

The Parable of the Fig Tree

Good morning brothers and sisters, let us have a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, we want to thank You that this morning we were able to remember You. And Lord, we do want to thank You for Your great, great love for us that paid a great price to redeem us. We are so grateful. And Lord, we thank You that You did not die just to forgive us our sins, but to draw us to You so that You could speak to us and have that relationship that You created man to have with You. And Lord, that is what we come for right now. We come to have that fellowship with You through the Word this morning. We ask, Lord, that You would show us the things that please You, Lord; and that You would open our hearts and our minds and our spirits to You by Your Spirit and through the Word of God. Lord, I thank You that You are able to speak through nature, through men, through Your Spirit. We commit our time and ourselves to You that we might hear Your Word and speak Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.

I am going to read a few verses and start with Psalm 92:12.

“The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the Lord Shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; They shall be fresh and flourishing, To declare that the Lord is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.”

And then in Luke 13:6 is The Parable, my Bible says, of the Barren Fig Tree, and I am just going to say the fig tree.

And Jesus spoke this parable: “A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, ‘Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?’ But the vinedresser answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.’”

And then going back to the Psalms again, Psalm 16, this is a Messianic psalm, but I do not want to use it in a Messianic way. I just want to look at the first part of verse 10: “For You (meaning God) will not leave my soul in Sheol (death).”

What the Lord Is Looking For?

Brothers and sisters, this morning, what is on my heart is: we talk a lot about the Lord's return and what the Lord is looking for. And I have been thinking about that. What is the Lord looking for in my life? Particularly in the life of our assembly, in His church, His whole church. What is He looking for?

We read in chapters two and three of Revelation, the Lord is in the midst of the church, and He is speaking, and He is telling them what He is looking for. And I have wondered, if the Lord came to me like that, looking for something, what would He say to me? What would He be after? What would He be after if He came to this assembly? What

would He be looking for if He came to His church at large? What is He looking for? He is looking for something.

We say, well, we want things to be finished so that He can return. Well, He is looking for something to be manifest.

And now, notice I did not say finished to be manifest. He is looking for a manifestation of something. And in looking at this, I was wondering, in my own life, "Lord, what are You looking for in me?" And these verses tell you exactly what I think the Lord has shown me as He is speaking to me. He is looking for fruit.

Understanding Fruit

And I want to stop because when we look at fruit, we can get really wonky considering fruit. What is fruit? "Oh, that means I need to go out and witness more so I can bring more people to Christ." We look at that as being fruit, that is the fruit of my life. Or we look at it as, "oh, I need to read more, I need to pray more so my life is more Christ-like." So, we are looking at things as being fruit. Things are not fruit; things are things. But He is looking for fruit.

And when I say looking for fruit, I want to take, for example, an orange. If you open up an orange, it has segments. And I think a lot of us, what we do is we look, and we want to divide fruit, the fruit that God is looking for, into pieces and say, "okay, He is working on this." So, for example, we look at Galatians, chapter 5. It says the fruit of the Spirit are these things.

Or we look at II Peter, chapter 1. It says to add on to your faith this; and add on to this, this; and add on to this, this. And so, it is almost like a to-do list. We are saying, okay, if I do this, then next we will work on this, and then next we will work on this, and next we will work on this. That is not it. It is not items. God is not looking for items. He is looking for fruit, the whole fruit.

The Whole Fruit

The fruit has all the items in it, and it is all in one. It is all within that peel, within that rind of that orange. All the segments are there. Nothing needs to be added. But the Lord is looking for the wholeness of the fruit. He wants the whole fruit.

And so, when we think about this, we want to ask, Lord, "What does it mean, You want fruit?"

Now some of us will say, and rightfully so. "Well, He wants to see Christ formed in us." And when we look at that, we have to say that can be nebulous. What do you mean you want Christ formed in you? What does that mean? What does it look like?

And so, these things were the questions I had in coming to the Lord and asking, Lord, what do You want out of my life? What is left of my life? And you know that Psalm, Psalm 92, He will bear fruit even in old age.

In other words, I am not off the hook. I looked it up. A fruit tree bears fruit for about 25 years, 25 years! I passed 25 years a couple of times. But the fruit that God plants is an eternal fruit. It is eternal life. And so, it bears fruit even in old age, all the way through.

The Source of Life

Look at the fruit that God wants, His whole fruit. Its source, its life, is divine. Its source is divine; its scope is eternal. It is so great, we cannot even fathom what it is. But this is the very thing that He is looking for in us. Because in us, in everybody who is born again, is the seed of this divine nature, this divine nature that man was meant to have from the beginning.

God meant for man to have this life in him. And the whole thing about it is this life is in us. He implanted it in us when we are born again. What does it say when He created the fruit trees in Genesis? He says, "let it have its seed in it;" and out of that tree, from that seed, is reproduced in everything that comes out of that tree.

Kenny was reading or teaching us in Romans, chapters 9, 10, 11. When you think of being grafted into that olive tree, we have been grafted into that life. And the thing about it is that the Lord can expect that life. I mean, that is why He implanted that life in us. Because there is an expectation in Him that the divine nature implanted in us would grow into the very thing it is meant to be.

And that is that man with this life in it, that humanity with that life in it. And so, we want to look at the Lord Jesus because, really, the fruit that the Lord is looking for, He is looking for the Lord Jesus.

Marks of the Life of Christ

We say that we want to be conformed to the image of Christ. Where do we look to find out what we are being conformed to? We look at Christ Himself. We can see Him as the risen Christ, and we can see Him as the Christ who is the lowly Christ on earth. But the whole thing is, the life is the same. That life is eternal and that life is divine.

I am not saying that we become gods. Notice that. But that life is divine. It comes from God. His life comes from God. And as we look at the Lord Jesus in this, I want to say there are three marks to this life.

Nothing Between Him and God

And the first mark is this. And really, when we celebrate the Lord's table, this is the mark that should be labeled on us. When you read the Gospels, look at Him and His life. Not just His words that He is preaching, not just His parables, but look at His life. Look at the way He is living. When you look at His life and you think about His life, and that is a part that Lenny brought up in one of his messages. The idea that we do not think deeply. The idea when you look at His life, you behold it, you look at it, you scrutinize it. You are really looking into it. You want to see who He is.

When you look at His life throughout the Gospels, you see a man who lives with nothing between Himself and God. There is nothing between Him and God. There is no sin.

Now we are plagued with that sin nature. But for Him, there was no sin. And do not think, “oh, it is because He was God.” *He was God the Son, and He is ever God Incarnate. But He laid aside His glory and He laid aside His right to act as God and submitted Himself to being a servant. (**restated and corrected in second message*)

And when you have nothing between you, that includes not only not sin, but there is a little chorus we sing, “that in my secret heart no other love competes.” He had no other love; no “I want this. I have to choose between this and this.” He loved God. He loved His Father. No other love competed with that. That was foremost in Him.

And then the chorus says, “no rival throne survives.” No rival throne will live before Him; He had no other throne in His life. Think of the temptations of the Lord Jesus in Matthew and Mark and Luke, how the devil tempted Him in many ways. But even offering the thrones of cities and things in the world, He said, “I do not desire those things. I desire the will of God. I desire to worship Him. I desire to live before Him.” That was it.

Now, I have to caution us. This is not saying you need to do these things. I am just saying let us look at His life, because this is the life that is implanted in you. And this is the life Philippians 2:13 talks about, “it is Him that is at work in you to will and to do of His good pleasure.” It is this life that is trying to work itself out in you. It is seeking to work itself out in you.

So do not go home and think, “Now I have to do this, this, and this.” Because that is not what I am saying. However, I am saying, let us look at the life that our Father has given us in Jesus Christ and having Him dwell within us by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, when we look at Him, let us look at Him in that way. Please do not place yourself under some rule of law, because this is not a rule of law. This is life, and life works itself out.

Love for God and Love for Neighbor

Now, there are two other marks, and I want to just say that these two marks can be summed up in the two greatest commandments: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” These are the two marks; these two things marked His life.

There is nothing between Him and God. Therefore, He is free to love God. He is not under, like I prayed this morning, He is not under the shadow of death. He is free, He is free to do the will of God. And if you read Romans 6 right, that is what it is saying to you. You are now free to do the will of God because that old man has been put aside. That old man has been crucified; you are now free.

The Fruit that God is Looking For

We want to understand the fruit that God is looking for, that He is coming for. He is coming to look for it in our lives, in His church, in His people. He is coming to you looking for these things. Again, not to put you under a guilt trip, this is not about that. But this is His desire.

I remember one time I planted popcorn seeds, and every day I watered them and I watched, until I forgot because it was taking too long. But then one day I was out mowing the lawn, and I noticed they were growing. And brothers and sisters, that said, you cannot watch. You cannot look for something to happen because life happens without your noticing. It just comes.

And so, He is looking for His fig tree. What He is looking for, the fruit He is looking for, the life He is looking for, is a life where there is love for Him; out of which there is love for Him and a life out of which there is love for fellow man.

And when I say fellow man, I do not mean fellow Christians. I do not mean fellow monotheists. I mean fellow men, that includes everybody. When Jesus was on the earth, He was not just with the Jews, He went among the Samaritans. He even went up to Caesarea where there was a Syrophenician. My gosh, a gentile. Fellow man, what a big scope. This life is not contained; it cannot be contained.

How Jesus Loved God

Let us first consider, how did Jesus love God? What do we have that shows us that Jesus loved God? Well, there are a number of things if you really look for them. I am not going to read a bunch of scriptures, I will refer to books they might be in.

Drawing Near to God

So how did He love God? Number one, He drew near to Him. In Mark 1:35, after He had healed all these people, the next morning they went to look for Jesus and He was gone. Where was He? Well, He was out in a lonely spot having fellowship with His Father. And they went up from there.

But the whole idea is that He drew near to God. And that is one of the things that James tells us to do, isn't it? "Draw near to God," and he says, "and He will draw near to you." And I want to change that a little bit, "And you will find that He has already drawn near to you." He is already near. And the whole thing about this drawing near is, how do we draw near to God?

And a lot of it is through our times alone. Now, we might call it devotional times. Sometimes I speak at youth conferences, and I hate how they shorten it to "Devo." That just bugs me, "Hey, did you have your devo?" Devo was a little song group back in the 1970's that wore flowerpots on their head.

Also, it is cutting off the root of the word. Because "devo" is the word, "devote," it is devotion. It is saying that I want to have this relationship with You, I am devoted to it. That

is why I am here. I am coming here because I am devoted to having a relationship with You. How many of us that are married did not devote time to courting our wives or husbands?

That would never happen if you are in one of these places where they have child marriages. But for us in the Western world, we spend time courting our spouses. We devote time. We set aside time to be there. But it was not just the time to go to a movie. It was a time to be with that person so you could interact with one another. You could see what that person was like.

In the same way, our prayer times are not times that we just ask for things that are needed. But our prayer times are also to be times when we are drawing near to God and when we are saying to God, "Lord, I would like to be with You. I would like to know that I am with You. I would like You to speak to me, and I can wait for You."

And sometimes our devotions are not only with prayer, but with the Word. We ought to open up the Word, and we say, "Lord, speak to me." This has been one of the biggest things for me to deal with, to pray, "I am not looking for a message, God; I want You just to speak to me. I want to know what You see, I want to know what You want. I do not want it for any other purpose than to know You and to do Your will. That is all I want."

And that was the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus wanted to know His Father's will. He spent time in prayer all the time. His disciples asked, "teach us to pray." I wonder if they ever asked, "how come You pray so long? What are You doing?" "I am waiting on my Father; I am waiting to hear Him."

Walking in Harmony with God

But that brings us to a second point. As He drew near to God and He had fellowship with His Father, out of that fellowship He walked in harmony with God.

Now, Jerry Linnebur used to make fun of me when I first dated Barb. He would say I have long, long features (legs). And so, when I walked, he would say, "you are walking, but Barb is trotting, trying to catch up with you." That is not walking in harmony.

Walking in harmony is like dancing. But of course, I am sure we as Christians do not dance, do we? For love of my wife, for two summers I took ballroom dancing with her. I will never dance at somebody's wedding, so do not look for me, because I am not a very good dancer.

But in dancing, that is what it is. You are walking in harmony with one another. One is leading and one is following. My wife said this because she had danced with somebody a long time ago, and she said, "that person knew what he was doing, and all I had to do was follow him. It was so easy, and it was so nice."

And one time for our final in our little class, we had to go to a ballroom and dance. For me, it was humiliating. But we saw this one couple, it was like they were floating, just

gliding all over the place, huge smiles on their faces. They were looking at one another. I was going like this: “what step? am I doing the right stuff?” I had that bad look on my face.

But these people were in such joy. And that is the whole thing. When you walk in harmony with the Lord, it is not a hard thing. There is an ease to it. There is a joy of being with one another in it. Unfortunately for Barb and me, we never got to know that in dancing.

And the thing is, walking in harmony, we find Jesus Himself says, “I do not do anything that I do not see the Father doing; I do not speak anything that I do not hear the Father speaking.” And again, we wonder, “well, where does He hear this? What did He do?” The Lord Jesus, because He was in this relationship with His Father, He drew near to get to know Him.

He saw God His Father in nature. You look at this parable and you can see Him seeing God in the parable. He is talking about nature, and not just in nature, but He saw it in the scriptures. He said this, “The Lord causes His rain to fall on the just and the unjust.”

Well, He saw that God was not a respecter of dry land, a desert, or a fruited plain. Rain comes on all of them. Now, you might not get much rain in a desert, but rain comes. Sometimes you can go out, and you can see the cacti flourishing. You go in the spring to the desert in California; you see the poppies bloom. It is amazing.

But the thing is, He was saying, “As far as you are concerned, your actions, I can see God being good to both the evil people and the good people. You ask me, why do I eat with publicans and harlots and these things? You ask me that? Can you not even see in nature that God gives to these as He does? He gives to the righteous. Can you not even see that? I see it.”

Doing His Will Completely

The third point, He did the Father’s will. But not just that He did His will, but He did it completely. He took His will to its end. For us, that was He died on the cross. But it is not just that He died on the cross. His dying on the cross led to the end of what God wanted, to raise Him from the dead and to seat Him at His right hand.

So, when you look at Him obeying His will, you can look at all through the gospels, you see this even when He is a kid. Got that? Luke chapter 2, He goes to the temple, and He is questioning the teachers of the law. And He is found there. And His parents say, “What are you doing here? Where have you been?” He says, “Do you not know, I am supposed to be about my Father’s business?”

Now, if that were you and me, once your parents came, would you say, “well, this is where I am supposed to be?” But He was supposed to be back home in Nazareth, because He went back home to Nazareth and put Himself under His parents; and then put Himself under being a breadwinner because Joseph did not live that long. We do not see Joseph when Jesus starts His ministry. So, who is going to take care of the family? It is the firstborn son. He put Himself under those things.

We see it in His baptism. He is obeying His Father. He is identifying and aligning Himself with His mission, with God's purpose. During the transfiguration, some commentators say that it was at that moment He could have walked right into heaven and not gone to the cross. He could have just walked into heaven. Here you have a man after God's own heart, pleasing to God. He could just walk right into heaven like Enoch. But He did not. Why not?

Because He saw that God's will was not just one man to enter heaven, but many sons. And so, He turned His back on that and set His face toward Jerusalem, because that is where He is going to be crucified. The gospels tell us that He went to the cross. He went to the cross in obedience to God His Father and to the purpose that He had for Him to be the sin bearer. But it was not only that He would become the sin bearer, but it was also so that He could be exalted, raised from the dead, and seated at the right hand of God, King, and Lord of all, forever. And to give His Father all that He had won and all that was under His reign.

All of that is included in His going to the cross. The Gospels tell of the cross; Acts and the Epistles really talk about His going to that place at the right hand of God. God has made Him both Lord and Christ. Wow!

How Jesus Loved Men

So, this is one side. This is the ways that the Lord Jesus as a man loved His Father, His heavenly Father. Well, how does He love men? That is a great question, isn't it? How does He love men? Well, let me tell you, there is a starting point for His loving man.

Because, like I said, He went out to the Samaritan as well as the centurion, who had a servant, a Syrophenician woman whose daughter was demon possessed. The starting point of His loving man centered in this. You read Psalm 8. It talks about, "what is man that You take thought of him?"

Well, the Lord Jesus, because of His fellowship with His Father, He knew what man was in the eyes of God. And He knew why God was mindful of him. Because God had purposed in His heart that man was supposed to be the bearer of that divine life.

He was supposed to be, as our brother talked about last week, tabernacling with us. He was supposed to tabernacle in us. That is what man was. Man was to be that vessel, that channel to all creation of who God is, a manifestation of who God is.

Good Will Toward Man

So how does He love man? Well, He knew what He created man to be. And He knew that man was lost to God for that purpose. And He knew that God wanted to bring men back to Himself and to that purpose for which He created them.

And because of that, all the Lord's actions toward men were based on this, all His attitudes toward man were based on this, that God wanted him back in the purpose that He originally had for him.

And so, the first thing we ask, “how does He love men? His every action toward man was based on good will toward him. God has good will toward man. Isn’t that in one of the Christmas songs, one of the Christmas carols? Peace on earth, goodwill to man. Every action that God has is full of good will toward man. Goodwill.

John 3:17. We all know John 3:16, but not many of us look to the next verse because he said it all in verse sixteen. But if you look at verse seventeen, He says, “I did not come to judge or to condemn, but to save.” Goodwill toward men. “I am not here to condemn you; I am here to save you.” What a different attitude, isn’t it?

We look at the world today and we see the horrible things going on, and we do not have good will toward those men creating those things. And yet God would save them. He had an attitude of grace that led to how He treated men. Grace, not just unmerited favor, but gracious in all His actions toward men.

Even in rebuking Pharisees, there was grace in it. “I desire mercy, not sacrifice. I desire loving kindness. I desire goodness and not sacrifice.” He accepted invitations to people’s houses. For me, it is easy to invite people to my house, but it is hard to accept an invitation to someone’s house. Do you find that so with you?

Unless I am visiting a Chinese family, I cannot take my shoes off and put them up. It is hard for me to go to someone’s house. But here, the Lord Jesus when He was invited somewhere, He went. He went right into their house. Whether it be a rich man or a sinner.

If you look in the Gospels, in Luke, chapter 7, He goes to the Pharisee’s house. Simon invites Him over, and all the time, Simon is judging Him, but He still went to his house, supped with him, spoke with him. And He also went to Levi or Matthew’s house, who was a tax collector; or Zacchaeus; or the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler whose daughter had just died.

He went to the houses when He was invited on all occasions, even to the wedding at Cana. He went where He was invited. How gracious! How gracious!

Listening and Conversing

He listened to man and conversed with him. He listened. My daughter Katie, she is my oldest daughter, she got me good once. She came home one day, and she was telling me about her day and the problems that she had, and I am not even letting her finish, and I am trying to fix things. “Well, if you do this...” and she stopped me, and she said, “Dad, I do not want you to solve my problems. I just want you to listen to me.” “The Lord is going to help me work out the problems. I just want to vent. I just want you to listen to me.”

I was put in my place because that is the way men are. Men we listen to solve. I know what the problem is, here is what you do. That is not what listening is; it is just not what men do.

But the Lord Jesus listened. He listened to Martha when she had that complaint and said, “My sister needs to help me.” He listened to her.

There is a part in John 5 where there is that man who was a paralytic for 38 years. And Jesus comes to him, and He asks, “do you want to be made well?” And then the man starts this big old spiel, talking about, “well, there is nobody here to help me.” If it were me, I would have said, “look, all I asked you was, do you want to be healed or not?” But the Lord Jesus listened to his whole spiel. Not because He had to; He listened and He let the man tell him his condition. And then He just looked at him, and He said, “Get up, rise up, take your bed and go home.”

Jairus, He did not stop him, He let him talk. The centurion who came, He let him talk. He let him pull out his faith; in listening to him his faith came out. “I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but I am a man under authority, just like You. If I say this to somebody, he does this. And so, I know that You, as a man under authority, if You say something, it will be done.” What did Jesus say? “I have never seen such faith, even in Israel.”

He listened to men; He listened to the Samaritan woman at the well; He listened to the Syrophoenician woman. After He kind of brushed her off and said, “it is not good to give the dogs the children’s food.” And He listened to the lady as she came and said, “true, but even the dogs get the crumbs.” And the Lord says, “I am not going to give you crumbs.”

He was entreatable. He was not too busy to respond to you. He allowed Himself to be pressed upon by others, to minister to the needs of others. He was available to others. It was not, “Well, I need to minister now. I need to have some time for my ministry.” No, He lost sleep, He set aside sleep to prepare for His ministry yet had total rest.

Charitable and Generous

He was charitable and generous. Now you say, “well, Jim, where do you find that in the Scriptures? I do not see anywhere where it says that.” Well, it is inferred in John, chapters 12 and 13. It is about Judas being in charge of the money box. And in chapter 13, when He is telling Judas, “do what you will,” the other disciples thought He was telling him to take the money box and give to the poor. In other words, He was generous, He was charitable. He gave of His substance to others; He did not deny them. When someone asked, He gave.

The Owner’s Expectation

So, as the owner is seeking figs from his tree, God is seeking this life in His redeemed people. This is what He is looking for in His church. We are so often stuffed with revelation, we used to say His first love. But you need to take revelation in all the churches as a whole. You need to look at it as a whole. There is much more than just first love, because first love includes finishing the works that you started. That is why I said He did the will of God completely. All these things are in there.

Now back to the situation in Luke. For the owner of the fig tree, there was an expectation of fruit. He expected it, and he was right to expect it. He probably planted that fig tree looking forward to it bearing fruit. And he planted it in his own vineyard that

had all the protection and everything it needed. That fig tree probably had everything it needed to bear fruit.

And yet with this expectation of fruit, there is also a situation of consequence. If the fruit is not found, there is a consequence. He says, "Cut it down." Now that seems to us really, really, drastic. And it is, it is severe. And we cannot water this down. It is a severe mercy.

The Nature of Grace

We might say, "well, that is not grace. How can you cut it down? That is not grace. Grace is undeserved favor. You should be giving undeserved favor to this poor fig tree. After all, I will bet it is giving you shade." A fig tree is not made for shade, although it can give shade. That is a byproduct of it. But the number one reason for planting a fig tree is for the figs, not grace.

Well, on the contrary, when Strong in his concordance defines grace, he says grace has the idea in it, not just unmerited favor, but it has in it the idea that the receiving of grace will affect you and be reflected in your life. It has an effect on you. If you have been shown mercy, it has an effect on you, especially if you know you do not deserve it.

And the Lord has some parables about these things. Remember the parable of the man who owed this huge debt, "Oh, please forgive me, and I will pay it all back to you." And the Lord had mercy on him, remember? And what was the effect of this mercy on this guy? He went out and throttled a guy who owed him some money.

And word got back to the man who forgave him. And what did he do to him? He put him in prison. Severe, isn't it? Or what about the man with the parable of the talents? Or the minas? You have the two that go well, but the one who does nothing. What happens to him? "I will take away what you have and give it to one who is going to do something with it." God expects an effect to His grace, a response to His grace.

"Cut it down." Now, brothers and sisters, I do not think that cutting it down means a loss of salvation, but I do think it means a loss of place, a loss of vocation. And that is what Kenny covered when he was teaching chapter 11 of Romans. The Jews have been taken out of the olive tree. They have been taken out of it, but they can be restored to that place.

But this is a harsh thing. You have to consider Israel in that. That is our reality. We may not be safe from consequences in our lives, of our sins, of our living for ourselves, but we are secure in His love. But there are consequences for not responding to the Lord. Just like the man who does not respond to God's gospel, there is a consequence.

Seriousness

In other words, this parable here speaks of seriousness. There is something serious of God's expectation and His right to act as He will; His right to act as a sovereign, His right to act as God. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God.

And we want to take parts of God and disregard other parts of God. Some of us read together, we read “The Knowledge of the Holy,” which is about the attributes of God. And the thing that Tozer says in this book is that you cannot slice up God and say, “okay, this is good, and this is good; but I do not want this part of God.” He comes as a whole. Yes, He has grace. Yes, He has love. Yes, He has mercy. But yes, He has righteousness. Yes, He has judgment. Yes, He has holiness. You cannot throw those things out.

This is serious, not to scare us, but to sober us. Even the enemy of God wants us to be cut down. He wants you to be cut down. And in doing that, he will even take parts of God. He is righteous, He has vengeance, and he will take those and say, “This is what God has for you.” He takes the parts of God, and that is how he condemns us.

But God is a whole, and His righteousness comes with love. And even His judgment comes with grace and mercy. It all works together in God to one thing. Nothing is overruled in His character. It is all one.

The Vinedresser

An Instrument of Grace

And then finally, and we will be closing with this, we come to the vinedresser. There is an instrument for breaking into the situation at hand, and that is the vinedresser. He is the instrument for breaking into this situation. In the Old Testament, it was prophets who came to a rebellious Israel. Remember, Israel was looked at in Isaiah, chapter 5, the parable of the vine.

And that vine, that He did everything for, produced wild grapes. And so, He sent prophets to Israel. But in the end, since they did not listen to the prophets, He took down the hedge and let the animals come in and tear it up. Those were the nations, and Israel went to exile.

And here we see the vinedresser who is intimately related with the owner of the fig tree. Now that is something you need to understand here. This vinedresser is intimately related because he can talk right to him. And what does he say to him? He intervenes not for the sake of the tree; his appeal is to the owner.

The Satisfaction of the Owner

What is at stake here is the satisfaction of the owner. The vinedresser wants to make sure the owner is satisfied. Let me do this to satisfy you, to bring about what you want, to bring about your will. So, we find here, this vinedresser is an intercessor. An intercessor who comes in, like I said, not generally for the sake of the people, but for the sake of the owner.

Have you ever noticed in the scriptures, in the Old Testament, how many times a prophet or someone interceded, and he was interceding on God’s character? He was not just saying, “oh, just have mercy on these people. Just have mercy on these people. Just have mercy on these people.”

For example, when Abraham pleaded for his nephew Lot, “are You going to destroy the righteous with the wicked? What will men say of You?” Or Moses after the golden calf came out and God said, “stand back, Moses, I am going to let them have it.” Moses interceded and said, “Why should the Egyptians say He brought them out to kill them? Why will You besmirch Your own testimony of who You are? A great deliverer. Why will You do that? You cannot do that. At Kadesh Barnea, when the slaves came back, the Egyptians will say, ‘You were not able to bring them into the land and You hated them.’” This was the intercession of Moses to these people, pleading to God for God’s sake, for Your sake, Lord, save them.

That is one of the things that we read in this morning’s passage at the table. “I will do it for My sake.” “I created man for this reason, for this purpose. And I will save them for this purpose, for My sake.” Israel was in exile, and the Lord, speaking through Ezekiel, said, “You dishonored My name. So, I sent you away into exile, but I will bring you back for My name’s sake.”

There is this further grace for us, that we have an intercessor. Yes, we celebrated this morning that we have a Savior who took our penalty, who saved us from the penalty of sin. But we should also be praising the Lord, that having paid that penalty and having been raised to the right hand of God on high, He ever lives to make intercession. He intercedes for us.

And when He intercedes for us, it is always for God’s will. He is praying for God’s will to be done. “Lord, You had this people, You created this people for this purpose. Let Your will be done. I stand before You with My wounds, speaking for them, that You bring about Your will for them. And Your will is total deliverance and the total place where in them they manifest that life that is divine and whose scope is eternal.”

Conclusion

So the vinedresser says, “Let me dig, let me fertilize. Let me do what You sent me to do.” Now, we would say, “Can these bones live? Can this tree live? Can this tree bring back fruit?” And Ezekiel, when God asks him, “Can these bones live?” what does Ezekiel say? “Lord, You know.”

Now you see, we look for ourselves for some redeeming quality. “Okay, I am going to get my act together now, and these things are going to happen.” There is no hope in our flesh. We know that. How many times have we tried to start by the Spirit and finish by the flesh? Times without number. But here is a wonderful verse, and it speaks of the Lord Jesus, but let us apply it to us. “He grew up as a tender plant and as a root out of dry ground.”

Isn’t it wonderful to know that the root of this life that is divine can grow up out of dry ground? And that is where I want to leave us right here, with that hope, that Messiah, the Christ, can grow up out of dry ground, the dry ground that we are in ourselves. Isn’t that wonderful? That is the aim of His intercession for His church, for us as individuals. You think that God is looking at us and saying, “Oh, these guys, I cannot help them.”

No, He is looking at us, praying, "Lord, let that root come out of dry ground. You are able to lift this up. You are able to bring this life out of death." And so, we have the intercessor. Now, next time, I will talk about the result of that intercessor and the digging and the fertilizing. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, heavenly Father, we want to thank You that You have purposed for us to have this wonderful life, this life that has no barriers between You and me. Oh, Lord, that is too wonderful to think of. And, Lord, I want to thank You that this is what You have bought for us through Jesus Christ and implanting Him in us. O Lord, we were happy enough to just have our sins forgiven, but that You would come and dwell in us. O Lord, we thank You. And Lord, we do not want to look at ourselves and say, "I will do better." We just want to look to You, and we want to come to You and say, "I know myself. I want to say, Lord, I am just so fruitless, I am so barren, I cannot produce anything You want from me. There is no fig, I cannot even produce shade."

But Lord, how I thank You that You create life out of nothing. O Lord, I just put myself in Your hands. Your hands, Lord, that is where I want to be. I want to be in Your hands. We want to be in Your hands. As Your church we want to be in Your hands. As Your church we want to please You. We want to give You the things that You have meant us to have. Life and life eternal, life which is the light of men. Lord, that life that glorifies You. This is our desire. This is my desire. How I thank You, Lord, that You have not only given me a Savior from sin, but You have given me a high priest who intercedes for me, who knows all my temptations and all my faults, and yet will not turn me away. Who, when I come to Him and say, "I am a leper," will touch me and say, "I will, be healed." Lord, we thank You for who You are. And we, as who we are, we do not want to be in ourselves and think about these things. We just want to come to You and be in You, because that is where You meant us to be. And so here we are, Lord, we are coming to say, "Lord, I belong to You. I belong in You and You belong in me. Have Your way, have Your will." In Jesus' name, Amen.

<i>The Parable of the Fig Tree</i>	1
What the Lord Is Looking For?	1
Understanding Fruit	2
The Whole Fruit	2
The Source of Life	3
Marks of the Life of Christ	3
Nothing Between Him and God	3
Love for God and Love for Neighbor	4
The Fruit that God is Looking For	5
How Jesus Loved God	5
Drawing Near to God	5
Walking in Harmony with God	6
Doing His Will Completely	7
How Jesus Loved Men	8
Good Will Toward Man	8
Listening and Conversing	9
Charitable and Generous	10
The Owner's Expectation	10
The Nature of Grace	11
Seriousness	11
The Vinedresser	12
An Instrument of Grace	12
The Satisfaction of the Owner	12
Conclusion	13

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