

### **Luke 13:6-9**

**<sup>6</sup>Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. <sup>7</sup>So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’**

**<sup>8</sup>“‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. <sup>9</sup>If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”**

Dear children whose hearts have been changed by God's power.

By now you have most likely seen several lists about some of the notable events of 2009 – both good and bad. On a larger scale, I have even seen a number of lists on things that have happened in the last decade, since we are now moving into a new decade. What were some of the biggest events of the last decade? Certainly the events of 9-11 rank near the top, but what about events like Hurricane Katrina, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? There were events like the massacre at the Virginia Tech campus and the Washington DC sniper. In the more recent past, we have had the economic downturn, the financial bailout and the Madoff scandal. In the last year alone we have inaugurated the first black president of the USA. We have seen the shooting of innocent soldiers at Ft. Hood and the downfall of Tiger Woods. We have lived through the H1N1 scare and the debate on healthcare.

If you look at this list from the last year and beyond, you soon realize that there are a lot of sad and horrible events that we have lived through. We might ask ourselves how in the world have we made it through all of these tough times? And as we sit on the doorstep of another year and the start to another decade we might wonder to ourselves, are we ready and willing to step out of the door to another year or decade like the last? But through all of this, we as children of God need to realize that we didn’t make it through the past year or decade on our own and we certainly can’t make it through the future on our own and so we will use this portion of God’s Word to help us as we look at the past and future using the theme:

### **Theme: Have A Fruitful New Year!**

- 1. On our own the year can’t be fruitful**
- 2. God’s grace makes every year fruitful**

Jesus told parables because people often missed the point of what he was saying. He used parables to make ideas clearer. He used them to teach. The interesting thing, though, is that all of his parables taught the same thing. Sometimes people learned about forgiveness, sometimes they were taught stewardship, and other times parables taught about matters of Christian living, but the only way they did that was by first applying to themselves Christ’s forgiveness. *Every* time Jesus used a parable, he was first teaching them about himself. He was teaching them about his forgiveness for them. He was teaching them that the only truly important thing in this world and in the next is that Jesus came to pay for their sin.

Today’s parable isn’t an exception. Someone brought to Jesus’ attention that some Galileans, Jesus’ native people, were murdered in a very gruesome way. Pilate, the same Pontius Pilate that would soon send Jesus to the cross, sent men in to kill these Galileans at their weakest, while they were making sacrifices. Jesus used this as a teaching opportunity. Rather than bash the government that would allow such a thing to happen, Jesus used the Galileans themselves as his object lesson. All sins are the same. These men, though

they suffered an atrocity, were not any worse sinners than anyone else. All sins result in death. And, Jesus told them, watch out. You could be next.

Apparently there was still some confusion. All sins the same? Did he know who he was talking to? Didn't Jesus know that these men who were following him weren't as bad as the Galileans. Or if not the Galileans, then surely they were better than, *gasp*, the Gentiles. All sins the same? How could they all be judged the same?

In order to make his point more clearly; in order to teach, Jesus told them a parable. **“A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’** “ If a tree isn't bearing fruit, it is worthless. It is using up good soil. It is wasteful. It ought to be cut down. In this parable, Jesus used simple black and white terms. There is only one way to tell if you have a good plant or a bad plant. If it bears fruit, it is good. If not; then not. There is no mistaking it. All trees that don't bear their fruit are bad. All trees that do bear fruit are good. There is no middle ground.

Do you think the crowds understood Jesus' point? There weren't some who were worse sinners than others. They were either a good tree or a bad tree, not worse than bad or better than good. Two categories; that's it. Do you understand Jesus' point? Do you bear fruit? Are you worthless? Are you using up a good pew that could be filled by someone else? Should you be cut down?

New Year's has long been celebrated as a time for self-reflection. Many look at what they have accomplished in the last year. It is a time for some to decide to continue in their ventures or to take tomorrow as an opportunity to start all over again. In Jesus' words today, we also find an encouragement to do a little self-reflection. But Jesus' main concern isn't whether you have gotten ahead in your job or whether you finally kicked that one habit. Instead take this time of reflection to look and see what category you fit in. Are you a living tree, bearing fruit or are you a worthless tree that ought to be cut down?

The owner of the vineyard which we call the world has come back again and again searching for fruit on the tree we call our life. When he comes, does he see your faith expressing itself through love? Does he see your love for him and for your neighbor in your actions? Or does he see that your sinful nature has so poisoned your desires that you don't bear any fruit? Does he see that your thoughts are selfish and greedy? Does he see that your words are hate-filled and meant to bring others down? Does he see that your actions are the complete opposite of what he is looking for? On this New Year's, we look back at the last year and we remember all the times that we have failed to obey God's righteous laws. We see how often we have ignored him and his will. We look in the mirror and see worthless trees that deserve to be cut down.

**“‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it.’** Because we have failed to grow, because we are unable to save ourselves from being uprooted and destroyed, our vineyard-keeper came and interceded for us. He came on our behalf to talk to the owner of the vineyard to save us. He promised to care for us himself and to nourish us himself.

Jesus stayed God's wrath. At any time since the fall into sin, God could have righteously come in and wiped clean his creation. He could have destroyed it all and no one could have objected. But your vineyard-keeper, your intercessor, your brother came and lived your life for you, bearing the fruits you were meant to bear, and died your death instead of you. Through his forgiveness, he made you a good, fruit-bearing tree. When Jesus died on the cross he dug around you and removed the filth that surrounded you. He did away with what you learned from the world around you. He took away your selfishness, your hate, and your sins against God's Law. He cleared them all away so that instead of continuing to look to yourself and the world around you for nourishment to grow on, you would look to him.

Your Savior has made the best fertilizer ever to make you grow. Instead of using the decomposing remains of the world around you, he used his living Word, living water, and his living body and blood.

To nourish you he connects you to his Word where you learn everything about God's plan of Salvation, from Christmas to Easter. When you need to be watered, he floods you again with the forgiveness he anointed you with in your baptism. When you need food, he gives you himself. He gives you his body; given into death for you. He gives you his blood; given and shed for you, for your forgiveness.

In the parable of the barren fig tree, Jesus taught the crowds—and us—the same thing he always taught in his parables. He died for you. He rose for you. He is what is important. The reason that he is so important is because a time is coming when the owner of the vineyard will finally come and look for fruit on your tree. If your tree bears fruit, fine. If your tree bears fruit, you are judged to be a good tree and you enter heaven. But if not, you will need to be cut down. If you are disconnected from your Savior, if you disregard his fertilizer and look again to the world around you, you will be destroyed. Jesus told this parable to let you know that this destruction doesn't have to happen. He died for you. He rose for you. He forgave you. He gives you life.

In this time of self-reflection, instead of looking back at the failures in your life, or wondering what the future holds, look at the victory Christ has won for you. If you are going to look in the past, look instead at the cross on Calvary where your Savior interceded for you. If you are resolving to change your life in this next year, change your life for the better. Resolve with God's help and strength to re-connect yourself to your vineyard-keeper. Resolve to receive his spiritual "fertilizer" more often, whether in Sunday services, bible classes, or home devotions. Resolve to be a fruit bearing tree. The only way to have a fruitful new year is to be connected to Jesus. Have a Fruitful Year! Amen.