

Footsteps in the Hallway

by Carter Conlon

The sermon 'Footsteps in the Hallway' by Carter Conlon explores the significance of the fig tree in Matthew 21 and how it represents humanity's attempts to come back to God through their own efforts and coverings, which are ultimately fruitless and deceptive.

Duration: 59:52

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 21:18-22

Topics: "Faith"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the need for individuals to let go of their old ways and rely on God for salvation. He describes a moment of realization where a person understands that their own efforts to reach heaven are futile. The speaker also shares a story of a man who, in his last moments, clings to a false covering and is filled with terror when faced with the reality of his impending judgment. The sermon concludes with a reminder that we will all eventually face the footsteps of death, and it is crucial to have a genuine relationship with God.

Transcript

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Matthew chapter 21, and we're going to begin at verse 18. And while you're opening that, let's pray together. Father, I thank you, God, with all my heart for the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

It's only you, Holy Spirit, that can give life to the Word. And you cause the Word to take life within our hearts and bring us to something that you've desired for each of us from the beginning of time and eternity. I thank you, Lord, that you'll take me out of the limitations of my own frailty in thinking and expression, and you'll bring me into something of your life that your heart may be heard and the thoughts of your mind might be known.

I yield myself before you, Lord, as a vessel. I only ask that I may speak as an oracle of God. Oh, Jesus, let your heart be glad when this day is done.

Let heaven record this is a good day. I thank you for the anointing. Help us to speak and help us to hear in Jesus' mighty name.

Footsteps in the hallway. Matthew chapter 21, beginning at verse 18. This is about Jesus.

Now, in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it and found nothing thereon but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforth forever. And presently the fig tree withered away.

And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away? Jesus answered and said to them, Verily I say unto you, If you have faith and doubt not, you shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if you shall say to this mountain, Be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done. And all things whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive. This is one story which begins at the fig tree.

Verse 18 tells us that in the morning he hungered. He returned to the city and he hungered. Now, Jesus Christ has always hungered for fellowship with his own creation.

The approaching of the fig tree is much bigger than just the scene that the Scripture describes before us. If you look at it just in the way it's written, you'd anticipate it's just simply a matter of hunger, and he just approaches the tree. Now, if you want to stay at that level in your understanding, then everyone is free to do that, but it represents a lot more than this.

Christ has always hungered for fellowship with his own creation. There's a longing in God's heart for communion with those he's created in his own image. This has been at the very center of God's thinking and of God's heart.

From before time, before the foundation of the world, he had a plan to send his son, that his son might redeem unto himself the people. That would be his own for all of eternity. Also, you see the very same scenario in Genesis chapter 3 and verse 8. Let me just share it with you.

It tells us that he came to the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day to seek fellowship with man, and this fellowship with man satisfied the hunger of his heart. Now, it's incredible when you begin to see it, because when you parallel Genesis to Matthew, in Matthew 21, 19, all he found when he came there, he said he found nothing on it but only leaves. He only found a deceptive in a fruitless tree, covered in leaves that identified it, of course, as a fig tree.

He came looking for fruit, and all he found is this deceptive covering. Actually, Unger's Bible dictionary tells us that the Jewish people called a fig tree, you see, a fig tree hides its fruit under the leaves, so you really don't know if there's any fruit there until you get close to it. And when a fig tree can be in full bloom, it can have this royal regalia, as it is, of apparel on it, but when you get close to it, you find no fruit, and they called it a hypocrite tree.

That was the name that the Jews gave to it. You hypocrite tree, you have the exterior appearance of bearing fruit, but when you get close and inspect, you find there's nothing there that satisfies the hungry soul. And he found it to be a deceptive tree, a fruitless tree, covered in leaves that I said earlier identified it

as a particular tree.

Now, in Genesis 3, 7, we're given a picture of what he found in Eden after Adam sinned against God. Now, sin against God was the thinking that I can live outside of what God has spoken, and somehow be in right relationship with Him, and actually even gain favor, gain understanding. And when Adam did this, when he moved outside of the revealed will of God for his life and the Word of God, the nature of Satan himself came into Adam, and he had a fallen, deceptive nature now.

And he tried to cover this nature. Think about it. Jesus comes into the garden, sits in the cool of the day.

He loved fellowship. He created man for fellowship. He created you for fellowship.

He created me for fellowship. The longing of His heart is to have you and me with Him for all of eternity. You have to understand that.

Even in the context of what you're about to hear, no matter how a message is spoken, or if it seems hard, if it seems simple or soft, the issue really is God says, I want you back. I want you back with me for all of eternity. But there are certain ways that you cannot come back.

You see, men's hearts are very, very deceptive. And men and women begin to think we can do things a certain way. We can somehow redefine this relationship, and heaven can still be our destiny.

And we're living in that kind of a time right now. Think about God coming down into the garden, and Adam and Eve, of course, have lost the fruit of righteousness. They've lost it.

They were in right relationship with God. They were moving with God in His creation. They were given dominion over so many things and given the care and charge of looking after things, but not satisfied to dwell within the parameters of what God says is life.

They moved outside of that parameter. They listened to the suggestive thoughts of the devil, and moving outside of that parameter, now they lost the fruit of righteousness. They lost the fruit in a sense of being able to come into fellowship with God, and perhaps longing for that fellowship is in measure as much as God longed for fellowship with them.

He comes down into the garden, and where does He find them? Hiding among the leaves, hiding among the trees. And Adam and Eve, losing this fruit of righteousness or right standing with God, hiding from His presence, covered in fig leaves. This is God's creation.

These are garments of their own making, as it is. Trying to prove to themselves and God that everything is still okay. Can you imagine the foolishness of it? Coming down, and here are Adam and Eve that were once clothed with the glory of God.

The very righteousness of God, in a sense, was upon them. But having sinned, they lost that clothing. They realized they were naked.

The covering was gone, as it is. And they knew they were bankrupt. They knew there was a flaw and a fault.

Their covering was gone. And so what did they do? The best thing that humans can bring out of their own understanding, is they took these broad leaves, as it is, and sewed them together. They must have looked

utterly ridiculous.

There's no other way to describe it. When we get to heaven, and if the video section has something on this, you get to see, perhaps, how utterly ridiculous it must have looked. Here they are, covered in leaves, with their Lord coming down to meet them.

And in Matthew 21, 19, it says, Jesus cursed the fig tree and said, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforth forever. In other words, let no hungry stranger ever find that which fully satisfies his hunger among your barren leaves. And presently, the scripture says, the fig tree withered away.

Now folks, it's much more than just a tree. You see, Christ has come. And humanity has now progressed from the time of Adam to the historical time when he's walking on the face of the earth.

And here now is the culmination of man's efforts, in a sense, to be in right relationship with God. The fig leaves are no longer there, but the garments are just the same. The fig leaves have become very, very fancy now.

They're long borders and long phylacteries and great flowing robes, and things that elevate one over another. And mankind is now clothed in all of this ridiculousness that comes out of his own mind. And Jesus is standing there before... It's a type, folks.

It's similar to when he came into the garden, and he sees Adam clothed in fig leaves. He's standing before this tree, and there's still no fruit. He's looking at Jerusalem.

This is the very center of where he's longed to dwell. It's where his heavenly kingdom is one day coming to this world. And now, behind the walls of this city, are thousands and thousands of people covered now in man-made garments.

Man-made efforts, as it is, to prove to God and themselves that everything is okay. And he looks, and there's no fruit. No stranger can find life there.

There's nothing in religion. There's nothing in man's attempts to get back to God in his own strength. Absolutely nothing.

It's fruitless. It looks holy until you get close to it. Folks, you can approach all kinds of religion in the world today, even in Christ's name, and it looks holy until you get close to it.

And there's no fruit on it. There's nothing of God's life in it. There's nothing that satisfies the hungry soul.

There's nothing that provides comfort for the stranger, or provides nourishment for the fatherless or the widow or the orphan. There's nothing in it. And Jesus stands there and says, Let no fruit grow on you forever.

It's a pronouncement on religion, folks. It's not just about a fig tree. You see, Jesus had come, and He was now going to put an end to all man-made attempts to get back into right relationship with God.

He was going to open up anew in a living way. He was going to do something that man could not do for himself. He was speaking through time.

From the time He came into the Garden of Eden, I'm sure Jesus had Adam in His mind. No fruit grow on you anymore forever. No more covering.

No more phoniness. No more hypocrisy. No more appearance of godliness without genuine fruit in your life.

No more of this phony religion that professes to be my representative on the earth, and that has deceived itself into thinking that it's coming back into heaven with me for all of eternity. No more. No more of this fruit of deception.

Genesis chapter 3, if you'll go there with me, please. The Lord speaks something to Adam, which goes down through the corridors of time, and touches all of religion that has attempted to portray itself as living in right relationship. Of course, the only way we know that that can be is that our sin has to be covered.

We have to have a newness of life. In Genesis 3, 17, here's what the Lord said to Adam. And unto Adam He said, Because you have hearkened to the voice of your wife, and has eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it, cursed is the ground for thy sake, and sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.

Thorns and thistles shalt I bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the ground, for out of it was thou taken, for dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return. Now here's what the Lord is saying now.

You see, this is Adam. This is Adam who covered himself in fig leaves. And the Lord says, You'll find no fulfillment from all that the world produces to cover you.

You try all you want, but you'll find nothing that covers you. A sense of sorrowful emptiness will become part of your daily life. What you produce in your own efforts will never satisfy you.

You'll produce it, you'll color it, you'll dye it, you'll sew great borders on it, you'll make it appear to be holy, but it will never satisfy you. And then He says, You will sweat and live with a sense of finality that you will not be able to escape. There'll be no hope for the future.

There'll be no true, genuine peace that comes when you and I are living in right relationship with God. Now the worst of it all, in verse 23 it says, Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden to till the ground from whence he was taken. In other words, you think in this world that you can find what you're looking for? Go try to find it.

Work the ground real hard. Work everything that this world has got to offer. Work it as deeply as you can.

Sweat in working it and see if you can find what you lost. So he drove the man and he placed, he drove out the man, verse 24, And he placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubims and a flaming sword, which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life. This is amazing.

When you look at the picture, you think for a moment of Adam. By this time now, of course, he's covered in animal skins. He's heading out from the garden, looking back, and there's the tree of life.

There is God's provision for eternity. And Adam looks back upon it and there's a sword now. And that sword represents to me the word of God.

And God says, You cannot come back here. You cannot return to this through any effort or covering of your own. You cannot come back here.

Your human effort will not bring you back here because I've placed a sword here. I've placed my word here. You can't come back here.

This tree is shut off to you. All of humanity. This tree is shut off to every man or woman who tries to come back in their own strength, who tries to produce a covering and say, God, how does this look? Will you accept this? How does this look? I'm not swearing anymore.

I'm carrying a big Bible and I'm wearing a \$500 Amani suit. Is that okay? Can I come back in now? Can I get in? And God says, No, you cannot come back. You cannot come to this place through any human effort or any covering of your own.

Now, back in Matthew 21, 43, Jesus is now speaking to a society that is almost a culmination of what men become in a flurry of self-righteous religious effort without the life of God at its core. Think about it for a moment. God is in their midst and they don't recognize him and they don't even hear his voice.

They don't know him. They don't know much of religion, even in our generation. They don't recognize him anymore.

They don't know his voice. If God speaks, they can't hear him because they've created another covering and they've come into his place through another manner than what he's prescribed. They're filled with man-made coverings.

They're hiding an unchallenged and unchanged deep inner corruption. Jesus himself said, you Pharisees, he said, you look righteous on the outside but inside you're full of dead men's bones. He describes, he says, you clean the outside of the cup and inside you're full of extortion and excess.

You're like graves, he said, that appear like to be beautifully decorated but men are not aware that when they join affinity with you, they're going down into the same death that you're going into. They have a deep hatred for God. Think about now, he's standing outside of Jerusalem.

This is his own people. This is a religious society as it is. Probably one of the most religious on the earth.

And they have a hatred for him and his work among men. And his work, of course, is to seek out, to recover and regain those that he has lost. That's his work.

That's why he came. Because he wanted to make a way again for men to go back in to the tree of life. The tree of life that was barred.

And I think perhaps there was a hope, at least in the prophets anyway, that somehow this religion could have brought people to such a sense of despair and emptiness. There could at least be an admission, like eventually was in Peter and Paul when they said it was a yoke. And it was grievous, we couldn't do it.

It was hypocritical. It was impossible to achieve. There could be at least this sense of, is this God and what is God saying? And is somehow the covering that we put upon ourselves, has it fallen short of the glory of God? And Jesus says, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation that will bring forth its fruit.

And that's what this story of the fig tree is all about. It's not about a tree. It's about a religious people who have covered themselves with a covering.

And they're attempting to declare themselves to be the people of God. And God says, no, I'm taking this from you. You're not going to bear any fruit in this anymore.

And I'm going to give it to a nation that will bring forth the fruit. I'm going to give it to a people who are going to come my way. Back in to the tree of life.

Hallelujah. Now folks, no man can steal his way into God's kingdom. Nobody.

No one with his own covering can find the tree of life again. No one. God has barred the way.

There is no way back in. Now, I was speaking with a member of a doctor's organization in Africa a few months ago. And I was talking to him over lunch about the death of the righteous.

Because I was greatly impacted by the death of especially Teresa's mother when she died. Folks, I will never forget it. I could never escape it.

The glory of God that came into that hospital room was as strong as, if not stronger than anything we've ever experienced in this sanctuary. The glory of God came into that hospital room. My daughter Katie, we were all gathered.

She was singing a song to her. And she was conscious. She had been singing up to a point.

She'd lost the ability to join us in song. But her eyes were still very bright. Still very much there.

And all of a sudden Katie said to us, she's leaving. Now, no exterior thing is happening that, at least to me, would indicate that she's in any other state than she's been for the last while. But we all jumped up.

There was an immediate witness that she was leaving. Amazing. And we gathered around the bed.

She didn't look any different than she had to me, at least for the past while. And we began to pray. And Teresa, the spirit of God, came upon her.

She began to prophesy. And she said, Mama, the Jesus that you've trusted all these years, since you got saved at 60 years of age, has just come into the room. And he's come to get you.

And as she was speaking to her, folks, I couldn't look up. And I didn't see this, but my wife did. She said her eyes became like two balls of fire.

Like two lighthouses. She saw something that was reflected in her eyes. And at that very moment, left her body.

And there was such a sense of holiness in the room. I don't think I'll ever be the same. Teresa's father, being in the room, we went home.

We sat in one of the rooms at home. And the spirit of God came on him. And he said, Oh, God, let me die like this.

He said, Oh, God, let me die like Mama just died. Let my last ten be like hers. And God granted him his request.

And he went the same way. The day he died, he told everybody, I'm going to die today. It was incredible.

Ate breakfast, bacon and eggs that morning. Led in a prayer meeting. Four o'clock in the afternoon, put his feet up in the bed.

Lost his speech, I guess, about nine o'clock in the evening. And about 11 or so p.m., he intently stared at each one of his children in turn. And then he left.

He was gone. Oh, God. No wonder.

There's a cry in Scripture, Oh, God, let me die the death of the righteous. I think of my own mother who died of Lou Gehrig's disease. A very, very debilitating, very scary disease where you literally suffocate to death.

And the incredible peace that came on her life. She could only, the last few days, write on a tablet. And I said, Mom, how does it feel to know that you're going to heaven? And she wrote down awesome on this tablet.

Amazing. Just to see the very same thing. God coming down.

And I asked this doctor, I said, you've seen a lot of death. Or this board member of this doctor's organization. I said, you've seen a lot of death, no doubt.

He said, yes, I have. Because, of course, of the AIDS epidemic in Africa. And I said, is it true? I've heard so many times that there seems to be a window into eternity in the last moments of our life.

Just a window. It seems just in the last few seconds for many people who are conscious still. Who still have their faculties.

They can actually see from time and into eternity. And he said, that is true. He said, I've seen enough death.

I've heard enough about death now to know that in many cases there is a window. It appears it opens before those who are going into eternity. Brother Crandall tells you about this young lady that died at 18 years of age of a disease.

And in the room she started describing in the last moments what she saw. She said, there's elders so and so. And she started describing people.

She said, oh, dad, mom, they look so young. And she saw into heaven and just left at that very moment. He spoke to me of a wicked man.

He said, one time in a hospital there was a wicked man. And he scoffed at everybody who believed in God. And thought everybody was simple minded who believed in the Lord.

And he was dying. And in the last moments, hours and days of his life, he was so debilitated physically that he could no longer lift or raise a limb. He had no strength left in his physical body.

He said in the last few moments of his life, he saw something come in the door of his hospital room. And what he saw so terrified him. He said that he jumped, it was a bed with sides like a crib, like an adult crib.

He jumped over, he got up and jumped over the side of the bed. Ran into the corner and cowered in the fetal position trying to shield himself. And died in that position in the corner.

Trying to shield himself from what he saw walking in the door of his hospital room. He told me also about another man who was a professing Christian. He was a deacon in a Christian church and professed to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

And he was in his last moments in his hospital room, laying in his bed. And in the last seconds of his life, perhaps the last minute or two of his life, he was conscious, he was lucid. And he said, oh the angels, I hear them.

Can you hear them? There were people in the room. Can you hear the angels coming down the hallway? He said, there seems to be two. I can hear their footsteps coming down the hallway.

And nobody, of course, in the room could hear anything. Because he had been given now a window for that moment into eternity. And then he was looking towards the door with this incredible expectancy.

And in the door came figures that he saw. And a terror came upon him. And he said, oh no, oh no.

Not you. And then he grabbed somebody close to him. And he grabbed them by the lapel of their uniform.

And he said, don't let them take me. Don't let them take me. And those were his last words.

He died with his hands still gripping the lapel of one of the personnel that were in the room with him. Now where did this man get a false covering in the Christian church? This is my question. Where did he get a covering of his own making? Was it something that he made for himself? I believe that God gave that man a window.

He expected angels to be coming into the room. And what he saw were not angels. The last moments of his life were terror.

Was it a covering of his own making? Was he a man who harbored secret sin? Was there a practice in his life that he was unwilling to lay down? Was there something he was doing and thought that he could continue to do it? I'm not talking about people who struggle. We all struggle. But for those who know Christ, the Scripture says in 2 Timothy 2.19, The foundation of God stands sure, having this seal.

The Lord knows them that are His. And let everyone that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity. We all struggle.

But for those who truly know God and truly walk with God, John, the beloved, in one of his epistles says, The man or woman who knows God cannot continue to live in sin. The seed of God is in him. There's a seed of new life in him or in her.

And there's this departing from iniquity. This constant throughout life, turning away from things that offend the very nature and the very character of God. There's this turning in the true Christian.

It doesn't mean, I don't want anybody getting condemned by this this morning, because it doesn't mean you don't struggle. But in your heart, you must know, if you're a true believer, that there is a turning away. There's a desire to walk away.

But many, many people who profess to know Jesus Christ, even in our time, they create a garment of their own making that allows them to commit adultery. It allows them to steal in the workplace. It allows them to lie and gossip and slander unrestrainedly.

And this garment that they put on themselves convinces them that there's no justice for this. There's no judgment day coming for them. Even though Jesus said, by every word you speak you'll be justified, and by every word you'll be condemned.

Jesus said, if you do not forgive those who have wronged you, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive your trespasses. But in spite of what God has spoken, they create a garment of fig leaves and they cover themselves and say, all is well, all is well. And they seek out a church that won't challenge their sin.

That won't expose this hypocrisy for what it is. I'd rather you get mad at me and go to Heaven. Did someone else convince this man that somehow just being better than the general level of society and standing in his self-made righteousness was good enough? What a tragedy, folks, to live in Adam's fig tree religion in our generation.

Only to find in the last moments that the feet coming down the hallway to get you are not taking you to Heaven. Whether you like it or not, folks, within 50 years or so most of us are going to hear those feet coming down the hallway. There's no way around it.

It's going to be your portion, it's going to be mine. God will either come or other emissaries will be sent. But what a tragedy to have been covered in an unrighteous covering, to have been covered in human effort, to have been covered in something deceptive, to find in the last moments of your life that the feet coming down the hallway are not taking you to Heaven.

I guess the question would be whose feet are coming to get you? Who's been assigned to take you into eternity? And if you're not sure they're God's, can it be changed? Can I get back? I want you to go to Zechariah with me, please. Chapter 3. Just go back from Matthew to Malachi to Zechariah, chapter 3. How can I know? There's only one question, folks, in life that really needs to be answered rightly. You can afford to be wrong in a quiz game, but you can't afford to be wrong with this one.

How do I know? How can I know that the covering I have is going to get me into Heaven? How can I know that I'm going to go back and dwell with God for all of eternity? Now, Zechariah, the prophet, is coming to a people who are discouraged in the rebuilding as it is at the temple. He's giving them a view into the future of what the work of God is all about. Where is all of this labor leading to? All of the things that God is asking people to do.

What is God's part in all of this? What is He going to do? In Zechariah, chapter 3 and verse 8, he says, Hear now, O Joshua, the high priest, thou and thy fellows that sit before thee, for their men wondered at. For behold, I'll bring forth my servant, the branch. That's very symbolic, because in the Hebrew text it means that which produces new growth, that which causes there to be productivity or fruit starting to grow again.

It's the source from which a new covering for man would come. It's a graft as it is of the tree of life. God says, you can't come back to the tree of life.

Human effort can't bring you back. False covering can't bring you in. Because you can't come back in, I'm going to come out to you.

I'm going to take a branch as it is from the tree of life. The tree of life is ultimately Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God says, I'm going to take a branch and I'm going to bring that branch to you.

And that branch is going to be the way that you come back again into fellowship with God. And in verse 4, in chapter 3, verse 4, He said, And He answered to those that stood before Him and said, Take away the filthy garments from him. And He said to him, Behold, I've caused your iniquity to pass from you, and I will clothe thee with a change of raiment.

The Lord says, I'm going to do something. I'm going to take away your filthiness. I'm going to take away all of the human struggles and trials to get back into my presence.

I'm going to take it all away and I'm going to give you a change of clothing. I'm going to hand it to you. You don't have to make it.

You don't have to sew it. You don't have to put it on. You don't have to clean it.

You don't have to keep it on. I'm going to give it to you. If you will reach out by faith, I'm going to stretch my hand out to you and I'm going to give you a covering that only can come from the hand of God.

And again in verse 9, he says, For behold the stone I've laid before Joshua. On one stone shall be seven eyes. I will engrave the engravings thereof, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.

Iniquity means the depraved actions of man, which he does in his separation from God. God says, No, you've sinned. You've fallen short of the glory.

No one can come back into my presence in his own effort. But I'm going to come. The branch is going to come.

Someone from the tree of life is going to come to you. And I'm going to give you a change of clothing. I'm going to do something that is going to take away the power of sin in one day.

And I'm going to open again the way to the tree of life. All the mercy of God. The incredible, unspeakable mercy of God.

Hallelujah to the Lamb of God. Not that I came to God, but God came to me. Thanks be to God.

Thanks be to God that He came to me. Hallelujah. The branch came, gave me a covering and took away my sin, allowed Himself to be nailed on a cross and paid the price for all the wrong things that I've done and for all the foolish ways I've tried to reason my way back into the presence of God.

God Almighty did it all Himself in a day. What I could never accomplish in a lifetime. He did it in a day.

He made the way back into His presence for eternity. Verse 10, He says, In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall you call every man his neighbor under the vine and under the fig tree. It's amazing.

He says, you're going to call everyone out of every place where they've sought some kind of covering to get back into My presence again. You're going to call them and say, no, you don't need those things. You don't need fig leaves anymore.

I've found the branch. I've found the covering. I've found the redemption.

I've found the Redeemer. I've found the Messiah. Hallelujah.

In John chapter 1, verse 47, there was a man called Nathanael. And it says, Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him. And He said to him, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile, or that means deceit.

In Nathanael, verse 48, John 1 says, Whence knowest thou Me? How do you know Me? Jesus' answer said, Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you. Amazing. Jesus says, now, you're a man with no guile because you're under the fig tree.

You're in a place where many before you have chosen a fruitless covering of self-deception. But you have not chosen this. You want something more.

You're not a man who is deceitful. You're not seeking to get into heaven with deceptive clothing. He said, you're a man without guile.

You want the real thing. You could have done the very same thing that Adam did in the Garden of Eden. You could be covering yourself with these fig leaves in all of the religion that's available to you today.

But I saw you under the fig tree. And you were a man who just said, No, not for me. If this is real.

If God is alive, I want to know who He is. I want to know the whole thing. I want everything that God has for me.

Oh, folks, don't miss heaven. Don't miss heaven. Don't miss heaven.

Heaven is open to you. Why would you choose to go to hell? Why would you choose to live in deception? Why, why, why would you choose this? When the life of God can be yours. The redemption of God can be freely given to you.

Why would you die in your sin? Nathanael verse 49 said, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God. Thou art the King of Israel. You see, immediately his eyes are open.

Because there's no guile in him. Because he's not trying to sneak his way into the Kingdom of God. Because he's not got some phony garment on in God's presence.

Because he's a man that says, let's just call sin, sin. Let's just call it the way it is. I want to know God.

I want to walk with God. I want everything God has for me. I want to go where God wants me to go.

I want to be what God calls me to be. I want to do what God calls me to do. And Jesus answered and said, because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, you believe these, you will see greater things than these.

Now here's what happens. He said, verily I say to you, hereafter you'll see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. Immediately, Nathaniel is taken into the blessing of

Abraham.

Immediately he's in the place where Jacob was, who was blessed of God. Even though his head was on a stone, he saw a ladder. At the top was God.

And he saw the provision of God coming down to earth. He saw it. And he says, Nathaniel, you're going to see God's provision.

I am the provision of God. Now, back in Matthew where we started, in 21 verse 20, and when the disciples saw it, he said to the fig tree, verse 19, let no fruit grow on thee henceforth forever. And presently the fig tree withered away.

And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, how soon is the fig tree withered away? And Jesus said, I say unto you, if you have faith and doubt not, you shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, be removed and cast into the sea, it shall be done. And all things whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive. You see, the moment we're in right relationship with Jesus Christ, He will command religious falseness to die.

The words of His mouth will bring an instantaneous death. If any man be in Christ, he's a new creature. The old things are passed away and all things are become new.

God says, I'll begin to speak and all the religious falseness and all the fruit of deception will begin to die. It will wither right before your eyes. You say then, well, what is my part in all of this? If this is what God does, if God's Word is what will cause this deception to literally dissipate and pass away, what is my part? And Jesus said in verse 21, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do this which is done to the fig tree.

In other words, I'll give you the power, if you believe, to cast these things down, bring all thoughts and imaginations into the obedience of Jesus Christ. I'll give you the power over all your enemies. I'll give you the power over deceptive reasoning.

I'll bring you into truth. You will understand truth. You'll know truth.

And the truth will set you free. But you'll say to this mountain, be removed and cast into the sea and it shall be done. Now, I don't know why he drew the illustration, but I have a picture in my mind of one fig tree is withered and died.

And on the mountain is most likely many more of them. And Jesus now turns from, their focus is on one tree and he turns to the mountain, in a sense, that is the nurturing source of many more of these things. The mountain is my nature, my fallen nature.

It's your fallen nature. It's the source. It's the fuel source of all of this empty, fruitless religion.

And he says, if you don't doubt, you can say to this mountain, be removed and be cast into the sea and it shall be done. You can say, you can look in the mirror and say, hey, you're finished. You're over.

Over. Get it? You're finished. You're not dominating my life anymore.

I have a new life source within me. And so fear, leave me and go into the sea. Depression, go into the sea.

Unbelief, into the sea with you. Selfishness, into the sea. Lying tongue, into the sea.

Lustful heart, into the sea. All of it, into the sea. All this old dead fruit, into the sea.

Religious garments, into the sea. Deception, into the sea with you. The whole mountain of you, into the sea.

Be gone from me. That's my part. That's my part, folks.

To get into this book and agree with God and everything that disagrees with God's nature in me, I simply agree and say, away from me. In the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Living Branch, get away from me and get into the sea. You have no more dominion over my life.

And then he says in verse 22, And all things whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing you shall receive. All things. That's the fruit of the root of that whole story.

It starts with the fig tree. It starts with religious deception. It's got to go.

It's all got to go. And then he says all things. First we cast off.

Then we say, Lord, I'd like to be like You. I'd like a heart of love. I'd like to know what it is to be a father, a mother, a brother, a friend.

I'd like courage to preach the Gospel. I'd like a willing heart. I'd like giving hands.

God, I'd like a mind that sees things and eyes that see what I've never seen before. And do you realize that Jesus said, If your desire is to follow Me in truth, all things will be yours. I'll give you a new mind, a new heart, a new spirit.

You'll be a new creation. The glory of God will be upon you. And most of all, most of all, and last of all, you and I will have an assurance that the feet that come down the hallway for you in the last moment of your life belong to God.

There'll be no surprise at the end. Hallelujah. The One you knew was coming.

You didn't hope. You didn't suppose. You knew He was coming.

Hallelujah. You knew those last moments belonged to God. You knew that the branch was coming to receive you unto Himself.

You knew because His life was your life. His heart was your heart. You had received the covering that He offered through the shed blood that He gave on the cross on Calvary.

You had given up all hope except God's hand stretched out to you. It's time to get rid of the leaves, folks. Get rid of the leaves.

These things won't get you into heaven. Get rid of the leaves. I've had people sitting in this very sanctuary in adultery, lifting their voices and praising God.

Side by side, adulterers. Handmade garments that will never get them into heaven. If you're a thief, the Scripture says all thieves dwell outside of the city of God.

Read it in Revelation. If you're a liar, you're not going there either. So whatever kind of robe you want, you're not going.

The leaves have got to come off. God says, I'm looking for a Nathaniel today. I'm looking for a man or woman without guile.

He says, Lord, I want it your way. You can get through the deception your whole life. You can even sing in the choir.

You can go your whole life, but there's one moment you will not get through and it's the last five seconds of your life, folks. You'll not make it through. It has to be true.

I want to give an altar call this morning. Sanctuary and annex. Oh, beloved.

Time is so short. If you only knew. The annex, when we stand, you can stand between the screens.

This is not a time to be heading for your car, folks. This is a time to get these leaves off. The Lord says, I'll open to you the windows of heaven.

You'll see if you will bend your knee to me. Acknowledge me as Lord as well as Savior. If you will confess with your mouth that I'm your Lord and your Savior and bend your knee to me in truth, I'll open heaven to you.

And you'll begin to see God's supply. You'll begin to understand that the garments that you need are received by faith. Now, they're not given to those who want to go back and use them as a license to sin.

That's a deception, folks, and the Bible warns very clearly about that. You don't come and get this garment so you can go back and enjoy your sin without pangs of conscience. That's called a reprobate mind.

You get this garment to begin to live a new life, a new master. And once you begin to know his life, you wouldn't want any other anyway. Everything will just start to fade.

But I want to give an altar call for every person in the balcony at the main sanctuary and say, Pastor, I don't fully understand everything you said, but I feel like God has spoken to me, and I feel like there's things in my life that have to go. I've tried to cram these into the kingdom, and I realized the dangerous game that I'm playing today. It's very, very dangerous to play games with God, folks.

Very dangerous. He's holy. He's righteous.

He's a God of mercy, but he's a God of judgment as well. Very, very dangerous. No more dangerous game in the universe you can play than to play games with the holy God.

He's extended a hand of mercy. If you have any wisdom, you will take that hand, and you'll cling to that hand and never let it go. You'll walk with him and agree with him, and he'll bring you into a life that you've only ever dreamt was possible and take all fear away, and you will know in your last days, you will know whose feet are coming down the hallway for you.

Would you stand, please? The Holy Spirit is drawing you today. Please meet me here at this altar. Just slip out of wherever you are.

In the balcony, you can go to either exit. Main sanctuary. Just come and meet me here.

Every person who just has passed, you've spoken to my heart. I've got to get something off of my life. And perhaps there's some here today, you've never, ever given your life to Jesus Christ.

You come. You come. Come just as you are.

He's going to hand you a new garment, but you have to be prepared to take off the old one. Hallelujah. Just make your way, and please move in close in the balcony.

Just make your way here in the annex. You can stand between the screens. We're going to worship for just a moment, then we're going to pray together momentarily.

This is a holy moment, and for some, this is the moment of your salvation. It's the moment where an old way of living is put away, and all attempts to reach heaven in your own strength you've realized today are foolish. You're never going to be able to do it.

And today you've realized that I've got to reach out and take the hand of God. It's the only way back into life. God stretched his hand out to me on the cross, paid the price for my sins.

An innocent man suffered, was beaten, and died for the wrong things that I've done, even the religious deception that I've committed against God. And today is the day of your salvation, if that's truly and sincerely in your heart. And for others, you've reached out for an assurance, because there's something in your life that you've been hanging on to.

There's a covering that you've placed over some sin. And the Lord is saying, I want to open heaven to you, but you have to be without guile. You have to be without deception.

You can't come trying to deceive me and expect me to open heaven to you. You have to be honest. Hallelujah.

And I can see that conviction of honesty on many of you here today. I see couples, I see individuals gripped by the Holy Spirit of God. And this is where conversion... To be saved, you are giving up the rights to your life.

You're giving them to God. That's salvation, folks. It's not a prayer that you pray to make you feel good and go out and just live the way you want to.

You're giving the rights to your life to God. He is going to buy you with His blood, as the Scripture says. Hallelujah.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus Christ, Thank you for loving me in all of my deception, in my foolishness, and rebellion. You've kept loving me.

You stretched your hands out to me. Today, my God, I receive your offer of eternal life. Into my heart.

And I invite you to be my Lord and my Savior. I bend my knee to you. Your ways are higher than my ways.

I confess with my tongue that you are not only my Savior, but you are the Lord. You are the absolute Lord. I thank you, Jesus, for receiving me.

God help me to walk with you and to honor you and to know your power and your promises all the days of my life. I'd like us to seal this with a worship song, if we could. And after the service today, downstairs,

lower rotunda, the back of the lobby, we call it the rotunda.

Beneath that is the lower rotunda. There are people there that will pray with you. If you're not, it's the Holy Spirit who gives you witness that you're a child of God, folks.

I'd love to be able to say you're saved, but really, I can tell you what you have to do to be saved, but the Holy Spirit gives you the witness that you are a child of God. You must not leave this house until you are absolutely sure of that, until you know that you've been born again by the Spirit of God. God's Spirit gives the witness.

When things are right, if you have to sit in your seat and pray, if you have to go downstairs and pray, you make sure you get this thing right. You make sure when you know here, leave here rather, that you can raise your hands in the air and say, I belong to God. God belongs to me.

Heaven is mine. Make sure you know this. Father, thank you for this day.

Thank you for the glory of Christ in our midst. Thank you, Lord, that the preaching of the gospel still does what the preaching of the gospel has always done. Lord, the preaching of the cross is the power of God for salvation.

I pray, Lord, this day, you finish the work in every heart. Don't let the devil steal the seed of life and hope out of any heart that's gathered at this altar today. Satan, you're a deceiver and a condemner.

We stand against you. I stand against you in the name of Jesus Christ. I command your voice to be silent.

God has stretched his hands of love out to these who have responded. He's willing to receive all who come to him in truth. Father, I pray God seal the work, Lord.

Don't make church attenders at this altar, but disciples of Jesus Christ, followers of Christ. Father, we thank you for it. God, with all my heart, I thank you.

Thank you, Father. In Jesus' name. Now, we're going to just sing one more song.

And as we do, take a moment, especially those who are standing in the aisles. Just take a moment. Let what you've done today be deeply sealed in your heart.

We have new believers classes here every Friday night. If you're truly converted and you're not visiting from out of town, you should get to one. If you are visiting, find a Bible teaching, Bible believing church and get into the new believers class.

This is a new life. Thanks be to God. Thanks be to God.

This is the conclusion of the message.

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