

**Empire Church of the Brethren**  
*Sunday Service Sermons*

**18 February 2024**

Produce or Remove

Text: "And he said to the vinedresser, Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?"

*Luke 13:7*

I face this situation each season.

I now carry red ribbon with me when walking the orchard during harvest.

An almond tree that has no fruit gets a ribbon tied to it and it is cut down in the fall to be replanted with a new tree in the winter season.

I just pruned some old, very large, almonds trees severely since they have not been producing lately.

They will be removed in time but in the meantime I want them cut back to see if they will grow new productive wood and to remove them from shading the already planted replants.

The scriptures on God pruning his people makes sense to me since I do this each year.

Today we have a fig tree that Jesus has passed by and it has no fruit.

In one Gospel he curses it and when they pass by the next time it is shriveled up and dead.

I keep in touch with Father God as to my being productive so that I might stay on this earth and have a more fulfilling life.

Jesus taught by stories that are called parables.

You might call them life illustrations.

He uses them to teach about God, people, life, privileges, opportunities, and responsibilities.

These parables contain warnings and point out the various perils we face in life.

In this illustration, concerning the fig tree, Jesus speaks about the penalty of being useless and fruitless.

There is both a national and a personal application in this parable.

Jesus was speaking to the nation of Israel in declaring that Israel had one more opportunity to bear fruit to the glory of God.

Israel was rejecting God's Messiah and God's purpose for them as a nation.

Forty years later the nation of Israel was to disappear as a national entity and remain so for nearly nineteen hundred years.

Jesus spoke to his nation, and he speaks to us, in a powerful way through this parable of the unfruitful fig tree.

Jesus speaks of God's absolute ownership.

The parable is talking about God and the nation of Israel.

God had been and continues to be repudiated as our creator.

Both the people of ancient Israel and modern civilization have, for all practical purposes, repudiated God as creator.

God had been and continues to be repudiated as owner.

Israel did not see God as owner with a clear title and all of the rights that accrue to ownership.

Many people today do not see the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as the owner of the earth and all of those who dwell in it.

God had been and continues to be repudiated as sustainer.

For all practical purposes, contemporary people believe that everything happens because of natural means.

They do not see God as the great engineer behind this fabulous universe.

By repudiating God as creator, owner, and sustainer, people have made practical atheists of themselves.

Jesus speaks of God's right to expect an appropriate return.

When you rent an apartment, house, or business building, you acknowledge who the owner is in that you always expect to pay a rental fee to that person.

Both Israel and people today have repudiated the rights of the divine owner to receive an appropriate return on his investment.

God does not expect corn stalks to produce cotton fiber.

The fruit of the fig tree is figs.

The fruit of redeemed human beings is conduct worthy of the family of God.

Furthermore, the fruit of a Christian is another Christian.

The fruit of a child of God is another child of God.

Jesus was encouraging his nation, and he would encourage us to recognize that the Father God is both pleased and glorified when we bring forth much fruit to his honor and glory.

Jesus speaks of a limitation of divine patience.

"Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?"

God is not in the business of encouraging parasites who use up space that could be occupied by productive plants.

God wants to replace parasites with those who will be productive.

The national application in this parable is that God's patience with a nation can be exhausted.

The personal application is that God's patience with a rebellious, unfruitful individual, who has been blessed with his favor, can reach the point of exhaustion.

Jesus speaks of the gospel of a second chance.

"Sir, the man replied, leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down." *Luke 13:8-9*.

When reading the Gospel accounts about Jesus one had to wonder if the authors varied the story or if there was more than one occasion when Jesus did not get fruit from a fig tree.

Luke in his account, gives the tree one more year.

In other places Jesus curses the tree and it withers.

There were many fig trees that Jesus passed by.

Maybe they are different occasions.

When we look back and evaluate our performance, we must admit that there have been periods of time when we have not been very productive as fig trees in the vineyard of God.

We have not brought forth fruit pleasing to God.

When some opportunities may be past, and impossible to recall, we can rejoice that we do have the present.

Let each of us decide that we will respond to the working of God's Spirit within our hearts and cooperate with the Father God that we might be productive rather than barren plants.

Let us decide not only to read God's Word but to heed it.

Let us see prayer as something more than a fire escape or a parachute.

Let us determine to listen that we might receive instructions, correction, and commissions to do what God wants us to do.

Let each of us recognize that the church is more than a place.

Let us see it as the body of Christ in the world today through which he carries on his work in the world.

Let each of us rejoice that in and through the church we can serve our Lord.

Let us not neglect or ignore the Holy Spirit.

Instead, let us respond to him positively as he creates within us a hunger for fellowship with God and as he lays in us the blessing of a burden of compassionate concern for those around us.

Let us seize every opportunity for self-improvement through study and training.

Then we will become more competent in the church as choir members, Sunday school teachers, and outreach ministers who carry the good news of God's love to people in our community.

Where do you stand with reference to his parable of the barren fig tree?

Does this parable make you tremble?

If you have not been born again, you have not brought forth any fruit to the glory of God.

And, as you are born again are you being productive to the best of your ability?

God has blessed each of us with special gifts and talents. Are we using them for his kingdom?

If Jesus is your Lord and Savior, but you have been asleep and inactive, it is time to awake from your rest and become productive for God.

The judgment we face, as his children, is this judgment of fruitfulness.

Have we dedicated ourselves to the use of what he has blessed us with to further the work of Christ in our lifetime and our opportunities?