



The Reflector

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“Why Cumbereth it the Ground?”

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Jesus spoke a parable against the Jewish nation of his day:

“He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.” (Luke 13:6-9 KJV)

Like the owner of the fig tree, God had planted and cared for Israel as a nation. He had every right to expect good fruit. But, like the fig tree, Israel had not produced fruit for the Owner in spite of the Owner’s longsuffering. She, like the fig tree, was being given a last chance by the calls for them to “repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” spoken by John and Jesus. If they did not repent now they would be cut down. They rejected the preaching by not only failing to repent, they reject and crucified the Christ. They were cut down as a nation with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

There is a question raised in the midst of this parable that merits our consideration. By not bearing fruit, the tree was just cumbering the ground or taking up space. We can learn some valuable lessons from this question.

God gives us opportunity to produce.

This fig tree was blessed by its owner. It enjoyed life in the vineyard with the owner and vine dresser supplying it with soil, fertilizer, and care need to bear fruit.

The tree disappointed its owner by ignoring its responsibility to bear fruit. Instead it was counterproductive by cumbering the ground, taking up space and using up plant food and moisture. It was really a burden to the rest of the vineyard by taking and not giving. It was not condemned for producing less than any of the other trees, but it did not produce what it could. The parables of the talents and the sower teach that each is expected to produce according to his ability.

This tree is so typical of too many professed Christians today. All they are doing is using up the ground. I fear Jesus would say to them, “Why cumbereth (ye) the ground?” They accept the gift of life (“he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things” – Acts 17:25) without its responsibilities. They accept benefits of citizenship in this great country without the responsibilities of citizenship. On the responsibilities to civil governments, Paul says, “Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour” (Rom. 13:7). They accept the benefits of the home without the responsibilities of husbands, wives, parents and children. They accept benefits of salvation in Christ and His church without accepting the

responsibilities that go with that salvation: “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:11-12 KJV).

God Gives Us Opportunity to Repent.

After three years the vineyard owner wanted to cut the tree down. But after the plea of the vine dresser he gave the tree another opportunity. God has given us all another opportunity through the intercession of Jesus on our behalf. All sin (Romans 3:10, 23), even those who are Christians (1 John 1:8,10). So, we all need opportunity to repent. The reason given for the delay in the second coming of Jesus is that God “is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Pet. 3:9). While the window of opportunity is still open to us we need to get right with God.

God Limits Our Opportunity to Produce and Repent. The parable of the fig tree shows that if the tree did not produce after its second opportunity it was coming down. History shows that Israel, represented by the tree, came down.

God’s longsuffering in Noah’s day came to an end with the flood. In Revelation, the Lord’s patience with “that woman Jezebel” was about to come to an end. He had given her space to repent (longsuffering), but she had not taken advantage of that space now the Lord was about to execute punishment. (Rev. 2:20-23).

God’s longsuffering toward us is limited. “Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” (Acts 17:31 KJV) After explaining why God is not slack concerning his promise to come again, Peter adds, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth

also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.” (2 Peter 3:10 KJV)

We all need to ask ourselves, “Are we producing, or merely cumbering the ground?” If we are just cumbering the ground, the church would be better off without us. We are sapping strength from the vineyard without giving anything back to the Lord. We should either repent or get out. The desired and best option is to repent and become productive by serving the Lord daily.

How long do you think the Lord will put up with our cumbering the ground? ■

BIG May not be Better

Hiram Hutto

Have you ever noticed how many people have “The Tower of Babel Complex?” Remember the tower of Babel? These people said, “Let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name” (Gen. 11:4). Evidently they thought, “the bigger the better” or, the way to be really somebody is to do big things in big ways. Many people are of that same disposition. They are not anybody, in their estimation, unless they can “see their name up in lights,” unless they have “the most” of whatever it is. Thus, the almost insatiable desire to “get to the top”--wherever that is.

In direct opposition to this, have you ever noticed how, according to the teaching of Jesus, greatness is not necessarily in doing the “big” things, but rather in the small things; and with Him and His people, the way up is the way down. This is just one of the many ways in which the kingdom of Christ is “not of this world,” that is, its standard of greatness is not the same as the world’s standard. Let’s notice some of these.

1. Recognition: How many people in Germany or Russia, or France, or England have ever heard of you? Probably none, if you are like most of us. Is this of any consequence? No, for God

assures us that if we are of those who belong to God, “ye are of more value than many sparrows” (Matt. 10:31) and although “two sparrows are sold for a farthing,” not “one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father.” If God is concerned about the little sparrows, surely he is concerned about his people. The people in France, Germany, or wherever may not have ever heard of us, but God has.

2. Prominence. There are not many who will read this bulletin whose deeds will be acclaimed by men. You won’t get your name in the newspaper for some worthwhile activity. Chances are you will not be receiving any medals. Yet remember, Jesus said, “whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward” (Matt. 10:42). The world may never recognize you as a “hero”, but God does even when you do a thing that little. Why then should we be concerned so much about what the world thinks of us?

3. Big Men. No doubt you have observed how the world almost goes wild over the movie star or the TV personality. The autograph-seekers almost drive them mad. And I even heard of a middle-aged woman who was a member of the church trekking all the way to Memphis when Elvis died. (I wonder if the same would be willing to go across town to visit a neighboring congregation engaged in a gospel meeting?). Yet God is not impressed with all that, nor does He want us to be. Listen: “Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate” Rom. 12: 16. Perhaps it is especially appropriate that the next words are “Be not wise in your own conceits”. But does this not at the same time tell us the very ones whom we should honor? What if Elvis, or whoever, “plays to audiences of thousands?” God takes no favorable recognition of such. He is concerned about people who do His will, and those who do are “precious in his sight”, no matter how insignificant they may seem to be. ■

Have you read your Bible today?

Various Thoughts on the Church

Forrest D. Moyer

A Growing Church...

A growing church does not just happen. It is like a garden that must be planted, cultivated, watered and cared for. A growing church is the result of planning and working the plan. It is the result of good people’s reaching to others to bring them in. It is the result of careful concern for the word of God. It is the result of faithful, uncompromising preaching of that Word. If we want a growing church, we, too, must be as diligent as a farmer in his garden.

Conscientious Scruples

It was one of these “modern” churches of Christ, with recreation center, youth gymnasium, banquet room, and an inexhaustible program of picnics, youth rallies, ball games, and entertainments. But the Sunday attendance kept steadily declining. The elders and the preacher were much worried and put out a questionnaire to some of the most faithful of the saints who were becoming lax in their attendance, asking why they had ceased coming to church on Sundays. They found out! Many of the saints said they had conscientious scruples against going to places of entertainment and amusement on the Lord’s day.

Which reminds me of the old saying: “If you have to get members by feeding them chicken, ice cream, and iced tea, they will be as dead as the chicken, as cold as the ice cream, and as weak as the tea.” I concur with this assessment. Physical recreation and entertainment are necessary parts of our lives, but they are no part of the mission and work of the church of our Lord. I don’t know the source of that quote, but it certainly is apropos. Let us always let the church be the church and keep secular activities in their place.

The Function of the Church

It seems that over and over again we must stress what the work of the church is. How often, indeed, do we see people with the idea that the

church is a glorified country club designed to cater to the fleshly appetites of its membership. Are we thinking of pleasing the Lord or of pleasing ourselves? Are we after spiritual amenities or physical ones?

Just for the record, let us re-emphasize what the work of the congregation is.

1. Preaching the gospel to those lost in sin. This is, indeed, one of the fundamental reasons for the existence of the church. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). Let us never forget why the church is here.

2. Edifying those who are Christians. Once we have obeyed the gospel of Christ, there is the constant need for growth. This growth comes through being taught the word of God. This is one of the great purposes of the local church.

3. Aid to saints in distress. When some emergency situation comes upon fellow-Christians, we all sustain a responsibility to give aid and help to those in need. The local church itself may enter into such work.

Brethren, this is the purpose for which the church exists.

Church, Assembly, or Congregation

Some have been writing lately that the word “church” is really not a good translation of the word ekklesia. They say that we should use such terms as assembly or congregation. Do they realize that usage in a given language often determines what a word means? The word “church” has been used for centuries to refer to “an assembly of God’s people” or “a congregation.” We have come to understand that when “church” is used, it refers to an assembly or a group of called-out people. True, some other words might be better, but, so far as I can see, it is not wrong to use the word “church” if we understand what the NT teaches about it. Of course, it is not used in a denominational sense, nor to refer to a building; but it does describe the people of God.

Are You a Regular or Part-time Attender?

We have a good number of members here who

are regular attenders. They attend every service! And then we have some who are part-time attenders. Which are you? Now it follows that the regular attenders will get regular benefits from their efforts, and the part-time attenders will get part-time benefits. Some get only one-third of the benefit that others do. Some may get two-thirds and some may not even get one-tenth of the benefits possible. Can’t you see that you are the loser by your part-time action? In fact, you may be an eternal loser!

Now, we (the church) are not a police force and I (the preacher) am not a truant officer. It is my duty to warn you and to teach you what God says about slackers. But I will not camp out on your door-step to get you to come out for the benefit you can get nor will I try to pet people or coddle them to get them to attend. If the pure, positive preaching of God’s word will not cause you to love the Lord enough to sacrifice for Him and to put forth the extra effort to be regular, I know of nothing else that will. I have no bag of “gimmicks” to use; there is no flamboyancy or super-showmanship on my part. But if you sincerely want to live a godly life and go to Heaven, I honestly believe that I (the preacher) and we (the church) can be of genuine help to you. Think it over!

Via *Auburn Beacon* ■

All That Glitters Is Not Gold.

Beware of ...

- **False Prophets Matt 7:15**
- **False Christs Matt 24:24**
- **False Witnesses Matt 26:60**
- **False Apostles 2 Cor 11:13**
- **False Brethren Gal 2:4**
- **False Humility Col. 2:18**
- **False Accusers 2 Tim 3:3**
- **False Teachers 2 Pet 2:1**