

## **The Man and His Orchard**

Do things seem to be falling apart all around you -- the church as a whole rocked by sin and scandal? Perhaps your own church is going through a shaking, people falling and failing? Or maybe in your own life, things you have held on to have been lost to you. What is happening? Where is God? Does He see? Does He care? Is Satan behind it all? Is he in charge while God watches passively on the sidelines?

Once upon a time there was a man who owned a peach orchard. In the spring, the trees blossomed profusely and the bees were busy pollinating them. After a few weeks, fruit began to form as the blossoms withered and fell off. The limbs were covered with tiny growing peaches. The neighbors who had recently moved there and had never seen peaches growing before were very impressed and remarked on what a huge crop he could expect.

But one day the man went out to his trees and began to shake them. Small, unripe peaches fell here, there, and everywhere. Finally, he stopped shaking the trees. When he was finished, there were only about one-third of the peaches left on the trees. The neighbors were horrified, not understanding why he would do such a thing. "You just lost two-thirds of your peach crop!" they exclaimed. "Look at the waste, the devastation! Why? Are you crazy?"

The man motioned for them to come over, and started to pick up a peach that had fallen. "Look here," he said, showing them a fallen peach. "From a distance these all look like good peaches. But look closely. See how deformed this one is. A virus attacked it before the blossom had finished blooming. It would probably not mature, and even if it had, would have been a reject. Look at this one. See how much smaller it is than the others. It was never fertilized and it will not grow any larger, but would dry up and fall off on its own in a week or so anyway." Cutting into another peach, he said, "See the worm in this one? It will cause it to rot before it has a chance to ripen. See the little spot on this one? It has a disease that could spread to the good peaches if allowed to remain. If I allowed all these defective peaches to remain on the tree, they would take up and use nutrients that the good peaches need and so cause their growth to be stunted. Yet because they are defective they would not mature properly or be of any use. I only hastened what would have happened eventually anyway in order to benefit the good peaches and to allow them to get the full amount of nutrients they need to grow to be large, juicy, and sweet."

As the season wore on, the man was proven to be right. The peaches left on the trees became large, sweet, juicy and golden with a pinkish blush. He had a bumper crop of beautiful, perfectly formed, disease-free peaches.

Scriptures for discussion:

Hebrews 12:26-29

John 15:16