

Jesus Clears The Temple

5 March 2023

If you are just joining us, we have been going through all four Gospels over the last three years. It has been really good. Now, we are on the final stretch of the The Gospels Series. The plan for the next few weeks leading up to Easter is to focus on Passion Week; the final days of Jesus' life. **Today, we are talking about the famous story where Jesus turns over the tables in the temple.**

Before we read the story, we need to talk about some important details to help us understand and appreciate what was happening. This story takes place during the annual Passover Festival in ancient Jerusalem in the year 33AD. This was the week when Jewish people celebrated the moment in history when God saved the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Families from all over Israel would travel to the small city of Jerusalem for the festival. Imagine 500,000 people traveling to a city smaller than Wrightsville Beach, then add in another 50K lambs and goats for the Passover sacrifice, and you begin to get an idea of the scene in ancient Jerusalem during the Passover Festival.

On top of this, there was political and religious tension ready to ignite between Rome, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and now Jesus. (For more details about the religious and political tension, listen to last week's message.) On Sunday, the week of the festival, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey with a large crowd shouting and singing, "Blessings on the king who comes in the name of the Lord." By doing this, Jesus was sending a message to the religious leaders and Rome that He was the Messiah King who comes in the Name of The Lord to bring peace on earth. And as a result, "the city was in an uproar." Matthew 21:10 NLT Jesus had everyone's attention, and they all wondered what he would do next? So what did he do? He wept, looked inside the temple, and then left the city for the night.

This brings us to Monday morning in the story. Tension were high, the religious leaders were on edge because Jesus threatened their power, and they had no idea what he would do next. Let's read the story.

"The next morning as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. 13He noticed a fig tree in full leaf a little way off, so he went over to see if he could find any figs. But there were only leaves because it was too early in the season for fruit. 14Then Jesus said to the tree, "May no one ever eat your fruit again!" And the disciples heard him say it." Mark 11:12-14 NLT

Jesus was hungry, saw a fig tree, but realized it didn't have any figs, so he cursed it. We know that Jesus was intentional about everything he did, so I don't think this was simply an overreaction to being hangry. And we know that Jesus was capable of providing food when there wasn't enough. So why did Jesus curse the fig tree? Jesus was using this as a teachable moment for his disciples. "In the Old Testament, a fig tree was often used to represent the nation of Israel," so by cursing the fig tree, Jesus was making the point that "Israel was being judged by God for appearing to be alive, but failing to produce fruit." (Kostenberger)

"15When they arrived back in Jerusalem, Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out the people buying and selling animals for sacrifices. He knocked over the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves, 16and he stopped everyone from using the Temple as a

marketplace. 17He said to them, "The Scriptures declare, 'My Temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations,' but you have turned it into a den of thieves." Mark 11:15-17 NLT

Jesus showed up to the Temple and immediately went into action. He stopped people from buying and selling animals, turned over the tables of the money changers and the chairs of people selling doves. This caused quite a big scene in the Temple for a Monday morning.

What was Jesus thinking? Why was he being so dramatic? Was this some kind of holy temper tantrum, or was this an intentional display of righteous anger?

We know that Jesus wasn't having a holy temper tantrum, because we know his character. Jesus is incredibly patient, slow to anger and long suffering. Think about all the stressful situations recorded in The Gospels where Jesus responded with patience instead of unrighteous anger.

We also know this wasn't a holy temper tantrum, because Jesus wasn't surprised by what he saw. Remember, he had visited the Temple the day before.

Jesus' actions were an intentional display of righteous anger. And there's a big difference between righteous and unrighteous anger. This is probably one of the most abused scriptures that people use to justify their unrighteous anger. Unrighteous anger is an unrestrained response to a personal offense. Righteous anger is a measured response to the injustice of another. Unrighteous anger is when I want to use bad words and lay unholy hands on the young man that steals my waves at Masonboro with a lot of attitude. Of course, this is only a theoretical example! On the other hand, righteous anger would be if I stepped in to help some young kids who are being bullied in the water by the young man I mentioned above.

Jesus was intentionally and appropriately responding to the irreverent scene in the Temple. The people had turned the Temple, a place that was designed to be holy for worship, into a marketplace. Merchants were overcharging to exchange foreign money into the Jewish Temple Currency, and for animals for the Passover sacrifice. All of this money making took place in "the Court of Gentiles, the only place in the Temple, where a non-Jew could go to pray and meditate." (Hughes) Think about the injustice of this! The Sadducees had set up an overpriced marketplace in the only place in the Temple where non-Jews could worship, which meant they were excluded from worshipping the One True God! No wonder Jesus was upset.

This is why Jesus said, "My Temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations, but you have turned it into a den of thieves." This first part of Jesus' quote is from the book of Isaiah, "Don't let foreigners who commit themselves to the Lord say, The Lord will never let me be apart of his people...I will bless the foreigner who commits himself to The Lord...and I will bring them to my holy mountain of Jerusalem and fill them with joy in my house of prayer...and my Temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations." Isaiah 56:3,6,7 The second part of Jesus' quote is from the book of Jeremiah, "Don't be fooled into thinking you will never suffer because the Temple is here. It's a lie...and then come here and stand before me in my Temple and chant, "We are safe!"—only to go right back to all those evils again? Don't you yourselves admit that this Temple, which bears my name, has become a den of thieves?" Jeremiah 7:8,10 The wealthy Sadducees had physically blocked foreigners from being apart of God's people by turning the Temple into a marketplace, "a den of thieves"! ***Jesus' actions and words***

were a severe judgment on the religious leaders. He was letting them know that they were out of line and things were changing!

"18When 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 amazed at his teaching." Mark 11:18

The religious leaders had already been looking for a way to kill Jesus, but now they were determined to kill him. The only thing stopping them from taking action in that moment was fear of the crowd.

19That evening Jesus and the disciples left the city. 20The next morning as they passed by the fig tree he had cursed, the disciples noticed it had withered from the roots up. 21Peter remembered what Jesus had said to the tree on the previous day and exclaimed, "Look, Rabbi! The fig tree you cursed has withered and died!" Mark 11:19-21

The dead fig tree was a physical display of the present reality of the nation of Israel and the Temple.

Israel had withered and the presence of God no longer dwelled in the Temple. Because of Jesus, everything was changing. The people of God would now include all nations and Jesus would become the new Temple, the place where God's Presence "dwells among us."

This is good news for you and me!

BECAUSE OF JESUS YOU CAN HAVE DIRECT ACCESS TO GOD THE FATHER.

Because Jesus cleared out the Temple, there is a way for you to be in God's Presence, and that way is Jesus Christ. He said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father except through me." John 14

Because Jesus fulfilled all the sacrificial requirements of the Temple by his life, death and resurrection, if you believe in Him, your sins are forgiven and you are made right in God's sight.

Because Jesus became the New Temple, you don't have to travel anywhere to worship God, His Presence is with you In-Christ through Holy Spirit in you.

This means you can confidently approach God anytime you want!

The Bible says it this way, *"We can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus...Let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water."* Hebrews 10:19,22 NLT. Your confidence to approach God doesn't come from anything you do, it comes from the blood of Christ.

1Corinthians 6:19 NLT says, "your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit." You don't have to travel to a temple to worship God. The Spirit of God dwells in you, and goes wherever you go. Think about this! The Spirit of God lives in you and is with you while you work, at school helping you learn, at home

guiding your Netflix choices, and helping your lips and hands stay holy when you're hanging out with your boyfriend or girlfriend. What a gift!

Have you responded to the invitation to become a member of God's family?

Are you confident that your sins are forgiven & You are Holy in God's sight?

Are you paying attention to the Holy Spirit's presence and power in your daily life?

Prayer— Thank you Father for sending your Son Jesus Christ into the world, to bring us the good news of your love, forgiveness and your kingdom come. We are eternally lost without you. Help us, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to believe in your Name and experience your presence and power in our daily lives. Amen.