

Revelation Requires a Response
Matthew 21: 12-17
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Good Morning! You can turn in your Bibles to Matthew Chapter 21.

But before we dive into the text this morning, I just want to share an update. Charles and I, as you know, were in Portugal and Romania. And when we were in Portugal, it was a gathering of church leaders from all over the globe sharing different updates about what God is doing in different parts of the world.

And I have got to say, there is nothing short of a revival breaking out in the Middle East. It is unbelievable how many people are coming to faith in that region of the world.

Many of these countries were closed countries in that missionaries couldn't get into them, but what is happening, we heard from brothers in Europe, is that through the refugee crisis, the very people that missionaries couldn't reach because of a closed country are fleeing the persecution into churches throughout Europe. And thousands are coming to know Jesus as Lord and Savior.

It is remarkable what is happening in our world today. Yes. You cannot stop the Gospel. You cannot close a country to God. He will open it in His way. So it's remarkable.

There are two things I want to look at this morning: the events that occurred leading up to Jesus' crucifixion on Good Friday, the events that took place on Palm Sunday and the day after Palm Sunday and throughout the week leading up to Good Friday.

And in Matthew 21:12 where we are going to read in a moment, the second thing I want to look at is the challenge that Jesus uttered to His people that still rings true for His people today.

So by the end of this service when we walk out, that's our two goals, is to understand what led to Good Friday and also for those words that Jesus uttered to His people, to be uttered to His people again today.

Let's read from Matthew 21:12:

“Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.

“‘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.’’”

“The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them.

“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.

“‘Do you hear what these children are saying,’ they asked him.

“‘Yes,’ replied Jesus, ‘have you never read, “From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise”?’

“And he left them and went out to the city of Bethany, where he spent the night.”

What I want to look at this morning is the revelation of Jesus, the rebuke of Jesus and the response to Jesus.

Let’s start with the revelation of Jesus. The verses we just read took place the day after Jesus entered into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. But you have to understand that the Israelite community, the Jewish people, have been waiting for a Messiah for thousands of years, prophecies looking forward to this moment.

And when Jesus makes the journey to Jerusalem in preparation for the Passover Festival, countless thousands of others are arriving to Jerusalem at the same time.

So when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and was received with this glorious praise, everybody knew what was taking place. Everybody knew that it was a fulfillment of a prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 where Israel was told hundreds of years before it took place that its king would return to it riding on a donkey.

We read in the verses just before the ones we read that as He entered Jerusalem, it was a fulfillment of that prophecy where it says,

“See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey.”

So Jesus is received into Jerusalem with a multitude of people lining the road into Jerusalem, praising Him, shouting out, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” because they all recognized that this is the moment that the Messiah is arriving.

And so how is it that in just a few days later the very people that this King has come to reveal Himself to, a section of them hold a mock trial and sentence Him to be crucified?

What were the events that took place on Palm Sunday and the Monday and throughout the week that led to Jesus’ execution?

Well as we read these verses we now move into the rebuke of Jesus. He enters the temple area; the whole city is stirred because this great prophet has arrived in Jerusalem. And as He enters into the temple, certainly Jesus’ disciples who have been following Him for a few years, are probably pretty excited at this moment, probably thinking, “this is the time; we just rode in on a

donkey, everybody is excited, there is all this fanfare; Jesus is going to return the kingdom to Israel.”

They were waiting for a conqueror king and so they, being those who faithfully followed Jesus for a few years now, are probably looking forward to their position within the kingdom that He is certainly going to establish now.

What do you think those disciples thought when Jesus walks into the temple and starts to create a massive commotion as thousands of other people are pressing into the temple getting ready for the Passover festival?

Jesus walks in and starts to overturn the tables and the moneylenders, starts to drive out those who are selling animals for sacrifice. What has Jesus so bent out of shape? What has Him so disturbed with what is taking place in the temple?

The chief priests and the Sadducees were the stewards of the temple system and the purity laws pervaded Israel’s worship of God. These guys were meticulous in their observance of certain ways in which God established how He wanted to be worshipped.

And purity was the core value that Jewish society was structured around. But for a matter of convenience for the millions of people that were travelling great distances to worship at Jerusalem, it wasn’t reasonable for them to carry their animal sacrifice hundreds of miles, if not thousands of miles, to Jerusalem with them.

In the journey the animal might get a defect, might break its leg or something else that might happen. So what people would do who were making the pilgrimage to the Passover festival, they would take with them currency, their money, carry it to the temple at Jerusalem.

They would have to exchange their currency into the temple currency and then they would go and buy an animal from the people that were selling animals, bring that animal, present it to the priest, and then they would be allowed to make their offering.

But it was well known in Jesus’ day that this whole system, this whole market system that had been set up in the temple, had become corrupt. When you would exchange your currency into the temple currency, they would charge ridiculous rates to convert your funds.

And then you would go buy an animal and you would bring what that person sold to you as an animal without defect; you would bring it to the priest and the priest might look and go, “No, there is a defect here,” you would carry your animal back to the person who just sold it to you, and they said, “I sold it to you in perfect condition; there is no defect” ‘and all of a sudden you are out the money and you have to buy another animal.

And all of this was taking place in the Court of the Gentiles. God had made provision for those who weren’t Israelites by birth and wanted to worship the God of Israel, to have a place where they could come and worship in His temple and be welcome. And this whole marketplace was set up in the Court of the Gentiles.

So those who wanted to worship and have a place where they could express their devotion to God, it was filled with the sounds of animals, eliminating their ability to worship.

And certainly the market system that was corrupt at the core, the priests and the Sadducees who were in charge of temple worship and allowed this to take place, do you think that some of the priests and the Sadducees who were in charge of this gave priority placement of money exchange and the selling of animals to certain vendors that might line their pockets?

They were in on the take. They were taking advantage of people's desire to worship, turning the worship of God into a financial gain ministry. (We don't see any of that today, do we?)

Now God's house was to be a place for communion, a place of confession, a place of celebration, a place where the community came together and expressed their collective devotion to God. But it had become corrupt. God's name was defamed because of the actions of His priests and His people.

You see the actions of God's people either compliment, bring glory to His name, or they defame His name. And as Jesus walks into this scene as He has arrived in His king-like fashion, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9, first order of business is to go in and confront this corruption at the epicenter of the people of God's worship.

But Jesus utters a couple statements that I think, as we unpack them, will give us further insight into what is really happening amongst the priests and the leaders of the nation that eventually lead to His execution.

Jesus utters two statements to them as He is cleansing out the temple. He says, "My house will be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers."

Jesus has just employed a practice that was common amongst rabbis of his day. It was called stringing pearls. I would quote part of a Bible verse to you and you, being a scholar in the Scriptures, would connect the dots and go to where that verse is found and read the verses before and after it to really understand what the rabbi is saying to you.

This was common in Jesus' day. So when there are instances in the Gospels that Jesus quotes a verse to someone, as students of Scripture, it is important that we go to that quote and find out really what is happening in the context.

It was called stringing pearls. So Jesus has just strung a pearl with the religious leaders, the Sadducees, the chief priests. He has just dropped part of a verse – actually part of two verses – to them.

And they, being the Bible scholars they are, know exactly the verses that surround that and certainly we do today, right? You guys know where, "My house will be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers." We all know that that comes from Isaiah 56 (see I even have to look at my notes to remember where it comes from.)

It comes from Isaiah 56 and Jeremiah 7. Jesus has just strung two pearls together. And when we go look at those texts we get deeper insight into what Jesus is really saying to His people when He is overturning this market system.

So why don't we go to Isaiah 56. Isaiah 56:6 talks about the Gentile nations having a place to come.

“Foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant – this I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer.”

So there Isaiah is looking forward and he is prophesying that the Court of the Gentiles is to be filled with people who will come under the Covenant of God to His nation and celebrate and worship Him. And it is to be a house of prayer.

Now look at the next verses – in Verse 9 we read this:

“Come, all you beasts of the field, come and devour, all you beasts of the forest!

“Israel’s watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they cannot bark; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep.

“They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough. They are shepherds who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way, each seeks his own gain.

“‘Come,’ each one cries, ‘let me get wine! Let us drink our fill of beer! And tomorrow will be like today, or even far better.’”

Do you see what Jesus has said to the religious leaders, to Israel’s watchmen? “You guys are mute dogs. You lie around; you are lazy. You are dogs with mighty appetites; you never have enough. You just want more and more. Greed is at the core of who you are. You follow your own ways. You seek your own gain. You are selfish. You drink and all you think about is your own wants and desires.”

Jesus has rebuked them pretty severely.

In Jeremiah Chapter 7, the other part of His quote where He says, “You have made it a den of robbers,” we read in Jeremiah 7:9; it says this:

“ ‘Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, ‘We are safe’ – safe to do all these detestable things?’”

“‘Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching!’ declares the LORD.”

Skipping down to Verse 13:

“‘While you were doing all these things,’ declares the LORD, I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen; I called you, but you did not answer.’”

You see Jesus is stringing pearls and most of the Bible scholars would know exactly what He was saying to them.

These guys were living in such a way that they could allow all this corruption to take place, line their pockets with the profits of it, and take advantage of people who were seeking to worship God.

Israel’s watchmen had become corrupt. God’s name was defamed because of the actions of His people. And again and again they had been spoken to, God speaking to His watchmen. But they would not listen.

I always said to the youth at UrbanPromise when I worked there as a missionary, sin is never interested in a peer to peer relationship. It always presents itself that way as though it wants to be your friend, but sin is only ever interested in a master/slave relationship.

And this text gives us insight into the damaging way that sin can harden our hearts and make us calloused.

Now allow me to break from the text for a moment to just take Jesus’ statements and apply them to our own lives.

In 1 Peter 2:9, Peter refers to any believer as a royal priesthood. And as already observed in this text, the actions of God’s people either bring glory to His name or defame His name.

And so it makes me wonder, what do our actions tell the world about the God we worship? You don’t have to survey church history long to see that we are prone to the same practices that crept into the temple system within Jerusalem during Jesus’ day.

Those same things can creep into the church. If you survey church history you see the abuses of taking advantage of people’s desire to worship for the means of financial gain. You see immorality amongst church leaders; there are sensational stories that are posted about the things that happened amongst church leaders.

So let us not pretend that these things can’t happen in our own lives.

So my question to you this morning is, is there something in your life, in your temple, because we are told in the New Testament that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit; is there

something in your temple that Jesus wants to drive out, something that is robbing Him of His rightful place in your life?

Are we ever guilty of practising what I would call a “den of robbers spirituality” because in Jeremiah 7 he describes people who do as they wish, live as they please, engage in all kinds of immoral behavior, and think to themselves, “I am okay to do such things, I am going to be fine.”

This seems especially dangerous in my generation when the ethical implications of the Gospel are up for debate about everything. There seems to be this pervasive thought amongst Christianity that because Christ died and cleansed us from our sin and we are forgiven - I absolutely fundamentally believe that – but because that is true, we can live as we please and just come before Him and He won't really take note of what is going on in our lives, that we turn the Gospel into a license of taking advantage of His grace.

And Jesus stands there, as He did with His religious leaders of the day, and says to them, “Do you think that you can live as you please, do as you want, and I won't notice?”

Is there something in your life that is robbing God of His rightful place, robbing you of worshiping Him? Because when we allow access to these things in our temple, they start to crowd out the places of worship. What was supposed to be set apart for His purposes get filled with animals that are just bleating and a bunch a noise and a bunch of static, and then our communion with God is affected.

Jesus doesn't want to drive sin from the temple because He is a killjoy. He doesn't want to drive sin out of our lives because He doesn't want us to have any fun. He knows that it is robbing us of the true joy we would have in allowing Him to reign in every part of our lives. He doesn't convict us of sin to shame us; it is only ever to free us.

Left untended, sin hardens our minds and our hearts to the work of the Spirit. Sin creates callouses in our lives that rob God of having all of us. And in our generation we have seen examples of great church leaders fall into all kinds of immorality, all kinds of financial controversy.

But I guarantee you that the Spirit of God was speaking to those leaders again and again prior to the news line, that the Spirit of God was at work and Jesus was longing to drive those things out of their lives prior to it blowing up, just as He does in Jeremiah Chapter 7 says, “Do you think that you can sow these things and not reap a harvest that will lead to destruction?”

Jesus came to His people gentle, a king that is riding on a donkey, gently. But now He confronts the sin that they have allowed into the temple, the sinful practices of the priests. And how will His people respond to His rebuke?

A couple of weeks ago, as Charles has been going through Hebrews, he uttered a statement in Hebrews Chapter 2, where it says, “We must pay more careful attention to the things we have heard so that we do not drift away.”

And Charles said these words: “Revelation requires a response.”

When God has revealed something to you, it requires a response from you. And so what I want to look at in this text now is Jesus has revealed something to them, Jesus has rebuked them; how do they respond to His rebuke?

Look in Verse 14, the response of the people.

“The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them.”

Jesus enters this temple system as the king, as the long-awaited Messiah, overturns everything; starts to drive the sinful practices that have been taking advantage of the people, and those who are drawn to Him are the blind and the lame.

In Leviticus Chapter 21 [vs 18], according to the law,

“No man who has any defect may come near; no man who is blind or lame,” (I mean it specifies it) “disfigured or deformed” may come near to God.

So the blind and the lame were excluded from entering into the temple in the court of the women or the men who could go further in, let alone the priests who administer within the temple system or the high priest who goes into the Holy of Holies once a year.

So these guys were on the out. But they come to Jesus. They are drawn to Jesus because of what He is doing, because of His statements that have been uttered. And Jesus begins to heal them.

Now Leviticus says that no man who has any defect may come near to God, but it doesn't say that God can't come near to them.

And so that's the good news of Jesus. We are all blind. We are all defective. We are all lame. We had no access to God but God came in the person of Jesus and healed our blindness, healed our inability to walk out the life that God intended for us, opened the access to the Holy of Holies.

On Good Friday when Jesus died and He cried out, “It is finished!” and gave up His spirit, the temple curtain was torn in two. The curtain that blocked the way to the Holy of Holies was torn in two from top to bottom; not from bottom to top as though man were doing it; top to bottom because God was the One who was tearing open the way through the death of Jesus for us to have access to Him.

Jesus is uttering in a whole new covenant, a whole new way of relating to God. You see these guys who were in charge of the law, these guys who were in charge of the temple purity system; it was just a broken system.

No matter how hard you tried to be pure, the law would continually announce you unclean, impure. And the law was powerless to do anything to make any of us righteous.

All the law could do is remind us that we are guilty sinners.

But Jesus ushers in a whole new way of relating to God and heals our vision, gives us eyes so that we can see, heals our broken sinful existence. The blind and the lame are drawn to Jesus.

And the children - I love children – sometimes they are the most spiritually astute people you will ever meet – oftentimes more than us adults. We get too educated, right? And we start to lose our ways like the experts in the law, or the priests. We just start, you know, complicating everything with these theological musings. Children just accept what they see and start to praise God and they are running around crying out, “Hosanna to the Son of David!”

So the reaction and the response to Jesus’ revelation of the Messiah has come, His overturning of this whole temple system, His pointed rebuke that only the chief priests and the experts in the law probably understood, the blind and the lame and the children are worshiping and coming to Jesus. They are drawn to Jesus. And they are shouting out, “Hosanna to the Son of David!”

In contrast let’s look at the leaders’ response to what they have heard and seen, and in Verse 15 we see this:

“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...” delighted...

No, no, no, it doesn’t say that, right?

“They saw the error of their ways and they started to praise Jesus.”

No, it doesn’t say that, does it?

“They were indignant.”

They were furious. They were fuming. They were so angry they were seeing red because here these children are ascribing praise to Jesus on the temple mount, at the epicenter of the Jewish purity system. Where God’s name dwells, Jesus has the audacity to receive praise on the temple mount.

And these guys are furious. Now of course their indignation with Jesus is absolutely pure in its motivation, isn’t it? It has nothing to do with the rebuke of Isaiah 56 that He has just called them blind dogs, right, with ravenous appetites? Their indignation with Jesus has nothing to do with the fact that they are probably half in the bag, they’ve drunk so much wine and so much beer, right?

Their indignation with Jesus is because He is receiving praise and it's pure in its motivation. I mean they have serious theological concerns about the behavior of Jesus, don't they?

Do you see how sin blinds us, the plank it puts in our eyes? These guys are trying to strain out something in Jesus' life, trying to scratch at, pointing out some type of sin in His life or something that He is doing something wrong. They are indignant.

Now this is what I find absolutely dumbfounding. How can people who are experts in the law, priests who have devoted their whole life to sacrificial service, those who know their Bible better than anybody in this room – nobody knew the Old Testament like the priests. I mean these guys had it committed to memory almost. You quote a story, you talk about Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Ruth, anybody, Zephaniah, Zechariah, all the obscure things, you know, the parts of your Bible where it's not underlined and the pages are really like brand new because you have never read like, "Who's Habakkuk?" right?

These guys knew the Word. And how is it that those who devoted their whole life to studying the Word, the masters of divinity, the masters of theology, the masters of everything, not recognize the author of that Word?

I mean John 1:14 says,

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”

The One who wrote the book is standing in front of them performing miraculous signs and wonders. I mean He is healing the blind, enabling the lame to walk, so that they can for the first time in their life, run into the temple, something they would never be able to do. How is it that they don't recognize who Jesus is?

Explain it to me, somebody in this room, please! Because what I find so troubling about it is that you can memorize Scripture, you can study it, you can talk about it, but it doesn't mean you know Jesus.

That's alarming. That's disturbing. He could be standing right in front of you, speaking to you face to face as He did with them, and they don't recognize the Messiah that they have been longing for.

Sin callouses our heart and makes it so hard it affects every part of our lives. Not just the heinous sins that He describes in Jeremiah 7 or Isaiah 56, but even our theological sins, the areas in which we construct the type of God we want to worship and think that we can live as we please, do what we want, and that He won't take notice because we underline only certain verses in our Bible. And we amplify certain aspects of who He is.

But in a day and age where we theologically scrutinize all the ethical implications of what it means to be a Christian, there is something wrong with that.

Jesus has clearly revealed His right to rule, and their response to His revelation and His rebuke it that they are indignant. And so they come to Jesus and they say,

“Do you hear what these children are saying?”

And Jesus’ statement back to them is profound. Jesus says, “Yes,” and He says,

“Have you never read, ‘From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise.’?”

And then Jesus leaves because He knows what is going to happen. They will try and seize Him and crucify Him on the spot, because Jesus has just added another pearl to that stringing of pearls. He has quoted from Psalm Chapter 8:2.

And Psalm 8:2 says,

“From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.”

Picture that. These children are praising. He quotes that verse. They know how it ends. But what is even more profound is that Verse 2 of Psalm Chapter 8 is connected to Verse 1 of Psalm Chapter 8, which says this:

“O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.

“From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise.”

Do you see what Jesus has just done? Jesus has just said to the experts in the law who certainly would know this psalm, “The Lord you worship – “O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name” – the children will shout out praises to Him and He is standing right here.”

On the temple mount, at the epicenter of Jewish worship, Jesus stands and declares, “I am God among you, with you.”

And what is their response to this revelation? The religious leaders will spend the rest of the week looking for ways to trap Jesus in His words so that they can kill Him.

Sin has a hardening, hardening effect on our minds and on our hearts. And as we turn our attention to Easter weekend, let me close with this. We are going to sing a song in response. We all experience seasons in our life where sin creeps into the temple, where things start to take place in our lives and become more prominent and start to rob us of our communion with God.

Is there something that Jesus wants to drive out of your temple today? Is there an area of your life that is robbing Him of having His rightful place in your life?

Maybe you have been guilty of living as you please, doing as you want, thinking that He doesn't see or take notice.

And as in Jeremiah Chapter 7 He says, "Again and again I spoke to you but you weren't listening. I tried but you would not have it."

Maybe for 33 years, because Jesus had been coming to the temple for years; maybe for 33 years, He has observed something in your life that He wants to drive out. It's been there plaguing you, robbing you and robbing Him of having all of you.

Why don't we allow Him today to drive those things out of our lives, out of our temples, just as He did thousands of years ago, so that as we enter into the Easter season there is nothing robbing the worship, there is nothing cluttering up the way? Will we allow Him to do what He wants to do in us?

Let's bow our heads. Let's close our eyes.

I don't know what you are wrestling with this week, this month, this year, this decade. I know that as I prepared this message, God wanted to do things in my own life. As I said, we all experience seasons where sin creeps in and sets up in our temple.

I want to pray for you. And if you would say, "There is something that Jesus is drawing His attention to, there is something that is in my temple, that is robbing Him of having all of me, something that is getting in the way of my worship of Him," I ask that just now you would stand to your feet.

If you want Him to drive this out of your life, if you want to freely worship Him and allow Him to have access to all of you, stand and I will pray for you now and agree with you in prayer so that He can have His way.

Jesus never wants to do these things to shame us or to hurt us. He only wants what is best for us. He only wants to liberate us. He only wants to set us free.

And maybe today He is saying to you, "Again and again I spoke to you. May this be the day that you listen and allow Me to drive it out, allow Me to give you vision, allow Me to enable you to walk out the life to which I have called you."

For all those who are standing, you are not alone and it is a bold declaration to say, "Have Your way in me, Lord. Do what You want to do."

Let's pray together.

Father, I thank You for every person standing and they declare today before You, "Lord, for too long this thing has been in the temple," robbing them of their worship of You, getting in the way of their relationship with You.

Lord, we acknowledge before You in so many ways we drift, we get distracted and things seep into our lives, sins become habits, habits become strongholds. But just as You drove them out thousands of years ago at the temple, so we ask that You would drive them out of our temple today. Liberate us and set us free from the things that are robbing our complete worship of You. Drive them out. As our great high priest, restore our vision, make us clean, wash us of all of our impurities and sin.

And I pray for each person standing who has made that statement to you, Lord, that throughout this week, they would experience Your power at work, restoring their sight, restoring worship, replacing those sin-filled places with sanctified places, Lord, that they would be set apart for worship. Do in us what we are powerless to do ourselves and have Your way in our lives.