

## 1 The Desolate House

- The effects of neglect . . .

## 2 Introduction

- If there's one biblical metaphor that translates easily to our culture today, it's likely the one Jesus uses in Luke 13:35, where he laments over Jerusalem and says, "Look, your house is left to you desolate ..." (NIV).
- Thanks to our home-foreclosure crisis, we are getting all too acquainted with literal desolate houses.
- Neighborhoods in cities and towns across America are decimated because of houses abandoned after their owners are either forced out by mortgage holders, or foreclosures.

## 3 Desolation is Rampant

- And we know how things often go from there: With no one tending them,
  - the buildings start to crumble,
  - eaves begin to sag,
  - windows get smashed,
  - mold becomes a problem,
  - yards become overgrown, and
  - vandals or squatters or even drug dealers add to the deterioration.
- The houses begin to die and so do the neighborhoods in which they sit.

## 4 The Once Great City of Detroit

- Once upon a time, Detroit was one of the greatest cities in the entire world. Today, it has become a desolate wasteland where the lawless reign.
- Once upon a time, Detroit was a teeming metropolis of about 2 million people. Today, it has become a rotting war zone with a population that is down to about 700,000.
- Once upon a time, Detroit was known for good paying manufacturing jobs and it was packed with middle class homes. Today, nearly all of the good paying manufacturing jobs are gone, and there are more than 30,000 vacant homes in Detroit.
- The city was once a shining example for the rest of the world, but now it is a laughingstock for the rest of the world.

## 5 Statistics

- More than 50% of all children in Detroit are living in poverty.
- Close to 50% of all adults living in the city are functionally illiterate.
- High School graduation rates are now down to 25%.
- The crime rate climbs every year, but the number of policemen is now down by  $\frac{1}{3}$ .
- Last year, justifiable homicides rose 79%, and the rate of self-defense killings is now about 2,200% above the national average.

⇒ Desolate Detroit

## 6 Desolation . . .

### 7 What is a “house?”

- When Jesus in Luke 13:35 said, “Look, your house is left to you desolate . . . ,” what was he meaning?
- In both New Testament Greek and modern English, the word “house” can stand not only for a building but also a line of people or a family.
- And, if you look at the context of Luke 13, you will see some very interesting things.

### 8 “Go Away Jesus . . .”

- First of all, Jesus is warning the people “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to . . .” (Luke 13:24 NIV)
- In fact Jesus says, “There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth . . .” because those who thought they were right with God aren’t. (Luke 13:28 NIV)
- Offended, the Pharisees turn to Jesus and say, “Leave this place and go somewhere else.” (Luke 13:31b)
- And then trying to scare Jesus, they tell him that, “Herod wants to kill you.” (Luke 13:31a NIV)

### 9 Go Away, “I will!”

- Since, the Pharisees and the leaders of Israel don’t have room for Jesus’ words or ministry.
- Jesus turns to crowd and says, . . .
  - “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Luke 13:34 NIV)
  - “Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” (Luke 13:35 NIV)

## 10 A House of Desolation

- The word “desolation” means a state of complete emptiness or destruction.
- It can also mean anguished misery or loneliness.
- In fact, it’s not much of a stretch to apply “the house desolate” to our lives.
- It can happen when we don’t value God’s word in our lives and indirectly tell the Holy Spirit to stop making us feel uncomfortable.
- The result being we lose all moral discernment in our lives and make wrong choices that shipwreck our faith.
- It is a dreadful thing to close the door on the Holy Spirit and harden our hearts.

## 11 Desolation in the News

- It's pretty easy to find desolate-house-type lives in the news.
- Think of any one of the celebrities or politicians or yes, even big-name religious figures
  - who destroyed their families,
  - lost their positions,
  - ruined their reputations, and
  - betrayed those who trusted them because of some act of infidelity or gross selfishness.
- But don't limit your thinking to just them, because it's often much smaller acts of spiritual neglect that can lead us down a road of eventual desolation.

## 12 The Closer

- The popular TV cop show The Closer, which ended last summer after seven seasons, contains another example.
- The main character, Deputy Chief Brenda Leigh Johnson (played by Kyra Sedgwick), was an effective police officer with an innate ability to discern who were the bad guys.
- But she had one habit that drove her family and co-workers nuts: When she was hot on a case, she became so focused on her job that she ignored the other important needs around her.

## 13 The Closer

- As the series went along, it became obvious that she was always behind in tending to the most important relationships in her life, and in an episode near the end of the series, it caught up with her.
- In that episode, Brenda's parents, whom she loved deeply but too often shortchanged her time with them, are visiting in her home.
- Just after Brenda gets a fresh lead on her current case, her mother asks for a moment to tell her something important.
- Reluctant to look away from her case, Brenda promises to give her some time over breakfast the next morning. Her mother agrees, but looks disappointed.
- The next morning, intending to keep her date with her mother, Brenda goes to the guest bedroom to awaken her, only to find that Mama has died unexpectedly during the night.

## 14 The Closer

- The next episode, set a week or so later and after the funeral, has Brenda, still grieving and badly shaken, back at work, where in a reflective moment, she tells a co-worker that she's sorry for not listening to him better.
- Then she adds, "Funny, I feel like I pay more attention to what murderers have to say while ignoring the people I really care about."

- In the concluding scene of that episode, her husband finds her sitting on the bed where her mother died.
- She says to him, "The last time I saw Mama, she asked me if I had a minute, and I didn't have the time just then. Now, I'm the one who could really use a minute, and Mama has no time at all."
- The episode ends with her weeping -- inconsolably -- in her husband's arms.

## 15 Spiritual Dumps

- An unattended spiritual house can yield a life where God is supposedly welcome, but where he refuses to abide because the place is a spiritual dump where he is ignored by the occupant -- so ignored, that the occupant doesn't even notice when the Lord is no longer there.
- We can become so accustomed . . .
  - to starving our relationships,
  - breaking our promises,
  - failing to carry through,
  - ignoring our spiritual health and so on
  - that we don't realize how bad things are until the whole thing comes crashing down.
- There was a certain irony in Jesus' lament over Jerusalem in that there was no widespread awareness among its residents of how far many in the city had drifted from God.

## 16 Lives left to Ourselves

- What does it mean to live in a house of desolation?
  - For one thing, it means that life is only what we can make of it on a temporal time scale, devoid of any hope that extends beyond our lifetime.
  - For another, it means that we have no ultimate authority to which we answer. Yes, we still have societal standards, but how helpful are standards that are constantly changing and held hostage to public or political opinion.
  - For yet another, we have . . .
    - no access to the sheltering wings that give comfort,
    - no eternal healing balm for our wounds,
    - no assurance that God is with us and that no matter how bad things get, ultimately it's going to be all right.

## 17 Spiritual Upkeep

- We keep our spiritual houses from becoming desolate by tending our relationship with the Lord.

- We can't keep telling the Lord “later” or “someday” and expect that to keep the relationship strong.
- Instead the Bible says,
  - You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. (Is 26:3 NIV)
  - He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD. (Psa 112:7 NIV)
  - The eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. (2 Chr 16:9 NIV)

## 18 Just say, ‘Listen!’

- In The Closer episode following the death of Brenda's mother, her husband stops by the police station and asks Brenda if she has a minute.
- She's begun work on a new case and almost reflexively, she responds, stalling him, and she begins to walk away.
- But then, with the memory of what she missed by doing that same thing to her mother, apparently hitting her afresh, she turns back and says, "Sorry. Yes, I do."
- After they are alone in her office, she tells him, "Don't ask me. If you need to talk to me, just say, 'Listen,' okay?"

## 19 Spiritual Maintenance

- It's good for us to be in that kind of relationship with God as well, where he can just say, "Listen," and we give him our attention.
- In fact, if we do, we have a wonderful promise.
  - Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. (Rev 3:20 NIV)
- In other words, when God speaks to us and we listen, we abide in the nourishing presence of the Holy Spirit that not only refreshes our soul but gives life to our spirit.

## 20 Spiritual Maintenance

- When it comes to our actual houses, it's not always our fault when maintenance is deferred.
- Sometimes we just don't have the budget for every repair the house could use, and we have to prioritize.
- But our spiritual house has this odd stipulation that not all maintenance is up to the occupant alone.
- God is ready to help us keep the place up.

- It's only our fault if we don't seek his help and then keep the lines of communication open.

## 21 Holy Communion

- Tonight, as we partake of Holy Communion, let us ask ourselves some honest questions.
  - Do our lives need some spiritual maintenance?
  - Are we so busy, we make God take an appointment?
  - Are we so proud that we think we can raise a young family, run a business, or perform ministry work, without making the Lord of glory a top priority in our life.
- Jesus laid down his life, so that we may have fellowship with God—become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Eph 2:22 NIV)
- This is our purpose and our destiny—a house that is in no way desolate, but filled with the presence of God's glory. Amen.