

# A TALE OF TWO TREES

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Learning from Luke

July 14, 2024

*Then [Jesus] told this parable:*

*"A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard,  
and he went out to find fruit on it, but did not find any . . . ."*

Luke 13:6

*Then Jesus asked,*

*"What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to?  
It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden.  
It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches.*

Luke 13:18-19

## When

1. Dr. Luke, the companion of Paul writes to the church to show that . . .
  - 1) Jesus fulfills the Old Testament story of God, his people, and the nations (Luke 24:46-47)
  - 2) the gospel of Jesus Christ brings certainty (Luke 1:1-4) in this life and the life to come
  - 3) the story of the church is the story of the Holy Spirit (see how Luke continues in Acts)
2. For a Gentile, Luke knows his Old Testament images: vineyard, tree, mustard seed, birds of the air
  - <sup>12</sup> *The birds of the air nest by the waters;  
they sing among the branches.*  
Psalm 104
  - <sup>3</sup> *"Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah,  
judge between me and my vineyard.*  
The "Song of the Vineyard" in Isaiah 5
3. Luke pays special attention to those on the margins and the hypocrisy of the religious leaders (See the account of the woman healed "between the trees" in Luke 13:10-17.)
4. These organic images are at the heart of our "vitality" themes: Connect, Grow, Serve

## Tree principle #1: we are all sinners in need of grace and repentance

<sup>21</sup> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup> God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.

Romans 3

1. Jesus rejects “what about . . .” distractions from the call to repent

<sup>1</sup> 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.”

Luke 13

2. In Hebrew thought, God’s people are his vineyard

<sup>7</sup> The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight.

Isaiah 5

3. God’s patience is how we experience his grace

<sup>15</sup> Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. <sup>16</sup> But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. <sup>17</sup> Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Timothy 1 (See also Romans 2:1-4.)

## Tree principle #2: The covert kingdom is “planted” to make a difference

1. The tree is for the benefit of the garden and of birds

<sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5

2. The seed might be small, even hidden, but we expect there to be evidence of its life

<sup>7</sup> “You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ <sup>8</sup> The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

Matthew 5

## What we are learning from trees

- 1) What do we learn about Jesus' mission and work?
- 2) How does this Word offer certainty for Christian living? for the life to come?
- 3) Where is the Holy Spirit at work in this image? in our church? in my life?

### 1. Jesus determines the purpose and provides the source for his fig and mustard trees

<sup>5</sup> *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. <sup>8</sup> This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

John 15

### 2. Jesus reveals that his is Lord of the Sabbath, Lord of the trees, and Lord of the church

<sup>2</sup> *When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples <sup>3</sup> to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"*

<sup>4</sup> *Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor . . . ."*

Matthew 11

<sup>18</sup> *Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?"*

<sup>19</sup> *They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life."*

<sup>20</sup> *"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"*

*Peter answered, "The Christ of God."*

<sup>21</sup> *Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. <sup>22</sup> And he said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."*

Luke 9

### 3. The Holy Spirit produces the life which produces the fruit which produces new life which . . . .

<sup>27</sup> *These all look to you . . . .*

<sup>30</sup> *When you send your Spirit, they are created,  
and you renew the face of the earth.*

Psalms 104

<sup>16</sup> *So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature . . . .*

<sup>22</sup> *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*

Galatians 5



## Resources for further study

The Bible Project's poster and video of Luke are available at <https://bibleproject.com/downloads/posters/>

Doug is referencing these commentaries on Luke:

The *NIGTC* by I. Howard Marshall (Paternoster Press, 1978)

The *EBC* by Walter Liefeld (Zondervan, 1984)

The *New Testament Commentary* by William Hendricksen (Baker Book House, 1978)

The Gospel Coalition commentary by Peter G. Bolt at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/commentary/luke/>

The *ESV Study Bible* (Crossway, 2008) has a good introduction to Luke.

The Gospel Coalition's Luke resources are available at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/scripture/new-testament/luke/> D. A. Carson's "Luke from the Outside In" lecture and study series is especially good at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/the-gospel-of-luke-from-the-outside-in/#course-introduction>

Spurgeon and Piper have sermons on the Luke 13:1-5, the "sinner or accident" matter, at <https://www.monergism.com/accidents-not-punishments-luke-131-5>

J. C. Ryles' commentary on Luke 13 is at <https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/l13.htm>