

## Luke 13:1-9 “Jesus’ prune warning”

“Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> Jesus answered, ‘Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? <sup>3</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.’

<sup>6</sup> Then he told this parable: ‘A man had a fig tree growing 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.”’”

**When you first saw this sermon title, what mental picture arose?  
Did trimming trees and vines come to mind?  
Or that Jesus forbade eating prunes?**

**One popular brand of prunes uses the word “amazing” on its packages.**

Ancient physicians advocated eating prunes.

**Internet “voyagers” can easily locate a source entitled:**

**“HOW THE PRUNE TRAVELLED THE WORLD - A BRIEF 4000-YEAR HISTORY”**

“Teachings of the Greek physician HIPPOCRATES (460-377 BC) spread throughout the Mediterranean world. He referred to prunes . . . in his DIAPRUN and CATHOLICON<sup>1</sup> remedies.” “Another Greek physician, Claudius GALIENUS studied medicine in PERGAMUM, SMYRNA and CORINTH. His treatise DE ALIMENTARIUM FACULTATIBUS includes a chapter on prunes.”

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<sup>1</sup> By catholicon I suspect that he mean “universal.”

**My Latin dictionary says that “alimentarium” refers to food.**

In school biology, we learned about the body’s alimentary canal, which channels nourishment (food) through us.

**The word “facultatibus” can mean feasibility or power.**

Connecting the two terms makes me think that the ancient Greek physician wrote a treatise on power foods.

Sounds like an article intended for Good Housekeeping or the Food Magazine and that he included a chapter on the “power of prunes.”

***The Book of Revelation* lists Smyrna and Pergamum among its Seven Cities; the Apostle Paul spent at least two years in Corinth and wrote the Corinthian Church two letters.**

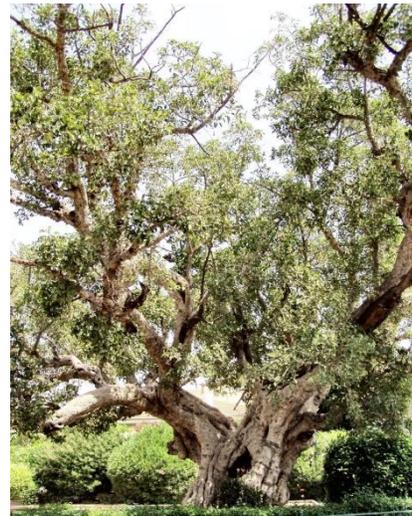
That doctor Galienus hailed prune power should not amaze us.

**From ancient times, folks in the Mediterranean area, especially Syria grew plum-prunes.**

**Paul, the other apostles and their wives probably knew about prune-plums.**

**Yet, to my knowledge, the Bible never mentions plums-prunes.**

**Wrinkled raisins, yes, but not their rumped prune cousins.**



sycomorus figs

**Ficus sycamorus** **If Jesus didn’t refer to the fruit from which prunes come, did he mention pruning trees?**

In this Luke 13 text, you find no word referring to cutting back or pruning trees and vines.

## **Why the topic, pruning?**

**We prune trees in the hope that they will bear fruit.**

Our text deals with that expectation.

**Think of Adam and Eve tending God’s orchard.**

**The Lord gave them that job.**

He warned them about becoming distracted.

**You know what happened to the couple.**

**They blew what could have been a cushy, lifetime position.**

He warned; they didn’t listen.

**The Lord alerts us, too.**

**Caution signs continually pop up in life.**

**In countless end-of-life conversations with people, I heard a common theme.**

Adults often admitted they would do certain things differently.

**They regretted not paying more attention to the warnings they received.**

**Many expressed deep regret.**

They sorrowfully said things like:

**“Family and friends warned me.**

**I didn’t listen.**

**I should have known.”**

**Though family members usually give good counsel; they sometimes give lousy advice. If you want consistently perfect, dependable guidance, however, consult the Lord.**

**His advice never fails.**

**For good reason, Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the Counselor.**

God’s Word and Spirit work perfectly together.

**Scripture “dos and don’ts” resemble warning signs along a highway.**

**Sometimes we miss them, don’t we?**

We get distracted.

**Creature comforts, iTunes, and happy, dreamy, notions preoccupy us so we pay little attention to warning signs.**

**What do you mean by signs, Bob?**

**Our consciences raise big caution signs.**

**If we honestly look at our activities, would we see questionable pastimes?**

## Why don’t we listen to God’s Word and to our consciences?

- We’re busy.
- Loud music dims the little voice.
- Friends ridicule us.
- Following God isn’t cool.
- Besides, other people are worse than we.

In these conditions, Luke 13 shouts, **“Stop and listen!”**

People came to Jesus telling him about the latest disasters.

Then as now, news junkies worked 24/7.

**“Jesus, did you hear about those people from up north in Galilee?**

**They came to offer sacrifices at the Jerusalem Temple.**

**“Pilate ordered his soldiers to slaughter them. Their blood mixed with blood from the sheep and cattle they sacrificed.**

**All that gore flowed down the street right in front of us. It was horrifying!”**

## What would you expect Jesus to say to current reports of atrocity such as this?

**Jesus made none of the standard comments.**

- He did not criticize Governor Pilate.
- He said nothing about the deplorable Roman government.
- He didn’t call for a senate investigation.
- Even for the brutalized worshipers, Jesus verbalized no pity.

**Post-tragedy conversations sometimes center on how the sufferers deserved it.**

- **“It wouldn’t have happened to us.”**
  - I wouldn’t have gone there.
- **“We’re smarter than the ones who died.”**

**Jesus read the minds of those folks:**

**“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?”**

**Then, Jesus did what he always did.**

He aimed words straight at the hearts of those present; reporters and his audience.

“Don’t speak about how guilty or stupid you think others are.

**“(3) I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”**

“You folks rock along thinking that because nothing happened to you today that you are OK. Unless you repent, however, you will meet a similar fate. You will perish, too.”

**God’s Word and our consciences resemble flashing road signs.**

We disregard those warnings at our peril.

**You possibly do things that negatively affect your relationship with God.**

**Are you paying attention to the warning signs the Lord sends you?**

**That’s the message in this pruning story.**

In our text, Jesus spoke of cutting down a useless fig tree.

Farmers and gardeners understand the exchange between the owner and his foreman.

**The owner expected figs, but saw none.**

**Are thinking: “This text does not mention pruning”?**

Many of us have likely never seen a fig tree, but Jesus’ audience understood that this tree was pruned many times.

A website labelled [gardeningknowhow.com](http://gardeningknowhow.com) provides procedures practiced for thousands of years by fig tree growers.

“When a fig tree is first planted . . . trim a tree back by about half. This will allow the tree to focus on developing its roots and becoming well established . . . In the next winter . . . Select four to six branches to be your fruiting wood and prune away the rest.”<sup>2</sup>

**In short, cut everything that doesn’t promote production.**



**Ancient pruning hook**

<sup>2</sup> Read more at Gardening Know How: Fig Tree Pruning – How To Trim A Fig Tree, <https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/edible/fruits/figs/pruning-fig-trees.htm>

**The Luke 13 tree surely underwent considerable pruning.**

**If you don’t prune, you’ll have lots of foliage, but no fruit.**

In the nearly 20 years Norma and I had fig trees, I spent a lot of time trimming long, worthless branches.

What Jesus taught here and elsewhere should change our ideas of a proper Christian life.

**Does the Lord want us to live exemplary lives? Absolutely!**

**But the Lord wants more than just a nice, proper-appearing person.**

**This parable teaches that the Lord expects us to bear fruit.**

**That fig tree probably looked healthy.**

**If it didn’t why would the owner look for fruit on it?**

When we plant an apple trees hoping to see Granny Smith, Gravenstein, or Delicious apples and we find nothing after we’ve properly pruned it, we’ll probably chop

down the tree.

The fig tree in Jesus’ story produced nothing.

The fig tree owner intended to axe it.

He fertilized it and gave it another year, however.

**What does this parable mean?**

**What does the Lord expect from us?**

**The Book of Hebrews helps us understand this Luke 13 text:**

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.

16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”<sup>3</sup>

**1. We continually praise and thank God. If we compare the time we spend gladly praising God and thanking Him with the amount of time we spend angry, complaining, worrying, and entertaining ourselves, what ratio would result?**

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<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 13:15,16 NIV

The phrase: “**the fruit of lips that openly profess his name**” deserves attention.

The “fruit” the landowner expected in Luke 13 and “fruit” in Hebrews 13 are the same Greek term.

“Fruit” is the Greek word *karpon* (κάρπον).

“Fruit” indicates something tangible.

**What fruit does the Lord want?**

The adverbs “continually” and “openly” warn strongly, don’t they?

**“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.”**

The fruit God expects us to produce is openly confessing that we believe in God, that we idolize His son Jesus, and we continually thank him.

**2. We don’t give expecting thanks.**

**But if the recipient keeps taking and never says “thank you,” big question marks, arise, don’t they?**

**The Lord gives abundantly to us.**

He expects us to produce--glorify him, thank him and confess the name of Jesus.

**If we don’t produce this fruit, He gives us signs to warn us.**

At times he even gives us more things—fertilizes us, if you will.

**But one day, he’ll demand an accounting.**

We can’t claim that He hasn’t warned us.

**Are you heeding the signs God gives you?**

I pray that we shall all praise God, thank him, and openly confess Jesus’ name:

**“The fruit of lips that praise his name.”**

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**Common fig**