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Borrowed Time

Hearing of the suddenness with which death tracks down the soul of every man, surely by this time many in the crowd surrounding Christ were shuddering at the prospect of their mortality. The headlines that read of Pilate's cruel unjust rage and that of a tragic toppling tower were brought to the forefront of discussion as a reminder that life tomorrow is no guarantee. We are all living on borrowed time.

As an agricultural society, these people were likely familiar with the basics of horticulture. Vineyards abounded around Israel, carpeting the hill-scapes and countryside with a lush reminder of God's covenant blessing of the land to His people. Vineyards were well cared-for since they were considered some of the staple portions of the nationwide industry. It wasn't uncommon for fruit trees to be intentionally placed within the confines of the carefully cultivated grounds of a vineyard. The soil was rich with fruit-giving nutrients. Orchards weren't grown in this way, but isolated fruit trees would find the personal attention of the vine-dressers.

⁶ He also spoke this parable: "A certain *man* had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. ⁷ Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?' ⁸ But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize *it*. ⁹ And if it bears fruit, *well*. But if not, after that you can cut it down.' " *Luke 13:6-9 NKJV*

The wonder isn't so much how long we have yet to live, as it is that we are even alive! It is only because of a merciful God Who abounds in His patience and forbearance that we breathe another breath.

Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let

him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. *Isaiah 55:6-7 NKJV*

By this time Jesus, had appealed to the world with the offering of saving grace for three full years. Most still lived in willful rejection of His Lordship. **Grace layered upon grace was the cadence of each turn of His appeal to the crowd that surrounded Him.**

Reaching 25 feet in height and around 20 feet in its spread the fig tree in Israel was a treasured mark of prosperity and a thick canopy of shade—if it was healthy. By the time a fig tree had reached its third season it was expected to bear fruit. With all the right conditions of a well-cultivated soil and skillful care of the farmer, this icon of Israel ought to be weighed down with its sumptuous fruit. But the tree in this parable had the pretense of health, yet lacked fruit. It had all the right conditions for fruitfulness, but lacked fruit. The keeper of the vineyard had done all that he could in his masterful care to tend to the tree, but there was no reward—yet. The owner made the determination that the tree was not useful, and an ax must be laid to its root.

Who would care for such a tree? Why would anyone give such attention to a fruitless tree as to plead for its continued existence and the patience of the owner? But this was the character of the keeper. He was mindful of each moment of toil he had invested into the nurturing of the fig tree. He was there when it was planted. He was interested in the prospect of its fruitfulness. Its isolation had granted it his special favor. And so he pleaded the graces of the owner that it be left for one more season to become what it was intended to become. Such was the character of the keeper—He would personally take responsibility to provide all that the tree needed.

Christ was further illustrating the point He had just made. It isn't whether you are better or worse than the next

person that determines your fate. The fact is that all who will not repent and acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior will meet the same death. They are living on “borrowed time.” **His words are not words of a threatening angry God, but they are words of infinite mercy and patient grace!**

We are left with a very sobering question: “Why should God allow me to occupy the ground?” “Why should He put up with no produce?”

As the “keeper” in this parable, Christ appears to intercede upon God the Father as the necessary mediator for the life of the fig tree. He pleads on behalf of the fruitless, hopeless tree. **In the *telling* of this parable, He is also the pleading Savior.** His invitation is for those who are putting off repentance and faith to take hold of this season of mercy and receive Him today! The consequence for rejection of His work on your behalf is disastrous!

LIFE APPLICATION:

1. Why did the owner come to the tree looking for fruit?
2. What about the fig tree made the owner believe that it should have borne fruit?
3. Was the fig tree dealt with individually or as an orchard?
4. Were there unrealistic expectations placed upon the fig tree? Was it unjust to expect fruit?
5. Was the fig tree given ample time to bear fruit?
6. Was there anything of value in the fruitless tree that the keeper should give it such personal consideration?

7. What actions did the keeper plan to undertake for the life and future health of the tree? How is that a picture of what Christ had done for us?
8. What is the attitude of the keeper towards the owner? (“Sir” = “Lord”)
9. How does the owner’s inquiry indicate His interest in the purpose for which he purchased the tree?
10. Is there any reason why the owner should delay the cutting down of the tree?
11. Is there any reason why a soul should delay the placing of their faith in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation?
12. Do you believe that Christ would have such care for you that He would personally intercede on your behalf that you might receive undeserved mercy and grace in forgiveness and reconciliation with God?
13. Are you delaying in your believing? If so, you are living on “borrowed time.”