

A STUDY OF THE PARABLE OF THE BARREN FIG-TREE
IN LUKE 13:6-9 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE
CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANS

NBTS
M. DIV. TH.
Ab-116

BY
CHRISTIAN AWATOMA ABANUM

A Thesis Submitted in Department of Theology, Faculty of Theological Studies of
"The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso" In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Award of the Degree of Master of Divinity in Theology

2013-0414

J.C. POOL LIBRARY
BAPTIST SEMINARY
OGBOMOSO NIGERIA

JUNE, 2013

ABSTRACT

Parable telling was one of the greatest tools used by Jesus as a great teacher during His earthly ministry; hence we have several parables recorded in the synoptic gospels. And each of these parables is of paramount importance to the local Church, the Church universal and the entire human race due to the spiritual truth embellished in them just as this peculiar parable of the barren fig-tree in Lukan narrative stands out from other parables based on the spiritual teaching it holds, which Jesus revealed to drive home His teaching on what repentance truly denotes. This thesis is therefore saddled with the goal of discovering biblical truths concerning the parables of Jesus with the parable of the barren fig-tree as a case study to analyze its content, identify its theological implications and the lessons which it holds for contemporary Christians. The methodology adopted for this research is historical-critical and exegetical method of research. As a follow up to this critical methodology, the writer will also employ contextual tools as a means of making the passage meaningful to the African context. In other words, this approach detaches the text from its historical source and setting and frees the text to mean what it will in any given time and culture. This research finds out that though God bears long, he will not bear always with unfruitful devotees; his patience will have an end, and, if it be abused, will give way to that wrath which will have no end. It is thus recommended that the contemporary leaders of the Churches and Biblical scholars properly exegete this parable in order to truly deduce Jesus' intended spiritual truth and as well apply it for the benefits of the 21st century postmodernism Christians and humanity in general.

creation to be destroyed: “but God is not willing that any should perish.” And for this single reason He gives man the justifiable timeframe for them to judiciously appropriate all the privileges they enjoys that should necessitate God’s ultimate expectation. Hence, man is to get reoriented with God, acknowledging the need for Him to create the dependent spirit that they need to walk with God. The decision is crucial one, for if time passes without repentance, only rejection remains. Luke concludes the speech on this basic note, which in Jesus’ context had national overtones, though this encompasses individual applications. Tragedy is hard and life is brevity—but life is more tragic if one does not turn to God.

5.2 CONCLUSION

The importance of bearing spiritual fruit is repeatedly emphasized in the Bible. Especially significant is the link between the failure to produce good fruit and divine judgment. Jesus makes this connection by telling the parable of the barren fig tree, a story describing a man seeking fruit. In this parable, the Lord Jesus chooses the fig tree as a picture of Israel to highlight the fact that what should have been most fruitful turns out to be not fruitful at all. Israel failed to be a fruitful nation. When God planted Israel, He expected fruit. The chosen nation was highly privileged in that it had received a choice spot in God’s vineyard. But with the privilege came responsibility—the responsibility to bear fruit. And Israel failed to match privilege with duty.

The judgment pronounced upon the barren fig tree not only symbolizes the sentence passed upon the Jews, but is also applicable to the professed Christians of this time, who have become formal, selfish, boasting and hypocritical. The irrevocable sentence passed upon the Jewish nation, and its consequent downfall and

ruin was symbolized by the doom of the barren fig tree. Though it is not always easy to detect the sincere, genuine Christian from the counterfeit; but when brought to the test like the barren fig tree they are found diverse in character even if the external appearance may deceive the eye. False and true devotion bear so close a resemblance to each other that it may be difficult for human wisdom to distinguish the difference between them. But the eye of the Infinite looks beneath the external and discerns the pretenders from the real, unmasks the hypocrite and discovers the difference between the cumberers of the ground and the fruit bearers.

This parable of the Barren Fig Tree is one that could however be classified as a dispensational or prophetic parable. The textual and historical context places it in a time of great conflict in the Jewish nation. Israel was warned that unless they would repent they would be cut down from their privileged position and possibly be replaced. The owner of the vineyard in which the fig tree was planted is God the Father who orders the tree to be cut down. The dresser of the fig tree is Jesus who asks for one more year for the tree. This extra year would allow special cultivation to take place with the hope that Israel would respond. Looking at the historical account in the book of Acts it could be seen that one year later the Jewish nation had not responded to Jesus' cultivation and thus are cut down as a favored nation. The Church, the body of Christ, with Jews and Gentiles being equal is then brought into focus.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Having systematically studied one of the peculiar parables in the Lukan narrative, specifically "the parable of the barren fig tree," told by Jesus it becomes obligatory to the writer of this thesis to make the following recommendations:

1. Considering the gravity of the teachings this parable holds it is therefore

- incumbent on the leaders of the Churches and Biblical scholars to engage themselves into an in-depth study of this parable in order to thoroughly deduce Jesus' intended spiritual truth and as well apply it for the benefit of the contemporary Churches and the entire human race.
- II. Some gospel ministers' have been for long ignorant of the significance of the parables in the synoptic gospels, hence they become complacent and reluctant in its painstaking studies which in turn land them into error of misinterpretation or eisegesis of these parables. The upshot of the research done on this particular parable of the barren fig tree serve as an eye opener toward encouraging gospel ministers to take interest into serious study of the gospel parables in which great spiritual truth is embellished, if they must disseminate their intended meanings.
 - III. Jesus as a great teacher and as one who came to ultimately give man a right standing with God uses this parable of the barren fig tree to drive home His teaching on repentance in order to reveal that those who enjoys God's privileges must as well live to God's expectations or wait to bear the consequences; which places the Church leaders in a better position to enlighten their congregation on the same crucial issue that antecedent this parable, which is very imperative for the contemporary Christians to pay attention to so as to escape God's impending Judgment.
 - IV. The pericope of the parable of the barren fig tree stands out from any other parable or passage that discusses same subject of repentance. Thus, for any scholar or leader of a Church to present a comprehensive view on same subject should endeavour to take a proper perusal of this pericope in question

before drawing a line of conclusion.

- V. Considering the opportunities and challenges confronting the man of the 21st century, this study thus puts on toes every believer from all works of life to take a deep search of their personal relationship with Christ so as to know whether they are fruitful/fruitless in the Christendom before it will be too late.