by talking about fruit. The idea is if the Jews repented as Jesus commanded in verses three through five, they will produce the fruit discussed in verses six through nine.

Let me remind you of something we have discussed before because it is one of the main points of these verses...and this brings us to lesson one...

Lesson one: repentance involves stopping and starting.

Do me a favor and briefly turn a few chapters to the left to **Luke 3**.

Here's the context.

John the Baptist wasn't performing Christian baptisms, or baptizing as we know it: to identify with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, because Jesus hadn't died, been buried, or resurrected yet.

Instead, he was performing baptisms of repentance. He was the forerunner preparing the way for people to receive the Messiah. He did that by preaching repentance, because the only way people would want Jesus to be their Savior was if they recognized their sinfulness and need to be saved.

But John knew that many of the Jews were trusting in their descendance from Abraham. In other words, they were trusting that just because they were descended from Abraham, or just because they were Jews, they didn't need to repent.

Look at verse eight to see what John said to them...

Luke 3:8 BEAR FRUITS IN KEEPING WITH REPENTANCE. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. 9 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. (And notice this and the similarity to Jesus's words in Luke 13...) Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

John told them to repent and bear fruit. He put these two together because they go hand-in-hand.

This is important to notice, because usually when we think of repentance, we think only of stopping. We don't also think of starting or producing fruit.

The main reason we typically fail to repent is we try to stop without starting the accompanying action.

In Scripture, what we should do, is known as putting off and putting on. The idea is when you stop something, you must start something else: fruit must accompany repentance.

The clearest two passages discussing this are **Ephesians 4** and **Colossians 3**. We have talked about this before, so let me go through this quickly. You don't have to turn there, just let me read the verses and let them wash over you...

Ephesians 4:25a Therefore, having put away falsehood,

This is what you stop, and then this is what you start...

Ephesians 4:25b let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

If you repent of lying the fruit you produce will be speaking truth.

The next example...

Ephesians 4:28a Let the thief no longer steal,

This is what you stop, and this is what you start...

Ephesians 4:28b but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Again, if you stop stealing you produce hard work and generosity.

The next example...

Ephesians 4:29a Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths,

This is what you stop, and this is what you start...

Ephesians 4:29b but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Again, if you repent of corrupt talk, you speak grace to people.

Tying it all together...

Ephesians 4:31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Stop all of this and start all of this...

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Colossians 3 is the other account teaching this...

Colossians 3:5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Stop all of this, and start all of this...

Colossians 3:12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

Again, if you repented this is the fruit that will be produced.

With this in mind please turn back to **Luke 13** and look with me at **verse 6**...

Luke 13:6 And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none.

The word parable is related to the word parallel, because a parable is a physical story put alongside a spiritual truth. It is an earthly account with a heavenly meaning.

In this parable:

- The man represents God
- The fig tree represents the nation of Israel.

The man looks for fruit on this fig tree but doesn't find any, so look what he says to the vinedresser...

Luke 13:7 And he said to the vinedresser, '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?'

Some trees are for decorations, but you plant fig trees because you want figs. Smart farmers are not going to let a fig tree take up space in the orchard when it isn't producing fruit. Not only does it waste space, if it is still growing it is taking up precious nutrients in the ground that could be going to other plants that are bearing fruit.

If we understand the symbolism the point is straightforward: God has been looking for fruit from the nation of Israel.

I might be wrong, but I'm guessing the man says that he has been looking **for three years** to correspond with the three years of Jesus's ministry.

Assuming that's the case, if Jesus has been amidst the people teaching, performing miracles, fulfilling prophecies, and preaching repentance it is very reasonable that God would expect to see repentance that was followed by fruit.

And this brings us to lesson two...

Lesson two: fruit is an evidence of genuine repentance.

I want you to think about two kinds of repentance:

- There's insincere, temporary repentance
- And there's sincere, lasting repentance

We have probably all seen insincere, temporary repentance, and there have probably been times we have insincerely, temporarily repented. It can look just like sincere, lasting repentance...at first. There can be emotion, crying, promises, you name it, but if there's no fruit accompanying it. It's not sincere, lasting repentance. Nothing's really changed.

Listen to these other New Testament verses making the same point...

In the Parable of the Soils the seed represented the Word of God falling on different soils, representing different hearts, and we know which soils or hearts received God's Word, because they are convicted by it and produce fruit as a result...

Matthew 13:23 As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He INDEED BEARS FRUIT AND YIELDS, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

People who hear God's Word are convicted by it, repent, and produce fruit as a result.

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Paul taught this too...

Acts 26:20 [he said] Gentiles...should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.

They should repent, and there should be deeds, or fruit, demonstrating the repentance is genuine.

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Ephesians 5:8 At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the FRUIT OF LIGHT is found in all that is good and right and true),

We move from darkness to light through repentance and faith in Christ, and when that happens we produce **fruit**.

Colossians 1:5 The gospel...6 is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth,

The evidence they received the gospel is the fruit produced in their lives.

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Hebrews 12 is the discipline chapter. God doesn't discipline us because He wants to be mean; He disciplines us because He loves us and wants to bring about repentance.

The question is, "HOW DO WE KNOW when discipline has brought about repentance?"

Hebrews 12:11 answers that for us...

Hebrews 12:11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields THE PEACEFUL FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS to those who have been trained by it.

Fruit is the evidence that discipline produced repentance.

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With this in mind, look back at our account to see how the vinedresser responded to the man...

Luke 13:8 And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure.

The man, representing God, chose not to cut the tree down yet. Instead, he wanted to let it receive special care so that it would hopefully produce fruit.

And this brings us to lesson three...

Lesson three: God is patient (part one) so we have time to repent and produce fruit.

This is a beautiful verse about God's patience and graciousness toward us. I was reminded of **Matthew 12:20...**

A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench.

God is not quick to give up on us. He keeps working in our lives, helping us, so we produce fruit.

Let me explain farming in the Bible by reading **Leviticus 19:23-25...**

Leviticus 19:23 “When you come into the land and plant any kind of tree for food, then you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden to you; it must not be eaten. **24** And in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, an offering of praise to the Lord. **25** But in the fifth year you may eat of its fruit, to increase its yield for you: I am the Lord your God.

So...

- The first three years the fruit from the tree is not eaten
- The fourth year the fruit belongs to the Lord
- The fifth year is the first year a farmer looks for fruit on the tree.

The farmer in the parable is on his third year of looking for fruit, which means the tree is going on its seventh year.

A fig tree was often given time to bear fruit because its root structure was complex and took time to develop. Three years is plenty of time, but seven years shows how patient the man has been up to this point. The owner had every reason to cut the tree down, but he chose to wait even longer so the tree might be ready.

God does the same with us...

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Just like the man in the parable had every right to cut the tree down, God has every right to cut us down. Just like the man in the parable was patient with the tree to see if it would produce fruit, God is patient with us we might repent and produce fruit.

But if we don't, look at **verse 9...**

Luke 13:9 Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.”

This verse reveals the balance...

God wants us to repent, and he will wait for that to happen...but he won't wait forever. As kind and patient as God looks in the previous verse, he looks equally severe and just in this verse. Yes, he is patient, but that patience comes to an end and if we haven't repented and produced fruit by then. Then we are cut down.

This is far from the only place in Scripture making this point. I would go so far as to say it is a theme:

- **Matthew 3:10** Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.
- **Matthew 7:19** Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.
- **John 15:2** Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away...**6** If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

Spurgeon said...

“There is a time for felling fruitless trees, and there is an appointed season for hewing down and casting into the fire the useless sinner.”

The last lesson relates to something we see in these verses and all other verses about God being patient so we have time to repent...and this brings us to part two...

Lesson three: God is patient (part two) even when he knows people won't repent.

Something that surprises me about these verses, and others dealing with God's patience, is he gives people time to repent...even when he knows they will not repent.

Turn to **Genesis 15** and I will show you one example and then explain the application for us.

God made the Abrahamic Covenant with Abraham in **Genesis 12**. One of the most important parts of the Covenant was the land of Canaan that God promised to give Abraham's descendants. God repeated the covenant to Abraham in **Genesis 15**.

Genesis 15:13 Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years."

This isn't the best news for Abraham to receive. He learned his descendants, the Israelites, wouldn't receive the land for four hundred years, and while they waited they would suffer. This refers to their time in Egypt.

If I was Abraham, I'd be thinking, *"I sure hope there's a good reason my descendants have to suffer for 400 years. Hopefully it's for some wonderful, godly people!"*

The news gets a little better...

Genesis 15:14 But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

God would judge Egypt, and the Israelites would leave Egypt with much of their wealth...which is exactly what happened. **Exodus 12:36** says **[Israel] plundered the Egyptians** when they left.

Abraham gets some personal news too...

Genesis 15:15 As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age.

"All your descendants will suffer terribly...but don't worry, you'll be fine!"

Now God tells Abraham why Israel couldn't go in the Promised Land for 400 years and why they would suffer all that time...

Genesis 15:16 And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, FOR THE INIQUITY OF THE AMORITES IS NOT YET COMPLETE."

In Abraham's day the Canaanites were broadly defined as **Amorites**, because they were the most prominent group in Canaan.

God told Abraham his descendants couldn't enter the Promised Land because He's waiting for their wickedness to reach a level that warranted the judgment He would pour out on them.

I suspect this would've been very disturbing for him to hear. Basically, *"Your people have to suffer, because the Amorites haven't been bad enough yet!"*

Think about what this looked like...

Each year that passed:

- The Canaanites got closer and closer to the point when God's patience could no longer put up with them
- They engaged in more and more wickedness, which meant more and more of God's wrath was stored up against them...

Finally, when they exhausted all of God's patience, He would unleash His righteous fury against them

- The Israelites' suffering in Egypt would be over...
- God would use Israel to destroy the Canaanites and replace them in the land

BUT...

Until that happened, what could the Canaanites still do?

Repent!

Otherwise, why give them all that time?

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Here's something to think about...

If God wanted to be merciful to the Canaanites, how long do you think He might give them?

- A few weeks?
- A few months?
- Maybe a few years if He REALLY wanted to be merciful?

He only gave the Ninevites 40 days!

But He gave the Canaanites over 400 years!

They didn't repent and he judged them.

God gave them over four centuries and the tree was finally cut down.

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But here's what's interesting...

God knew the Canaanites would not repent...yet he still let the Israelites suffer in Egypt over four centuries to give them time to do so.

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I think the Canaanites are one of the two best examples in Scripture of God patiently waiting for repentance from people he knew would not repent.

Do you want to know the other great example?

We have been looking at it. The Jews in Jesus's day.

This past week I took the kids to speech and debate camp. A wonderful Christian family hosted us. I have permission to share a story with you they shared with us, and even posted about on Facebook...

They adopted a girl from China. They told me that in China parents expect their children to take care of them when they are older. Because China limits the number of children people can have, they a large number of parents getting

rid of their child if the child is disabled. They want a child that they believe has a better chance of caring for them in the future.

When the children who have been given up find themselves in orphanages and foster care homes they are treated terribly. Not only are they not shown any affection, educated, trained up to be functioning members of society, they are often beaten.

The family I was staying with adopted a down syndrome girl and when they received her she had terrible behavior problems. Although they were kind and loving to her even in their discipline, they had to discipline her frequently just to get her to behave decently.

They have a son named Jun, whom Johnny became very good friends with over the past week, and he felt bad that his sister was being disciplined so much. He told his parents, “Can I take the punishment that she deserves?”

The parents told him, “You can, but because of her intellectual disability she won’t even understand what you are doing for her.”

He said he wanted to take the punishment for her anyway, which involved standing in the corner for her for some period of time. Here’s a picture from Facebook, which I also asked for permission to share.

Now when Jun was standing in the corner for his sister, guess what she was doing? She was mocking him. She was telling on him when he wasn’t standing the right way.

You probably see the parallels:

- Jesus wanted to take the punishment for the Jews.
- They didn’t understand what he was doing for them.
- They mocked him while he was being crucified.

And that’s not really very surprising to me, because we know men are terribly simple. What is surprising to me is Jesus knew they would treat him this way, yet he still gave them time to repent and produce fruit.

This parable is about the Jews repenting and producing fruit, but God knew that wouldn’t happen. The Jews were going to continue rejecting Jesus to the point that they cried out for his crucifixion...

John 19:6 When the chief priests and the officers saw [Jesus], they cried out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.”

You almost wouldn’t believe it if it wasn’t recorded here, but Pilate is trying to TALK THE JEWS OUT OF CRUCIFYING CHRIST.

John 19:12 From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.” 15 They cried out, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.”

The Jews rejected Jesus so strongly they began claiming Caesar was their king and threatening Pilate to get him to crucify Christ.

God is so merciful. It is unbelievable he gave so much time to these people who would treat his Son this way. He gave them time to repent...knowing they would not repent.

And even after all this he still gave them another 40 years to repent, from 30 A.D. to 70 A.D. But they didn't, so the Romans came and destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple.

In other words, just like Jesus said would happen: the fruitless tree ended up being cut down.

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God's patience isn't evidence of his approval of people's actions. It's easy to think when people seem able to get away with something that God must not be bothered by it, but instead he's just giving them to repent. If they don't, they're chopped down.

Conclusion

Let me read the last verse again...

Luke 13:9 Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.”

Interestingly, the parable is left open-ended. Don't you wonder what happened?

- Did the tree produce fruit or was it cut down?
- Did the special care that the tree received – the extra patience from God – accomplish anything?

Considering the parable has application for all of us, I take the open-endedness to mean we should ask ourselves if we will repent and produce fruit or need to be cut down.

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God is seeking fruit in our lives and the time to repent is now.

If we connect verses six through nine back to verses one through five, which is how Jesus preached them, the next time we hear about a tragedy that claims many people's lives, we should examine ourselves and whether we have repented and begun producing fruit, or are we simply trees that are taking up space and will be cut down.

Let's pray.