

THE AWAKENED CHRIST

Week #1 of a 2-Week Easter Series

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Alright; you ready?

I want to really open a space for each and every one of us to really feel a message that God has for us during this Holy Week. That sometimes, in my experience, we kind of hurry through things.

How many of you have been through Holy Week before? [Congregation laughs] Right? And so what happens when we've been through something before is: Our intellect -- our ego -- gets involved and says, *"Oh, I know what this is. I know what this means. I know how this goes. I've got this figured out."* And so we tend to do it from a very superficial way that our mind has worked out what Holy Week means to us.

But there is a spiritual process here. And I believe that things begin to change when we simply ask Spirit to reveal what the lesson is for each one of us during Holy Week this year. In this moment! What does my soul need this Holy Week? What is the message for me this Holy Week?

Because the moment we actually put ourselves in that kind of relationship with God -- where we believe; where we expect that God has a message for us; that there's an experience that our soul needs during this Holy Week -- then we actually get the experience. We get the message. We get the learning. We get the moment. We get the upliftment. We get the healing. We get the miracle that really isn't available if we just go through the motions.

I mean, can you think of how many Easters you've had over the course of your life? And how many of them do you actually remember? How many of them were even truly spiritually meaningful for you? How many of them were just, *"Welp. Here's the outfit."* [Congregation laughs] You know, put on the hat or whatever you do ... right? We're going to do sunrise, or whatever it is we do. And we go through the motions of Holy Week, but it's not holy. It's not meaningful. It's not deep. It's not profound.

And I want your soul asking for the profound. I want you to say, *"I know that this is an important spiritual week every year, and I want a profound experience."*

See, I believe that most people are spiritually hungry. Whether they realize it or not, most people have a need within their heart and their soul for something more; for something deeper; for something more meaningful. But we don't really ever ask for it! We don't really open up to that possibility -- that we could actually have something profound and meaningful and transformative.

And as I go through and share the first few days of Holy Week with you today, I want you to see that the underlying thing is that the disciples were transformed by being in Jesus' presence in three years. So if it took the disciples only three years to walk away as different and profound spiritual experiences ... How many of you have had more than three Holy Weeks? [Congregation laughs] Right? And I just want to kind of change the game. Because if your spiritual life is, *"Oh yeah; what else you got?"* then I think we've missed the point! And I think that God could have a very profound spiritual experience for you if you were willing to open yourself to that level of an experience.

Now, do you have to? No! You can How many of you have ever slept through a movie? You can sleep through the whole thing! [Congregation laughs] Right? You can sleep through the whole experience. Or you can really say, *"Oh! This is a holy moment! And God, I want all of it! I want everything you've got for me this year. I want to be profoundly touched and blessed and healed, and I'm open to a miracle. I'm*

open to something that would really change my life." Because as you ask for it -- as you open and expect it -- Spirit can do it.

You know, most of you know that on Sunday mornings I speak up at Unity of Prescott. And so every Sunday morning I'm driving the same route. It's about an hour and a half from my house. And every day it's different. This time of year it's amazing, right? The sunrise and the sunset is about the same time that I'm going back and forth. But all the wildflowers are out right now and it's incredibly gorgeous! And I could sleep through that experience.

How many of you have ever driven someplace and, when you got there you had no idea how you got there, because you really were unconscious at the wheel? Has everybody had that experience? Well, I've driven up there so many times, I pretty much know the route. And I can't go unconscious! But I work at staying awake and noticing the drive; and noticing the beauty; and what's changing; what's happening; and how the mountains look; and how the hills look; and what color are the wildflowers this week. And really taking in the experience. Because life is meant to stay awake.

So here we go! I want to share four experiences in Jesus' life of the first part of Holy Week. Next week I'm going to talk a little bit about the back end of Holy Week. But this week I want to cover Palm Sunday; the cursing of the fig tree -- which is a personal favorite; the cleansing of the temple; and the Last Supper. Because I believe that kind of sets us up for what it takes to have a spiritual experience. That each one of those four events -- when we look at them -- kind of opens in us something special.

Palm Sunday

So we're going to start with Palm Sunday which, of course, was last Sunday. And I'm going to read from John 12:12. Now, as a minister, I love Palm Sunday! I love Palm Sunday! Because, as a minister, my whole adult life is about serving people spiritually. And sometimes I wonder if it's making a difference. Can you imagine that? Where I give my best shot -- sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. But I wonder if it really is having an impact on people's lives.

And on Palm Sunday, Jesus walks into Jerusalem and the crowd goes nuts. It is his rock star moment! It is the moment in his earthly ministry where he gets to be fully acknowledged and fully celebrated. And they just go nuts! I mean, there's people taking off their coats and throwing it in the road. And people are cutting off palm branches; and they're waving; and they're singing. Like, they have heard the stories! And he's coming into town, and they expect something. They expect something big.

So here we go. John 12:12:

"The next day a great crowd who had come to the feasts heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took palm branches and they went out and met him, crying, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even as the King of Israel!' And Jesus found a young ass and sat upon it, for it is written, 'Fear not, daughter of Zion; for behold, your king is coming, sitting on an ass's colt.'

And his disciples did not understand this as first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered what had been written and had been done to him. And the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead bore witness. And the reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they had heard the signs that he had done."

Right? So this is his rock star moment! He walks in and the people go nuts! Right? He walks into Jerusalem, and the people go nuts! And they're celebrating him; they're acknowledging him; they're so excited! There is a bit of the energy that says, *"What's he gonna do now? Like, he's already raised somebody from the dead; what else has he got?"* Right? And they're there; they want to experience it.

And I just believe that there was something that had to happen in this moment in Jerusalem, where his soul got to experience something before all the rest of the stuff started. Where his soul got to acknowledge that he did really good work. That he walked in and he was seen as a spiritual presence ... maybe like none other. And he got to be celebrated -- fully, deeply celebrated.

And then the next day.

The Cursing of the Fig Tree

Have you ever had a really good day, and the next day you're a little cranky? [Congregation laughs] Now, you would think after you had a really big day, the next day, man, you'd still be on top of it! And you'd be just, "*Wasn't that a great day?!?*" and "*Wasn't that fantastic?!?*"

And when I'm teaching or speaking -- when I'm doing a weekend -- and after I did a long weekend and really gave everything I had, sometimes ... Now it doesn't happen very often, please! [Congregation laughs] But sometimes on Monday morning I'm a little cranky.

Like, my wife just says, "*Why don't you just stay in your room and come out when you're ready?*" [Congregation laughs] And she slides food underneath the door. [Congregation laughs] And she keeps it locked. And I'm kind of cranky! Right? Because, you know, when you've given everything you've got -- it's mental; it's emotional; it's physical; it's spiritual.

And so I believe that even Jesus could have a bad day. Now, for some of you this is going to be way too much. Hang on to your hats, because it's going to get worse. [Congregation laughs] Alright?

So reading from the Gospel of Mark -- Mark 11:12-25:

"On the following day, when they had come from Bethany, he was hungry."

Jesus was hungry.

"And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything to eat. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not yet in season. And he said to it, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.'"

Let me repeat that in case you missed it:

"'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.' And his disciples ..."

They made sure it was in the Bible!

"... And his disciples heard it."

Like, they had to make sure that it was in there. "*And his disciples heard it.*" Because it made such an impression on them that their teacher just cursed a fig tree. [Feigns a look of shock - congregation laughs] I mean, come on! "*What are we going to do? The big guy needs a meal!*" There were no McDonald's between Bethany and Jerusalem. There were no diners; you know, they couldn't whip him up a couple of eggs and take them out to him. Right?

Like, the guy just spent all day Messiah-ing in Jerusalem. And the next morning he gets up: no breakfast, no coffee. And he has to go back into Jerusalem for another full day of being the Messiah. And all he wants is a stinkin' fig! [Congregation laughs] Nada! So he cursed it. And I think it scared the disciples. I do! [Congregation laughs] Right?

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

So reading beginning with Verse 15, because the story continues:

"And then they did get to Jerusalem."

And he still ... ask him if he's had any breakfast? No!

"And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those bought in the temple, overturning the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who were selling pigeons. And he would not allow any one of them to carry anything out of the temple."

So can you see that he's still a little on edge? [Congregation laughs] Right? So his blood sugar still hasn't come up; he didn't get a fig; and now he's in the temple and he's ticked that, in the temple, they're doing all these things that he thinks are inappropriate spiritual activities. And so what does he say?

"He said, 'Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?' But you have made it a den of robbers!' And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and sought a way to destroy him; for they feared him, because the multitude was astonished by his teachings. And that evening they left and went out from the city."

Okay; so look at this. I want to kind of slow this down. Because I want to make sure we teach into this. So there is a part of your spiritual journey -- all of our spiritual journeys -- where we have to be willing to step in to the fullness of who we are. Where we have -- as Jesus said -- *"Let our light so shine that others see our good works and give glory to God."*

So Jesus went into Jerusalem with his energy full: he was big; he was bright; he was powerful; he was transformative! And he walked into Jerusalem as the full expression of God that he was. And I imagine that the scribes, the Pharisees, the church elders were already a little wiggled out that so many people were coming and giving him praise and acknowledgement for his spiritual presence. The stories of what he was doing were being passed around and people were talking about it. And then he walks in and they start calling him "the King of the Jews." And that made the church elders nuts.

The next day he comes in and he clears the temple. He said, *"This is a house of prayer!"* And he clears the temple. And I want you to see that, as you call forth -- as you celebrate the fullness of who you are; as you walk into Holy Week being the magnificent man or woman of God that you are -- there is still a part of us that still needs to be cleansed. There is a part of us where there's our fear; our wounds; our anger; our resentment; our upset that still needs to be cleansed. And we want to just celebrate who we are and allow our light and our energy to be big and wonderful that we say, *"Oh that! Just don't pay any attention to that!"*

But no! The very next day he cleansed the temple. And I want you to see this as part of your spiritual journey. Like, I want you to be so big and so bright and so magnificent and let your light so shine that others see the presence of God in you! But I also don't want us to walk away from the places in us where we know that we still need more inner work. Where we need to be cleansed; where we need to let go of the old and the limited and the broken. Because, as we move further into Holy Week, there's going to be more and more asked of us of letting go of the old and preparing for a greater expression.

Well ... I don't want to get there yet. But it's coming!

So the first thing that we have to really get clear on is that God wants you to be a magnificent expression of the Divine. And the entire universe wants to celebrate how amazing you are.

And then the second aspect is that we need not be afraid of asking the Holy Spirit to cleanse us of our fears; our woundedness; our doubts; our shame; our stories; our drama. Cleanse us of anything that is getting in the way of the full expression of God in us.

Now let me get to three.

The Lesson from the Withered Fig Tree

This is them going back from Jerusalem. Back to Bethany.

"And as they passed by in the morning they saw the fig tree, and the fig tree had withered away to its root."

So at this point, it's dead, dead! In eight hours or 10 hours or 12 hours -- from the moment he cursed it until the moment they got back, as they walked by the fig tree -- it's now dead to the root. The leaves just didn't fall off; it's dead to the root! And Peter ... God bless him!

"And Peter, remembering what Jesus had said, said, 'Master! Looooook!'"

[Congregation laughs] That's what it says! *"Master! Looooook!!!"* [Congregation laughs]

"The fig tree which you cursed has withered!"

He is freaked out! [Congregation laughs] He saw it -- eight hours ago; 10 hours ago; whatever it was. He saw it; it was like a nice, green, lovely fig tree. And it's dead to the root. It's dead! He is freaked out! You thought his eyes were big when [Jesus] cursed it; his eyes are now huge and he's freaked out!

Now, if you cursed a tree in your yard ... [Congregation laughs] Does anybody have a tree that you kind of have a love/hate relationship with? I've got a ficus in my back yard, and it's a beautiful tree. And I've never had a tree that spends more time making and dropping leaves 24/7. [Congregation laughs] Right? That tree can make and drop more leaves in 24 hours ... I mean, I've got a blower and a rake that just has to constantly ... to keep my patio ... okay; that's more information than you need.

But if I cursed that tree in my back yard, and it was dead to the root by that evening, my wife would have my hide. [Congregation laughs] She would! She would have my hide! Right? She loves that tree, right?

And if I cursed a fig tree and it died, I don't know about you, but you might have a little bit of shame! Would everybody be embarrassed? I mean, you're the Messiah! You're the king of love! You're the one who's supposed to heal and raise the dead, and you just cursed a fig tree ... and there were witnesses! [Congregation laughs] Right? He couldn't say, *"Oooops"* and make firewood out of it. It was there!

And I think the human experience would be to be embarrassed; to go into your shame; to pull back. And what does Jesus do? He teaches into the moment:

"Jesus said, 'Have faith. Have faith in God. For truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you will receive it, and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father who is in heaven may forgive you for your trespasses."

I love that! He has no shame! He has no ability to stop teaching; to stop preaching; to stop being the spiritual force in the world that he is. He just acknowledges, *"Yes! Now let me teach you about the power that's within us."* So it looks like he uses the power incorrectly, but he uses it -- as one of the last events for him -- as this huge object lesson: That our words are that powerful!

Because how many of us have said things like, *"My back is killing me!"*? Or, *"This situation is going to drive me crazy!"*? Or, *"My mind doesn't work as good as it used to."*?

And every time we speak the word in a negative way, if instantly that was made manifest, we'd all already be dead! We would have already cursed ourselves into a life experience that none of us want to live!

And he just taught into that so beautifully about the power of our words. And that, as you awaken to the glory of God within you, we have to awaken to the power of our words. And one of the last things he made sure the disciples knew was that every one of them had the power to speak the word and it would be done upon it; it would happen!

So we have to celebrate who we are. We have to be cleansed over and over again of all the limitations; all the doubts; all the fears. And then we have to speak the word with power and authority as the transformative expressions of God that we are.

The Last Supper

And the final thing I want to speak into tonight is the Last Supper. And communion.

The final thing that Jesus wanted to do in his earthly ministry for his disciples was to have Passover with them. He wanted a small, intimate place where he could have the Twelve who had been with him for three years -- where he could have them in a small room, just the 13 of them. So they had Passover together.

And I believe that he wanted to use this night -- this moment -- to teach them one more thing. And it wasn't for the whole crowd; it wasn't for everyone that was in Jerusalem. It was just for those Twelve. And he wanted to say to them -- in a way that would be tangible and that they would remember -- what had been happening the last three years.

So after Passover -- after the meal was finished -- he took bread and he broke it. And he said:

"This is my body; eat.' Then he took a cup of wine and he passed it around and he said, 'This is my blood; this is the Spirit of the work that I've been doing.'"

And I want you to see that, in this final private act for his disciples, he wanted to show them the spiritual process that they had been undergoing for the last three years. That for the last three years, they had been eating and drinking the spiritual food that he was offering him, and it had been transforming them from the inside out. That each one of those men ... They started out as fishermen or tax collectors and each one of those men were now fully equipped to go and do the work that he was doing. In three years, he took them from people who weren't very spiritual to people who were able to continue to do the spiritual work at the level and in the way that he was doing it! And it happened in three years!

And so the very last act was, *"Pay attention ... because you've been eating and drinking the spiritual food that I've been offering you, and you are no longer the same creation. You are no longer the same."* And in this simple act of the bread and the wine, he showed them a very profound spiritual lesson.

You know, one of the things that can happen to us on our spiritual journey is that we can think it, but not always realize that we have to live it for it to matter. We can think of a great spiritual truth, but until we can really bring it down into our everyday existence, it doesn't really matter.

So communion for the last 2000+ years has been a way for us to acknowledge our spiritual growth. That every year -- or whenever we take communion -- it's an acknowledgement that we are no longer the same as who we used to be. That all the spiritual food that's been offered to us this last year has changed us from the inside out. That we've eaten it and we've drank it, and we're now different because of it.

So tonight I'm going to offer communion. And you don't have to do it; nobody has to do communion. You don't have to do the elements. But I'm going to offer them to you. Because sometimes we can't see -- week after week, month after month, year after year -- the spiritual transformation that's going on within us.

And the other thing that happens for me in taking communion is: It leaves a sweetness in my mouth. And I don't want you to miss that. Because every time we take hold -- we lay hold -- of the activity of God in our lives, it leaves a sweet taste in our mouth. There's a sweetness to living your spiritual life. And every time we take it in, like, it's good; it's sweet; it's wonderful; and it changes us from the inside out!

So if you want tonight after service, we're going to offer you -- and I'll tell you how it's going to work -- but we're going to offer communion. And if you want to partake, please do. If you don't, then just leave quietly and it will be part of our spiritual experience tonight.

So here's the underlying gist. I think God has something for you tonight: a message; a truth; a healing; a miracle. And I have no idea what it is for you. But I believe it's available to all of us. And I want to make sure that you don't leave without it. I want to make sure that -- whatever the message or the inspiration or the transformation is -- that you get it; you lay hold of it; you allow it. For every year, when we go through this process, this process becomes deeper.

You know, over the last few weeks I've been talking about the difference between a circle and a spiral. And a circle is the experience in life where you go around the same experience over and over and over again, and nothing really changes. Right? You're just hitting the same marks on the circle, and it's exactly the same. And nothing's ever different.

A spiral is very different. A spiral is: The events might be the same, but where you access them is always changing. I want to make sure that this Holy Week is a spiral experience for you, not a circular experience. I don't want you to just hear the same message for the hundredth time. I want you to listen to God and see and hear the message that God has for you this Holy Week.

Will you pray with me?

That we are open and receptive to all that God is. And we allow ourselves to be in awe that this is Holy Week. That this week really is profound! It's transformative! It's amazing! And that we open to the message that God has for each one of us.

So Holy Spirit, speak to me! Heal me! Bless me! Reveal to me all that I need to know! Allow the Christ to whisper to your soul what your soul needs most. So tonight we say, "*Thank you*" for all that God is; for all that God is doing in our lives; for the blessings; for the miracles; for the transformation. For all of it, we say, "*Thank you, God!*" And so it is. Amen.

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