

Luke 13B

- As we begun Chapter 13 last week, we were confronted with Jesus challenging the crowd that gathered around Him to see themselves for who they truly were
 - They were sinners before God
 - He wanted them to understand they all had sin worthy of judgment
 - And therefore they all had need to repent and appeal to God for mercy
- And to emphasize His point, as He usually did, Jesus taught through a parable
 - We ended the teaching last week in the verse leading up to this parable,
 - And after the we finished the formal teaching, we spent time as a class studying the parable, but today I'd like to revisit it as part of today's teaching
 - So let's begin by reading the parable in verse 6

[Luke 13:6](#) ¶ And He *began* telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any.

[Luke 13:7](#) "And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?'

[Luke 13:8](#) "And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer;

[Luke 13:9](#) and if it bears fruit next year, *fine*; but if not, cut it down.'"

- The elements of this parable are very important to understanding its meaning
 - The most prominent actor in the parable, of course, is the fig tree itself
 - The tree is part of a vineyard
 - In other words, the tree exists for a specific reason
 - It's not simply a wild fig tree
 - Rather, it's a tree that someone planted with the specific purpose that this tree might produce fruit for it's owner

- Another actor is the owner of the field who came to the tree at some point looking for the fruit that he expected the tree to produce
 - When he arrives, we're told, he finds no fruit
 - This is a pathetic sight
 - A fruit tree that does not produce fruit is pretty useless, isn't it
 - It's one purpose for existing is to produce fruit for its master, and here it is without any fruit at all
 - Useless
- Finally, there is a vineyard keeper working for the master
 - He is caretaker for the tree, prompting it to produce fruit
 - And when the owner finds the tree empty of fruit, he tells the vineyard-keeper to get rid of this worthless tree
 - We should take note here that the owner never seems to blame the vineyard keeper
 - The vineyard keeper isn't the reason the tree produced no fruit
 - If anything, we can assume the vineyard keeper is doing everything he can to make the tree produce
- As the parable goes, the vineyard keeper responds to the owner's disappointment and anger over the useless tree...
 - Let's try something else
 - Before we destroy this tree, let's see if a little more care and feeding will fix the problem
 - At this request, the owner agrees to give more time
 - It's already been three years and now he permits it to wait one more year
 - While it's possible to see the 3 + 1 years to have specific meaning (represent the years of Jesus ministry on earth)

- More likely, it's probably just a general reference to God's appointed period for patience
 - Of greater significance is the fact that the master sets a deadline
 - In other words, the owner isn't willing to wait forever
 - He doesn't have infinite patience
 - There will be a day of reckoning for this tree
 - If the tree won't produce fruit, it will be struck down
- So what's Jesus teaching here?
 - Well, remember that immediately before the parable Jesus had just been teaching the crowd that they must repent or face judgment
 - So with that context in mind, we have the key to understanding the parable
- We begin with the fig tree
 - It's a classic picture of Israel in scripture
 - You can see references to Israel as a fig tree in Hosea 9:10; Jer 8:13 and many other places
 - In fact, in Luke 21:29 we hear Jesus compare the regathering of the nation of Israel in the last days to the appearance of leaves a fig tree in the Spring

[Luke 21:29](#) ¶ Then He told them a parable: "Behold the fig tree and all the trees; [Luke 21:30](#) as soon as they put forth *leaves*, you see it and know for yourselves that summer is now near.

[Luke 21:31](#) "So you also, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near.

- So if the parable is talking generally about the nation of Israel failing to bear spiritual fruit
 - In light of the earlier context of Jesus' teaching, it seems appropriate to conclude that He's referring to an unfruitful Israel in His day
 - That nation was planted by God for a reason

- He established the nation of Israel for His reasons
 - Not just so that the nation might exist for itself
 - And when the Messiah came to them as the Father promised,
 - They received Him for the whole world's sake
 - But they were not bearing fruit
 - They were not receiving their Messiah
- You should also remember at about this point that we're nearing the end of the three act drama represented in Chapters 11-13.
 - This is the pivotal point in Luke's gospel where Jesus is rejected by the nation and He confirms their rejection by withdrawing His offer of the kingdom
 - This is a point of no return
 - So through this parable, Jesus warns the nation that Father won't have infinite patience with them
 - If they won't bear fruit by accepting their Messiah, there will finally be a day when he cuts down the tree
 - A day when He brings the nation low
 - Though never without a remnant, Israel will suffer greatly for their rejection
 - Because if they don't receive their Messiah, what use are they to God?
 - They are like a tree that doesn't produce fruit
- To put an end to our discussion on the parable, let me take you to Isaiah 5
 - In a former day when Israel was given the command to repent, God spoke to them through their prophet Isaiah and this is what the Lord said:

[Is. 5:1](#) ¶ Let me sing now for my well-beloved
 A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard.
 My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill.

[Is. 5:2](#) He dug it all around, removed its stones,
And planted it with the choicest vine.
And He built a tower in the middle of it
And also hewed out a wine vat in it;
Then He expected *it* to produce *good* grapes,
But it produced *only* worthless ones.

[Is. 5:3](#) ¶ “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah,
Judge between Me and My vineyard.

[Is. 5:4](#) “What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it?
Why, when I expected *it* to produce *good* grapes did it produce worthless ones?

[Is. 5:5](#) “So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard:
I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed;
I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground.

[Is. 5:6](#) “I will lay it waste;
It will not be pruned or hoed,
But briars and thorns will come up.
I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it.”

[Is. 5:7](#) ¶ For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel
And the men of Judah His delightful plant.
Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed;
For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.

[Is. 5:8](#) ¶ Woe to those who add house to house *and* join field to field,
Until there is no more room,
So that you have to live alone in the midst of the land!

[Is. 5:9](#) In my ears the LORD of hosts *has sworn*, “Surely, many houses shall become
desolate,
Even great and fine ones, without occupants.

- Just as he did in Isaiah’s time, God is now speaking again through His Son to Israel demanding their repentance and their acceptance of their Messiah
- But now Luke moves away from this moment and into a new sequence which continues to build to a climax in verse 35

[Luke 13:10](#) ¶ And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.

[Luke 13:11](#) And there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all.

[Luke 13:12](#) When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, “Woman, you are freed from your sickness.”

[Luke 13:13](#) And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made erect again and *began* glorifying God.

- There's an obvious transition here from the scene moves that began in Chapter 12 and continued into Chapter 13
 - These events may have transpired hours or days or even weeks later
 - But Luke places this teaching here because it fits so neatly with the main theme of these chapters
 - And it also forms an important teaching sandwiched between two related thoughts
 - First, between Jesus' call at the beginning of 13 for the nation to repent
 - And then secondly, it introduce Jesus' discourse in verse 18 and beyond on the nature of God's coming kingdom

- To understand this transition a little better, let's take a look at the details in these verses
 - First we note that Jesus is teaching in a Synagogue on the Sabbath
 - This was Jesus' custom, but it also meant that He would be a target of the Pharisees who had turned the Sabbath into the religious equivalent of police speed trap
 - It was the best day of the week to catch someone doing something wrong
 - Especially to catch Jesus healing – something their traditions and teaching considered to be a violation of the Sabbath

- Luke tells us there was a woman who has suffered for 18 years with a paralysis that causes her to be bent over double
 - The number of years (18) may have spiritual significance, but frankly I'm not sure what it means
 - I do find it more than a little interesting that 18 is the sum of 3 sixes – as in 666
 - This is especially interesting given that we're told her paralysis is caused by a demon

- In other words, the woman is in the grips of a debilitating sickness that has as its origin the enemy
 - Obviously, she's unable to cure herself of the enemy's curse and it's slowly destroying her body
- Isn't interesting that the demonic presence in this woman resulted in a sickness that would appear to anyone today to be merely a muscular skeletal deformity?
 - Our culture have become naive to the work and presence of the enemy around us
 - CS Lewis once said:

"There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight."
- So Jesus takes note of this woman in the crowd and He calls her over and heals her instantly
 - It's important to note that there's no indication that she asked for the healing
 - Jesus decided in His mercy and love to heal the woman
 - Doesn't it seem odd that in the midst of this deep discussion on the coming kingdom and the need to repent and the receiving of the Messiah
 - That Luke inserts this simple story of Jesus healing another woman
 - Well there is an important reason, and the reason explains not only why Luke places it here, but also why Luke alone decided to include this event in his gospel
- First, consider that Jesus just taught that the nation must repent and settle their debts with the judge
 - That they were just as worthy of destruction as the Galileans who died in the temple

- But if they are unworthy sinners, sinners who justly deserve God's judgment, how can they hope to recover and bear fruit?
 - In other words, if the nation is like a sick, worthless tree unable to bear the fruit, then what can save them from the coming judgment?
 - How can they be made to bear fruit?
 - Remember the fertilizer in the parable? The vineyard keeper is the solution
- Now returning to our story of the woman in the synagogue
 - Let's notice again the details of the woman's situation
 - She has been crippled, in the grip of the enemy
 - Her body suffering and likely dying from the paralysis
 - She is unable to help herself and she doesn't even have the inclination to ask God for help
 - As we said, she never asks Jesus to heal her
 - He takes mercy on her and by His grace He determines to heal her
 - Appropriately enough, He heals her on the Sabbath, giving her rest from her affliction
 - And after she is healed, she bears fruit
 - She glorifies God
- So Luke places this account here in these verses to make the connection for the reader between
 - The sinful hopeless state the nation of Israel finds itself in
 - And the one hope they have been given from God to rescue them from their spiritual affliction
 - Sin is a spiritual paralysis brought about by man's disobedience and nurtured and magnified by the power of the enemy

- And without God’s intervention through grace and mercy, men would remain condemned to suffer in their sin and ultimately to receive their just punishment
 - But just like the woman in the Synagogue, all Israel can look to Jesus for healing required before they may bear fruit for God and avoid His judgment
 - If only they would receive Him
- But what do the leaders of Israel say in the face of this miracle?

[Luke 13:14](#) But the synagogue official, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, *began* saying to the crowd in response, “There are six days in which work should be done; so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day.”

[Luke 13:15](#) But the Lord answered him and said, “You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water *him*?”

[Luke 13:16](#) “And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?”

[Luke 13:17](#) As He said this, all His opponents were being humiliated; and the entire crowd was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him.

- The Synagogue official becomes indignant and chastises the synagogue crowd telling them to come back for healing on any of the other six days of the week
 - How absurd
 - A man has just performed a miracle in your midst, in a gathering of God’s people
 - And the official’s first concern is that the healing took place on the “wrong day”
 - It’s hard to believe that anyone could be that oblivious to what’s happening before him
 - It’s like complaining to your wife that she chose to go into labor on the wrong day and ruined your plans to play golf

- This is an interesting because we're not talking about a Pharisee necessarily, but rather the synagogue official
 - This would be roughly equivalent to the worship leader or pastor of the synagogue
- So here again is another official within the nation of Israel unwilling to acknowledge Jesus for who He was
 - And He essentially demands that the crowd depart and not seek after Jesus except on the days men like him have determined are appropriate
 - In his hardness of heart, this man has become a barrier to people accepting their Messiah
- Finally, consider Jesus' response
 - In a tone that almost sounds angry – righteous anger
 - Jesus again calls them hypocrites
 - He says they say one thing and do another
 - Essentially, they are trying to convince the people that they shouldn't follow Jesus because he violates the rules (man made rules)
 - Therefore, anyone who violates rules can't be worthy of their admiration – that's the logic
 - Jesus responds to their faulty logic and exposes their hypocrisy by making an argument from the lesser to the greater
 - Jesus points out that these men were willing to overlook the very same rules for lesser reasons, like the needs of an animal
 - But they condemn Jesus for violating the man-made rules to care for people's needs on the Sabbath
 - In verse 16, Jesus says that when it comes to God's willingness to free his people from their bondage –
 - Whether a bondage of demon possession or a bondage of sin
 - Waiting even one day longer for that freedom is asking too much

- And that's what these leaders are doing to the nation of Israel
 - They are essentially demanding that the nation of Israel overlook Jesus
 - And by doing so, they are condemning the nation to continue in their sin and bondage to the man-made system of rules and regulations
 - So Jesus humiliates them even as He prepared to dismiss
- Now the scene is set for the conclusion of this important chapter
 - In Chap 11, Jesus has shown Himself before all the people and the leaders of Israel as the one promised, as the Son of David
 - He has been declared to be the devil himself
 - He declared woe – or judgment - on the Pharisees and lawyers
 - In Chap 12 He taught the disciples of what to expect as they confronted the enemy and those who are under the enemy's power
 - He warned of persecution
 - He warned of traps and temptation
 - Then Jesus began to call on the crowd to repent of their hypocrisy and to acknowledge the signs they understood
 - Finally, Jesus warned of coming judgment
 - Now, in Chap 13 He's warned that a nation that doesn't bear fruit is useless to God
 - That the Jews shouldn't take satisfaction in thinking that they were somehow exempt from judgment because of their Jewishness
 - If they persisted in failing to bear fruit for God, they would be judged too
 - Finally, Jesus demonstrates once again that He can heal the nation just as He healed the woman in the synagogue
 - But alas, the leadership persists in trying to turn the people against Jesus

- Next week, we see Jesus confirm this rejection as Chap 13 ends
 - It's an important moment for several reasons, and we'll take a close look at it then.