

“Christ’s Confrontation of the Religious Unbeliever” Matthew 21:12-17, Sermon Notes

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Saving Grace Bible Church

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Morning Worship Service

“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.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.”¹⁴ And *the* blind and *the* lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.¹⁵ 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 indignant¹⁶ 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?’”¹⁷ And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.” (Matt. 21:12-17 NAU)

Textual Purpose

Matthew seeks to demonstrate Jesus’ zeal for God’s house and the confrontation that ensues with the religious leaders of Israel

Sermon Purpose

To explain Jesus zeal for the glory of God in His temple and the ensuing conflict with the unbelieving religious leaders of Israel

Introduction

This Sunday is a communion Sunday for us so we will be first looking at God’s Word and then turn our attention to the Lord’s table

How do you respond when you face hardened unbelief in someone?

- It is shocking to see this kind of unbelief
- But it is even more shocking to see it in someone who claims to believe in God

Over the next few weeks we are going to look at passages of scripture where Jesus confronts the religious unbeliever

As you remember Jesus has just entered into Jerusalem

- This is now his fourth and final Passover during His earthly ministry

And now here in our text before us we see Jesus concluding His earthly ministry the way he started

- Back in John chapter 2, John records for us Jesus’ first Passover

“The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.¹⁴ And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated *at their tables*.¹⁵ 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;¹⁶ and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business."¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME." (Jn. 2:13-17 NAU)

- Here Jesus finds people in the temple buying and selling
- Jesus confronts them and drives them out
- The religious leaders confront Jesus and asked Him who gave Him the authority to do these things. Vs18
 - What right does Jesus have to cleanse the temple
 - The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?" (Jn. 2:18 NAU)
- Jesus tells the people that God's house is not to be a place of business but of worship
 - And here the disciples learned of Jesus' zeal

We now come to Jesus' last Passover and the buyers and sellers are at work again

- Nothing has changed over His last four years of ministry

Now the temple was a remarkable structure. Listen to the description made by one commentator:

"For most first-century Jews, especially those country bumpkins from Galilee we have been following for some time now, entering Herod's temple in the holy city produced. . . [a] sense of euphoria. The temple was one of the world's most magnificent structures. Its outer walls, for example, were comprised of huge double colonnades, made with cedar painstakingly engraved and painted. Most of these columns were thirty feet high, and some of them were a hundred feet high. The columns were so massive that it would have taken three persons with their hands joined together to surround one of them at the base. Those were just the boundary walls of this immense and extravagant edifice, a building that took 10,000 carpenters and masons, laboring over four decades to build."

"At the heart of the temple was the Holy of Holies; then came the Holy Place (its doors were between sixty and 100 feet high), then the court of the Priests (where the altar was and the sacrifices made), then the court of Israel (for Jewish men), then the Court of Women (for Jewish women), and then surrounding these center structures, last and certainly least, was the court of the Gentiles (a place for non-Jewish converts to Judaism)."

"This court of the Gentiles is important as it pertains to our passage, for it is in that thirty-five acre, open-air courtyard where Jesus made, as everyone did, his entrance into the temple." R. Kent Hughes, Matthew Commentary, pg 599

The temple was an amazing structure. It took up 1/6th of the entire city of Jerusalem

- It was the largest structure in the Roman World

In Contrast

Roman Colosseum

It measures 615 ft long and 510 ft wide, with a base area of 6 acres. The height of the outer wall is 157 ft, equivalent to a 12-15 story building. The perimeter originally measured 1,788 ft

The temple on the other hand had

- a western wall of 1,590 feet
- Northern wall was 1,035
- Eastern wall was 1,536 feet
- 912 South

The total space equaled 35 football fields

The Temple in Israel more than doubled the size of the Roman Colosseum

It was so impressive and took up so much space in Jerusalem that people used to cut through the outer courts on their journeys

- Mark 11:16

“and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple.” (Mk. 11:16 NAU)

- People were cutting their travel time down by coming in one of the out gates and passing through another, carrying their stuff, so that could travel freely. In doing so they were cutting through the outer courts of God’s house using them as their own person highways

The scene for our next section of Scripture is in this grand courtyard

- The outer courts of the Temple
- The place had been turned into a market

This outer region which was for the converted Gentile to worship was now the place of commerce

- It had been turned into a bazaar
- Or a Saturday Market
- Booths had been setup
 - Animals in stalls ready to be purchased
- Tables had been setup for exchanging money

The Jews would not allow for the Temple tax to be paid for with unholy money

- That is money with Pagan images
- So their coins needed to be converted – at a cost of course

All of these booths, stalls, tables, are setup right in the middle of where the Gentile converts were to worship

- This would have made this area noisy
 - With the animals bleating, wailing, or fighting
 - In fact, scientists today have studied sheep and when they are nervous, they become loud
- The scientists found that when they separated one of the woolly creatures from its flock, it immediately became agitated – bleating loudly – and its heart-rate rose from 80 to 100 beats per minute on average

- Read more: <https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn6320-nervous-sheep-are-pleased-to-see-ewe/ixzz5y8mAqg1t>
- When you have these animals in an unfamiliar place they would be scared, nervous and consequently loud

Couple the noise of the animals with the buyers and sellers haggling over prices and things would be chaotic

Then of course are the smells of animals being animals and relieving themselves

The noise, the smells, the usury prices would rob anyone of a sense of worship

It is in this context that Jesus enters into the Temple

- And here we see our first point

Body

The Conflict vs – 12-13

“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.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." (Matt. 21:12-13 NAU)

Jesus comes into this chaotic scene and He cleans house

- He disrupts the whole enterprise

Now recognize this, this is the second of 3 times that Jesus does this

- The first time we saw was in John 2:13-18
- This is the second time – this in on the day that Jesus entered into Jerusalem – Either by tradition Sunday or as I suggested last week Monday
- On the same day he rode into Jerusalem on the back of a Donkey and received the praise from His fellow countrymen, He entered into the Temple

Vs 12 starts with “Kai” indication continuation of what Jesus did

- He entered into Jerusalem and He entered into the Temple

Now here is where some debate takes place

- Mark Says, “Jesus entered Jerusalem *and came* into the temple; and after looking around at everything, He left for Bethany with the twelve, since it was already late.” (Mk. 11:11 NAU)”

Mark does not record anything else about what happens. He simply says that Jesus entered into Jerusalem and into the temple

- Then they left because it was already late

Mark then continues in Mark 11:15-18 to describe Jesus cleansing the temple

You see the problem –

- Did Jesus cleanse the temple once and Matthew just mash the events together? Or did Jesus cleanse the temple 2x?

Many are inclined to say Matthew is just taking liberty with the narrative to fit his purposes

- The conclusion is that Jesus is demonstrating He is the king in stature and in power as he commands the temple to be cleaned so the events are placed together

But there is no reason to believe that both accounts are not right. Neither author wrote exhaustively. They selected the events they wanted to highlight

So, as I said the synoptic gospels record for us three occurrences of Jesus cleansing the temple

- The first in John 2
- The second here on the day Jesus entered into Jerusalem
- The third the next day – the day the Jews question Jesus about the authority he has to do the work of cleansing the temple

Which I believe this is why Matthew records the first cleansing and not the second cleansing.

- In the first cleansing Matthew wants to demonstrate that hypocritical character of the religious leaders
- In the second cleansing – which Matthew does not record – He records the debate about Christ's authority

So here on the day Jesus enters into Jerusalem with all the fanfare He enters into the temple and starts to clean it

- Also I would be inclined to believe that this was the same day as His entrance because the Kids were still crying out, Hosanna to the son of David
 - They had been hearing their parents and the people saying it, and now they are mimicking what they had heard

Now the scene is again chaotic

- Jesus starts to turn over tables

Notice first the text says that he is sending both the buyers and the sellers away

- Many focus on the last part of the verses and assume that Jesus was mad because of the usury prices
- They were making God's house a Den of robbers

But that is secondary

- He was concerned that they were using God's house for business instead of worship
- He was equally concerned about those who bought as he was with those who sold

Both were at fault

- And it is important to note, because some have concluded that Jesus was anti-capitalism, that He was concerned about the business being done in the temple

- He was not going through businesses in the streets or in their own buildings but rather in GOD'S HOUSE

He was also then casting out the money changers

- The money changers were by this time in Jewish history a new feature of Temple life
- *It was believed that Caiaphas, the High Priest, had allowed these money changers into the temple to ply their trade for a kickback to the priest of priests*

It is believed that Caiaphas and his henchmen were using their power to secure a better lifestyle

- So when Jesus is coming in and turning over tables scattering money everywhere
- Sending animals scurrying and owners scrambling
- The religious leaders are wondering who this guy thinks He is

They had taken the temple and made it "Robbers Den"

- That is they had made it safe to practice evil
- A robbers den is where they take their stuff
- It is where they do their evil work
- The religious leaders had made it comfortable for these people to practice what was evil and now Jesus was confronting it

What gives this man, even if the people thinks he is a prophet, the right to disrupt their labors?

- This question will be asked of Jesus the next day

But at this point Matthew seeks to record another issue. And that is what the leaders believe about Jesus

- This leads to our next point

The Confrontation vs 14-15

"And *the* blind and *the* lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. ¹⁵ 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" (Matt. 21:14-15 NAU)

Not only did Jesus remove the profane practices in the Temple but then He performed miracles

- The blind and lame came to Him and He healed them on the spot
- Instantaneous and miraculous transformation
- Right before their eyes

And the Kids continued to cry out "Hosanna to the son of David."

- The response of the leaders is recorded by Matthew

Matthew Says, "¹⁵ 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"

The response of the religious hypocrite to the practices of Christ AND the praise Christ received was rage

- Again contextually Matthew has just demonstrated that Jesus was fulfilling prophecy in their sight
- These leaders should have known the teaching of Zechariah
 - They should have heard the praises from the people and explored whether it was deserved
 - They should have seen the mighty deeds performed with His hands

All of these evidences would have then pointed to this truth, that Jesus is the messiah, the Son of God, the anointed one, the savior

- The evidences were right before them
- The truth was plain

BUT they would not see it

- They would not believe
- They would not honor Christ
- They would not be persuaded by the crowds who were calling out “Hosanna to the Son of David”
- They would not be persuaded by the miracles of healing the blind and the lame
- They would not listen to His words and believe the truth

Here we have a terrifying picture of unbelief ruling in the hearts of men

They had hardened their hearts in unbelief

- The evidence of that is in how they were indignant
- They were angry at him for his practices

There hardness of heart leads to their confrontation of Christ and His response in our final point:

The Counterclaim vs 16-17

“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?'"¹⁷ And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.” (Matt. 21:16-17 NAU)

They wanted Christ to rebuke the kids for calling him the Son of David – is one theory

- I think it is more sinister than that. I think they wanted him to say that He was the Son of David so that they could accuse Him on the spot of blasphemy and condemn him
- Remember they are asking this question in anger
 - Which tells me that many theological debates are not for the seeking of truth but for the attempt to preserve hardened unbelief
 - Many fight and war against the truth so that their heart does not need to come under the truth

Therefore, because they will not believe what is being said they want Jesus to silence the children

- This is another sign of a religious hypocrite
 - They want the righteous to conform to their unbelief
 - They are first, filled with rage
 - They are secondly, seeking to worship in the way they want

Jesus responds in perfect wisdom

- He quotes the Scriptures
 - Once again fulfilling God's perfect plan
 - If you remain silent the mouth of infants and babes will cry out
 - God has prepared praise for himself through these children

Jesus does not bow to their unbelief

- They don't believe that He is God
- He does not back down and quotes a verse from Psalm 8:2 affirming the praise meant for God belongs to Him
- Jesus does not cower to their unbelief he boldly confronts it

"For the choir director; on the Gittith. A Psalm of David. O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth, Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens! ² From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength Because of Your adversaries, To make the enemy and the revengeful cease." (Ps. 8:1-2 NAU)

You see friends the truth confronts error

- The truth exposes those in darkness
- And Jesus when confronted by the hardened unbelief of these religious leaders did not cower and hide and change His message
- He continued to declare plainly what they could have already seen and discovered for themselves if they were not hardened in their sin

Conclusion

Now from our text this morning we can draw some conclusions about the religious unbeliever:

There are characteristics of religious hypocrites:

1. They are not concerned about God but themselves
 - Oh they claim to care for God but use their platform for their own good and self-advancement
 - Like these religious leaders who changed God's house into a business

We are tempted to do the same thing. To take the Church and make it be what God has not designed

- To make the Church like a business run by CEO's which has a message to sell to a consumer base eager to receive it
- We are tempted to use the Church for our own glory

- I am sure there are some who seek a bigger ministry for their own reputation and legacy
- This is how we are tempted to do the same thing as these religious leaders

2. The religious hypocrite is filled with unbelief

- They will not believe the Word of God
 - They will not learn it
 - They will not hear it
 - They will say that is your interpretation but they will neither explain their own or defend why their own is the best explanation of what the scriptures teach
 - They will say that we all should have our own opinions and each is valid. There is no right or wrong
 - They will not believe what God has said and come under it
 - Their unbelief is manifested in how they view God's Word
 - They twist it, change it, ignore it with a different verse that might kinda relate, or pick on one word and change its meaning

In all these ways they hide their unbelief

3. The religious hypocrite is filled with rage against those who do not believe as they do or who oppose them

- Fleshly people are filled with rage
- The proud man who has become accustomed to denying God is violently opposed to those who disagree
 - This murderous intent filled these religious leaders

This violence starts with strong speech of hatred, disgust

- It moves to inflammatory comments
- Then jokes about someone dying
- Then finally threats

One of many things a religious hypocrite cannot control is his temper

- Many a false teacher has been exposed by his violent temper
- Mark Driscoll once famously said, "People must get on this bus or it will run them over."
 - He was speaking about his ministry mowing down any who got in its way
 - The same time he was yelling at staff members and people who could not keep up with his ministry
- Religious hypocrites are filled with anger

Why were they indignant?

- Because they did not believe that He was the Son of David
- Because while seeing they could not see, and while hearing they would not understand
- Because they were blind to the truth
- Because they opposed what was right

- Because they had become accustomed to practicing evil in God's house and they were not going to go back

4. Religious hypocrites want others to conform to their unbelief

- Frankly this is the chief problem
- People do not believe the Word of God
- They will not come under it
- They are willing to go to Church as long as it is a Church that allows them to live in their unbelief
- The religious hypocrite loves religious life as long as that life does not confront his unbelief

A religious life is attractive because it gives a sense of meaning, it brings peace, have friendships, even feel like we are right with God. It calms the guilty conscience

- *Look I am not so naive to believe everyone here today wants to be here. I know there are plenty who are here begrudgingly*
- *A religious unbeliever loves a spiritual environment that is not hostile towards their unbelief*

As long as the Church does not confront their unbelief they will go. BUT as soon as the Church will not embrace their unbelief then the religious hypocrite rages

- Just as these religious leaders wanted Jesus to rebuke the kids because they would not believe so the religious hypocrite wants us to live in their unbelief
 - They are so caught up in a form of religion that comforts their unbelief that they rage against the truth

How do we expose this? The same way Jesus did, going back to God's Word and proclaiming it

- It is the bible that gives us clarity to what God wants
- It is the bible which gives each one of us voice to encourage the body
- It is the bible which exposes unbelief
- And it is the bible which protects us

Let's Pray

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