

## **BEWARE THE AXE**

If a fruit inspector came to inspect your fruit today, what would he find? There is no mixed fruit in the Kingdom of God, only good, or bad. The question, therefore, is what do we do if our fruit is not all that it should be? To answer this question, I want to examine in some depth a parable of our Lord's which addresses this issue.

*Luke 13:1 There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.*

*2 And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things?*

*3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

*4 Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?*

*5 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

*6 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.*

*7 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?*

*8 And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it:*

*9 And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.*

Luke 13, begins with a repeated call to repentance. (verses 3 and 5) Everything in the Kingdom of God begins with this step. If you are not happy with the state of your fruit, then repentance is the first thing you should do. Unless this is done, there is no hope of salvation. Verses 6 to 9, tell the parable of the unfruitful fig tree. Interestingly, this is not the only incident in the Bible of an unfruitful fig tree. Christ, Himself, curses one in Matthew 21:19 and we shall see the link between the two later.

I have already discussed in some detail, the importance in Bible numerics of the number three. We see it in operation with fruit. There is good fruit, bad fruit, and as verse 6 tells us, no fruit. Also, in John chapter 15 we are introduced to the concept of some fruit, more fruit, and much fruit. All of these are obviously important, as we shall see.

Two sources of fruit are presented in the New Testament; the fig tree, and the more significant vine. It is from the vine that grapes come, and these in turn produce wine which is symbolic of blood in the Bible. The vine, itself, is also representative of the nation of Israel and all that that encompasses.

*Ps 80:8 Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it.*

*9 Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land.*

*10 The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars.*

*11 She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river.*

*12 Why hast thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her?*

*13 The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it.*

Remembering that this passage refers to the nation of Israel, and God's displeasure with it, an important question is posed in verses 12 and 13. To answer this question, we must let scripture interpret scripture. The book of Isaiah chapter 5 is where we'll look.

*Isaiah 5:1 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:*

*2 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 winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.*

*3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.*

*4 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?*

See how his expectations are frustrated: '*It brought forth wild grapes;*' not only no fruit at all, but bad fruit, worse than none, grapes of Sodom. Deut 32:32. explains this.

*Deut 32:*

*32 For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter:*

*33 Their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps.*

Verse 33 is an obvious reference to Satan who counterfeits everything that is good in the Word and corrupts every truth. Wild grapes are the fruits of the corrupt nature, fruit that is in a sense illegitimate, and not a part of the engrafted branch. They stem from a root of bitterness. Hebrews 12:15 sheds further light on this.

*Heb12:15 'Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;'*

Where grace does not work, corruption and bitterness will. Wild grapes are hypocrisy in religion. Looking like grapes, they are sour, bitter, and far from being pleasing to God. Today, we see much hypocrisy in the church. There is so much hype concerning issues that are not in the Word of God, making totally unsubstantiated and unscriptural claims. The true grace of God is forgotten, replaced by these counterfeit graces which come from the pit of Hell. Counterfeit graces are wild grapes. They are not found on the Ancient Paths. Let's continue with our study of Isaiah chapter 5.

*Isaiah 5:5 '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:*

*6 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.*

*7 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.’ (of oppression and distress).*

Here then is the culmination of the first four verses. Because wild grapes, bad fruit, was produced, where the expectation had been good fruit, the vineyard was laid waste, turned into a wilderness. Verse 6 becomes clearer if we consider Hebrews chapter 6, verses 7 and 8.

*Hebrews 6:*

*7 For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God:*

*8 But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.*

We have almost come full circle. There is an echo here of Matthew 7 verse 19. *‘Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.’*

However, the real significance of all these scriptures concerning the vine and the vineyard is found in the book of John chapter 15.

*John 15:*

*15:1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.*

*2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.*

*3 Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.*

*4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.*

*5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*

*6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.*

Could anything be clearer. Turn or burn. Repent, find and walk the Ancient Paths, or suffer eternity in Hell. You either produce good fruit, or your end is the fire. The wrath of God is real against those who do not produce good fruit.

*Matthew 3:7 'But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*

*8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:*

*9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.*

*10 And now also the ax is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.'*

Note also, the parallel text in the book of Luke.

*Luke 3:7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*

*8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.*

*9 And now also the ax is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

Beware the Axe. It will be laid at the root; that root of bitterness which produces wild grapes, poisonous fruit whose only use is to bring death, both physical and spiritual. Walk the Ancient Paths, God's good ways and have Life through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

Let's return now to our Parable of the Fig Tree in Luke chapter 13.

*6 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.*

*7 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?*

*8 And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it:*

*9 And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.*

The Fig Tree is planted IN the vineyard, rather than the wayside. It is not outside 'the way', but rather inside God's vineyard, unlike the other unfruitful fig tree.

(Mt.21:19) *'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 for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.'*

Therefore, because of its location, it must represent Christians. Note, in verse 6, that the owner of the vineyard deliberately had this tree planted there. The Tree belongs to someone, it is not just growing wild and its being there was part of a plan the owner had.

However, the Tree, while not producing any fruit, is doing damage to the vineyard; *'why cumbereth it the ground?'* and the owner has already been patient and longsuffering. There are many scriptures which tell of this aspect of God's character and nature.

*Exodus 34:6 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,*

*9 And he said, If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us; for it is a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance.*

*Romans 2:4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?*

*2Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

*15 And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;*

Christ intercedes for a REPRIEVE (for 1 year), not forever, in verse 8. This is a symbolic period of time, rather than a literal year, but we don't know when that reprieve will be up; we're not guaranteed a tomorrow, no one is. The following poem, makes this abundantly and powerfully clear. I wish I knew who wrote it.

### If Tomorrow Never Comes

If I knew it would be the last time that I'd see you fall asleep, I would tuck you in more tightly and pray the Lord, your soul to keep.  
 If I knew it would be the last time that I see you walk out the door, I would give you a hug and kiss and call you back for one more.  
 If I knew it would be the last time I'd hear your voice lifted up in praise, I would video tape each action and word, so I could play them back day after day.  
 If I knew it would be the last time, I could spare an extra minute or two to stop and say "I love you," instead of assuming, you would know I do.  
 If I knew it would be the last time I would be there to share your day, well I'm sure you'll have so many more, so I can let just this one slip away.  
 For surely there's always tomorrow to make up for an oversight, and we always get a second chance to make everything right.  
 There will always be another day to say our "I love you's", And certainly there's another chance to say our "Anything I can do's?"  
 But just in case I might be wrong, and today is all I get, I'd like to say how much I love you and I hope we never forget, Tomorrow is not promised to anyone, young or old alike, And today may be the last chance you get to hold your loved one tight.  
 So if you're waiting for tomorrow, why not do it today?  
 For if tomorrow never comes, you'll surely regret the day, That you didn't take that extra time for a smile, a hug, or a kiss and you were too busy to grant someone, what turned out to be their one last wish.  
 So hold your loved ones close today, whisper in their ear, Tell them how much you love them and that you'll always hold them dear, Take time to say "I'm sorry," "please forgive me," "thank you" or "it's okay".  
 And if tomorrow never comes, you'll have no regrets about today.  
 Author Unknown

This reprieve, which Christ provides, involves work and effort. There is the digging, the breaking up of the fallow ground around our heart, and the spreading of manure. This manure/fertilizer is the Word of God, which is spiritual food that nurtures us and helps us to grow and produce not only good fruit, but much good fruit.

Again, let scripture speak for itself; this time from the Amplified Bible.

*Jer 4: 3 For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem: Break up your ground left uncultivated for a season, so that you may not sow among thorns.*

*4 Circumcise yourselves to the Lord and take away the foreskins of your hearts, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My wrath go forth like fire [consuming all that gets in its way] and burn so that no one can quench it because of the evil of your doings.*

*Hos 10: 12 Sow for yourselves according to righteousness (uprightness and right standing with God); reap according to mercy and loving-kindness. Break up your uncultivated ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, to inquire for and of Him, and to require His favor, till He comes and teaches you righteousness and rains His righteous gift of salvation upon you.*

*13 You have plowed and plotted wickedness, You have reaped the [willful] injustice [of oppressors], you have eaten the fruit of lies. Because you have trusted in your [own] way and your chariots, in the multitude of your mighty men.*

The Bible tells us to be trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord. What type of tree are you? By your fruits will you be known. Are you producing much good fruit, or does your fallow ground need digging up? Do you need more of the Word in your heart, in your life. Are you on the way, the fruitful way, or are you standing in the wayside where fruit cannot grow? Are you walking the Ancient Paths?