

*Grandpa walked into the family room and found his little grandson, Jeffrey, standing up in his playpen, crying.*

*He looked so pitiful, standing there in his little baseball T-shirt and diaper. His face was red and tear-stained from crying. When Jeffrey saw his grandpa, his face lit up in a way that tugged at the old man's heart. Jeffrey reached up his chubby little hands and said: "Out Papa, out!"*

*What grandpa could resist such a plea? Not this one! He walked over to the playpen and reached down to lift his little buddy out of his captivity and distress, but then – "the law" stepped into the room.*

*Jeffrey's mother walked out of the kitchen with a dishtowel in her hand and spoke sternly. "No, Jeffrey! You are being punished. You have to stay in your playpen! Leave him right there, Dad."*

*Now what's a grandpa to do? His grandson's tears and reaching little hands tore at him deeply – but he didn't want to interfere with a mother's discipline.*

*He couldn't stand staying in the same room with the boy, reading his newspaper and pretending to not care, but nor could he walk out the door without feeling like a betrayer to his little buddy. What could he do? Well, love found a way.*

*Since Grandpa couldn't take Jeffrey out of the playpen, he leaned over, did some rearranging to make room, and climbed on in with Jeffrey. He said, "If you're in the playpen, I'm in the playpen with you. So, what's your sentence Jeffrey? How long are we in for?"*

We are focusing on the last week of Christ – the last week of His earthly ministry. We began with the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, where Jesus rides into the capitol city, fulfilling Old Testament prophecy as only the true King and Messiah could do. The city was in an uproar with His arrival, it was quaking with excitement, for the people had certain expectations of Jesus – expectations that He would deliver them from their enemy, from their problems, and establish His earthly kingdom right then and there. That's what they expected, but that's not what they got – for instead of ascending to the throne to reign, Jesus must first be lifted up on a cross to redeem.

Now, make no mistake – Jesus is in control, forcing the hand of the religious leaders to act against Him during Passover, and to turn up the intensity, we come to

the second event that occurred during this last week of Christ – the cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem where I would like to think, maybe in a symbolic way, Jesus is making room for us.

The cleansing of the temple happens on Monday, the day after the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. I say it's Monday because in a parallel passage, **Mark** explains that once Jesus came into the city on Sunday – He enters the temple and takes notice of everything that is going on there, then with His disciples in tow, Jesus makes His way to the village of Bethany, which was only a few miles away, presumably to stay overnight with friends Martha, and Mary, and Lazarus.

So, let's pick up from where we left off in **Matthew 21**, beginning with **verse 12**.

**<sup>12</sup> And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. <sup>13</sup> And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a robbers' den."**

Before we dig into this passage, I really need to set the stage. As you know, it's time for Passover, where devout Jews from all over the world have descended on the city of Jerusalem – multiplying the population probably four to five times its normal size. Two million people, maybe more are there to take part in this seven-day celebration to commemorate the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, and in this celebration somewhere in the neighborhood of 250,000 lambs and goats will be sacrificed at the temple – one for each family, and that's not including doves and pigeons for the poor.

As you might imagine, it was really hard to travel from a long distance with the live animals needed for sacrifice, and so instead of bringing animals on their journey, it was much easier just to carry money and to purchase the animals in Jerusalem before arriving at the temple. In principle – on paper, that seemed to be a good idea, it was helpful and convenient until the whole thing was turned into a version of organized crime by the religious leaders, and let me explain.

Annas who still bore the title of high priest, his sons, and his son-in-law Caiaphas – the current high priest who was put in place by the Romans, were greedy and corrupt, and under the guise of worship, they preyed upon others to become filthy rich. As you may know, the temple in Jerusalem was sectioned by several inner courts reserved solely for the Jews and an outer court for the Gentiles called the "*Court of the Gentiles*". The Court of the Gentiles was the large open area, the

outermost courtyard, and the only area on the temple grounds were non-Jews, and foreigners, and outcasts, and those considered unclean could learn about and worship the one true God. The Court of the Gentiles was as far as they could go for worship in the temple, but at this point, their only place of worship had been turned into nothing more than a strip mall.

Vendors, who purchased franchise rights from the Jewish religious leaders, were allowed to set up their businesses in the Court of the Gentiles and they sold their products such as food, and souvenirs, salt and wine and oil, and of course – sacrificial animals. It was really profitable, especially during the week of Passover, and whatever the vendors sold, they had to give up a percentage to the religious leaders who would take their cut, and then divvy up the rest amongst the other priests in their crime syndicate.

**So, what would happen if you brought your own animal for sacrifice?** Well, before the sacrifice, the animals would be thoroughly inspected for blemishes, and if the animals were considered unacceptable for sacrifice, the priests would force you to buy one of their pre-approved animals, at a very steep price, from a vendor inside the courtyard.

But, that's not all. They also had **money changers** in the courtyard. Their job was to take the currency that these people were using, typically Greek and Roman currency, and exchanging it for "acceptable" money so they could give their offerings or pay a temple tax – a tax that every Jewish man was expected to pay every year. Now of course, the temple would only take approved currency – and you can see where this is going. The money changers were requiring people to pay huge surcharges to make these exchanges of money, and of course, the religious leaders would get their cut.

So, under the guise of worship, the Jewish religious leaders had created a gouging and profiteering scheme – it was absolutely criminal, and **isn't it ironic that the Jews hated tax collectors like Matthew, and yet in the name of worship, the Jewish religious leaders were robbing their own people blind?**

Anyway, Jesus walks into the courtyard probably through the eastern gate, and this is where you cue up the sound track to the movie *Jaws*.

Immediately, Jesus goes to work. He drives out the vendors and their customers from the courtyard, tables and chairs are being flung all over the place, animals are scattering, doves and pigeons are flying off, and money is rolling all over the

ground. Jesus goes in and He demolishes the entire strip mall – rejecting what He hates – their version of worship.

If you recall, just the day before, Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem on a young donkey and the people proclaimed Him as the King, and they expected Him to deliver them from the Romans – to just walk over to the *Antonia Fortress* – a Roman army garrison and clean them out – **but what do we see here?** Oh, there is some cleaning going on, but it's not the Romans – it's His own house that's being cleaned.

The Apostle Peter spoke on this very thing in **1 Peter 4:17** where he said,

*For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, **what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?***

Where would Jesus go first if He came to America? **To Washington D.C? To Wall Street? To Las Vegas? To Hollywood?** Nope, He would go directly to the churches – to those who claim to worship Him. You see – for Jesus, the Romans were not the main problem – God's people were. God had made room for them, but they did not make room for God.

Now, for some, what Jesus is doing here might seem really out of character for Him. Jesus is often portrayed as nothing but meek and mild, but let me remind you that this Jesus who healed the sick, who fed the thousands, and loved the unlovable, is the same Jesus who told the religious leaders their father was the devil. He called them a brood of vipers.

Yes, Jesus was meek and mild when encountering broken people, but He was hell, fire, and brimstone when dealing with the self-righteous who actually turned people away from God. Jesus is the "*Lamb of God*", but please do not forget that He is also called the "*Lion of Judah*" for a very good reason.

So, there were likely thousands of people in the courtyard, **but have you noticed that no one tried to stop Him?** Maybe Jesus was flexing a little bit of His God muscle as He was flinging tables across the courtyard and they were scared of Him, or maybe the people knew they were completely busted. Jesus knew it, they knew it, and there is nothing they could do about it.

Hopefully, you can see why Jesus takes this necessary course of action because the temple was supposed to be a place where God's people could draw close to Him

and demonstrate their devotion, but instead the temple was completely corrupted by empty and false worship. God was not pleased with His people, their hearts were far from Him, and things needed to change.

You know, getting a little personal, **doesn't God do this very thing in our own lives?** God calls us His own, and He enters our hearts, and the cleansing starts. From the inside out, God deliberately and carefully goes from room to room in our lives to do a little “*remodeling*” if you will. He exposes our self-centered agendas and He reveals our empty and meaningless worship where we just go through the motions, and for our own good, He flips over the tables and the chairs of sin – disrupting our lives, frustrating us – telling us that things need to change.

*A young man named John received a parrot as a gift. The parrot had a bad attitude and an even worse vocabulary. Every word out of the bird's mouth was rude, obnoxious and laced with profanity.*

*John tried and tried to change the bird's attitude by consistently saying only polite words, playing soft music and anything else he could think of to “clean up” the bird's vocabulary. Finally, John was fed up and he yelled at the parrot. The parrot yelled back. John shook the parrot and the parrot got angrier and even ruder.*

*John, in desperation, threw up his hands, grabbed the bird and put him in the freezer. For a few minutes the parrot squawked and kicked and screamed. Then suddenly there was total silence. Not a peep was heard for over a minute. Fearing that he'd hurt the parrot, John quickly opened the door to the freezer.*

*The parrot calmly stepped out onto John's outstretched arms and said “I believe I may have offended you with my rude language and actions. I'm sincerely remorseful for my inappropriate transgressions and I fully intend to do everything I can to correct my rude and unforgivable behavior.”*

*John was stunned at the change in the bird's attitude, and as he was about to ask the parrot what had caused such a dramatic change in his behavior, the bird continued, **“May I ask what the turkey did?”***

So, for these turkeys in the temple, Jesus is making some changes, and He explains why,

**“My house shall be called a house of prayer; but you are making it a robbers' den.”**

Jesus is quoting **Jeremiah 7:11**, which is a verse they would have absolutely remembered as soon as He said it. A **robbers' den** was a place where thieves would hide out for safety – like a cave, and likewise, these people thought they could come into the temple, do whatever they wanted in the name of religion, all the while assuming they were safe from God's judgment. They thought they were safe in the temple even though they had forsaken and abandoned the God of the temple, and when Jesus said the words "**My house**" – that's exactly what He means.

It's the Lord's house – it's His house, and in a subtle way, Jesus is declaring that He is God with the authority of God to cleanse His own house. God's house should be a **house of prayer** – a place to seek His face, a place to talk with God from the heart, a place to acknowledge one's absolute dependency upon Him – a place to praise and worship God for who He is and what He has done – a place to act in faith according His Word. That wasn't happening at the temple, it had become religion without relationship, and Jesus needed to clean His house.

Well, Jesus is not done in the temple, and once clean – and I'm not saying tidy because a Jesus bomb just when off in there – but clean, He takes the opportunity to show the proper use of it.

Let's continue on with **verse 14** where we are told,

**And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.**

After all the commotion, after this very public and deliberate remodeling scene, we are told that the blind, the lame, the crippled, the handicapped – those the Jews considered unclean and cursed of God, those normally shunned and excluded – "*those people*" come into the Court of the Gentiles to see Jesus.

They came to the temple for the right reason – to seek God and to come into His presence, and sure enough, God was much closer to them than they could have ever imagined, He was right there in their midst, and they were not driven away like the others.

This is what the Lord wanted in His temple all along. He wanted the religious leaders to care about their people, to serve and minister to them, to show compassion, but instead they abused their people, and so Jesus hit them where it hurts – in their pocket books.

Well, Jesus knows what's coming. Towards the end of the week, on Friday, He will be rejected by His own people. The Jews will crucify their King and Messiah, they will cut Him off, and as a consequence, the church age will be ushered in, and as I said earlier, maybe in a symbolic way, knowing what's coming, Jesus cleared the temple to make room for us.

So, none of this goes unnoticed – how could it, and beginning with **verse 15**, Matthew tells us this,

**<sup>15</sup> But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they became indignant <sup>16</sup> and said to Him, “Do You hear what these children are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise for Yourself?’” <sup>17</sup> And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.**

This is amazing. The Jewish religious leaders are furious – not so much for what Jesus has done, but for the praise that's being focused directly at Him. Jesus did some amazing and **wonderful things** – they saw these miracles up close and personal for themselves – the blind can see, the lame can walk, the deaf can hear, but you know what – it meant nothing to these religious leaders because these broken people meant nothing to them.

To these religious leaders, what makes them angry is to hear children in their innocence, probably young boys experiencing their very first Passover in Jerusalem recognize Jesus for who He truly is – **the Son of David** – the Messiah who came to save. The religious leaders wanted Jesus to stop these children, to reject their words of praise, but Jesus let them continue for they were speaking the truth and focused on Him.

*Lou Little, the former football coach at Columbia University, had a guy on his team who didn't play very well, but who had a spirit that lifted the morale of the entire squad. Coach Little was proud of the boy and marveled at how he and his father would walk arm and arm around the campus after the football games. The boy's father died unexpectedly and after he returned from the funeral, the boy asked if he could play in the game on Saturday. He said he wanted to play for his dad.*



*The coach thought he would let him start the first few minutes, then replace him with a regular player, but to the surprise of every one, the boy played the entire game. He played 60 hard minutes of inspired football.*

*After the game the coach sought the boy out and asked, “What got into you out there?”*

*The boy replied, “Do you remember how my dad and I used to walk around arm-in-arm after the game? Well, he didn’t want people to know – but he was totally blind. This afternoon was the first time he ever saw me play football!”*

For this boy, his heart was focused upward – his face was turned to heaven – he was all in – and it showed. I read a devotion some time ago where the writer said, “The hardest thing to do as a Christian is to obey God, and yet the easiest thing to do is to obey God – as soon as you decide He is God.

**Ultimately, isn’t that the heart of the matter?** God made room – He made room for us – not to simply walk through the motions of religion but to engage us in a real and personal life-changing relationship. God made room for you – **have you made room for Him?**

Source Material:

The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Walvoord & Zuck

D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984).

Stuart K. Weber, Matthew, vol. 1, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000).

Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996).

John F. MacArthur Jr., The MacArthur Bible Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005).

Charles R. Swindoll, Matthew 1–15, vol. 1A, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2020).

D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984).

Jon Courson, Jon Courson’s Application Commentary (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003).

Enduring Word – David Guzik