

# King Jesus Purifies His Temple

Matthew 21:12-17

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## **Introduction**

Last week we saw how Jesus openly presented Himself as the Messiah in the sight of all Israel.

- In the past, He had been very reticent to make it known that He was the Messiah because of the people's confusion about what the Messiah was to do,
  - They had no idea that as their Messiah, He would give Himself into the hands of His enemies to be crucified!
  - But once the time for that great sacrificial work to be accomplished had drawn near,
    - Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey colt,
      - just as Zechariah had prophesied of Him...
      - and He freely accepted the public shout of joy that He was the Messiah who had come to save.
      - The people in this hosanna shouting crowd still did not understand that He would be their passover sacrifice that year,
        - but it was necessary for Him to be publicly presented before He was made an offering for their sins and so He was...
          - not with pomp and ostentation, but lowly, riding on a donkey.
          - not with recognition by priests and rulers, but with only the acclaim of the common people.

This is what we looked at last week...

- This week, we come to see how He presents Himself as Messiah in the temple.
- Matthew 21:12-17 tells us how He entered in and found God's house in great disorder and how He took zealous action to reform the abuses He saw...
  - even overturning tables and driving out those who were buying and selling in the temple court of the Gentiles!
  - As I preach from this passage today, I want you to see three things:
    - First, I want you to see that the temple is all about access to God...
    - Second, I want you to see Jesus' zeal to keep clear the way of access to God...
    - Third, I want you to see that there are always some who find true access to Him, even in times when the way is darkened.

We will take up each of these in order... so first of all...

## **I. See that the temple is all about access to God.**

A. Jesus describes the temple in terms that make this clear...

1. After driving out the merchants from the temple, He quotes from Isa 56 to remind us what the temple is supposed to be...
  - In verse 13, we are told that He said:
    - Mat 21:13: "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer.'"
    - What does this mean: "A house of prayer?"
  - a. In the Old Testament times, God promised that He would live among His people...
    - In other words, He would be always accessible to them.
    - 1) When they lived in the wilderness, He had them build a moveable tent called the tabernacle.
      - This tent was pitched right in the middle of their camp.
      - It was called the tabernacle.
    - 2) Then, after Israel settled into the land and obtained rest from all their enemies,
      - God commanded them to build a house—a non-moveable dwelling—in the midst of their houses.
      - This house was called the temple.
        - It showed the people that God dwelt among them.
    - b. Because God dwelt among them, this meant that they access to Him...
      - 1) As Moses said in Deuteronomy 4, they were a nation that God "near to them for whatever reason they might call upon Him."
        - This was a reversal of the curse in the Garden of Eden when mankind was driven out of God's presence...
          - Now, God was showing them that He had come to dwell with them again.
        - God's house was called the house of prayer because it was here that the people could come to speak to God...
          - Under the word prayer, Jesus includes all aspects of their devotion... in other words, praise, prayer, offerings and confession

- 2) Solomon rejoiced in God's accessibility on the day the temple was dedicated...
  - a) In his prayer of dedication he spoke about God hearing his prayers and the prayer of the people that were directed toward the temple. He said:
    - 1 Kings 8:29-30: ""that Your eyes may be open toward this temple night and day, toward the place of which You said, 'My name shall be there,' that You may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place. "And may You hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear in heaven Your dwelling place."
  - b) And in the same prayer, he spoke about the temple as the place where they could find mercy when they had fallen under God's chastisement:
    - 1 Kings 8:33-34: "When Your people Israel are defeated before an enemy because they have sinned against You, and when they turn back to You and confess Your name, and pray and make supplication to You in this temple, "then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the land which You gave to their fathers."
- 3) Perhaps you will remember how Daniel, as a captive in Babylon, continued to rejoice in the temple as the way of access to God even after it had been torn down...
  - Each day He faced Jerusalem where the temple had once stood and prayed at the time of the morning and evening sacrifice.
  - He knew that the temple was all about God being accessible to His people.
  - He turned to the dust and rubble of God's house of prayer, remembering God's promise of access.
- c. Understand that as the house of prayer in this sinful world,
  - The temple was the one place in all the world where God manifestly connected with sinners.
  - I don't mean that this was only place from which one could pray,
    - but I mean that this was the one place where the true way of access to God was shown.

B. Let me explain how the temple provided that access...

1. The temple gave sinners access to God by setting forth Christ and His mediation in types and shadows.
  - a. You see, it is not a simple thing for sinners to have access to a holy God...
    - Sin has cut us off from God.

- Adam and all His descendents were driven from the Garden because together they had all fallen into sin...
  - We are polluted and defiled—unclean in the eyes of God and fit only for destruction if we should dare to approach Him.
- b. But at the temple,
- There were all sorts of cleansing rituals that were performed to enable sinners to come near.
  - There were washings and sacrifices offered by priests who themselves had to be washed and sanctified by the blood of bulls and goats.
- c. The temple made it absolutely clear that the Holy God could only dwell with sinners who had been cleansed...
- They had access to Him only through offerings that He had appointed.
  - In this way, God's holiness was preserved while at the same time,
    - God showed His acceptance of His people through the cleansing that He provided through the rituals of the temple.
2. These temple rituals set forth Jesus Christ as the One that would come to take away the people's sins...
- a. This is why it was so important that they be conducted strictly according to God's prescription...
- To deviate from the proper order would distort what the temple was portraying of Christ...
- b. God also made it clear that the offerings and rituals were not themselves the final solution to the problem of access,
- but only figures that pointed to Christ...
    - 1) This was evident because they were offered again and again, showing that they did not actually accomplish the required cleansing...
    - 2) And because God did not allow the people to have access to the holiest place even in the temple,
      - showing that the way of access was not yet fully made known or accomplished.
- c. It was Christ alone who would make the offering of Himself by which we would have true access to God.
- All the rituals and ceremonies in the temple pointed to what He would do when He came to give sinners access to our Holy Creator.

C. Now that Jesus has come, we no longer have a temple made with men's hands...

1. Jesus has come as our true priest and has offered Himself as the sacrifice that actually accomplishes the cleansing of sinners who wish to approach God...

- He has opened the way of access for us.
  - The Old Testament rituals were useful before He came so that the people could rest in the cleansing that God had then promised, but had not yet accomplished.
  - We, on the other hand, look back to what Jesus did.

2. Although in both cases the way of access is by faith,

a. For them it was faith in Christ promised in what was still a shadowy way at the temple...

- For us it is faith in Christ proclaimed by the preaching of the gospel...

b. In other words, it is still the responsibility of the leaders of God's people to clearly set forth the way of access to God...

- only the method has changed...
  - In the Old Testament, it was through the rituals at the temple...
  - In the New Testament, it is through the preaching of the gospel.

c. In both cases,

- the leaders God appoints to present His way have a tremendous responsibility to be clear about how God is approached.
- In both the Old and New Testaments, God's house can be called the house of prayer...
  - In the Old Testament, His house or temple was the place where sacrifices were offered by a succession of priests in a temple made with men's hands...
  - In the New Testament the house of prayer is all those places His people assemble under the preaching of the gospel...
    - In both cases, it is all about sinners gaining access to God through Christ.

TRANS> That is the first thing I want you to see from this passage...

**II. Secondly, I want you to see Jesus' zeal to keep the way of access clear and undistorted.**

A. Jesus was incensed when He went to the temple at Jerusalem because the leaders were hindering instead of encouraging access to God!

1. Jesus accuses them of changing the temple from a house of prayer to a den of thieves!
  - a. As we have seen, the temple was supposed to be the place where the people found the way to communion with God...
    - Where Christ promised was set forth through types and shadows that cleansed them from their sins so they could pray to God.
  - b. But the wicked priests and leaders and leaders of Jesus' day had turned the temple into a way of fleecing God's people—of robbing them!
    - Indeed, God had appointed that the priests should live off of the tithes and offerings that were brought to the temple...
      - He provided well for them...
      - But this was not enough for these wicked men!
2. They had set up a wicked market place right in the temple...
  - a. Spaces were rented out in the court of the Gentiles for the selling of animals to be offered as sacrifices...
    - and spaces were rented out to moneychangers who, for a fee, exchanged foreign currency for the money of Tyre which was the only money that was accepted for offerings at the temple.
    - These were indeed good and necessary services that should indeed have been offered around the city when the crowds came up to worship...
      - There were many currencies, so money changers were needed...
      - And there were many who could not easily bring their own animals on the journey to Jerusalem and might wish to buy them at Jerusalem...
        - It was all well and good to provide these services.
  - b. But the priests had joined up with the sellers of these sacrifices and with these money changers and had made into a way of wickedly increasing their wealth!
    - As a worshipper, you would bring your offering to be examined by the priest.
      - He would look at it and determine that it was unfit for offering to God.
      - He would direct you to purchase an approved animal from the merchants in the temple court.
    - Then, when you approached them, they would send you to the money changers to get the proper currency.
      - You would be charged an unreasonable fee for the exchange of money.

- Then you would go back to purchase the “approved animal” and would be charged an exorbitant fee for that!
  - The profits would then be divided between the merchants and the priests—who should not have had any profit from these services!
    - The people knew what was going on and with derision called the temple market the Bazaar of the High Priest!
    - They knew that he was back of all this!
3. On top of this, there was the simple fact that all this business was going on right in the temple court.
- a. Instead of it being a place of worship,
    - it was a place where haggling and the clanking of coins was heard, not to mention the noise of the animals.
  - b. Such things should not have been done in the temple.
    - The temple was the place where people were to consider the fact that God was pleased to cleanse them from their sins so that they could have communion with Him!
      - Instead, it had become a marketplace!
      - They had made the house of prayer into a den of thieves!
        - They completely forgot about leading the people to rejoice in the access they had to a holy God who cleansed them from sin.
- B. But brothers and sisters, things have not changed much even though the temple is no more.
1. The Apostle Paul spoke against men who made merchandise of the gospel in his day.
    - a. Though he often refused to receive compensation for his ministry, he fully approved the support of ministers of the gospel...
      - but he spoke out strongly against those who preached the gospel for gain.
      - In-as-much as they preached the gospel, he rejoiced,
        - but in-as-much as they perverted it, he raged against them.
    - b. He warned about those teachers that would come along and tell people what they wanted to hear instead of telling them the truth...
      - They would try to gain a greater following by telling lies!
        - He spoke of those preachers that would come with a message that appears to those who have itching ears.

- He saw that wicked church leaders would forever find ways to make merchandise of the gospel.

TRANS> And so it has been in the history of the church

2. At the reformation, wicked popes and priests were very creative in finding ways to fleece the people of God...
  - Martin Luther protested against the sale of indulgences...
    - a. These were very appealing.
      - The people were taught that by purchasing indulgences,
        - they could buy their deceased relations out of purgatory—an imaginary place of suffering!
      - They were also taught that if they wanted to sin,
        - they could buy an indulgence and obtain forgiveness for themselves!
    - b. The Pope was behind all this and sent out his agents in place of ministers of the gospel to sell these indulgences, promising them great commissions...
      - Instead of teaching the people to rejoice in Christ as the way of access to God—and preaching about Him...
        - They taught the people to rejoice in indulgences as the way of forgiveness.
        - It was very similar to what the priests at Jerusalem were doing...
          - Instead of focusing on Christ promised, they focused on the sacrifices that pointed to Him.
3. But now the protestant churches have fallen into similar error!
  - a. When they began, they emphasised that worship should be conducted only according to the word of God...
    - Thus preaching was restored to its central in the worship of God as God appointed...
      - And the sacraments were returned to their primitive forms without all the additions.
      - The people were taught to focus on Christ and what He had done instead of on what they were doing to worship God.
        - They were taught to enjoy access and favour with God instead of trying to win it by their own deeds or by their offerings.
  - b. But what a multitude of errors there are today!



- 1) In the name of evangelism, there has been a huge marketing movement that has attempted to market the church to the please unbelievers.
  - Instead singing psalms that speak about God's whole character,
    - the people are consulted to find out what they want to sing.
  - Instead of preaching the whole counsel of God,
    - the people are given therapy sessions about how to reduce stress...
    - or political talks about how to gain control of the nation and have ones rights recognised...
  - And the medium of preaching is changed to television style interviews or dramatic presentations or music concerts.
  
- 2) In all this, the whole character of God has been reshaped to suit the consumer's tastes...
  - Instead of presenting Him as a holy God who graciously accepts sinners through the offering of His Son...
    - He is presented as an all accepting God who requires no cross.
      - The whole concept that God is to be feared is almost completely lost!
      - The message has been so distorted that most people ask why God would not accept them instead of asking how God could accept them!
        - You see how far we have fallen!
    - He is an image fashioned according to the popular opinions of men and women...
      - He is not the God of the Bible who dwells in absolute holiness and graciously gives us access through His Son.
  
- 3) The Church, the Temple of God, is turned into a den of thieves.
  - The very things that go in the name of God are things that should never be tolerated in God's house!

C. Jesus opposition to these abuses is very strong!

1. With holy indignation, we are told in verse 12 that He drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple!
  - a. We are told that He turned over the tables of the money changers and the seats of those that sold doves!
    - Some have viewed this as one of His greatest miracles...

- For the temple police were on duty.
  - Jesus was unarmed and completely outnumbered...
    - Yet, no one dared to touch Him...
    - It would seem that they were in awe of Him.
      - Like the lions in Daniel's den, not one dared to attack our Lord!
- b. Oh that we might have such an awe of Him today!
- He has not changed at all...
    - The holy fire in His eyes that kept any man from resisting Him is still in His eyes today.
    - If only we could see Him, we would not be so cavalier about our worship.
      - He will take action against all who distort His worship just as He took action when He entered His temple as the Lord of the covenant.
2. Surely you can see why He took such strong action!
- a. The temple was designed to represent Jesus and the work that He was going to do—just as the church designed to represent the work He has done.
- Jesus' whole being as the Son of God was wrapped up in this great work!
  - He was preparing to offer Himself as that sacrifice that God required for the remission of sins!
    - that one sacrifice that was to be set forth and celebrated in the temple that gives access to sinners.
    - that sacrifice that would cause this mighty lion who awed the temple police and the high priests to tremble with anguish and to sweat drops of blood!
    - He knew how important His work was!
- b. Jesus was doing this because of His zeal to honour His Father and to show forth His holiness and grace,
- His justice that demands so great a sacrifice for sin and His mercy that provides so great a sacrifice.
    - Jesus was absolutely dedicated to providing this glorious way of access to God!
    - His whole soul and being was bent on it...

- c. And here He finds all that He was about to do, all that He was so passionate about...
  - grossly misrepresented by the very people who were appointed to set it forth!
  - This is why the regulative principle of worship is so important...
    - The regulative principle is that principle taught in scripture that we are not to add or take away from what God has appointed for our worship.
      - In NT worship, preaching is to be central.
        - There is to be prayer and the singing of psalms,
        - There is to be the sacrament of baptism and the Lord's Supper.
    - Worship that deviates from God's appointed way is worship that always misrepresents Jesus and our way of access to God through Him.
      - If our worship is not right, nothing else can really be right.

TRANS> Jesus burns with holy indignation against all who would pervert His way!

- 3. And my brothers and sisters who love Him,
  - a. You ought to burn with holy indignation against all the abuses of the gospel that are around you today!
    - There is too much indifference about these things!
      - You ought to weep that the truth is not presented to God's people...
      - You ought to burn with anger against those who distort the truth for gain.
  - b. I do not say that you should go out as the Messiah did and turn over their tables and drive them out...
    - 1) God has not called private citizens to do such things...
      - But you have been given a tongue to speak against these abuses and you ought to do so...
      - God forbid that you should support such things...
        - I know a lot of believers that go to churches that water down the gospel as if it doesn't matter.
      - If you are a husband and a father, you should see to it that such things matter in your home...
        - that you lead your family in truth and permit no base thing in your house...

- If you are an elder, you need to take action by opposing the ordination of men that will water down the gospel,
- and by standing up against them if they should come to the congregation over which you have been given oversight.
- I know I speak about this often, but that is because the NT speaks about it so often...
  - and because even still, God's people continue to be lax about these things.

TRANS> May the worship of God be something that matters very much to you!

2) It certainly mattered to Jesus!

- He drove out both the buyers and the sellers.
  - It was not just those who sold, but also those who bought that He stood against...
- He was incensed that the work the Father had given Him to do, the work that glorifies the Father more than any other, the work that brings men into communion with the Father
  - was being grossly distorted by those who were supposed to be clearly setting forth that work.
  - His judgement on such will be very severe!
    - He has not changed—and sadly, neither have we!

TRANS> But be encouraged!

**III. There were some in this dark time that found true access to God through Jesus, and there always will be some!**

- This is the third thing I want you to see...
  - A. First of all, learn from our text that those who saw their need of Jesus found access to God through Him in these dark times...
    - 1. These are mentioned in verse 14:
      - Mat 21:14: "Then the blind and lame came to Him in the temple and He healed them."
      - a. These were persons who clearly saw their need of Jesus, and so they came to Him.
      - b. They are a picture for us of those who see their need of the salvation Jesus offers even though they live in dark times.

2. Dark times come when the leaders of God's people no longer clearly set forth Christ as the way of access to God...
  - a. Like the Chief priests and scribes, they find themselves in competition with Jesus and even envy Him.
    - Instead of rejoicing that He has come to bring us the salvation we so desperately need and presenting Him to the people...
    - They hinder the way of truth.
  - b. If only they could see—or would admit—how much they need Him, how different they would be!
    - 1) It's very hard to be envious toward the one who comes to bring you what you desperately need...
      - You are not envious of a physician who has the skill and the desire to heal you, are you?
      - You do not try to ignore the one who comes across the desert to bring you water when you are dying of thirst, do you?
    - 2) If they could see how much they need His salvation, they would point to Him and say,
      - "There is our wonderful Saviour! Come to Him and find forgiveness of sin and eternal life!"
      - "He is the way to be reconciled with God."
  - c. When the leaders do not present Jesus in this way,
    - Many of the multitude go astray—
    - They do not see their need of Him either.
3. But the blind and lame represent to us those who clearly **did** see their need of Him.
  - a. They knew that the chief priests and the scribes could not heal them...
    - They knew that no matter what the leaders said about Jesus, He could...
    - And so they came to Him.
  - b. I tell you, it will not matter to you what popes or bishops or scholars or priests or anyone else says if the Holy Spirit once shows you your need of salvation.
    - You will see that there is no one else that can possibly save you but Him...
    - And you will come to Him, even in those darkest times, and be saved...
      - Who else has a sacrifice that can wash away your sin?

TRANS> So first see that the needy find access to God through Jesus in dark times...

B. Secondly, see that even little children found access to God through Jesus.

1. That's right, there praises were acceptable to God.
  - Jesus says so...
  - a. They were going about in the temple repeating what had been said of Jesus during His triumphal entry...
    - "Hosanna to the Son of David."
      - 1) By calling Jesus "the Son of David,"
        - They were acknowledging Him to be the Messiah...
      - 2) And by saying Hosanna,
        - They were acknowledging Him as the One who had come to save them.
    - b. When the envious scribes and High Priests heard them, they were indignant...
      - 1) That's just the way it always is in dark times...
        - If you are confessing Jesus and publicly praising Him, the leaders will regard you with contempt.
        - Now of course they would never say that they are opposed to praise—
          - They would say that they always encourage it...
          - But if you praise Jesus in truth—especially pertaining to those truths that they are opposing and denying...
            - they will regard you as a babbler.
            - They will sneer at you and treat you as an ignorant fool who knows nothing...
      - 2) See how they speak to Jesus...
        - "Do you hear what these are saying?"
          - As if to say,
            - "Surely if you heard, you would not allow it to continue"!

TRANS> But look brothers and sisters!

2. Jesus fully accepts their praise!

- a. He says, “Yes...” Yes, I hear them!
  - He knows what they are saying...
  - He knows and He is pleased!
  - He accepts the worship of these weak, ignorant little ones...
  
- b. He accepts their praise in the place of the wicked leaders who ought to have been leading in the praise...
  - To these leaders He says,
    - v. 16: Have you never read “Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise.”
  - See how Jesus holds these leaders in contempt who hold His true worshippers in contempt.
    - He mocks these scholars—“Have you never read Psalm 8?”
  
- 3. Brothers and sisters what an encouragement this is for you when proud Christians mock at your worship!
  - a. Let them mock!
    - Do they think it silly that you confess Jesus as the only way of salvation?
    - Do they think it silly that you believe He created the world in six days?
    - Do they think it silly that you believe in a literal Hell?
    - Do they think it silly that you sing psalms without instruments?
    - Do they think it silly that you still hold preaching as central to worship?
  
  - b. Do they make you feel small and insignificant?
    - Well be encouraged—
      - Jesus accepted the praises of little children when the leaders of His people would not praise Him...
      - He said that God’s praise was perfected in them!
  
  - c. Our God will always have His praise...
    - If not from those appointed to lead, He will have it from children.
  
- C. In the very darkest hour, the Lord always raises up a people to praise Him and to see their need of Him...
  - 1. What a mighty force such little persons were in Israel when they praised Jesus in the temple...

- These little people were the ones that carried the truth into all the world when they leaders refused to do it!
  - God raised up fishermen and former tax collectors to be His worshippers.
2. And so it is for you who worship God today...
- Do you find few companions?
  - Do we seem to be such an obscure little company?
  - Let me tell you...
    - If you are worshipping God in truth through Jesus Christ,
      - Your worship is highly pleasing to God!
      - Let the popes have the gilded altars and their processions and their long robes, their candles and their big paper hats...
      - Let the scribes have their PhDs and their books and their great names...
      - Let the marketers have their crowds to swoon to their music and enjoy their productions...
        - If you have praise that is accepted by God,
          - you have more than all of them put together!
          - In the very darkest times, the LORD will always have a people to praise Him through His Son.
            - May you all be found in that number.
3. And further to this, let me say to you children...
- May God make you strong to grow up in their house of the Lord to be carry on His true praise into the next generation.
  - May God use you to be His instruments to carry His truth when others forsake it.
  - Those who only hold to a part of it and cast off a part of their true confession as irrelevant do what they can to bury a part of God's truth
    - I pray especially for some of you boys among us...
    - The church needs young men that will be strong and zealous for the gospel.
      - May He make such men out of you!
      - I have been disappointed by the weakness of so many young men that grow up in Christian homes and have no back bone...
        - no zeal for righteousness...
        - no strength to lead their homes in the way of Christ though dark times.
    - Surely our hope is in God that He will raise up such men for His glory!