

**Text: Matthew 21:12-17**

**Title: “Housecleaning by Jesus”**

**SERMON BUMPER** – Maybe this past week you heard someone at work or school talk about Lent ... giving up something for Lent. Lent is a term used in some churches or denominations to mark off the six weeks leading up to the celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus at Easter. People will give up something for Lent, like certain foods or luxuries. Lent starts with what is called Ash Wednesday (last Wednesday). Maybe you saw someone wearing an ash cross on their forehead. The day before Ash Wednesday is called Fat Tuesday. The idea is if you’re going to fast from something for six weeks for Lent starting on Ash Wednesday, the day before you should go out and gorge yourself on food or liquor or whatever before you give it all up for Lent. The French translation of Fat Tuesday is Mardi Gras. So to celebrate Mardi Gras in places like New Orleans, people sin real big before they try to stop sinning for six weeks leading up to Easter.

Well, we’re not about that, but we still believe it’s important for us spiritually to go back to the Gospel and to prepare for Easter by retracing the activity of Jesus in the week leading up to His death and resurrection ... “The Week that Changed the World.”

Open your Bibles to Matthew 21:12. It is traditionally believed that the week began for Jesus when He made what is called the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on that Sunday. Riding on a donkey, fulfilling the prophecy of the OT, Jesus officially presented Himself to the nation of Israel as her King. We said last week that this all happens at the Passover, the most important of the Jewish holy days, when all Jewish males were required to present themselves before the Lord in Jerusalem. So the city was packed with hundreds of thousands of people. And Jesus, being a righteous man, was one of them. So He rode along the road leading into the city with throngs of people along the way crying, “Hosanna!” signifying that that this Jesus may just be the Messiah who could save the Jewish nation. That evening Jesus returned to the village of Bethany where He spent Sunday night. Now it’s Monday morning of the week that changed the world and the main thing that happened on that day is recorded in the Gospels of Mark, Luke and here in Matthew. **Read Matthew 21:12-13.**

Incidentally, John’s Gospel records a similar incident at the beginning of Jesus ministry when He did some housecleaning in the Temple of God. And here He is doing it once again.

The observance of the Passover physically and spiritually revolved around the Temple. Jews were required to bring offerings and sacrifices to be presented at the Temple. If you want to draw this picture in your mind, there was what v.12 calls the "temple area." The outside perimeter was what was called the Court of the Gentiles. Anyone could go there. Then you walked through a gate and you were in the Court of the Women where all Jews, including women, could enter. Then you went through another gate into what was called the Court of Israelites where only Jewish males could enter. And then through another gate you would enter the Court of Priests where the altar for burning sacrifices was located. So they would bring whatever animal sacrifice was required, pass it off to the priest in the Court of Priests who would then burn the sacrifice on the altar. And beyond that was the Sanctuary which was divided into two ... the Holy Place and then the most sacred Holy of Holies where only the Jewish high priest could enter.

Now the Court of the Gentiles was a noisy, chaotic place ... a cross between a flea-market and a stock yard. Remember people are coming from lots of different nations to observe the Passover. A temple tax had to be paid with temple currency. So there were specially authorized agents (called moneychangers) who would exchange, say, your Syrian coins for the special temple coins to pay your tax. It's sort of like going to Chucky Cheese to play the games, but you can't use your quarters; you have to exchange your money for the tokens that can be used in the games. And it was a huge racket because the moneychangers would charge a ridiculous fee for the exchange.

Jews were also required to offer animal sacrifices, like lambs or goats, or if you were really poor, a dove. The problem is that people were travelling to Jerusalem sometimes from hundreds of miles away so it was impractical to bring an animal with them. So you could buy an animal there in the Court of the Gentiles from one of the specially authorized agents. And again, it was a racket. Worshippers often had to pay several times what the animal was actually worth. And these agents were getting rich.

And this takes place in the Court of the Gentiles, where Gentiles, non-believers, were supposed get a glimpse of the glory of God and the worship of His people. But there's not much worshipping or praying going on; it's more like a bizarre. And the priests who were supposed to be leading the people to worship and seek the Lord were actually running the business of the mone changers and animal salesmen. It was pure extortion.

And this is all a very visible representation of the spiritual condition of most of the Jewish nation. So into this crowded, noisy, stinky market scene in the Court of Gentiles Jesus walked to do some spiritual housecleaning.

Now you may wonder, “What in the world does all of this temple stuff have to do with me? I have to pay my bills, my marriage is in trouble; I need a new job.” Well, stay plugged in, because you’ll see that it is more relevant that you realize. As we watch Jesus doing some things that seem out-of-character for Him, we’re actually learning some important truths about our Savior. First, we see...

## **1. HIS FOCUS ON OUR WORSHIP**

Matthew 21:12 tells us that “Jesus entered the temple area.” That’s His focus. He’s concerned about how people approach God ... how they worship. Jesus riveted His attention to what, at that time, was the center of the spiritual lives of God’s people.

Now, there were a lot of things wrong in Israel. Jesus could have gone to protest in front of the palace of the Roman governor Pilate, but He didn’t. He could have gone to bang on the gates of the Fortress of Antonio, the headquarters for the Roman army that oppressed the Jews, but He didn’t. Jesus went right to the root of the problem ... the spiritual lives of the people of God. Their greatest need was not to be free of Roman oppression; their greatest need was to get right with God.

We rarely, if ever, see Jesus this intensely agitated, but He really is ... and for good reason. The spiritual life of God’s people is all messed up. So we see our Savior’s focus but also we see...

## **2. HIS AUTHORITY OVER OUR WORSHIP**

We’re told in v.12 that when Jesus entered the temple area He drove out all who were buying and selling there. He turned over the tables and the benches where they were selling stuff. He did that because He had the authority to do that. In v.13 He called the Temple, “My house...” He has the authority to clean His own house.

Don’t miss the emotional intensity of this moment. So these little weasely guys are sitting on their stools with their stacks of coins on their tables and Jesus just starts flipping them over. The incident that John records in His Gospel says that Jesus made a whip and drove all the animals away. So you see Jesus’ physical force driving them out, but behind that was His moral authority to say, “Out!” It was like

when He raised Lazarus from the dead. He just said, “Lazarus, out!” and out comes this man all wrapped in burial clothes. That’s the authority of Jesus.

He is intensely concerned and He takes control of what’s going on at the heart of the spiritual lives of God’s people. But Jesus wasn’t throwing a temper tantrum. What He was doing was righteous. So we see...

### **3. HIS ZEAL FOR HOLINESS**

**Matthew 21:13 - “It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it a ‘den of robbers.’”**

In John’s account of the first time Jesus cleansed the Temple, it says that when Jesus’ disciples saw what He did they remembered what Psalm 69:9 said: “Zeal for your house consumes me...” The Lord is zealous for the holiness of His own name but also for the holiness of His people. He is zealous for His Word to be honored. Jesus said, “It is written...”

The Father has determined that His House (the Temple) is to be a house of prayer. Jesus quotes Isaiah 56:7 when the Lord said, “For my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.” So at the center of the spiritual lives of the people of God is to be prayer. But it can’t be if there is sin in our lives? The psalmist said, “If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me.” How can there be prayer when our lives are filled with so many other competing passions. And His house is to be house of prayer *for all nations*. The Gentiles should be able to see the glory of God and the worship of His people. The Psalmist writes about the proper way to approach the Lord in worship:

**Psalm 27:4 - One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.**

Jesus said in v.13, “You have made My house of prayer a ‘den of robbers.” This goes back to an OT reference where the Lord rebuked His people through the prophet Jeremiah. A “den of robbers” would have been a cave where robbers hide to keep from getting caught. Religion had become a place to cover up a sinful life, hiding behind the rituals of religion.

So Jesus came to His Temple to vindicate God’s holiness. They had completely lost sight of the holiness of God, and God is too zealous for His glory and too

zealous for our holiness to let that go unchecked. He is consumed with zeal for the purity of our worship. But what happens next reveals something else about our Savior:

#### **4. HIS COMPASSION FOR THE HURTING**

**Matthew 21:14 - The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them.**

So in one instance Jesus confronts the most outwardly religious people but then He turns with compassion to the people whom others ignored. The blind and the lame are not allowed to go inside, but they get as close as they can because they know they need God. They came to Jesus and He healed them. What a tender moment! Jesus displays the perfect combination of fierce holiness and tender mercy. And what a powerful moment! Matthew just casually says, “Oh, and Jesus healed them.” Just like that! What amazing power to give blind people back their sight and for crippled people to stand on their own two feet.

Now blind people seeing for the first time and lame people walking for the first time aren't going to be quiet about it, are they? Their shouts were probably heard throughout the temple area. “Hey, look what Jesus did for me!” It was truly *wonderful* ... it caused people to be full of wonder at what Jesus did. And that's the next thing we see about our Savior...

#### **5. HIS RIGHT TO BE WORSHIPPED**

**Matthew 21:15 - But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.**

Jesus is worthy of wonder and worship. He has done wonderful things and is to be rightfully worshipped. But the uber-religious guys didn't care about the blind and the lame, and they didn't care about children either. And they certainly didn't want any praise going to Jesus. All they could think about was that their hypocrisy had been exposed. And they were furious. Isn't it amazing that the smartest theologians and the most rigorous religionist couldn't see who Jesus was ... but the little children could.

**Matthew 21:16 - “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him. “Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read (and He quotes another psalm here), “From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise’?”**

And I can just see Jesus with a little smile say, “Yes, I hear their praise and that’s how it should be.” In fact, in Luke’s account of this Jesus said, “If they don’t sing My praises the very rocks on the ground will cry out.” Jesus has the right to be worshipped.

Now I said earlier that this was going to be more relevant to you than it may appear at first. And let me show you why. When you zoom back and look at the whole message of the NT you see that Jesus isn’t just talking about a temple building in Jerusalem. God has His eye on something more lasting and more foundational. The Lord envisions the day when people don’t just worship at a place. They become the very place where God is worshipped. They are not just really religious; they are truly righteous. They become a holy temple of praise through Jesus Christ.

**1 Corinthians 3:16 - Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?**

**1 Corinthians 6:19-20 - Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.**

**ONSCREEN – QUESTION #1** - What is in the temple of your heart that ought not to be? Jesus comes kicking over the tables of our \_\_\_\_\_. He comes driving out the thieves of \_\_\_\_\_.

**ONSCREEN – QUESTION #2** - What ought to be in the temple of your heart that isn’t? Is it a new purity, more prayer, more compassion, more praise?