

## Cleansing of the Temple

Context:

### **The Triumphal Entry**

<sup>Mark 11:8</sup> Many in the crowd spread their coats on the road ahead of Jesus, and others cut leafy branches in the fields and spread them along the way. <sup>9</sup>He was in the center of the procession, and the crowds all around him were shouting,

"Praise God! <sup>E55</sup>

Bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

<sup>10</sup> Bless the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Praise God in highest heaven!" <sup>E56</sup>

<sup>11</sup>So Jesus came to Jerusalem and went into the Temple. He looked around carefully at everything, and then he left because it was late in the afternoon. Then he went out to Bethany with the twelve disciples.

### **Jesus Curses the Fig Tree**

<sup>12</sup>The next morning as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus felt hungry. <sup>13</sup>He noticed a fig tree a little way off that was in full leaf, so he went over to see if he could find any figs on it. But there were only leaves because it was too early in the season for fruit. <sup>14</sup>Then Jesus said to the tree, "May no one ever eat your fruit again!" And the disciples heard him say it.

### **Jesus Clears the Temple**

<sup>15</sup>When they arrived back in Jerusalem, Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out the merchants and their customers. He knocked over the tables of the money changers and the stalls of those selling doves, <sup>16</sup>and he stopped everyone from bringing in merchandise. <sup>17</sup>He taught them, "The Scriptures declare, 'My Temple will be called a place of prayer for all nations,' but you have turned it into a den of thieves." <sup>E57</sup>

<sup>18</sup>When the leading priests and teachers of religious law heard what Jesus had done, they began planning how to kill him. But they were afraid of him because the people were so enthusiastic about Jesus' teaching. <sup>19</sup>That evening Jesus and the disciples <sup>E58</sup> left the city.

<sup>20</sup>The next morning as they passed by the fig tree he had cursed, the disciples noticed it was withered from the roots. <sup>21</sup>Peter remembered what Jesus had said to the tree on the previous day and exclaimed, "Look, Teacher! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"

### **The Authority of Jesus Challenged**

<sup>27</sup>By this time they had arrived in Jerusalem again. As Jesus was walking through the Temple area, the leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the other leaders came up to him. They demanded, <sup>28</sup>"By whose authority did you drive out the merchants from the Temple? <sup>E60</sup> Who gave you such authority?"

<sup>29</sup>"I'll tell who gave me authority to do these things if you answer one question," Jesus replied. <sup>30</sup>"Did John's baptism come from heaven or was it merely human? Answer me!"

<sup>31</sup>They talked it over among themselves. "If we say it was from heaven, he will ask why we didn't believe him. <sup>32</sup>But do we dare say it was merely human?" For they were afraid that the people would start a riot, since everyone thought that John was a prophet. <sup>33</sup>So they finally replied, "We don't know." And Jesus responded, "Then I won't answer your question either."

Introduction:

This week will be the first of 5 weeks following the last 7 days of Jesus as He went to the Cross and the Resurrection. There are 5 key events that I will cover in this series: This is notable, since Matthew spends 30% of his Gospel account dealing with the final week of Jesus' life.

1. Cleansing the Temple (today)
2. Anointing of Jesus (next week)
3. Last/Lord's Supper (April 6<sup>th</sup>)
4. The Price is Right (April 13<sup>th</sup>) dealing with the trial and crucifixion of Jesus
5. I'm Forgiven! (Easter Sunday)

My prayer for you is that you will gain a clear picture of our Savior during his last week. I also hope that you will begin praying for people to invite to join us on Easter Sunday. Easter Sunday is the most church visited day of the year by unchurched people, and holds one of the best potential for connecting with people who are searching for meaning in their life.

1. The passage explained.
  - a. Jesus has just completed a series of teachings and now heads for Jerusalem. He instructs his disciples to get a colt and makes a triumphant entry into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives near Bethany. And he is greeted by enthusiastic crowds. Then as he approaches the city of Jerusalem, Luke tells us that he "weeps over Jerusalem" (Luke 19) and speaks prophetically of its destruction in a few years.
  - b. And then, Jesus enters Jerusalem and goes into the temple. The scripture says, <sup>L</sup>*So Jesus came to Jerusalem and went into the Temple. He looked around carefully at everything, and then he left because it was late in the afternoon. Then he went out to Bethany with the twelve disciples.* <sup>L</sup>
    - i. Jesus goes through the temple and makes observations about many things. He has been there before. He spent time there as a child in the Colonades. Now he looks around the temple area and leaves. What was he doing? Why go in and look around?

- c. The next day, however, we are told that he goes back to the temple. But first, he comes across a fig tree and curses it.

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## 2. The Cleansing of the Temple:

- a. The cleansing of the temple is found in all four gospels. John lets us know that it is during the Passover season. It is relevant to know that it is during this time because before Passover begins, one must clean all of the LEAVEN out of the house. This is not a coincidence – Jesus has previously warned his disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. And now, he takes action to remove the leaven from the Temple. (Mt 16:6-12).
- b. What was happening?
  - i. Well, by this time in Jewish history, Jews were living all over the Mediterranean world. Every year, hundreds and hundreds would come from foreign countries to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem, and not surprisingly they would come with money from their home country
  - ii. When they came to the Temple to offer their sacrifice, they had to buy an animal. First they would exchange their foreign currency for Jewish, and then poor Jewish families would buy a pigeon, middle-class Jewish families would buy a sheep, and wealthier Jewish families would buy an ox.
  - iii. The sins of the family would then symbolically be placed on the animal, it would then be killed, the priests would take both the purchase price and the animal flesh for their own support, and both they and the families would be satisfied.
  - iv. All of this was prescribed in the Law and was legal.
- c. **So why was Jesus so upset?** What led him to take such drastic action? Understand that Jesus' actions probably upset the worship services for the rest of the day, making it impossible for anyone to offer sacrifices.
  - i. We should understand something about the Temple to understand this incredible reaction by Jesus to the sellers and money changers
    1. The Temple, as you can see, is made up of 5 concentric rectangles.
    2. And not only are they concentric, but the closer you get to the inside, the smaller they get in size.
    3. The largest and outermost rectangle is called the Court of the Gentiles. That's where both curious non-Jews, and terrible Jewish sinners, those whose sins were so terrible that God had had to punish with blindness, deafness, lameness, leprosy -- that's where they could gather to watch from long-distance what was going on on the inside.
    4. The next rectangle is the Court of the Women -- Jewish women, of course -- which is as close to the center as they could ever get.
    5. The middle rectangle is the Court of the Men, which is where the Jewish men could observe all of the sacrificing and other liturgies going on around the nearby altar.

6. Finally, then, there is the Court of the Priests, and, in the very middle of that court, the Holiest Place, where only God could go except for Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest could go in as well.
7. Other than that, though, the Holiest Place was completely empty, so that nothing would interfere with its being completely filled by the Presence of God.
8. Look, by the way, at the theology of that architecture. The closer you are to the inside, the closer you are to God. Those furthest away from the inside, the non-Jews and the women, they need binoculars and cell-phones to see or hear what's going on. And the interesting thing is, while they are defined as needing God the most, they are given the least possible chance of meeting that need.
9. **Now, guess where in the Temple all of this took place?** Right there in the Court of the Gentiles.
  - a. Right there, in the only place where those who were defined as needing God the most could have even the slightest chance of meeting God, right there, even that chance was removed.
  - b. The Gentiles were displaced by pigeons. They weren't even as important as pigeons.
  - c. And Jesus becomes infuriated, and makes a whip out of some ropes that weren't too hard to come by, and commits assault and battery on the entire crowd, shouting the whole time
  - d. "The Temple is supposed to be a house of prayer for the nations, the Gentiles (in Greek they're the same word), but you rob them of the chance even to look at God, much less meet God, and you replace them with pigeons. Get out!"
  - e. The Greek word used in this passage for drive out the money changers is "ekballo" which is the same word that is used to describe what happened when Jesus "drove out" demons from those who were afflicted.
  - f.
- ii. What was the immediate result of Jesus' actions?
  1. Temple sacrifice/ritual was interrupted, on one of the busiest seasons for the priests.
  2. The outcasts, Gentiles, those who were being excluded began coming to Him, and He proceeds to teach them for the remainder of the day.
  3. The priests and leaders decide at that moment, as a result of that incident, that He must go and he must go soon!

### 3. Application

#### a. Transactional Faith vs. Relational Faith

- i. Transactional Faith sees God as a supernatural Vending Machine. You put your sacrifices, offerings, good deeds in...and out comes the promised blessings.

1. If we are good Christians, then won't our life be made easier by God?
  2. Nabisco story about the problems on my line. I thought prayer would make my line run better (and make my job easier). (as if that was really God's goal).
  3. Transactional Faith says that God will do my bidding.
  4. Transactional Faith is idolatry because it makes God in my own image. (instead of the other way around).
- ii. Relational Faith sees God as God.
1. It is faith that worships.
  2. It is faith that sees oneself as a creature, made and loved by God, and DEPENDENT upon God.
- b. *What about our worship?*
- i. I believe that God is offended when we create barriers to worship Him. Worship is our highest duty to God...it is the act of seeking Him with all of our hearts and responding to Him when we encounter Him.
  - ii. Is worship for you centered on the things we do in our services rather than the God who is present?
- c. *Why the Whip?*
- i. Look at Jesus. He fashions a whip (likely to drive out animals with), commits what would amount to assault and battery and destruction of personal as well as temple property, impeding commerce, knocks over tables, turns the animals loose and drives them out to the financial loss of their owners.
  - ii. Why wasn't Jesus, "meek and mild" more diplomatic? Why didn't he resort to trying to sit down with the religious leaders and working this out? Isn't that the Christian thing to do?
    - 1.
  - iii. Keep in mind that Jesus did not act impulsively...this was a deliberate, premeditated action. He had gone into the temple the day before and saw what was going on. He had time to know His Father's plan.
    1. God surprises us again, doesn't He? We can't fit Him in a box. He is far too complex to say God is a pacifist or God is a warrior. God is God!
    2. And why a temple? Would it not have made more sense for Jesus to drive people out of the pagan temples, turning over the bar stools at the local taverns, tearing up the smut in adult bookstores and burning abortion clinics where sin occurs?
    3. We need to ask if God has a stricter judgment for those who are inside the house than those outside?
      - a. In fact, the bible says that "judgment begins at the household of God."
      - b. God seems not to have much trouble with his enemies, it has been said that it is those who consider themselves God's friends who give God fits.

- c. Karl Rahner (theologian) said, “the number one cause of atheism is Christians. Those who proclaim God with their mouths and deny Him with their lifestyles is what an unbelieving world finds simply unbelievable.
- d. Ghandi was noted for once saying, “I would become a Christian if I ever met one.”
- e. The Christian church in America have become known less for their love and concern than for what they are “against” and for their programming.
- f. Perhaps we should ask ourselves if we are willing to set aside our practices which make us comfortable and instead seek God afresh?
- g.

There is a powerful scene in the movie, *The Godfather, Part III*. Perhaps some of you remember when the Godfather, Don Corleone, is forced to visit the distinguished Cardinal Lamberto to tell him the bad news that a legitimate business deal involving the Vatican Bank has gone bad. The bank is run by the Archbishop and a coalition of Catholic businessmen. The Cardinal listens to the Godfather; then the Cardinal says something quite profound. He picks up a stone and says, “Look at this stone. It has been lying in the water for a very long time. The water has not penetrated it.” Then he smashes the stone. “Look,” he says peering at the smashed insides of the stone, “perfectly dry. The same thing,” the Cardinal continues, “has happened to men in Europe. They have been surrounded by Christianity for centuries, but Christ does not live in their hearts.”

This is exactly what happened to the Temple in Jesus’ time. There were people in the Temple who had been surrounded by the Temple for years, but the God of the Temple had not been allowed to enter their lives nor penetrate their hearts. As St. Paul once put it, “They had the form of godliness, but not the real thing.”

The hardest hearts in this world are not among the ungodly, but among the Godly.”

#### 4. *What will you do?*

- a. Jesus cleaned the temple because it was meant to be a HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR THE NATIONS. That meant EVERYONE.
- b. The temple was a symbol for us...a symbol of the our heart. There is the outer court, the inner court and ultimately, the holy of holies.
  - i. We should ask ourselves if the temple of our heart is right with God? Does Jesus dwell there?
    - 1. He won’t force His way into your heart. He waits for you to ask Him to become the center of your life. Rev. 3:20 “behold I stand at the door and knock”
    - 2. And why does he not enter? Because our love of sin closes and locks the door. Our action of letting Him come in requires a TURNING toward Him and away from the ways that we choose. It requires that we surrender and then allow Him to sweep our hearts clean of the past.

3. He promises to make your heart whiter than snow...”though Your sins be as scarlet, I will make them white as snow.”
  4. But you must let Him enter and fill your temple. If you have never done that before, you can do it today.
- ii. Those of us who claim to belong to Him...what is your reply? Is your stone dry because you will not let Jesus penetrate your heart? You are surrounded by everything good, but you keep Jesus out of the courts of your daily life?
1. Or you never enter the Holy of Holies to encounter HIM.
  2. This house is to be a house of prayer. Is it? Will you allow it to be so?
  3. Will others find God because you allow Jesus to live through you?
- c. Take a step toward the savior today, open the door of your heart, surrender to Him and find a huge change in your life as He cleans out your temple.

Let us pray.