

"If It Bears Fruit"

*Gathered up in Jesus – part #3
from umcdiscipleship.org*

Luke 13:1-9

[46] (Welcome, prayer)

I like fresh fruit, especially oranges, apples, and raspberries. Fruit is good for you, but how well do you know your fruit trivia? Let's find out with this quiz from fruitexpert.co.uk.

[47-59] Fruit Quiz Questions & Answers¹

1. Which fruit has the highest oil content?

a) Peach, b) Avocado, c) Olive, d) Mango

2. What percentage of the watermelon is water?

a) 34%, b) 80%, c) 66%, d) 92%

3. Apple pips (seeds) contain:

a) juice, b) Vitamin H, c) sodium, d) cyanide

4. The only fruit to have seeds on the outside is:

a) Pineapple, b) Raspberry, c) Lychee, d) Strawberry

5. Because it has a high quercetin content, this fruit may help relieve hayfever:

a) Raspberry, b) Strawberry, c) Melon, or d) Grape

6. A loganberry is a cross between a blackberry and a:

a) Blueberry, b) Raspberry, c) Blackcurrant, d) Strawberry

7. According to American research, which fruit is No. 1 when it comes to antioxidants?

a) Blueberry, b) Orange, c) Pear, d) Cherry

8. Which of these fruits is not native to North America?

a) Blueberry, b) Apple, c) Cranberry, d) Grape

9. The stones from which fruit were once used in bed-warming pans?

a) Plum, b) Avocado, c) Cherry, d) Peach

¹ <https://www.fruitexpert.co.uk/fruit-basics/fun-fruit-quiz/>

10. There is a fruit juice that can increase the potency of some medication, even causing an overdose. Which fruit juice is this?

a) Apple, b) Orange, c) Grapefruit, d) Pineapple

11. And finally, if you have 4 bananas in one hand and 5 mangoes in the other, what do you have?

ANSWERS: 1) olive, 2) 92%, 3) cyanide, 4) strawberry, 5) raspberry, 6) raspberry, 7) blueberry, 8) apple, 9) cherry, 10) grapefruit, 11) big hands!

[58] A while ago I was surprised to discover there is at least one orange tree growing in the Keweenaw peninsula. It's in the lobby of a plumbing store in Hancock. It even has real fruit growing on it, because someone is tending to it.

[59] We naturally expect to find good fruit on healthy plants, and bad fruit or no fruit on plants that are sick, malnourished, or dying. In fact, we often apply the same reasoning to people. "Good things only happen to good people, and bad things only happen to bad people."

[60] We aren't the first people to try to rationalize disaster. In the Bible, this conversation comes up between Jesus and some Galileans – outsiders in Israel – who tells Jesus about a horrible crime, when the Roman governor, Pilate, killed "those Galileans" inside the temple, while they were worshipping at the altar. Their implication: "Jesus, doesn't that mean they were really bad people?"

The reigning theory in Jesus' time was somewhat like karma: if you are a bad person, bad things will happen to you. In John 9:1, Jesus's disciples ask why a certain man is born blind: was it the man's fault or his parents' fault? Now, some Bible books, like Exodus, Deuteronomy seem to back this idea up, that sin causes illness or punishment. But this logic is refuted in other scriptures, like the book of Job and Psalm 73.

[61] In my research, I found this helpful summary from Pastor Bob Utley: "It is hard theologically to know the reason for problems or persecutions in this world.

1. It could be punishment for personal sin and rebellion.
2. It could be the activity of personal evil.
3. It could be the results of living in a fallen world (statistical evil).

4. It could be an opportunity for spiritual growth."²

The point is, we are not to judge. We should never think, "I must be OK with God, because nothing terrible has happened to me." It doesn't matter who you are, if you try hard enough, you can always find someone who "sins better" or whose current hardships prove what a "horrible person" they are.

[62] Jesus explains, to them and to us, that the Galileans were not "worse sinners." Jesus warns everyone, "Unless you repent, you too will all perish." (Luke 13:3) Jesus points to another terrible calamity – a tower collapse that killed 18 faithful Jews in Jerusalem. Those people were not "more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem." Again Jesus warns everyone, "Unless you repent, you too will all perish." (Luke 13:5)

The first lesson to us all here is simple: everyone needs to repent. Period. We all need to receive God's grace and change our lives. The two groups of people mentioned here thought they could trust their heritage or location to save them. One group was murdered in the temple, the place God dwelt; the other died under a tower built to protect God's chosen city. It does not matter who you are or where you're from: we all need to turn to God.

Any of us could make excuses to say, "Well, I'm good. I must be blessed more than those people over there." We could claim our income, our vocation, even our geography makes us exempt from needing to repent.

[63] How would you feel if I, your pastor, prayed to God, "Thank you, God, for exempting me from repentance and making me so much better than those awful sinners in my neighborhood!"? In fact, in Luke 18:9-14, in the parable of the tax collector and the pharisee, and those were pretty much the pharisee's words. No way! Friends, if your own pastor doesn't believe that, if not even pastors get a spiritual exemption from God, no one else should think so, either.

We all need to repent. We all need to admit we are not perfect, we have rebelled against God, and we need God's help to be saved. We must change our thinking. Without humility, confession, repentance, and forgiveness, we will not enter God's kingdom. We all need to repent.

² Bob Utley, bible.org

[64] The second lesson in this story is about fruit, and it drives home the other point about repenting: not only does everyone need to repent, we need to do it now. God's patience is timeless, but our lives are not.

To illustrate his point, Jesus tells a story. A man with a fig tree goes into his garden for three straight years, looking for fruit to harvest and eat, but he finds nothing. Fed up with the tree, he orders the gardener to cut it down and burn it. The gardener says, "Wait. Have some patience, sir. I'll give it some extra water and fertilizer. Give the tree another chance. If nothing changes in the next year, then we can go ahead and dispose of it."

If it's not obvious, let me help you with a little biblical interpretation: the fig tree is us. We should be bearing fruit.

[65] A life given to Christ should bear evidence over time. The fruit we should produce is in our attitudes, our actions, our generosity, our patience and kindness. Ephesians 5:1 tell us, since God is generous, patient, and kind to us, we should imitate God. In John 15:5, Jesus promises his disciples and us, if we remain in Christ, we will bear fruit. It is a natural by-product of our relationship with Jesus.

If the fig tree is not bearing fruit, that fig tree needs a pep talk.

[66] The gardener loves the tree. He is willing to fight for it and nurture it. Similarly, Jesus intercedes for us. The Holy Spirit encourages us. In 2 Corinthians 6:2, the apostle Paul says, "Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation." (NIV) Every day of our lives, we are offered God's amazing grace. Every day, we can choose to accept it or reject it. The question is, how long do we really think we can hold out?

There comes a point in everyone's lives when the time to repent and choose Christ will expire, literally, when you expire. Why would anyone wait? Why would anyone test God's patience?

What does it mean if we say we accept Christ, yet we never bear any good fruit? How can we really say our lives have changed, if there is no noticeable difference? Please understand, we do not and cannot earn our salvation. The scripture is clear about that. God's grace is freely offered to us in Jesus Christ. No one is advocating for work-righteousness. Yet we must understand, God's plan for us is to bear fruit. We should get excited about that.

[67] Think of the ministries of Grace United Methodist Church that bear fruit right here in Houghton County:

- We serve meals to the elderly with Little Brothers three times a year.
- We support the needy through Salvation Army donations.
- We regularly offer Vacation Bible school, Sunday School, and Youth Group to our children.
- We have a cancer support group.
- We promote peace and understanding with International Neighbors.
- We bring communion and chapel services to residents of the Bluffs.

That is our fruit. And you know what’s special about fruit? It is the part of the plant that has seeds. When our lives bear fruit, we are planting seeds of faith.

[68] Do you want to see fruit in your own life? I hope you would say yes. I pray every day for my children to know God, and to bear fruit for God. I pray for our church, for all of our churches. But I cannot force anyone to produce fruit, nor can you. We can create opportunities, dig a little here and there, add some water, add some plant food – also known as pizza – but no one else can control your output, attitudes, words.

If we want to bear love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, we have to repent, believe in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross to save us, and let the Holy Spirit change us from the inside. We have to commit to living for God and letting Christ grow the best spiritual fruit from the depth of our souls. In our words, our actions, and our witness, we can show the world the good news. We can offer acceptance and love. We can trust God no matter what. We can be a place of healing and love, not a burden to people, not creating more anxiety. We still have a long way to go to get there, but we can do it, together, with the strength of Christ.

Notice that Jesus never tells us what happens to the tree the next year. That’s intentional. In our own lives, there is free will. The “tree” has a choice. You have a choice. Repent and bear fruit, or risk getting pulled out by the roots and missing the eternal life God offers you.

In closing, allow me to share this poem I found in the New Testament Commentary by an unknown author. It describes the choice each of us faces.

*There is a line by us unseen
That crosses every path,
The hidden boundary between
God's patience and his wrath*

*O where is that mysterious bourne
By which our path is crossed,
Beyond which God himself has sworn
That he who goes is lost?*

*How far can one go on in sin?
How long will mercy spare?
Where does grace end and where begin
The confines of despair?*

*An answer from the sky is sent:
Ye who from God depart,
While it is called today repent,
And harden not your heart.*

Author unknown. (NTC, 697.)

Let's pray.

Memory verse: Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV)

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

Reflection questions:

1. What does it mean to repent?
2. When calamity strikes in our lives, do we look for the possible lesson in it, or do we try to rationalize it?
3. Do we show similar patience as the gardener when things do not turn out like we want?
4. How has God shown his love and patience in your life?
5. Have you responded to Jesus's call to repent and bear fruit?