

Unless

A boy living in a polluted town visits a strange isolated man called the Once-ler "at the far end of town where the Grickle-grass grows... [on] the Street of the Lifted Lorax", who never appears fully in illustrations; only his arms are shown. The boy pays the Once-ler fifteen cents, a nail, and the shell of a great-great-great grandfather snail to explain why the area is in such a run-down state.

The Once-ler explains to the boy (shown in flashback) how he once arrived in a beautiful, pristine valley containing happy, playful fauna (Brown Bar-ba-loots, Swomee Swans, and Humming Fish) that spent their days romping around blissfully among "Truffula trees".

The Once-ler proceeded to cut down the Truffula trees to gather raw material to knit "Thneeds," a ridiculously versatile invention of his, "which everyone needs". Thneeds could be used as a shirt, a sock, a glove, a hat, a carpet, a pillow, a sheet, a curtain, a seat cover, and countless other things.

By cutting down the tree, he summoned the titular Lorax to appear from the stump of a Truffula tree. He "speaks for the trees, for the trees have no tongues" and warned the Once-ler of the consequences of cutting down the truffula trees, but the Once-ler ignored him, instead contacting all his relatives to help him with his business.

The Once-ler's small shop soon grew into a factory and new equipment was made to keep up with the demand for more Thneeds, and signs of damage to the Truffula Forest became evident to the Lorax. The Lorax first complained to the Once-ler that the Truffula trees, being chopped down, were also the food source of the Bar-ba-Loots, who are now facing a terrible food shortage and a disease called "the Crummies because of gas and no food in their tummies." To save them, the Lorax sent them off to find another food source. At first, the Once-ler only showed a little remorse, but still focused on expanding his business.

Soon, the Once-ler's Thneed-making business expanded tenfold and now used delivery trucks to take out the shipments. The Lorax eventually came back complaining to the Once-ler that the

factories were belching out so much "smogulous smoke" that it was giving the Swomee Swans sore throats, leaving them unable to sing. After the Lorax sent them off, he also complained to the Once-ler about his machinery making a goo by-product called "Gluppity Glup" and "Shloppity Shlop," and how it was being dumped into the ponds where the Humming Fish live, leaving them unable to hum and forcing the Lorax to send them away too.

The Once-ler, however, still dismissed the Lorax's pleadings and declared his intention to keep "biggering" his operations, but at that very moment, they "heard the tree fall. The very last Truffula tree of them all." Without raw materials, his factory shut down; without the factory, his relatives left. Then the Lorax, silently, with one "very sad, sad backward glance", lifted himself by the seat of his pants and flew away through the clouds.

The Once-ler lingered on in his crumbling residence, living in seclusion and remorse, while pondering over a message the Lorax left behind: a stone slab etched with the word "Unless". In the present, he now realizes that the Lorax meant that unless someone cares, the situation will not improve. The Once-ler then gives the boy the last Truffula seed and tells him to plant it, saying that if the boy grows a whole forest of the trees and keeps them protected from logging, "the Lorax, and all of his friends may come back."

***Unless someone cares, the situation will not improve. Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. Its not!***

Wind back to the year 30AD approximately. Greeks come seeking Jesus. It signals, for the writer John, the beginning of the Christian mission to the gentiles. They come to Philip who then came to Andrew and they went and told Jesus.

The Greeks did not get an audience with Jesus. Jesus replies to the disciples in his normal cryptic manner.

*Unless.* One small word with huge repercussions! Like the Lorax who left the a stone slab etched with the word "Unless", Jesus leaves the word "Unless" etched into history.

Firstly, *Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

Unless something is buried and dead, growth will not take place and fruit will not be seen.

>>>One of the hardest things is to let go of something or someone and bury it, dead. I have seen people hold onto things and not bury it and hence they remain the same. There is no growth.

I have had to counsel men and women whose partners have died, years before, but they still carry the grief and are consumed by it.

I have seen organizations and groups in the church and in the community continue on for years. They have reached their used by date but no one is willing to let go and bury it.

I have seen ministers who have lingered too long in a parish and they are unwilling to end their ministry in the parish. This decision has been unproductive for both minister, family and the congregation/parish.

But I have also seen, individuals bite the bullet and close a business or an organization and even a church so that something new can start and new fruit can begin to grow.

There are attitudes and life experiences that we have to die to and bury, good and dead so that something new can take place.

You can't look back to what has happened and be buried by it. Rather you have to bury it, so that growth, life and new things can come into place.

What needs to die in you, in this church and be buried so that the new can come into being.

Secondly, *Unless you follow Jesus, your service will not be honoured by the God.*

While we emphasize service and put a lot of capital value on the service that people, the emphasis for Jesus is following.

We live in a country that has a history of volunteerism and service. Many make significant contributions and they are honoured by the community from citizen of the year awards to medals and letters after their name.

But the people who will get honoured by God, will be those who follow and serve the Master Jesus.

"Servant" in our English New Testament usually represents the Greek *doulos* (bondslave). Sometimes it means *diakonos* (deacon or minister); this is strictly accurate, for *doulos* and *diakonos* are synonyms. Both words denote a man who is not at his own disposal, but is his master's purchased property. Bought to serve his master's needs, to be at his beck and call every moment, the slave's sole business is to do as he is told. Christian service therefore means, first and foremost, living out a slave relationship to one's Savior (1 Corinthians. 6:19-20).

Jesus said *"If anyone wants to come after me, they are to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Jesus.*

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Johann Sebastian Bach was born into the musical family of Bachs in 1685. By the age of ten, both of his parents were dead. Early in his friction-filled life, young Johann determined he would write music ... music for the glory of God ... and this he did.

Most of Bach's works are explicitly Biblical. Albert Schweitzer referred to him as The fifth evangelist, thus comparing him to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. At age 17 Bach became the

organist at the church; soon thereafter he was given charge of the entire music ministry.

During his ministry in Weimar, Germany he wrote a new cantata every month ... EVERY MONTH! And during one three-year period he wrote, conducted, orchestrated, and performed (with his choir and orchestra) a new cantata every week!

No one had any idea what a mark Bach would leave. His legacy lives on some 300 years later. You can hear his music at will.

At the beginning of every authentic manuscript one will find the letters "J.J." This stands for Jesu Java (Jesus help me). At the end of each original manuscript you will find the letters "S.D.G." This stands for Soli Deo Gloria (to the glory of God).

Bach is a reminder that one who gives his life to Jesus and serves Him does not count it a loss.

*Unless God is in it, big things do not happen.*

Jesus is still struggling with what the Father has asked of Him. But like any servant of the Most High God, Jesus asks that not only God's will be done but God's name be glorified.

At that moment, God speaks to the crowd who are onlookers. A voice, the audible voice of God, from heaven speaks. *I have glorified my name and I will glorify it again*"

The voice is for all who hear. Judgment of God will come down when Jesus is lifted up on a cross.

God will act through the death and resurrection of Jesus. *Unless God is in it, unless God acts in Jesus, nothing good will happen.*

We need to fall on our knees, often, and throw ourselves and our future onto the mercy of God. Unless God acts, it just does not happen.

We can connive and do our best effort but if God is not in it, all of our good efforts will come to nought.

Our life and growth is dependent upon God, His will and power.

As the Psalmist wrote so long ago *Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it will labour in vain.*

*Young William Wilberforce was discouraged one night in the early 1790s after another defeat in his 10 year battle against the slave trade in England. Tired and frustrated, he opened his Bible and began to leaf through it. A small piece of paper fell out and fluttered to the floor. It was a letter written by John Wesley shortly before his death.*

*Wilberforce read it again: "Unless the divine power has raised you up... I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that (abominable practice of slavery), which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature.*

*Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? Oh, be not weary of well-doing. Go on in the name of God, and in the power of His might."*

Brothers and sisters, heed the Lord's word *Unless*.

*Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

*Unless you follow Jesus, your service will not be honoured by the God.*

*Unless God is in it, big things do not happen.*

*Unless Jesus died on the cross, our sin cannot be forgiven.*

*Unless Jesus Christ be raised from the dead, our faith is in vain*

Unless!