

Film: *Sean*
Parable: **The Barren Fig Tree**
Scripture: **Luke 13:6-9**

Interpreting *Sean*

The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree explores grace, mercy and judgment. It is likely that the vinedresser is the original parable represented Jesus – the one fighting for delayed judgment on the barren fig tree.

Jesus was and is perfect. So why does the teacher (that seems to represent Jesus) assume some of the guilt? “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21). When Jesus paid the price for us on the Cross, he carried our sins and assumed our guilt. Like many of Jesus’ parables, we don’t know how it ends. The fig tree gets one more year, but we don’t know what happened to that tree, just like we don’t know what Sean is going to do.

Cultural background

The purpose of a fig tree is to bear fruit. But what do you do with something that refuses to fulfill its purpose? That’s the question Jesus poses in the parable of the barren fig tree.

Israel had been given a task. Sealed with God’s covenant, Israel was called to be a “light to the nations” (see Isaiah 49). The problem was - the light had been put “under a bushel” (Matt. 5:15-16), it obscured God rather than enlightened people concerning Him.



So what’s to be done? The owner of the vineyard says it’s a waste of space, but the vinedresser, in this parable, intercedes for this fruitless fig tree. Jesus is the vinedresser who’s been pruning for 3 years (His earthly ministry was around 3 years in length)...and often to no avail. So he asks for another year, to dig around and fertilize. This is the work of Jesus - to offer us a second chance. An opportunity to become fruitful under His tender care, but we must produce a response to God among the nations. This is exactly what happened in the early church era. The followers of Jesus went from a tiny minority of scared disciples to an empire-wide majority in a few hundred years! That’s some serious fruit.

Discussion questions

- 1) Since it is likely that Jesus was alluding to Israel as the barren fig tree, in what ways is the modern Christian Church not producing fruit?
- 2) In what areas of your life do you feel barren?

Application

The question of fruitfulness remains for us today - are we fruitful? Are we extending His Kingdom? Or, are we just wasting space in the ground? A recent book by Ron Sider ("The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience") poses the question of the American church's fruitfulness. Sider cannot find a single area of distinction between Christians and Non-Christians in our culture today.



Will the owner bypass us...or even worse -cut us down? And just how long does His patience extend? Jesus is not talking here about forgiveness (that was answered on the Cross) - He's talking about usefulness. It's entirely possible to be forgiven but fruitless.

What about me?

Do I serve any good purpose, or am I just taking up space?

Discussion questions

- 1) Is Jesus possibly giving us some instruction on being patient with others? Is there something to be learned about how we should deal with other barren fig trees?
 - 2) In what ways have you been like the landowner (or the principal in the film)... ready to cut down the tree? In what ways have you been like the vinedresser (or the teacher in the film) pleading for mercy for another? In what ways have you been like the fig tree (or Sean), deserving of judgment, but spared?
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As you reflect on the parable and the film, consider that Jesus told these stories about our everyday lives. He reveals Himself through common experiences and we should be able to find Him in the most unlikely places. Christ "shows up" while we're sitting in front of our computers at work, cooking dinner or driving in traffic. We always like to learn something during the big moments in our lives, but Christ clearly makes the point that learning about His love, His grace and His mercy can be experienced in the most ordinary circumstances of our everyday lives.