

March 31, 2019

“The Lord of the Temple”
Matthew 21:12-17

FCF: We are allergic to prayer

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The Lord has come into His temple.
(magnet) This impels His people to pray.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Food allergies are not terribly uncommon or pleasant. I discovered a few months ago that I have developed an allergy to bananas. Which means that, if I were to eat one, my face would swell up and I would go into anaphylactic shock. So, bearing that in mind, I avoid bananas.

Most of us here are allergic to prayer. So we avoid it. I do. Why? Prayer forces us to slow down, to be still. Prayer causes us to acknowledge our need, our dependence and reliance upon God’s love. It presses us to reorder our priorities. We’re allergic to prayer. So we avoid it.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 21:12-17](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

This week’s text is a continuation from last week. The cleansing of the temple is a sequel to Palm Sunday. On Sunday, the King came into His city. On Monday, the Lord came into His temple. Here’s a question worth asking. When Jesus arrived at His temple, the center of Jewish identity and worship, what did He do? He cleansed it. He purified it. And showed whose it was.

Here are a few things worth knowing about the temple in Jesus’ day. The temple grounds were made up of a series of courts, like boxes within boxes. Each one was named for how far you could go. The events recorded here took place in the outer box, the Court of the Gentiles. There’s something else worth knowing. By this time, the Passover would have attracted a great deal of commerce, a lot of buying and selling. Why? For the sake of the pilgrims traveling for the festival. Money had to be changed to pay the temple tax. Animals had to be purchased to make the sacrifices. The problem wasn’t so much in the commerce itself. The problem was the place of all the commerce - within the temple grounds. Which caused the purpose of the temple to be compromised, to be so much less than it was meant to be. So Jesus came and cleansed it.

What we see here is that the Lord has come into His temple. The Lord has come into His temple. And this impels His people to pray. How so? In two ways. First, with His zeal for His Father’s glory. Second, with His zeal for His people’s hearts. Something extraordinary is going on here. Palm Sunday is the only time we see Jesus riding and not walking. The next day is the only time we have any record of His using violent force. Why? What’s going on? These two things - His zeal for His Father’s glory and His zeal for His people’s hearts - impel our prayer.

I. HIS ZEAL FOR HIS FATHER’S GLORY

Why the cleansing? The first reason has to do with Jesus’ zeal for His Father’s glory.

A) What He Observed

There was a terrible gulf between what Jesus observed and what should have been.

1. Distraction

What He observed was an atmosphere of great distraction. Possibly some corruption, greed and up-selling. We're not sure. But certainly great confusion. Josephus, a 1st century historian, writes of a Passover in which 255,000 lambs were killed. Imagine the scene - the sights, sounds, and smells. It would be like the NY stock exchange reset into a barnyard. So much confusion.

2. Hardening

And hardening of hearts. For many, the Passover was merely a product of centuries of routine, a rote going through the motions. Years of annual tradition leading to a sense of presumption.

B) What Should Have Been

Distraction and presumption - that's what Jesus saw. What then should have been?

1. Due weight

Due weight given to the Lord. Through those sacrifices, a dawning recognition. "Our sin is that horrible. But God has made a way. Salvation is of the Lord! He is indeed our rock and refuge!"

2. Changed lives

Due weight. And changed lives. Offerings gladly given that represented hearts devoted. Deep trust and obedience. Lives marked by imitation, reflecting the great mercy and grace received.

Jesus cleansed the temple because of His zeal for His Father's glory, because of a terrible gulf between what He observed and what should have been. And that could not stand.

Application:

His is still a holy jealousy. And, as His disciples, it should be ours as well. "Hallowed be your name" is the first request in the Lord's Prayer. It is foundational and fundamental to true Christian prayer. "May you be honored in every way. May you be revered in all things."

Our prayer should be that God would be given His due. In all of life. At all times - Sunday and Monday. And in everything - as we look around at our culture, at the church, in our homes, and in the mirror - this should be the burden of our hearts and the focus of our prayers.

That Monday, The Lord came into His temple. This impels His people to pray.

II. HIS ZEAL FOR HIS PEOPLE'S HEARTS

Part of the reason for Jesus' cleansing of the temple was His zeal for His Father's glory. But there's something else just as stirring. And that was His zeal for His people's hearts.

A) What He Observed

(**READ Matthew 21:12-17**) The gulf between what He observed and what He ushered in.

1. Disinterest

What did He observe? Disinterest towards outsiders and seekers. Why does he refer to the temple as "a den of robbers"? Because of the taking, the robbing of the outsider's chance to worship God in any meaningful way. The message of all this chaos was, "You're not welcome."

2. Callousness

So a disinterest. And then a callousness towards the handicapped and crippled. Yes, according to the law, they were restricted in where they could go amidst the temple courts. But there was an utter failure to see that their physical state should have pointed everyone to our spiritual state.

B) What He Ushered In

So Jesus sees this disinterest and callousness. All contrasted to what He came to usher in.

1. Glad welcome

Starting with a glad welcome. The prophets spoke of a time to come when the temple would be for all. All nations and peoples would be able to freely enter God's presence. With Jesus, that time had come and so what was acceptable - the corruption and confusion - was to be rejected.

2. True wholeness

A glad welcome was given to all. And, with these healings, we see true wholeness was now possible for all. This one of the last cases we see of Jesus healing. And it is right there in the temple precincts. Meaning not only what was acceptable had been rejected but those who had been rejected were now accepted. The damaged and broken were made whole and brought in.

Jesus cleansed the temple because of zeal for His Father's glory and His people's hearts.

Application:

This was both a literal and symbolic turning of tables. A great reversal, a reminder that this kingdom is upside down and inside out. He drives away what we welcome - all posturing and pretending. And He welcomes what we drive away - any vulnerability and transparency.

To both groups of people, those on the inside and the outside, He says, "Come as you are. All is ready. You have nothing you need to bring. Just come." There is a powerful draw to such an invitation, knowing that no matter what we are welcome, that He both knows and loves us.

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CONCLUSION:

Since the birth of our grandson, I have found myself reading children's books again. I'm looking forward to doing a lot of that - especially in sharing with him a few of my favorites. One of which is Margaret Wise Brown's 1942 book, The Runaway Bunny. It begins with a young bunny who decides to run away (**READ quote**). "*If you run away,*" said his mother, "*I will run after you. For you are my little bunny.*" And so begins a game of chase. But no matter how many forms the bunny takes - a fish in a stream, a crocus in a garden, a rock on a mountain - his mother finds a way of retrieving him. "*Shucks,*" said the little bunny, "*I might just as well stay where I am and be your little bunny.*" Lingering over each page, it takes less than five minutes to read. And has a way of grabbing your heart, staying with you long after you've closed the book.

For it's the story of a tireless, persistent, relentless love. And it echoes the zeal of the Lord - His heart for our hearts, His welcome to our approach, His delight in our presence. Think back to what we heard in our Call to Worship (**READ Psalm 149:4**). We see that same thing here

in Matthew 21 and throughout the Bible. God delights in our presence. Our King exults in His people. Do you know His zeal for you? He is entirely for you. He longs not only for His great glory but for our deepest good. So He pursues us. He clears every obstacle out of the way.

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