



"Though the land be good, you cannot have an abundant crop without cultivation."

—Plato

16-Jun-17

Lessons From Roots (Part Three)

In Part Two, we began to consider the Parable of the Barren Fig Tree:

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. 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?' But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.'" ([Luke 13:6-9](#))

The owner is a type of the Father, and the keeper, [Jesus Christ](#), our Advocate and Intercessor. The tree, though Jesus likely used it as a symbol of Israel, can be understood to apply to individual Christians as well, which is how we will look at it.

What is especially relevant to us is the reason the tree was not producing fruit. We can catch a glimpse of the cause of its fruitlessness by looking at what the keeper considered to be the best solution: to break up the dirt and

fertilize the tree. In other words, the tree was not receiving the nourishment it needed to bear fruit. It was getting some nourishment, or else it would have died. But for whatever reason, it was not obtaining the nutrition it required to produce the fruit that the owner wanted.

Of course, all analogies have their limits, and one of them in this analogy is that the tree is not a sentient being. A tree does not have free-moral agency. It only responds according to its genetics and its environment—it does not choose. But if we put ourselves in the place of the unthinking tree, the picture changes slightly since we *do* have the capability and the responsibility to decide on a course.

When we look at it from this perspective, we are reminded that the keeper, Jesus Christ, has already provided the spiritual nourishment we need, and He continues to provide it. He has given us His Spirit and His Word, and He continues to teach us through His servants. We will not be able to stand before [God](#) in the judgment and tell Him that He failed to supply what was needed.

One of the warnings in the [book of Amos](#) magnifies this issue. In [Amos 8:11](#), God speaks of a famine—a spiritual one, and not simply a scarcity of the *Word* of God, but of *hearing* it. We can see something similar here. For us, the spiritual nourishment is available. Our predicament, though, is caused because we either fail to seek out what will nourish us, or else we do seek it out, but something else is keeping that spiritual food from being absorbed. The mind is wrapped up and distracted by things that will not spiritually strengthen and that may even contradict and counteract the good things that we manage to put in.

As an extreme and somewhat silly example, imagine a man studying the Bible for two hours each day. That is not the silly part, as doing so could be tremendously helpful to him in being able to think and act in alignment with God. But, if this man then spends his other fourteen waking hours watching the Cartoon Network, he will derive minimal benefit from those two admirable hours of study. The silliness will counteract the good. The things going into his mind—ideas and principles that would normally edify him—will be washed out by the junk. The junk will hinder the godly material from being absorbed and used, and the result will be little or no fruit produced.

Thus, we must be watching out for the things going into our minds and the things that we keep stored in our minds that inhibit us from making use of the spiritual resources God has so graciously provided to us.

The parable also shows the keeper digging around the tree, indicating that Jesus will do all He can to make sure the spiritual nutrients get to us. He is quite willing to disturb our environments, to break up our circumstances, or to shake things up so that we turn back to our Source of life. He is fighting for the survival of the "tree," because the tree cannot do that for itself. With us, it is slightly different. Consciously or not, because we are free-moral agents, we choose to accept or reject all the spiritual resources that come to us because of our relationship with God, and ultimately, this means that we choose whether or not to bear fruit.

Within the parable, the keeper showed himself willing to fight for the survival of the tree, which depended on the tree bearing fruit. Christ is also quite ready to fight for our spiritual lives, so if we see our environments being disturbed or our circumstances being broken up, perhaps it is because our Savior—our Keeper—is intervening so that we can return to our Source of life and begin to bear that fruit that pleases Him.

In summary, the depth and health of our roots are synonymous with the depth and health of our relationship with God. When we are strongly rooted, we can withstand adversity and bear fruit, even when scarcity and drought are causing turmoil around us. But if we are not adequately rooted, or when we are not making use of the spiritual food that God provides or allowing it to be chased out by other concerns, we are really choosing to remain dormant. The solution is to refocus on the source of spiritual and eternal life so that we can glorify God through bearing much fruit ([John 15:8](#)).

- David C. Grabbe

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by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

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