

## No Turning Back- Living the surrendered life

### Lesson 14

### **“Dead man walking”**

**Prayer-** Thank you God, for sharing your secrets with me, for speaking in love and listening in kindness. My life is filled with the sights and sounds of the gospel. How privileged I am! How blessed! Amen. **[Eugene Peterson- Praying with Jesus]**

**The far side-** objects are closer than they appear.

Have you ever come across something and it wasn't what you thought it was?

- Restaurant: looks promising, but turns out differently? (Memphis & Chinese food)
- Hotel: looks promising on internet, but something's different in person?

In today's story we see that there was a place that looked so promising.

**Today's story though is a difficult story to read.**

On Tuesday mornings the shepherds and I get together to pray and talk about the ministry here in the Chelmsford church. And this time of year the early morning sun sort of rises more from the South than it does the East. At about 7:15 am going down Rte. 3, the morning sun is rather blinding. Honestly, it hurts my eyes to look--however, if I'm going to make it to the office here I gotta keep going. What I can't do is not look ahead, because that's when I'll get in a crash. So I look into that bright sunlight and I press on.

In the case of this morning's lesson, it hurts my eyes to see the rotting glory of the Temple and the beautiful breakdown of Jesus' ministry. But I gotta look and try to understand what may be happening. So I press on.

Here's this picture of the magnificent Temple and off in the distance walking toward the Temple is the Son of God. Both are alive! But ironically, at the same time it looks like the playing, laughing child in the final stages of his hospice care. Pretty much, both the Temple and Jesus are already dead.

Jesus enters Jerusalem and a parade breaks out. Jesus is making his way to the Temple. Here it is Passover and there are thousands of people celebrating the festivities of God's power to free his people.

This Temple is really a symbol of the people's existence before God. It is where the people sensed their connection with God. The Temple somehow housed God's Holy Presence, which reminded the people of his promise for their present and their future.

What a great place to be! But Mark shows us that something is wrong.

After Jesus' triumphant entry through the gates of Jerusalem, there was silence in the Temple!

- After the people recognize Jesus as the Messiah that Peter proclaimed in Mark 8:29 as Jesus rides on this prophetic donkey expressed in Zechariah 9:9 **Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!**  
**See, your king comes to you,**

righteous and having salvation,  
gentle and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

After the cries of "hosanna in the highest" (Save now, God!) there was silence in the Temple.

The Temple is the very place where Christ as the Son of God should have been recognized. But, on that day, there was no welcoming party in the Temple.

- There were no banners stretched out against those white marble walls declaring "Welcome Our Lord, and Our King!"
- There were no bands playing "Joy To the World, the Lord has come."
- There were no balloons, or cake.

-Where **Fruitfulness** should have been seen, there was only silence in the Temple.

Scripture tells us that after that glorious parade of affirmation, the triumphal entry, Jesus went into the Temple and looked all around. But because it was late, nothing happened. You gotta wonder where were the Scribes? Where were the teachers of the law? Where were the Jewish leaders? No one was to be found. Nothing happens. This may be a metaphorical statement. So, Jesus goes back to Bethany. I want you to notice what happens next.

**Mark 11:11-21**

The journey by foot from Bethany to Jerusalem took about 55 minutes. And Mark tells us that on this journey Jesus saw a fig tree off in the distance. A tree with its branches and broad bright green leaves calling out to weary hungry travelers. Jesus approaches that desirable tree, but examining its branches, found it to be fruitless. But, Mark was quick to point out that "the time of figs was not yet." In response, Jesus curses the tree. That seems unlike the character of Jesus, to curse a seemingly innocent tree!

**Luke 9:56:** Jesus' work is not to destroy, but to save.

**Micah 7:18:** God delights in mercy.

So why would He curse a seemingly innocent tree? What point was Jesus trying to make with His disciples at the expense of a fruitless tree?

Listen to part of this text in **THE MESSAGE**:

**"Off in the distance he saw a fig tree in full leaf. He came up to it expecting to find something for breakfast, but found nothing but fig leaves. (It wasn't yet the season for figs). He addressed the tree: 'No one is going to eat fruit from you again – ever!' And his disciples overheard him."**

Evidently this fig tree, showing it's green leaves, was sterile or barren. On the outside, it looks so promising. But inwardly, at its deep core of usefulness and vitality, it is a tree with no fruit. So it's really of no use for its intended purpose – which is to provide enjoyment, sustenance, and life for fruit eaters. So, Jesus goes from the useless, fruitless fig tree up to Jerusalem. Again, like the night before, he enters the Temple. When you hear the word **TEMPLE**, don't think of a small white church building. Think a Cathedral, like St. Patrick's or St. John the Divine in New York.

What a magnificent Temple, it's huge columns--it's sacred altars--its mitered priests, and impressive ceremonies.

Jesus walks into the Temple court, and does something--again, that we might think is out of character. He begins clearing house. Jesus goes into the Temple and immediately begins throwing out those selling and buying. He overturns the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of the dove sellers.

Why? Could it perhaps be a symbolic act to show what is to become of the Temple in the future?

Jesus gives us a clue when he speaks: **"My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations, but you have made it a den of robbers."**

This was an official visit by the King, an inspection visit at the heart of the nation. Jesus went to the Temple, where the very heartbeat of the nation was throbbing, where worship was to take place, and he looked at everything. And what did he see? NOTHING. It was barren... good as dead!

Oh, he saw commercialism, moneychangers, exploitation, corruption, and injustice. What he did not see were people of humility and love. He saw religious leaders who were concerned for their reputation and filled with pride. What he did not see were leaders filled with compassion and selfless interest for their own people. Like that fig tree, the Temple and all that surrounded it, had become fruitless.

That day when Jesus looked around the Temple...He knew hearts had become barren and fruitless. He knew that people had turned their backs. He knew that the future of the Temple had been sealed. And I think this truth breaks God's heart.

I think we need to see God's character shining through this ugly incident. But hold on, God may not be as he seems to be at first blush.

You might be inclined to see God as a cursing, negative God as you first read these stories. But I think this curse and what Jesus does in the Temple are reactions. Both of these creations (Fig tree & Temple) by God are no longer fulfilling the purposes God intended. The fig tree refuses to do what God created it to do—to provide enjoyment, sustenance, and life for fruit-eaters. The Temple was created by God to serve as a house of prayer for all people, and instead it is doing everything but.

You see, God is a truly for-us and not-against us...kind of God.

- God wants our life!
- God wants our church's life
- God wants you to be alive and fruitful.
- He fertilizes every tree he plants and His desire is for you and me to blossom into healthy, spiritually alive people.
- God wants to water you, anoint you, and feed you every day.
- Jesus came to offer you abundant life.
- Jesus wants his church, you and me, to be a people who offer the free gift of God's love without thought about ourselves.
- God created you and me to love him...to love our neighbor...and love one another because God first loved us.
- That is the kind of God we have in our life.

**“Take one step toward God, and He will take two steps toward you.”**

- This is the God we know and love, and the God who loves us.
- He is unrelenting in wanting to share his goodness with you and me.

Jesus’ outburst against the fig tree and the Temple is only because he is so passionately in love with his people.

**Some things are not as they appear.**

Mark shows us a dead man walking (Jesus). But He’s not like the fig tree or the fruitlessness of the Temple. No! This dead man’s death is the only hope there is for a relationship with God. But don’t miss the further irony here--without Jesus’ death, we are the walking dead.

Here’s what it looks like: Any person who decides to not turn back, but to live the surrendered life--any person willing to follow Jesus to the cross is, according to Mark--a dying person coming to life! **Mark 8:34-35** Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. **35**For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

Jesus is zealously in love with you. So much so that He embraces you with his grace.

As Frederick Buechner says, *“Grace is like God saying, Here is your life. You might never have been, but you are, because the party wouldn’t have been complete without you. Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. But don’t be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us. It’s for you I created the universe. I love you.”*

Jesus’ call to us this morning is “embrace me.” Don’t be like a fruitless tree or a spirit-less Temple. Because time can run out! Time can run out for fruitless trees. Time can run out for prayer-less Temples. Don’t let time run out on you!

Live a life that follows Jesus to the cross. Today, die so that you may have life!

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