

## Matthew 21:12-17 The Purification of the Temple

We start a new section this morning. Matthew chapter 21. The full section is verses 12 through 22 but we will be taking the first half, verses 12 through 17 for this morning.

Last week when we began Matthew chapter 21, we entered into the final week of the Lord's earthly life and His ministry as He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Actually there was a donkey and then there was a colt, and Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the colt. And the people from behind, and the people in front were singing the Hallel Psalms, Psalms 113 through 118 as they rode into Jerusalem.

And remember, because this is important in order to understand the events that are taking place, is that there are already a few million Jews in Jerusalem. This is the beginning of Passover week. It is not just a ride on a donkey into Jerusalem. It is the beginning of a week-long activities, where the Jews gathered together and there were three feasts that the Jews were legally bound by God to gather together into Jerusalem. And the Passover is one of those feasts. So pilgrims are flowing in from other countries. And flowing in from the outside.

And there are two things that they had to have, required of them, during this Passover week:

1) They had to have a lamb. They had to bring their own lamb and take it to the temple and give it to the priests and have the priest offer that lamb for them. So there were millions of people. There were millions of lambs.

Some believe that is why the shepherds were out in the fields when the birth of Christ was announced. That is where they kept the lambs for the Passover feast during that year's tribute.

Two things, they were supposed to bring a sacrifice, a lamb. But if you were poor, you were allowed to bring a dove. That is why when Mary and Joseph dedicated Jesus in the temple area after His birth, they presented doves because they were poor. They could not present the regular oxen sacrifices.

2) The second thing they had to bring was the Temple tax. They had to pay a half a shekel of Temple tax, but it had to be Temple money. It could not be regular money of the street. All of this is to set it up for you as to why all the problems are ensuing as we will see in a moment.

So when He rides into Jerusalem at the beginning of this chapter, it is just the beginning of a week's long activities with a few million Jews in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. I want to read this text to you beginning at verse 12, **And Jesus entered into the temple of God and threw out all the ones selling and buying in the temple. And He overturned the tables of the money changers** (tipped them over with the money on them), **and overturned the seats of the ones selling the doves.** Did not scatter the doves but overturned the seats of those sitting at the tables. **And He says to them, It has been written, "My house will be called a house of prayer," but you yourselves made it a den of robbers, or thieves. And the blind and lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed**

**them. And when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonders which He did, and saw the children calling out in the temple, and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became angry. And they said to Him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus says to them, "Yes. Did you never read that, "Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You established praise?" And after leaving them, He went outside of the city to Bethany, and was lodged there.**

So on the same day that He rides into Jerusalem, once He gets into the city of Jerusalem, He entered into the temple, according to verse 12. This is now the second time, not that He has entered into the temple, but that He entered into the temple and the title of this section is The Purification of the Temple. Verses 12 and 13 is The Cleansing of the Temple. He went in and chased all these people out. Nice and gentle Jesus, full of love, chasing the people out of the temple area.

The first time that He cleansed the temple was three years earlier right at the beginning of His public ministry. And that is recorded for us in John 2:13-16. Three years earlier He made a whip out of ropes and chased out all the people who were selling oxen and sheep and chased the people who were selling the doves out of the courtyard area, and He says, "You have made My Father's house a house of merchandise." Is not that interesting? Back in John chapter 2 the word for *merchandise* is our word *emporium*. You have made an emporium out of the house of God. And so the disciples then in John chapter 2 remembered what God said in Psalm 69:9 where he says, "The zeal of your house has eaten me up." The zeal of the Lord for the house of God, and to keep it pure, and to keep it cleansed, and to keep it functioning for what it is meant to be. But they made it an emporium.

What is interesting, it says in our text, **And Jesus entered into the temple of God and threw out all the ones selling and buying in the temple.** The word *temple* is not the word *sanctuary* in the Greek text; it is the *temple area* or *courtyard area*. Alfred Edersheim, a Christian Jewish historian said that it was in the courtyard area and the courtyard area was twenty acres in size. So can you imagine a farmer's market covering twenty acres? That is what Jesus faced when He walked into the courtyard area, and He saw people buying and selling. Let us see what happens then.

**He threw out**, that emphasizes what the Greek text says. I mean He literally threw them out. He did not ask them to leave, He did not say, "Please." But **He cast them out the ones who were selling and buying in the courtyard area. He cast them out and then after He cast them out, He overturned the tables of the money changers, and He overturned the seats of the ones selling the doves.**

Here is what we understand about what was going on. If you came in to the temple and had to pay the temple tax, half-shekel, but it had to be temple money not the normal money of the street. You had to come to the moneychangers and exchange your money for temple money in order to pay your temple tax. And there was a charge for this. It was not just equal straight across. Edersheim says it could be as much as ten to twenty percent more you had to pay above what it is worth just for the service of the temple tax.

Also, if you came in from out of town and you had to provide yourself with a lamb - well they did not bring a lamb all that distance if they had to go a few hundred miles. So they waited until they got there and purchased an animal from the priests and rabbis in the temple area. And so again, we are talking about charging ten times more than what the animal was

worth, because they were forced to. They had no choice. They had to have a lamb. Even if people were in from the city and had their own lamb and it was perfect, they had to bring it before the priests, before the Rabbi, and get it approved. If he found a defect, or found something wrong, then you had to go by one of theirs. You see how this is working out to be a fundraiser. One of the first fundraisers the church has ever had. So they had to purchase the animals. Like I said, Edersheim says up to ten times what the animal is worth they would be charged. So they would be making a profit.

The seats for those who distributed doves to the poor were overturned and he threw out the ones who sat there with the doves. Now the doves were obviously in cages because He did not chase the doves out, but He chased the people out who were manning the tables and selling the doves. So if they could not afford a lamb, they had to buy a dove. And even that cost a little extra money than what the dove was worth. Even the poor people were taken for money.

So you can see this is like a farmer's market in the temple area, where the priests took advantage of the people because the people were forced to by God's law, to come and present temple tax and to present a lamb for the Passover. But the priests made sure that they were earning money off of this [sacrifice] that the people had to do.

And He says to them, that is after He drove them out in verse 13, **"It has been written,** this is from Isaiah 56:7, **"My house will be called a house of prayer."** And notice He is making it applicable to Him. He is quoting from Isaiah 56, but He is saying *My house*. Not *God's house* will be called a house of prayer, *but My House will be called a house of prayer*.

**"But you yourselves,"** He quotes now from Jeremiah 7:11, **"you have made it a den of thieves."** You have made it a den of robbers. You have taken advantage of the situation and taken advantage of the people to earn money.

Now I understand and I am speaking from an experienced standpoint - not an "experienced of doing good" but an "experienced of being caught up in the system" - the church system of fundraisers and a farmer's market type selling of things in order to earn money for the church. We justify it. We justify it and say it is for God. It is for His church that we sell things to people and make a profit. And it is interesting that in the past when the ministry website was getting started, we set up a system where you could purchase the cassette tapes. I am dating myself now. Where you could purchase the cassette tapes and we would send them to you. You could purchase the Greek course online and we would send it to you, but it was all for a profit. Justified by saying it is the Lord's work. It supports the Lord's work, and it keeps us going and keeps us making supplies so that we can distribute them. But something about it bothered me. I was going by the capitalistic system of doing what business does in the United States and that is you sell; you make a profit. There are those who have written books that have helped people, and they make a million dollars profit on it from the publishers, but it is all to produce more books you see. It is justified for a cause.

But we began, there is a Scripture text - Matthew 10:8 Jesus says, **"Freely you have received, freely give."** Which literally is translated, *you have received it as a gift, give it as a gift*. And that always bothered me. What God has given to me did not cost me anything.

Well, it cost me my life but financially did not cost me anything. So why would I turn around charge other people?

But the website moved on. We began to make distribution based on donation. Some things sold; other things were a donation. Cassette tapes free of charge, only donations needed. Not enough money coming in though. It is not working. "Cannot let God's work fail," we say. But changes began to be made, changes in me, when that Scripture verse in Matthew 10:8, **"Freely you have received, freely give,"** is just take God's word and just give it. We were able to do that through many hours, many hundreds of dollars changing tape into audio for a website so that people can listen online for free. Free of charge. And that was God's change in me. It took years.

I do not present myself to you as somebody who has made it. Somebody who painfully over the years God has dealt with me. Because I was just doing business like all other ministries do business. But God was dealing with me. And so we just began to rebuild the website to what it is being rebuilt into today and put everything on there for free. Someday the Greek course will be on there for free. Right now all the Bible studies are on there for free. Everything we do each week.

And by the way in case you did not remember, last week I announced that there would be a new section on the website called Greek Concepts. It is listed on the home page on the website and every week we will be posting a Greek Concept. An English definition of a Greek word that is being used in the New Testament. And it is free. We have made it so that you can download it. We have made it so that you can print it out. You can make a book out of all these words. There are one hundred fifty [words] so it is going to take three years to run through them, publishing one a week. It is all free. Free of charge, basically is what we told people. It is free of charge.

Even here at the church. And if you will notice we do not take an offering. We have a donation box in the back, but we do not take an offering. It is not required. Giving is not required. The Lord has laid it on my heart, if it is of Him, and if He is ministering to people, He will lead people to give in support. You do not have to motivate people with certain gimmicks. And so with the donation box in the back it is for whoever is led by God's Spirit to give and to support. Or donate online. That is the finances that God uses to keep everything going, to make everything available free of charge. Some people are led to give, some people are not. But I am convinced that if it is of the Lord, He will lead through the people to support it. If the finances are not coming in, even if it is here at the church, if the finances are not coming in, if it is the website finances are not coming in, we just shut it down because the Lord does not want it. And it is not a matter of, "Well, people we are getting ready to shut down and we need about hundred bucks from each of you this morning just to make it through the week. And somebody is tapping into our electric line, and we have an outrageous electric bill," and you know this... No. It is not like that at all. It has nothing to do with the dependence upon people. It is the Lord that moves people to give. And the people who are receiving, and the people who are getting ministered to, God moves them to give. Period. It is just the way it is. So freely give. Freely give. Give whatever God has given. And the support that comes in, use that to pay for the materials, pay for the utilities, or pay for whatever needs to be done. Pay for the website and the new sections of the website.

So the Lord has caused us to go from a traditional farmer's market type set up, what everybody else does. But I personally, this will be personal for me so that you do not have to be offended by it, but I personally see that it is an offense to God to say, "We need to go out and start selling things in order to support God's work." As if God cannot support it and He needs us to go out and earn money off of people in order support it. That to me is an offense to God. He is capable of moving through people and He has proven that to us. Where people have just come out of the woodwork, and just started listening to studies, and started supporting, and we take that, and we just keep going on week after week and month after month. It is all of the Lord, and it is all for the Lord because it is all by the Lord, it is not by people. It is not by people.

Look at verse 14, verses 14 through 17, The Complaint of the Religious Leaders. Can you imagine if Jesus were to walk into a church today, and overturn the tables of the money, and chase out the people; tip over all the crafts, and all the things that people are selling, and run them out of the church? Do you think the religious leaders would get upset? Yes, they would.

Verses 14 to 17 The Complaint of the Religious Leaders, **And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.** Now to the Jews at Passover time if you had a physical handicap, you are not allowed to participate in the Passover celebrations. So it is interesting that once Jesus chased all of these sellers out of the temple area that the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple area and He healed them. He made them eligible. He made them eligible. That is what you do in the Lord's house. He makes people eligible to receive from His Spirit.

**But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonders which He did, and when they saw the children calling out in the temple saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became angry.** King James says *they were sore displeased*. That is what my mother got when she was angry with me. I got sore but she was displeased. The word *sore* is the word *pained*. They were so angry at Him that they were in pain. That is how angry they were. So when they saw the children saying, "**Hosanna to the son of David,**" that is what they were saying when He came into Jerusalem.

*Hosanna* is made up of two Hebrew words: *hoshea* for *save*, and *na* for *now*. Hosanna, save now. And then they also said *Son of David*. Son of David is a Messianic title. So they were saying, "Save now, Messiah." And the religious leaders were saying, "Do You hear what they're calling you?" In other words, "Tell them to be quiet. And who do You think you are coming in here and ruining business? Do you realize how much this is costing us?" So they became angry, pained with anger.

Verse 16, **And they said to Him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus says to them, "Yes. Did you never read that,"** and this is from Psalm 8:2, "**out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You established praise?**" So from those who are so young their religious education could not mess them up, to those who were too young to form opinions, and form adult like religious doctrines - it is out of infants and nursing babes, they are the ones who are going to respond and praise the Lord, and not be hindered by the adult problems that adults get into when they get older.

**And after leaving them, He went outside of the city to Bethany, and was lodged there.** Bethany was one of the towns up on the Mount of Olives. Remember Bethphage was

the city out of which they got the donkeys to ride into Jerusalem. Bethany was another village in the Mount of Olives. And Bethany is where Jesus went every night in Passover week. When it was evening hours, he went to Bethany and stayed at the house of Simon the leper, who was raised from the dead, and also Mary and Martha and their families there. They stayed with them in Bethany in the evening but when into the city during the daytime.

God's house is a house of prayer. It is also a place of healing where people can come and hear the Word of God and receive the touch, and receive the ministry, and receive the healing that God has for them. It is not to be a distraction. It is not to be an organization, a money-making industry that produces in order make God proud of us. It for the salvation of lives. For people who are struggling that come looking, not to be taken financially, but they look for the Spirit of God to touch them and heal them and bring them to a point of peace in their life. That is what church is for.

Let us close with prayer.