

“Be Unstoppable”
Psalm 118:19-29; Luke 19:28-44
Sermon Series: Forgotten God Week 6 The Community on Fire
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The Woodside Church

Palm Sunday – March 25, 2018

Francis Chan’s children story “The Big Red Tractor”¹ is a parable about the Church. Now I love the Church. I’ve pastored churches for thirty-two years. I love church people, worship services, growth groups, missions. Yet even I can see why many view the Church as old and outdated, why they see it as a rusted relic of farm equipment which can’t move on its own power. Here are just a few statistics to document this attitude:

- On any given weekend, the average percent of Americans in worship: 17.7%
- Half of all American churches have an attendance of: 80 or less
- The percent of churches which are plateaued or declining in attendance: 85%
- The approximate number of churches closing every year: 3000
- The fastest growing religious group in America: Those who say they have no religious preference - 22.8%.²

While some of these may be angry at the Church, I get the sense most feel it is old-fashioned, unnecessary and irrelevant. They say they are “spiritual” not “religious.” They have no use for “organized religion.” To them it appears we are pushing this old clunker across the fields with very little fruit to show for it. In fact, did you notice the villagers in the story only produce enough to feed themselves? Those outside the church wonder why we pour all this time, money and energy into holding Sunday services for ourselves but do little or nothing for those in the world. Here’s what I find most sad about the story: the villagers can’t imagine it any other way. When farmer Dave announces the tractor can plow the field in a day and feed multiple communities they laugh and tell him he’s crazy.

Call me crazy – but I am here to tell you the Church can do so much more than we can imagine. How do I know? The Manual says so.

On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prove stronger than it (Matthew 16:18).

Jesus says His Church is unstoppable. Far from being a rusty old tractor, the Church is a battering ram which can demolish the rusty gates of hell and every stronghold Satan can

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4&v=mite667rJnA

² The Pew Religious Landscape survey reported that as of 2014, 22.8% of the U.S. population is religiously unaffiliated, atheists made up 3.1% and agnostics made up 4% of the U.S. population.

throw up. By entirely peaceful methods, the Church conquered the mighty Roman Empire. For the last two thousand years the Church continues to grow exponentially all over the globe except in Europe and North America. Why is the Church so unstoppable in other ages and places yet so stoppable here? All it takes is a change in leadership or a change in the neighborhood for a congregation to decline and disappear. Our problem is we are not following the Manual - the Bible. We aren't doing what Jesus wants.

We are not that different than the people of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. All of them also missed the point.

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." (Luke 19:37-40)

We miss the point when we focus more on **Blessed Buildings than Blessing People**. The usual tidal wave of pilgrims pouring into Jerusalem for Passover is out of control. Jesus of Nazareth leads a swelling tsunami of followers from Galilee. As they make the climb up to the Holy City excitement is rising. Then they break over the crest of the Mount of Olives and glimpse the stones of Jerusalem gleaming in the morning sun. In the center is the holy Temple of God, dazzling like a precious jewel in the crown. The multitudes from Galilee know why Jesus has come: to reveal He is the Messiah, to conquer the city, to claim the throne of His father David. He even mounts a donkey just as Solomon, David's son, did when he ascended to be king. So as they begin their final descent down the Mount of Olives into the city, His disciples bursts into an old song about the coming Messiah: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! (Psalm 118:26) Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (Luke 19:38).

When the Pharisees hear the crowds from Galilee shout this they run up to Jesus and say, 'Teacher, tell your followers to shut up! If you play with Messianic matches you'll set this place on fire. The Romans will destroy this city. We will lose our blessed building.' Jesus replies, "'I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.'" (Luke 19:40). What does He mean? The Temple in Jerusalem is God's House. Its massive stones have one purpose: to be the meeting place between the Lord and His people. It is the place where God blesses His people. The people love and defend the Temple, with their lives. What they do not know is the Temple is temporary. The stones of the Temple are waiting for the Lord to come and bless His people in person. When the Lord comes, there is no longer a need for a Temple.

God is not against buildings. He told Solomon to build a Temple. Yet over time we start to worship our buildings. When the church is identified with the building, the church becomes imprisoned in the building. We think church only happens here. The point is not for people to bless the building for but for people to bless people – especially people who will never come into our building. This building is wonderful. I praise God for all the Growth Groups, children and youth ministries, worship services, dinners

served, recovery services, homeless missions, and more that go on here. People are blessed all the time within these walls. Yet what if that's all the blessing we do? What if you are required to come here to get the blessing? What if we keep the blessing locked up within these walls? We will only reach a fraction of the people God wants to bless.

The people living in Parkland thought the church was closed. The handful of members loved their building but they weren't reaching the community. On Sunday they unlocked the building, held their worship service, locked the building and went home. Nearly all lived elsewhere. Now, under the leadership of Pastor Greg, they are blessing the community and growing. Recently, when someone proposed starting a second worship service Greg replied, "Why don't we do that and start another church too!"

God's new Temple is made not with stones but with people. Peter say,
As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a temple of the Spirit to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (I Peter 2:4-5)

Why is a Temple made of people better than a Temple made of stone? A Temple of stone stays in one place. A Temple of people can go everywhere and bless people. A Temple of stone can be destroyed. A Temple of people is unstoppable.

Take the blessing to the people. Share the difference Jesus makes in your life. Invite your neighbors to your Growth Group or Easter services. Care for neighbors who are sick, lonely, and hurting. Visit the prisons, the recovery cafes, work with Urban Promise or Habitat. Start a Bible study at work or in school on your lunch hour. Read the Word with skeptical friends at Starbucks. If we keep the blessing within this building it will be very stoppable. But if we take it into the world it will be unstoppable.

We focus more on **Human power than Holy Spirit power.** What Jesus does next shocks and rocks the establishment.

When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling. "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be a house of prayer'; but you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words. (Luke 19:45-48)

It took forty-six years to build the Temple and thousands of priests to run it. Obviously this requires a lot of money. Scholars believe the money changers and sellers of sacrificial animals are gouging the people. Perhaps some profits go into the treasury. What's more, the holy priests have made an unholy alliance with the Romans. They hold their positions and power by the grace of Caesar not the grace of God. No wonder the chief priests and leaders are angry when this upstart Rabbi disrupts their operations. The whole structure is built on human power. It can only accomplish what people can do. Like the people pushing the big red tractor, the priests are pushing the big stone temple.

Jesus says prayer is more important than human power. Jesus builds houses of prayer. “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Mark 11:17). Prayer causes us to follow the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is unstoppable.

Twenty-four years ago when I came to Woodside there were lots of people selling things in the hallways on Sunday mornings. Nearly every ministry ran a fundraiser: food coupons, donut sales, candy sales. There were car washes, bake sales and flea markets. And despite all these sales, the church was so deep in deficit, so unable to pay its bills, fix its building or give to missions that some thought it would have to close. Now I didn’t do what Jesus did – make a whip, over turn the tables and drive them all out. I just said please stop. Some thought I was crazy. How can we pay our bills, fix our building or give to missions without the fundraisers? But they tried it. And within one year the church was back in the black. How did it happen? We prayed and followed the unstoppable lead of the Holy Spirit. Now God is blessing us with so many resources through you that we send out people and funds to bless other congregations like Parkland and Anchor and other missions in our area, our nation and around the world. Ten percent of what you give to the Share the Story building fund goes to fund mission projects here and around the world. One of those is training elders in Mozambique, Africa. In one province there are eighty plus churches and only three pastors. You paid for funds to train these elders to lead the churches when there is no pastor. What do they call these churches? Houses of prayer. If we rely on our own power we are completely stoppable. When we pray, we access the unstoppable power of the Holy Spirit. As I said last week: when you face a tough decision – pause, pray and say to God “What would please you?”

We focus more on **Protecting Our Pieces than Passing the Peace**. In the middle of all the hallelujahs and hosannas of Palm Sunday, Jesus does a very strange thing.

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.” (Luke 19:42-44)

Why does Jesus weep? He knows Jerusalem will not welcome His offer of peace – peace with God and peace with one another. They are worried more about protecting the pieces they control – their position, their power, their preferences, their possessions. When Jesus shows up they fear they will lose their pieces. Either He will take them or the Romans will destroy them. So four days later they arrest the Prince of Peace, they pierce His hands and feet to a cross, and drop the cross into a hole in a rocky hill on the edge of the garbage dump, outside of town.

Jesus knows this is coming. But that’s not why He weeps. He weeps for Jerusalem and for us. We would rather grab for pieces than receive His peace. Jesus knows grabbing for pieces causes everything to fall to pieces. This craving for pieces of power will put them on a collision course with the Romans. Forty years later, the greatest superpower of

that day will surround Jerusalem and crush it. He weeps, for He knows every piece they clutch will be lost, every stone in this beautiful city will be toppled, every man, woman and child will perish by disease, famine, fire and sword.

Four days from Palm Sunday Jesus will be arrested, sentenced and crucified.

Forty years from Palm Sunday Jerusalem, the City of Peace, will be in pieces.

But a little more than forty days from Palm Sunday the Risen Jesus says:

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.
(Acts 1:8)

“Bring my peace to the ends of the earth.” Share the Good News. Tell the world they can have peace with God through Jesus. Are you passing His peace? Do you bring His peace to struggling marriages and families? Do you bring His peace to teens and adults addicted to alcohol or opioids? Do you bring His peace to the hungry and homeless, to prisoners and those caught in trafficking? Do you bring His peace to those who are rich in things and poor in soul, to the anxious and angry, the fearful, grieving and depressed? Do you bring His peace to the doubtful and hopeless?

Two thousand years ago the Temple in Jerusalem was stopped and never rebuilt. During the same two thousand years the Church has been unstoppable – so long as it passes on His peace.

Francis Chan has friends named Dave and Lynn Phillips. God gave them a passion for passing His peace by caring for suffering children and sharing the Gospel. Yet Dave is by nature very shy. He didn't want to talk in front of people. After much prayer Dave and Lynne put aside their fears and launched Children's Hunger Fund out of their garage in 1992. Six weeks later Dave received a phone call from a director of a cancer treatment center in Honduras. They needed a specific drug for seven children who would die without it.

Dave wrote down the name of the drug and told the director that he had no idea how to get this type of drug. They then prayed over the phone and asked God to provide. As Dave hung up the phone, before he even let go of the receiver, the phone rang again. It was a pharmaceutical company in New Jersey asking Dave if he would have any use for 48,000 vials of *that exact drug!* Not only did they offer him eight million dollars' worth of this drug, but they told him they would airlift it to anyplace in the world! Dave would later learn that the company was one of only two that manufactured this particular drug in the United States.

Within forty-eight hours, Dave had the drug sent to the treatment center in Honduras and to twenty other locations as well. It was then he believed firmly that God was at work, validating his calling to this ministry.

Year after year, God continues to provide supernaturally. Today they have distributed more than \$950 million in food and other relief to more than ten million kids in seventy countries and thirty-two states.

The uniqueness of CHF is that they train and equip volunteers from local churches to distribute the food through home deliveries in the United States and other countries. Going from family to family, they find the poorest of the poor and share not only food but love and the gospel.

What Dave and Lynne do can only happen by the power of God, the power of prayer, the power of peace. When Jesus looks at us, will He rejoice at the way we passed on His peace? Or will He weep?