

TWO BASKETS OF FIGS

PART 1: THE GOOD FIGS

Jon Macon

Moses spoke to the children of Israel after they were delivered from their Egyptian bondage, and said, “The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deut 7:6-8). Sadly, the people forsook their God and turned to wickedness. In Hosea 9:10, God compares the spiritual decline of Israel to good figs turning rotten: “I saw your fathers as the firstripe in the fig tree at her first time: but they went to Baalpeor, and separated themselves unto that shame; and their abominations were according as they loved.” A similar analogy is used in Jeremiah chapter 24, where God distinguished between the remnant of the people, setting them before the prophet Jeremiah as two baskets of figs. One basket was full of good figs, while the other basket contained bad figs that were completely inedible. We can avoid losing our own souls if we learn the crucial lessons taught by these two baskets of figs.

The basket of good figs

Jeremiah 24:2 describes the good figs as being “like the figs that are first ripe.” God explained who the good figs represented: “Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge *them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans* for their good. For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up” (Jer 24:5-6). The good figs were the Israelites who were sent away into captivity in Babylon around 597 B.C. when King Nebuchadnezzar removed Jeconiah from the throne of Judah (2 Kgs 24:8-16). The prophet Ezekiel was among these captives and spent his career working with them (Ezek 1:2-3).

God sees what man cannot

Notice that the goodness of these figs would come forth *in the future*. At the time they were actually sent into captivity, they were committing the same sins and abominations as the evil figs which remained behind

TWO BASKETS OF FIGS

PART 1: THE GOOD FIGS (continued)

(Jer 8:10; 9:2-5). At that moment, God said, “*all* the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart” (Jer 9:26). Although all these figs may have appeared equally rotten on the outside, the Lord sees not as man sees, as He looks upon the heart (1 Sam 16:7). “The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly” (Prov 20:27). The Lord could see good in these people and He would bring them to repentance in time: “And I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: *for they shall return unto me with their whole heart*” (Jer 24:7). This work would not be easy, and would take time. God gave Ezekiel a forehead stronger than flint to withstand their hard heads (Ezek 3:8-9). They did eventually repent, and returned to the land of Israel and obeyed their God (Ezra 1-3).

Godly sorrow works repentance

We need to avoid following the rebellion of these figs, but must remember the lesson of repentance. Without repentance, there will be no forgiveness from God. Jesus called sinners to repentance (Matt 9:13), and upbraided those who refused to repent (Matt 11:20). He said, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). Some Christians in Corinth fell into sin and were warned to repent. Like the good figs, they listened and “sorrowed to repentance,” being “made sorry after a godly manner” (2 Cor 7:9). As with the return of the prodigal son, there is joy in heaven when a sinner repents (Luke 15). Let us also remember “the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Heb 12:5-6). “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed” (Heb 12:11-13). The goal is for us not to sin, but there is a remedy if we do. “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2).