

CLEANSING A CORRUPTED TEMPLE

Matthew 21:12-17

At **Passover**, the city of **Jerusalem** would swell to *four* or *five* times its normal size because of the **Jewish** pilgrims who came to the city from all over the known world to celebrate **Passover**. Tradition had long dictated that **Passover** could only be properly celebrated in **Jerusalem**. And because the city couldn't accommodate the multitudes...many had to stay in surrounding villages (such as **Bethphage** and **Bethany**) during the night, coming into **Jerusalem** during the day.

While in **Jerusalem**, many **Jews** would go to the **Temple** to *pray*...to *offer sacrifices*...to *perform rites of ritual cleansing and purification*... and to *give offerings*.

It was in this setting that Jesus had made His *triumphal entry*. The *triumphal entry* had begun outside **Jerusalem's East Gate** where a multitude followed Jesus into the city, while another large group came out of the city to meet Him. As He entered the city, the crowds began spreading *clothes* and *palm branches* in the road (**vs. 8**)...and were shouting...*"Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!"* (**vs. 9**).

While **Matthew's** account seems to imply that Jesus immediately entered the Temple after He entered **Jerusalem**...the other gospel accounts state that He returned to **Bethany** since it was already late (**Mark 11:11-16**).

It was the next morning when Jesus went back into **Jerusalem**. But as Jesus came into the Temple that day...He came for a unique purpose...*to further demonstrate His messianic credentials*.

Keep in mind...Jesus had not come...

- To *reign*...but to *die*.
- To be *crowned*...but to be *crucified*.
- For the purpose of *delivering Israel* from the *power of Rome*... but to *deliver all men* from the *power of sin*.

I. THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE: (**vs. 12**)

And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves (**vs. 12**)...

And Jesus entered the temple...Jesus began His ministry at a **Passover**...He's now going to end it at a **Passover**. And just as He did at the beginning of His ministry...He is about to do it again... that is...cleanse the Temple!

"He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, 'Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business'."

~John 2:14-16

As long as things were wrong with **Israel's worship**...things could not be right in the *nation*. **Worship is always preeminent!**

Drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves...Jesus has cleansed the Temple *three years* earlier...yet it was now probably even more profane and corrupt than ever.

According to the **Levitical** law...any animal approved by the priest could be offered in the Temple. The problem was, the chief priests made certain that any animal not bought from them would be judged *unacceptable*...giving them a monopoly for the right to provide all the animals used for sacrifices in the Temple. According to historical writings of that day...a person would often have to pay as much as *ten times* what an animal would normally cost.

And if that extortion wasn't enough...people weren't allowed to use money that had been circulated in society to purchase animals for sacrifice. They had to exchange their money into temple money first...and then use the temple money for their purchases. The exchange fee for this transaction was typically *twenty-five percent*.

This is why Jesus was speaking quite literally when He called the Temple marketplace...*"a robbers' den."*

As a result...on this occasion Jesus as the incarnate **Son of God**... forcefully manifested divine hatred against sin...especially sin that profaned **God's house**...**God's name**...and tarnished **His holiness**.

II. THE CORRUPTION IN THE TEMPLE: (vs. 13)

And He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer’; but you are making it a robbers’ den.” (vs. 13)...

As He often did...Jesus vindicated what He was doing by quoting Old Testament Scripture. Here He combines quotes from **Isaiah 56:7** and **Jeremiah 7:11**...

“Even those I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.”

~Isaiah 56:7

“Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it,” declares the Lord.”

~Jeremiah 7:11

The Temple was to be *a place of worship...a house of prayer*...a place where God’s people could *draw close to Him*...a place where they could *seek His will and blessing*. It wasn’t ever meant to be a *commercial place*...a combination *marketplace, stockyard, and bank*.

David declared...

“One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in His temple.”

~Psalm 27:4

III. THE COMPASSION IN THE TEMPLE: (vs. 14)

And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them (vs. 14)...

Jesus’ majestic display of *divine compassion* was accompanied by a mighty expression of *divine power*. Immediately after His vivid display of *righteous and divine indignation...the blind and the lame came to Him in the Temple*. They could sense that the Lord’s anger wasn’t directed at them.

As soon as **the blind and the lame** approached Him for help...**He healed them**. Only God can restore sight to eyes totally lost...and

only God can replace or restore limbs that are shattered or diseased beyond repair...or are even missing.

Just as the *wicked* and *unrepentant* can expect God’s *anger*...those who *humbly seek* Him can expect His *compassion*.

IV. THE CHALLENGE IN THE TEMPLE: (vs. 15-17)

But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they became indignant (vs. 15)...

But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done...To those religious leaders...Jesus’ healing of the **blind and lame**...the wonderful things that He had done...though irrefutably miraculous...they were repugnant to them.

It’s the same spirit and response that the **Pharisees**’ had when they charged Jesus with casting out demons by the power of *Beelzebub the ruler of the demons* (**Matthew 12:24**).

And the children who were shouting in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David”...Just as their parents and others had done the day before. The **chief priests and the scribes** knew well that **Son of David** was a *messianic title* and that the **Messiah** would perform such *miracles* and *wonders* just as Jesus had been performing.

Became indignant...comes from a **verb** that means, *to be stirred up in anger*...and carries the idea of *fury* and *wrath*...it’s only used in the Synoptic Gospels (**Matthew 20:24; Matthew 26:8; Mark 10:14, 41; Mark 14:4; Luke 13:14**).

And said to Him, “Do You hear what these children are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise for Yourself?’” (**Psalm 8:2**). (vs. 16)...

Do You hear what these children are saying?...In effect they are saying to Jesus...“*Don’t You realize that these children are calling You the Messiah? Why don’t You stop them? How can you stand there accepting acclamation that belongs only to God? How can you tolerate such blasphemy?*”

Letting His accusers know that He wasn’t oblivious to what was going on and what was being said...**He said to them**...“Yes!”

He was *fully aware* of *what was being said*...and He was *fully aware* of its *meaning* and *significance*.

“Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise for Yourself?’” ...Just as He had done in **verse 13**...and as He had done on numerous occasions before...He quoted the Old Testament against them (**Psalm 8:2**)...to those who were considered to be the experts in Scripture!

And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there (vs. 17)...

He left them...simple but haunting words...and includes a volume of truth. Jesus will not remain where He isn't wanted.

When **He left**, He returned to **the city of Bethany**...about a *two-mile* walk over the **Mount of Olives** where He **spent the night**... probably, once again, in the home of **Mary, Martha, and Lazarus**.

WHAT WE CAN LEARN:

- **God is a loving God...but He is also a just God...and He can be an angry God.** God hates sin and corruption and will judge it. Scripture says that He is a *jealous God*.
- **Worship and Prayer are preeminent.** We should never enter a place dedicated for worship without reverence. True worshippers stand in *awe* of God. Prayer proclaims our absolute dependence on God.
- **Be careful of commercializing God.** God isn't impressed with the number of *songs, albums, and videos* people sell. Be careful that you don't seek the coffee and donuts more than you seek God. *Seek Him with all your heart.*

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”

~Matthew 22:37