

08.16.26

Luke

Chapter 13 - An Unpredictable End

No Indication of Fruit (vs. 6-9)

Luke 13:6-9: And He began telling this parable: “A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. And he said to the vineyard-keeper, ‘Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?’ And he answered and said to him, ‘Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.’”

Well, there was clearly a time in Israel's life where they thought just by virtue of having this holy city, Jerusalem, they would be protected. Jeremiah declares to them, "Don't think that you can say, 'This is my home, the temple. We have the temple of God. We have the temple

of God.' Don't think that that's going to save you." They are resting on what they perceive to be a righteous place rather than on having a relationship with God. And because of this, they've been bamboozled into thinking that everything's okay. This particular chapter is about Jesus warning them things are not okay and you have no idea how things are going to end.

If you look at the end of this chapter, Chapter 13, it'll read this way,

(Luke 13:34) "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!

(Luke 13:35) Behold, your house is left to you desolate; and I say to you, you will not see Me until the time comes when you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'"

Of course, we know that the destruction of Jerusalem came, and within 30 years of this particular message or 30 to 40 years, the destruction of Jerusalem was complete,

and the temple existed no more. Jesus in this chapter is warning them of that particular onslaught, that it's going to happen. The judgment is coming. It's right around the corner. In fact, He ends in Chapter 12 by saying, "Don't you understand you're on your way to go see the Judge and you're not getting ready?" It's as if the people are literally oblivious to these things. And of course, really in many respects, it's been the theme of the Gospel of Luke, that fundamentally we just don't think like God. Isaiah 55 is very clear, His ways are higher than ours, as high as the heavens are above the earth, are His ways, and His thinking and His mindset far above our ways. For us to perceive that we know how God thinks is just plain presumptuous. 1 Corinthians 2 reveals this as well. Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man the things of God. That these things are only revealed by the Spirit of God; so that we have not a clue of how God thinks or how He operates. As we've been going through the Gospel of Luke, that's one of the things that we've emphasized, that all of this is unlikely to us because we wouldn't think this way. This is why we

need to repent, i.e. think differently, because we just have no idea.

So, if you look at your sheet in particular and you look through the different topics of the chapters, an inconceivable announcement, a most unusual advent, a different kind of authority, an orthodox power, unconventional intent, uncommon. I mean, everything that we're seeing in here is unbelievable; it's peculiar; it's unexpected; polarizing; it's unforeseen; and there's absolutely no way that we could understand what's going on.

When you come to Chapter 12 in particular, as we emphasize the unforeseen disclosure, unforeseen revelation, Jesus begins to reveal to them that "You're fearing the wrong things." Of course, man's afraid of man, and he's afraid of how he looks before him. And he lives his life in accordance with that. And He says, "Your problem is not only that you fear the wrong things, but you also want the wrong things. And in your pursuit of the wrong things, you become anxious about the wrong things; you neglect all the important things. And then,

ultimately, you have no clue why I'm even here." And He makes reference to that.

In fact, if you look with me in Chapter 12,

(Luke 12:49) "I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled!"

(Luke 12:50) But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!

(Luke 12:51) Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division."

And then He begins to explain that. In other words, "You have no idea why I'm here." And then ultimately, as you come to the end of Chapter 12, "You have no idea what you're heading towards, because ultimately it is the judgment of God."

And He gives the example, of course, in verse 58,

(Luke 12:58) "For while you are going with your opponent to appear before the magistrate, on your way there make an effort to settle with him, so that he may not drag you before the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison."

(Luke 12:59) I say to you, you will not get out of there until you have paid the very last cent.""

His fundamental point at the end of Chapter 12 is, "You're on your way to the Judge, and you don't even know it."

He conveys that in many respects in verse 56 when He states,

(Luke 12:56) "You hypocrites! You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not analyze this present time?"

And of course, he goes into the fact that they're walking in a way that is heading towards the judgment before the great Judge, and yet they just don't have a clue.

As it comes to the beginning of Chapter 12, the problem is that you're living in a realm of hypocrisy and you're so afraid of what everybody else is thinking, you're just putting on a facade and you're only concerned about that. So, you think that this whole life that you live is just about you looking good. I mean, most people actually think that way. The reason I'm here is to make people think how wonderful I am. And so, we try to convince them by all of

the lies of our hypocrisy. And once again, Jesus is fundamentally saying in this particular chapter, Chapter 13, "You have no idea how precarious your life is; how close you are to standing before the Judge of all the earth."

An example is given, of course, in Luke 13, (Luke 13:1) "Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices."

And Jesus goes, "What, do you suppose these people were more evil than you?" And of course, "They were more evil than us." And He says, "No, I tell you, you need to repent. You're in just as precarious a situation, and God is just using this to get your attention." And the same thing is true when you have the tower of Siloam, and He brings that up in particular in which, you know, it's kind of an arbitrary, seemingly accidental thing. And in spite of that, you have these people that die because a tower falls on them, and a tower falls on them in a place in which people go to get cleansed to worship in the temple. You would think that's the most holy place. These are the best

of people that are in this place. And He goes, "No, I tell you, all of you are in a precarious place." And we're so busy looking at everybody else and comparing ourselves with everybody else I mean, choose a really bad person and walk next to him, and yeah, you're going to look a little bit better in your own eyes, but not to God. So, Jesus continues to emphasize the fact that you need to repent, you need to get right. In the midst of this, He will tell this parable. And it is the parable of this fig tree one plants, and no fruit is on it.

So, we pick up in Luke 13:6, and at first, you ask yourself, "What in the world does a fig tree have to do with what He's been talking about?" But what you're going to see is that the Judge that you're going to stand before is looking for something and you don't have it, and it's called fruit. So, it's a very poignant passage in which it should stir within us a sense of reality that we have lost focus on because we're so immersed in thinking about how we look to other people that we're not focusing on what God is actually going to judge us according to. This is why you have to keep coming back to that fundamental principle

in Galatians 1. You either seek God or man, but you can't seek both. And if you seek man, you're obviously not a servant of God. God is coming and looking for the servants.

Now, He gives that kind of example in Chapter 12. And if you remember in particular, He talks about the steward. You back up into Luke 12:41, and Peter comes and asks the Lord, "Are You addressing this parable to us or to everybody else?" And of course, that's the nature of man to think that's a real good sermon to somebody else.

But verse 42 reads,

"And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time?"

Scripture is conveying that we have an obligation. We are here for a reason. We think that we were just kind of planted in the garden so that we could look good. And God says, "No, you're planted in the garden to bear fruit. That's why We planted you in the garden." So, as man is on the earth, God gives him those around him to watch over and to care for and ultimately to do it in such a way

that would bring glory to God. And unfortunately, he's not paying attention because he's too busy looking in the mirror.

So, as you come to this passage, it seems to convey not only that you're gonna be a sensible steward in the sense that you're gonna be faithful and manage everything well, but the passage reads this way, that you give to those that you're responsible for rations at the proper time. Now, in order for you to minister to people at the proper time, you have to actually know what they need. You have to be acquainted with what they need and you have to be focused on ministry rather than self. You can't be so involved in yourself that you're not looking to minister towards somebody else. You would have no idea what they need and when it was the time. It's one of the great things that the Lord is teaching me in this old age, and you can teach an old dog new tricks. I'm just letting you know that. But the Lord is teaching me that it's not as much ministry just because you feel like it, it's ministry when they need it. And sometimes, we just kind of wait around for that particular feeling of, "Okay, now I'm ready to do

something," rather than "This person needs it whether I feel like it or not. This is what I should be doing." And God is looking for those that are concerned with the people that He is given under their care, and they're so focused on that, that they know exactly what the person needs and when they need it. When we're not doing that, it's called the sin of omission. That is to say that you're omitting things. And this particular passage that we're going to be looking at here in Chapter 13, is actually about the sin of omission. It's about what you don't do. I mean, a lot of us feel pretty good about the fact, "I don't drink, and I don't chew, and I don't run with those who do." And we feel pretty good about that. As long as we're not doing the bad things, we feel good that we're good. And God says, "Yeah, but have you done what you're supposed to be doing?" And I guess in some respect, our answer is to Him, "Yeah, but we look good." And God says, "It's not going to work." So, it's this particular parable that really relates to that. The way that James puts it is, "To him that knows to do right, and does it not, to him it is sin." Now, what that's stating is, there's a sin of omission. There's something you know you need to do, but you don't do it.

You say, "Well, I just didn't do anything." Yeah, but that's a sin.

So, as we come to this, He gives this interesting parable of this fig tree. Now, we start off in Luke 13:6, and once again, it's on the heels of, "You all need to start thinking differently. Everybody needs to repent." "Well, what about the other guy?" "No, you need to repent." What about the guys when the tower fell?" "You need to repent." So, it's very clear.

So, as He comes into verse 6, it says,

(Luke 13:6) "And He began telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any."

This really sets the stage for the whole paragraph. This is about the fact that God is looking for something and it's not there. What is it? Well, the text is very clear in this setting that it's fruit and He uses the example of the fig tree. Why the example of the fig tree? Well, I can tell you a number of reasons why He would use the fig tree. One is, you go back all the way in Genesis 3, and it seems to be the place where God would speak to Adam and Eve. How

do we know that? Because when they sinned, they took the fig leaves off and covered themselves. So, where were they? They must have been by the fig tree as God was talking with them. And we also know that as Scripture goes on, whether it's in 1 Kings 4 or Song of Songs, I think it's in Chapter 2, that it actually makes reference to this fig tree as a place that was aromatic in the sense it smelled good, made you feel good, and it was a place of a sensation that made you feel relaxed and comfortable. You know, certain smells come out and it just kind of relaxes you. Because of that reason, in John 1:48, is Nathanael, and where is he sitting? Under the fig tree. And once again, that was not unusual for Jews to sit under the fig tree and study Scripture in that. I'll give you a number of passages. Let me just give you a couple.

One is in Micah 4. And if you look with me in verse 4. Of course, the promise is in this particular chapter, the day is coming when God's going to establish His house in the last days, things are going to be well.

And then it says this in verse 4,

(Micah 4:4) “Each of them will sit under his vine And under his fig tree, With no one to make them afraid, For the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.”

It clearly is a place of rest; it clearly is a place of communion; it clearly is a place in which God is giving some sense of desire to be with Him. And so, they would see that as this place. Unfortunately, what ultimately then began to take place is that they would see the fig tree as a source rather than the communing with God as a source of relaxation. So, it became the sensation of just all the wonderful feelings that came with it that they were focusing on. This is why oftentimes you'll see the fig tree, and He describes it as the fig tree has all its leaves, but there's no fruit. That's a fig tree just looking good but not doing anything. And that was the perfect example of the Pharisees that would say, "You know, we look pretty good." And God says, "Yeah, but you don't produce anything. You will know them by their fruit." So, as it comes in the text, we have clearly this interesting picture of this tree that has been planted. And the purpose of it being planted is planted in the vineyard, which is in the

garden, and the purpose is for it to bear fruit. So, there's a purpose here. There's no fruit on it. It's not doing what it's supposed to be doing.

Then in verse 7, if you look with me,

(Luke 13:7) ""And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have

Once again, what's the significance of 3 years? The ministry of Christ was 3 years. So, for 3 years, Christ has been ministering. We're coming to the close of His ministry. Now, where's the fruit? Where's the evidence that people have responded? In Chapter 12, He says, "You don't even know why I'm here." So, there hasn't been a response to the presence of Christ. And let me just say this, what they have actually witnessed in the coming of Christ... I think of Matthew 5, where it says that God causes the rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous, and He causes the sun to shine upon the righteous and the unrighteous. So, when you look at what a fig tree needs, obviously it needs water; it needs plenty of sunshine. Which, of course, Christ has come as the Light of the world. So, the grace of God has been shown,

and the tree has gotten fundamentally everything that it needs to grow, rain and sunshine. It's been the grace of God that's displayed that. Light, warmth, water, these things the tree needs, and it's gotten those things. However, it's still not producing any fruit.

“And he said to the vineyard-keeper, ‘Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?’”

That's an interesting statement, isn't it? Fundamentally, God is not a God that makes things for nothing. I think we forget that. I think our thought is, "He made us so that we could just do whatever we want to do." And God says, "You're just doing a bunch of nothing. No, I'm not going to leave you doing a bunch of nothing."

That's why in Matthew 5:13, He talks about salt and if it's lost its flavor... What's the phrase? It's good for nothing. That's actually the phrase that He uses. And by the time He begins to talk to the Pharisees about their prayers, He says, "Look, you're using meaningless repetition in your prayers." Meaningless, obviously, is the fact that they're

doing nothing. So that what He's looking for is a tree that bears fruit and it has to bear good fruit. This fundamental principle is seen in Isaiah as well, so it's not something new.

If you look with me in Isaiah 5, you see God bringing up this example to the Jews.

(Isaiah 5:1) "Let me sing now for my well-beloved A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard.

My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill.

(Isaiah 5:2) He dug it all around, removed its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it And also hewed out a wine vat in it; Then He expected it to produce good grapes,
But it produced only worthless ones.

(Isaiah 5:3) And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge between Me and My vineyard.

(Isaiah 5:4) What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?

(Isaiah 5:5) So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed; I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground.

(Isaiah 5:6) I will lay it waste; It will not be pruned or hoed, But briars and thorns will come up.
I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it."

What was He looking for? Fruit. "There's no fruit." "Cut it down." That's Luke 13:7. He turns to the vine keeper, and he says, "Cut it down, it's useless." But there's a stay here that comes into play. Verses 8 and 9, the vineyard keeper goes, "Wait, there's one more thing we can do."

(Luke 13:8) "And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer;

(Luke 13:9) and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.'"

Fertilizer. Okay, well that might work. So, the question is, what is fertilizer and what kind of fertilizer do they use?

Pliny the Elder, which actually was a naturalist during the time of Christ; he was probably a historian and naturalist and wrote books to the Caesars and for the Caesars in Rome as well as in many other places, had great volumes of work at that time. One of the things that he wrote about was fertilizing fig trees. So, the question is, how did they fertilize fig trees back then? And they used fertilizer; fertilizer that consisted of decomposition largely. That's what they were looking for. And he was fairly specific on that. But one thing was emphasized, and it's the same thing that's emphasized today, interesting enough, when fertilizing a fig tree. And that is, the fig tree has to have potassium. That's very interesting. So, the question is, what did they use for potassium? And the answer is ashes. So, they would bring in things of decay; which really, when you think about decay and refuse, you're thinking about things that are repulsive. So, you're bringing in things that are repulsive, and then ultimately, you're bringing in ashes.

When you read in Hebrews, as well as in the Old Testament, it talks about the sacrifices that are given

before God. One of the sacrifices that are given are the ashes of the heifer. The reason why it's this large heifer that is oftentimes made manifest and the burning of this heifer is about burning of strength. And that's why people repent in dust and ashes. It's because they are fundamentally coming toward God saying, "I'm nothing. I have nothing to offer." And they lay it before God in the sense that "I'm just dust and ashes before You." They're humbling themselves before God by doing that. "I lay before You my strength. I give You all of my strength." Well, what's going to happen in the time of after Christ dies and resurrects is this is when things are going to start heating up with the Roman government. And a lot of Jews are going to die. They're going to be highly resistant. And of course, ultimately, as Luke will even make reference to the fact that "You women, you need to start crying now because your sons and your daughters are going to die. And as we also mentioned, it's going to be so horrific that you're going to be eating your own children. So, it's going to be a horrific time." The question is, what is God doing? And I would say He's fertilizing. It's the difficult times in our life that bring us to humility. It's a sense of God laying

at our feet and going, "You need to humble yourself. You need to repent in dust and ashes. And quite frankly, you need to accept things that are going to be repulsive to you." When you see Jesus with the disciples and He begins to tell them, "Unless you eat My flesh and drink My blood, you can't come into the kingdom," they go, "Well, we're repulsed by this." And He goes, "I know, but you need to accept the things that are repulsive to you because this is what will bring you to Myself." And it is in this that God begins to work. It is in this that God begins to draw people to Himself.

So, Paul will make mention of this, interestingly enough, in Philippians 3. He'll use a different word besides "manure" or such as that, but he uses the word "refuse".

If you look with me in Philippians 3, his statement is, (Philippians 3:7) "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ."

(Philippians 3:8) More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish..."

I think some texts actually use the word "refuse," but it is actually different than just refuse in the sense that it was basically garbage that they would throw to the dogs. In other words, it would just be stuff that they would throw to the dogs in order to get rid of the garbage, not because they liked the dogs. Now days, dogs have really good stuff. I mean, people food, really. But back then, if you wanted to get rid of garbage, you would throw it to the dogs.

What's interesting about this is in Philippians 3:2, what does he say?

"Beware of the dogs..."

Right. So, the dogs are those that put confidence in the flesh and the dogs are those that love the accolades of man. That's what he talks about. They have confidence in the flesh; they have confidence in the things that they do. He goes, "That's dog food." So, everything that was gained for him, he just counts as garbage. And he says, "Let them have it. Let the dogs have it." "Oh, they're getting all the awards." Let them have it. It's just dog food.

Because if you look at the passage,

(Philippians 3:8) "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ."

I've got something far better than dog food. See, I have the glory of Christ. Even the disciples say, "Behold, we've left everything to follow You." And He says, "But you're going to receive so much more by following Me." We have a poor idea of what really is valuable.

There's a passage in Hebrews 6 that in many respects parallels to this that we've been talking about, and that is the fact that God has blessed us with so many things and expects us to do something with it.

And so, if you pick up there with me in Chapter 6, it reads this way,

(Hebrews 6:1) "Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity..."

Now, let me just say this. When you first come to the Lord, you're receiving something. What are you receiving? You're receiving the word of God. You're receiving the word of salvation. And the way that it's actually described in Luke is, it's like a seed. Remember the parable of the soils? So, the word of God, He goes on to explain, is a seed that's spread out. So, at first you're receiving the seed. But the seed was never meant for you to sit there and go, "I got a seed, I got a seed." And just hold on to the seed. What was the goal of the seed? To grow and produce food, right? That's the whole point. So, you have the parable of the soils.

Keep your finger here in Hebrews, we're going to jump right back.

But if you look in Luke 8:15,

"But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance."

Another way of putting it is, bear fruit continually. In other words, don't stop bearing fruit. I think it's one of the reasons why you have the fig tree because, I mean, if

you use the corn husk, corn's done, chop down the corn, but the tree just keeps producing. And that's what we're called to do.

So, in Hebrews 6, his point is that you want to grow up. You start off receiving stuff. "I've been saved." Good for you. You know why you've been saved? Just read the end of Titus 2. "Unto good works." Yeah. God didn't plant the seed for it to sit there. He planted the seed for it to grow and produce fruit.

(Hebrews 6:1) "Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God."

Some of us are still in the category of, "Gee, I'm still wrestling with this sin." And God goes, "Stop, already. Start serving."

(Hebrews 6:2) "of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

(Hebrews 6:3) And this we will do, if God permits.

(Hebrews 6:4) For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift..."

Now, there's the seed, right?

"... and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit,

(Heb 6:5) and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come."

This is why you have the different soils. I mean, different ones received the word, but the question is, did they bear fruit? The only evidence of true faith is bearing fruit, not the fact that you benefited from the goodness of God.

People can walk in these church doors, and they can have the blessing of having people encourage them, having people pray for them, having people care for them. And they can actually witness and be recipients of many of the blessings of God. I mean, you can walk outside and you can bask in the sunlight that God provides for the wicked and the good alike, and you can have the showers of blessing that come upon you. So, the passage reads, you can have all these things and still not respond right. It's not until it takes root, and you bear fruit that faith has come.

"For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit,

(Hebrews 6:5) and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,

(Hebrews 6:6) and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

(Hebrews 6:7) For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God;

(Hebrews 6:8) but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

(Hebrews 6:9) But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.

(Hebrews 6:10) For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name..."

Now I just want to stop there, because sometimes we get a little confused about, "Okay, what does this fruit look like?"

Look at verse 10,

"... your work and the love which you have shown toward His name..."

I mean, there are a lot of unbelievers that do altruistic things; they come across very benevolent. However, the problem with that is they're just patching up the sore. They're putting a band-aid on it where we give people life everlasting. So, the problem with just helping people, it's not a bad thing in and of itself, but people begin to see that as the answer to the problems in their life, rather than seeing that they need something that goes way beyond the band-aid. They need something that will take care of the problem forever. And so, we have that wonderful work. So, that's what really separates us. We're not just putting band-aids on problems. We're working in

the name of Christ and we're ministering and still ministering to the saints. In other words, we're building up the body of Christ.

He goes on and says,

(Hebrews 6:11) "And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence..."

Which seems to convey, you just keep bearing this fruit.

"... so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end,

(Hebrews 6:12) so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

So, what is the passage saying? Well, it's saying that you're busy doing the work, you continue to do the work, and the evidence that you are ministering in the name of Christ is the evidence of fruit that will remain.

Matthew 3:10 reads,

"... every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

Scripture is conveying, of course, the fact that we need to do that.

As you go throughout the many passages of Scripture that deal with this particular issue, you realize that God is talking about the sin of omission. And the big problem I see with a lot of people that profess to be believers is they think that by virtue of the fact that they just said or repeated certain words, that that's faith. And God says, "The evidence is the Spirit of God within you. And the Spirit of God within you can't be idle." He is that which grows and causes growth. He is that which matures.

In fact, the way to maturity, as he says in Hebrews 6:1 here, is,

"...let us press on to maturity..."

If you look at the definition of maturity, what is it according to 1 Corinthians 13? Love. So, you're walking in the love of God, which means that you're not seeking your own; you're not taking into account a wrong suffered. I mean, you're not going around sulking because somebody hurts your feelings or anything like that. You're busy serving rather than thinking of yourself. You're not

so involved in the things that you're concerned about, or as we have been saying all along, you're not concerned about just looking good. You realize that you've actually been planted in the garden for a reason.

Psalms 51 in particular, David writes, "I know what God wants more than anything else, and that's truth in the innermost being." And so, it is in that truth that we begin to serve in the right way. And unfortunately, the god of this world has blinded the minds of us in the sense that he's telling you it's okay just to look good. And that's why Jesus will say in Luke 12, "Beware of the hypocrisy, beware of putting on those masks, of thinking that looking good is what God is actually looking for." But God is coming to this place and He's looking for fruit. Are you bearing fruit? And are you bearing fruit that will remain, as Scripture says?

There's a final passage that really ties in with this. If you look at me in John 15, Jesus will make mention to this subject of horticulture within this context.

His statement is in verse 1,

(John 15:1) "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

(John 15:2) Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit."

They say one of the things that is necessary for a fig tree really to thrive is that it has to be consistently pruned. And what is that? Well, it's really taking off those things that are hindering and actually taking the sap and the nutrients that should be going to the ones that are producing. And so, the wonderful thing about God is, in His kindness, as He's the vine dresser, as He goes on and says in the passage, as the Father begins to prune us. And sometimes, it hurts. I don't know if you've ever felt it or not, but it's like He cuts out. He goes, "This thing in your life right here that you're hanging on to, it's worthless." He pops it off. And you go, "Wow, that hurt. Don't do that again." And He does. So, He doesn't seem to listen to me. But these are things that we've allowed to creep in and take a part of our life. This is why as believers, sometimes we're disenchanted. We go, "Why are these things

happening in my life?" And God goes, "We're pruning you. Because you got to thinking that it was all about you and it's not. I put you in the garden to grow and produce."

And I just have been acutely aware of the fact that I have to be so focused on this. That I have to pay attention to what people need around me as He talks about the steward and the timing. And I can't think in terms of what's convenient for me. A person who is serving isn't thinking in those terms. He has to think in terms of, "What do the other ones need, and what will bring them to Christ?" Because you're serving in His name.

Otherwise, you're not serving in His name, and you don't produce the fruit that God is looking for. And so, as you begin to do that, you begin to see how God is producing more. And I have found that when God begins to take things out of my life, that I actually do produce more. It's a bizarre thing, isn't it? And it's the grace of God. So, it's a great parable that sets us on track. You think that you are here just to look good, think again. You're here to produce.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we give You thanks for Your word and how it brings us back to what everything is about. We realize that You have called us for a wonderful, marvelous work and how great it is to do that work, how fulfilling it is. In fact, You seem to convey to us that it's impossible to have joy unless we're doing the work. And so, You say to us, You came that we might have joy and that our joy may be made full within this very same passage of pruning us. Lord, we know that what You're doing in our life at this time is making us productive and helping us help others around us.

Your head's bowed and your eyes closed. I know that maybe you've been thinking wrong. Jesus says everybody needs to repent. Nobody's thinking right. So, maybe that's you too. And maybe you've been focusing on things that just had to do with you. Or maybe you've been concerned about what everybody else thinks. Think again. That's not why you're here.