

Title: Jesus is in the House
Text: Matthew 21.12-17
Theme: The right of Jesus to rule
Series: Matthew #100
Prop Stmtnt: Jesus has come to take back what rightfully belongs to him, and he will not be denied.

Read Text:

The Temple Mount in Jerusalem during the life of Jesus was an enormous venue. It was the focal point of the city and the country. The Temple that Herod built was very impressive. It was the largest structure in the world in its day. Archaeologists have unearthed stones that were used in the foundational walls. The largest one discovered is 11.5 feet high, 12 feet thick and 45 feet long. Imagine a stone that is as high as a basketball backboard, sits almost to the free throw line and extends to almost the entire width of the court. The Temple took up one-sixth of the city, which was 1.5 million square feet which is about 35 football fields. That area would provide enough space for several hundred thousand people to gather. During the Passover week, the population of Jerusalem would swell to many times its own size and most of the activity of the week would focus on the temple area.

When Jesus entered the city on Palm Sunday, he went into the Temple area and returned to Bethany. This event (throwing out the vendors) took place on Monday when Jesus returned. While Matthew follows a general chronology in his gospel account, he arranges some events on the basis of theme and not on a strict order of time as he does here. Matthew is showing the connection between Jesus entering the city as the Messiah who is chosen to inherit the throne and his cleansing the Temple of the vendors who were ripping the people off. Jesus' first order of business is not going to the palace and starting a coup, but going to the Temple and cleaning house.

Now, don't miss this. Jesus has come as the King to establish his kingdom. He is a king, unlike any king that you have ever known and therefore, his kingdom is unlike any kingdom you have ever known. That means, he does things radically different. We know that Jesus has come to change things. What kind of a change is it? When we think of change, we think of someone who has new ideas, or a new approach, or a fresh personality that will bring people together or get some things done.

Do you remember President Obama's original campaign slogan? It was hope and change. In terms of marketing, it was great. In terms of reality, it has been a complete bust. The tabloids have hit gold with the ongoing saga of Bruce Jenner. What has Bruce attempted to do? He has attempted to change his gender because he is not at peace with who he is. What he has done is not only extreme, but will fail him. Surgery and hormone pills cannot change your heart (nor your DNA). Walt Heyer has firsthand knowledge. He went through gender-reassignment surgery and lived for eight years as a female, until he "gathered the courage to admit that the surgery fixed nothing – it only masked and

exacerbated deeper psychological problems.” We posted a link to the full article from the church’s Twitter and Facebook account.

But, here is my point. We know that this world is a mess. We know that we need change. But here is the rub. Are you willing for real change? Are you willing for Jesus to go into your temple and clean house? Are you willing for him to identify and radically remove your sin? Are you willing to cooperate with him? Becoming a follower of Christ means that you give him a key to go into every room of your life and take over. If you have secretly set up another kingdom in the temple of your heart, he is going after it. He loves you too much, not to.

1. Jesus takes over. (12-13)

Look at the verbs in verse 12. He *drove out* all who sold and bought and he *overturned* the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. There is a lot going on here. What were all of these vendors doing here in the first place? This was the feast of unleavened bread also known as the Passover. In order to participate in this, one had to be ceremonially clean. In order to be ceremonially clean, you had to offer a sacrifice. It was rather inconvenient to travel with a lamb, pigeon, or turtledove. Therefore, vendors would sell these to you. Related to that issue was the fact that if you did bring an animal, then a priest would have to certify that it was acceptable. If the priest said that your animal was not acceptable, then you had to purchase an acceptable one. You had to have an approved sacrifice, so, what do you think that did to the price? (It reminds me of what happens at Stadiums and Ballparks. You can buy a bottle of water at a store for about .25 or at a ball-field, where they hide the drinking fountains for \$5.) That brings up the next problem. How do you pay for that animal? The coinage in those days had the image of the emperor on it and was considered to be an idol. Therefore, your money was not good enough. You had to exchange your money for the Tyrian silver that was used for the half-shekel temple tax. (Remember that issue from Jesus and Peter in chapter 17?) There is some historical evidence cited by one scholar that supports the claim that the moneychangers and the vendors gave a kickback to the priests in exchange for being able to do their business in the temple area. Doing business in the Temple and being sanctioned by the priests, gave the clear impression of being kosher, right? The bottom line is this. The priests were in cahoots with the vendors to take advantage of these people and to use the worship of God as a pretense to rob them. I believe this is part of the reason why Jesus used the term, “den of robbers.” Thieves and bandits would hide in caves and dens where they would plot their next attack. It was their hideout and their planning center. And that is what the priests and vendors were doing. They were using the Temple as the place where they plotted to rob the people. They were fleecing people in the name of God.

Jesus was compassionate, kind, tender and approachable to the needy and broken. But, do not think for a minute that he was an effeminate wimp. He spent about 18 years as a carpenter. He knew manual labor. He was obviously intimidating. He drove out ALL who sold and bought. He (singular) overturned the tables (plural) of the money-changers (plural) and the seats (plural) of those (plural) who sold pigeons. He single-handedly

created a holy ruckus. How does one guy do that? How does one guy simply take over and throw all of these people out and (according to Mark) stop people from carrying stuff through the area? He is all over this! He is angry. He is sweating. He is shouting. He is pushing. He is shoving. He is threatening. And no one is disobeying him. This is not what the disciples are used to, is it? It is not what we are used to is it?

We are tempted to think of Jesus as being meek, mild, thoughtful and restrained, and he was, oftentimes. But he was and is more. He is the entire package. He will defend the needy and he will offend the proud. There is no better place for you to be than with Jesus because he will fight for you. And when Jesus fights for you, no one can stand up to him. At the same time, there is no worse place for you to be than to be his adversary. How can you be an adversary to Jesus? It's dangerously easy. Believe that you are an exception to the Word. Assume that you can use the pretense of religion to mask a life of greed. Assume that you can use the reputation of God as a cover for pursuing your own self-centeredness. Do you see what was going on here?

a. Jesus acted as a prophet.

When Jesus said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers" he was combining a statement from Isaiah 56 with a statement from Jeremiah 7. The text from Isaiah 56 speaks of God's plan to draw people together from all over the world to gather in Jerusalem and worship Him. However, in Jeremiah 7, he is warning the men of Judah who come to the Temple and "worship God" even though their personal lives are full of sin. But, because they "go to church" and because other people think that they are good Jews (or church-going people) they believe that they are fine. Jeremiah is warning them. You must repent of your sin. You are in danger of being wiped out. Then Jeremiah tells them to look at what happened to Shiloh. Shiloh was the place where the original Tabernacle was set up. Shiloh was in the northern kingdom area and during Jeremiah's time was now gone. The northern kingdom was destroyed by the Assyrians. His point was, do not assume that because you are standing on holy ground that God will overlook your sin. He will not overlook your sin. In fact, as Jeremiah warns, you have turned the Temple into a den of robbers. While you are robbing your own citizens and taking advantage of the widows, you come here and pretend to worship me. I know what you are doing and unless you repent you will face my fury. The Temple in Jeremiah's day was the Temple that Solomon had built and it was destroyed by the Babylonians. Ezra rebuilt the Temple and now Herod rebuilt it again, the same thing is taking place. And Jesus is warning them of the same thing.

b. Jesus offered a preview of the future.

Jesus drove them out. Jesus overthrew their tables and seats. Jesus physically manhandled them. This was a preview of what would happen on a much greater scale if they did not repent. If you do not repent, the Temple will be destroyed. They did not repent in Jeremiah's day and the Temple was destroyed. Obviously, it was not just the Temple. And now, Jesus is saying the exact same thing. And what happened? They did not repent.

The Temple was destroyed and it has never been rebuilt. The Roman general Titus, led an army that crushed Israel, destroyed much of Jerusalem and razed the Temple.

c. Jesus took their sin, personally.

When God created the world, he made the Garden of Eden the focal point because that is the place where he made Adam and then made Eve from Adam, where he gave Eve to Adam and presided over their wedding and hung out with them during their honeymoon. The Garden of Eden was a model of God's plan for the entire world, which was for all people to live in his presence and enjoy Him and one another. Adam's rebellion cursed that plan. Out of the chaos and destruction that ensued, God initiated a plan of redemption. This plan focused upon one man, Abraham, from whom God created a nation, Israel, that was to be a model for the rest of the world. When God redeemed Israel from Egypt, he set them on a course to go inherit a land that he had prepared for them. During that journey, he gave them instructions to build a Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was designed by God to be a replica of the Garden of Eden. It was the place where God would once again dwell with his people. The Tabernacle was portable and finally came to rest in Shiloh. Solomon, following the instructions of his father David, built the Temple in Jerusalem to replace the Tabernacle. And the Temple, on an even grander and more glorious scale was constructed to look like the Garden of Eden and to be the place where God first met with man and where God would continually meet with man until the day would come when the whole earth would become the Garden of Eden. That was the plan. The Temple was supposed to be very meaningful to the people of God because it was intensely meaningful to God. This represented where he made his children, where they married and where he lived with them and enjoyed them. This Temple represented what he planned to do all over the world.

Imagine someone breaking into your house and stealing the pictures of your children and family and then placing those pictures in toilets in order to defecate on them. Would you be offended? Would you not be incensed? That is what is going on here in the Temple. The vendors brought in not only animals, but they brought in their greed, their avarice, their lust and made an utter mockery of God. The very place that was established because of the seriousness of sin had been turned into a place where sin was condoned, encouraged, and ignored. One day the new creation will be the new Jerusalem and the entire thing will be a Temple

This was his house and Jesus was righteously angry. Righteous anger is being angry for a righteous cause. Righteous anger is right. Righteous anger is rare because we tend to get angry over things that do not matter and be passive over the things that do matter. Now, let me tie this in with the previous point I made about this being a preview of what was to come. Jesus was warning them that they were facing destruction because of their sin. The Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed because of the rebellion of Israel. The Temple, like the Tabernacle before it, was designed to be a miniature replica of the earth. And just as the Temple was destroyed by the rebellion of the people, what do you suppose is going to happen to this earth? And who do you suppose is going to pour out his wrath upon this earth? In Revelation 6.15-17 the apostle John speaks of the day when, "*Then the kings of*

the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful and everyone, slave and free hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?'

On September 11, 2001, a number of people who were trapped in the upper floors of the World Trade Center, jumped from the building to their certain death. Why? In that moment, they considered the trauma of falling and the deadly impact on the concrete to be considerably less than the trauma of burning. Revelation 6 speaks of the day when people will consider the trauma of being crushed in a rockslide to be considerably less than facing the wrath of the One who is seated on the throne and the wrath of the Lamb. That Lamb is Jesus. He is mercifully patient, but sin will not be left unpunished. He will not be mocked.

Do you know what the church is? I am not speaking of the building. I am speaking of this local assembly of believers. We, according to 1 Corinthians 3.16, *are God's temple*. Verse 17 says, *"If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you (plural) are that temple."* Beloved, the church is at once the most glorious and the weightiest reality in this world. She has the amazing capacity to put the glories of Christ and the gospel on display and the capacity to wreak havoc and chaos. You have the capacity to help her look like Jesus and you have the capacity to wreck her by your sin. But know this, that when you do, you are inviting the judgment of God on your life. He is serious about his love for his church. And I see in this text a particular warning for people who are in leadership who are tempted to use their influence in an effort to fleece people of their money.

2. Jesus takes care. (14)

This is not surprising because Jesus has spent his entire ministry looking after those that the world brushes aside. There were some clear restrictions on where the blind and lame could go in the Temple area. In fact, they were restricted from getting into the actual Temple out of concern that their unclean crutches or their unclean mats would desecrate the Temple. But, Jesus makes it clear what he meant when he said that his house was to be a house of prayer. It was a house not only of praise to God, it was a house where people would pray for God's help and where they would cry out for mercy because they needed God. Needy people are not an embarrassment to God. Needy people are the very people that Jesus came for.

This is the last healing miracle of Jesus that is recorded in the gospels, apart from the healing of the servant's ear in the Garden of Gethsemane. This scene and the one that follows captures the tension that Jesus exposed. Beggars and broken people loved him. The powerful, political and religious ones hated him. That does not mean that every beggar loved him, nor does that mean that every powerful, political and religious person hated him. There are obvious exceptions like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, but this contrast was for the most part defined by these groups.

3. Jesus took on the leaders. (15-17)

A little while ago I received an email that read, “Hi Robert; I heard about you through Annie B., and am contacting you to see if you would be available and interested in providing singing/voice lessons to my daughter, (“Ashley”). She is 15 years old, a freshman at (name) in Boulder, CO and has been singing, studying and been involved in performing arts since a very young age and her passion and desire is to have a career in the performing arts. I look forward to hearing back from you. Sincerely, (“John”)” Now, I like to sing, but I didn't think I was that good. So, I wrote back. (“John”) I think that you have the wrong email address. I am a pastor in Detroit. I could certainly try to teach (“Ashley”) but the airfare and the results would probably not be worth your investment. Good luck on tracking down the other Robert Johnson. There are a few of us out there.” He never wrote back. I was obviously not the man he was looking for and with good reason.

Jesus was obviously not the Messiah that these leaders were looking for, but for the wrong reasons. That is abundantly clear because of what causes them to be so angry. What you get angry about reveals what really matters to you. Jesus was angry about the desecration of the temple due to the pilfering and profiting that was taking place at the expense of the vulnerable people. The chief priests and scribes were angry about people being healed and children praising Jesus. And here is where the stage is set for what is about to take place.

The children are singing praises to Jesus and the chief priests and scribes are incensed that young impressionable children would do such an atrocious thing. Jesus quotes Scripture to them. To ask the scribes if they have never read the Scriptures was a double-edged jab. Jesus quotes from Psalm 8 because Psalm 8 is ascribing glory and majesty to God. Jesus quotes from that Psalm and declares himself as the fulfillment of that Psalm. These children were doing what they were designed to do. In praising Jesus, they were praising God, because he is God. And if you refuse to praise God, then he will not have anything to do with you. “And leaving them...” was more than a statement of fact, it was a statement of condition. I have 2 concluding questions:

1) What do you praise?

What do you get excited about? What do you teach your children to get excited about? What do they see you delighting in? And, does what you praise, really matter?

2) What do you get angry about?

What frustrates you? What causes you to burn, to blow up, and to get exasperated? Does it really matter? What you get excited about is what your heart truly worships. And what you get angry about is what you actually trust in.