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### Sermon Summary #32

#### “Who is this ‘Jesus’? Messianic King, Enemy of Religion, Healer of the Sick” Mark 11:1-19; Matthew 21:1-17

Try to envision yourself as best you can in the first century, around 30 a.d. You are a young Jewish boy or girl, living with your family in the city of Alexandria, Egypt. The time has come for you to make your first visit to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. During the course of your journey your father once again tells you the story that Jewish fathers have been telling Jewish sons and daughters for centuries. It is the story of what happened in Egypt on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month Nisan, many, many years ago.

The people of Israel were at that time in slavery in Egypt, but God was about to intervene to set them free. On the night that would come to be known as Passover, “the angel of death” swept through the land, killing the first born in Egypt. But death “passed over” those homes where the sacrificial blood of the lamb had been applied to the doorposts. And now here you are, centuries later, traveling with your parents to Jerusalem to celebrate that glorious deliverance.

“But daddy, where will we get a lamb or a goat to sacrifice in Jerusalem?” “Don’t worry,” your father replies, “there will be many for sale in Jerusalem when we arrive.”

What you as yet do not know, indeed could not know, is that after the events of the coming week the annual tradition of securing a lamb for Passover would never again carry the same meaning it once had. Something was happening that week which would **forever transform** the significance of this Jewish festival.

Something else you couldn’t have known is that a man named Jesus, together with his disciples, was making his own plans for entering the city. At that moment Jesus dispatched two of his disciples into the village. Their task is clearly defined in vv. 2-3. In case you’re wondering, the mother donkey was probably brought along in order to induce her offspring to cooperate.

But why all the fanfare about a donkey? After all, it wasn’t customary for pilgrims to enter Jerusalem for the Passover riding a donkey or any other animal. The final stage of the journey was always completed on foot. The answer is found in **vv. 4-7** . . . There Matthew alludes to a famous prophecy found in **Zechariah 9:9** – “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

By securing a donkey and making his entry into Jerusalem in this altogether unconventional way **Jesus is claiming as clearly and boldly as he can to be Israel’s Messiah**, the promised one, the savior from sin, the ruling King, the sacrificial Lamb of God **whose blood will accomplish once and for all what the blood of hundreds of thousands of sheep and goats could never accomplish in the centuries preceding**. Jesus is saying, in no uncertain terms, “You know the one of whom Zechariah spoke in 9:9 of his prophecy? **I am He!**”

The Messiah was to come riding a donkey because it was **a sign of peace**. To come on a horse would have signaled a declaration of war, a man seeking a military triumph. But Jesus is the Prince of Peace. *He came not to wage war but to end it. He came not to alienate but to reconcile. He came not to condemn but to heal and save. He came not in self-serving pride and pretense, but in humility and lowliness.*

“Daddy, look! Who’s that man on the donkey? And why are all those people throwing their clothes on the ground and shouting? And what does ‘Hosanna’ mean?” “My goodness, you’re full of questions, aren’t you?”

The father would likely then have told his children that “**Hosanna**” was a cry for help, asking that God “save us now, we pray” or something similar. It was also a word that the people of Israel would use as an acclamation of praise, shouting their worship unto the Lord.

But at this point, all you can think about is getting to the Temple and hearing the wonderful sounds of fervent prayer and heartfelt praise of Almighty God. Sadly, though, you are met with other sounds of an altogether different spirit.

“Daddy, look at all the merchants! Why are all these salesmen here? Wow, look at all the money! Daddy, I don’t understand. This isn’t what you said it would be like.” “I don’t understand either,” your father responds, sadly and somewhat confused. “Daddy, look, people over there are buying a lamb for the sacrifice. Get one for us, just like you said.” Your father soon returns, empty-handed and downcast. “I can’t believe what I just saw,” he says. “They’re charging three times what a lamb is worth. I can’t afford what they’re asking. This is outrageous!”

“Daddy, isn’t that the man we saw riding into town on the donkey, the one everyone was praising and singing to? He looks sad. He looks like his heart is breaking. Daddy, he’s crying. Wait a minute. He’s not crying anymore, and now *he looks really, really mad*. He’s got a whip in his hand. Look out! Move back! Watch out for that table. It’s a stampede!”

“Shhh. Son, be quiet. I think he’s going to say something. Listen!”

“It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers.’”

During Passover the population of Jerusalem swelled to 10x its normal size; thousands in and around the Temple complex gathered to pray, to offer their sacrifices, to perform ceremonial cleansings, rituals of purification, paying their tithes, and no doubt watching and wondering what would come next. Jesus would have been deeply pained by what he saw. What a sorry spectacle. It sickened him. Instead of a quiet courtyard where people could pray and praise, there was a noisy trading center, a **veritable religious flea market!** Instead of the dignity and reverence of a prayer meeting, there was the sound of cattle and the bleating of sheep. Instead of songs of praise and adoration, there is noisy, even angry commerce.

All pilgrims were required to bring a sacrifice. If you were too poor to afford one, the Law of Moses provided an alternative (Lev. 5:7,11). Each animal had to undergo a **rigorous inspection** for defects and deformities. Even the slightest physical flaw would force you to purchase one of the animals from the merchants at an inflated price. On the Mt. of Olives there were 4 markets for selling animals. In a.d. 66, Josephus tells us that more than 250,000 lambs were required for Passover! A quarter of a million! The going price was outrageous. This was price gouging at its worst. Two pigeons that normally sell for 25 cents might now sell for as much as \$4.00.

Many people from places such as Persia, Syria, and Egypt would have brought **foreign currency** with them. The **“money-changers”** referred to in v. 12 were there to exchange it into Jewish coins for use in the Temple . . . for an outrageous fee, of course! Every male Israelite between 20 and 50 years of age had to pay a Temple tax, but only in Tyrian coinage because of its high silver content. So another exchange was required, and another fee had to be paid. There was extortion, bribery, theft, dishonesty, and greed everywhere, all in a place designed for prayer and praise.

Finally, Jesus had seen and heard enough. So here, in prime time, so to speak, with maximum exposure, he goes into action.

It must have been an incredibly violent outburst. Rage, anger, and indignation drove him. He got physical! According to v. 12 he “drove out” the merchants. The word is the same used often of exorcising or expelling demons. Jesus suddenly becomes a bouncer! He grabbed them by the scruff of the neck, kicked them in the seat of their pants, overturns their tables, and knocked them from their perches.

When the time for his crucifixion has come, he will permit them to lay hands on him and carry him off. But not now! They are frozen, powerless, in awe, stunned and fearful! Jesus made an absolute shambles of their religious bazaar. The disarray and confusion must have been something to see: animals running everywhere, doves flying to freedom. But no one could so much as lift a finger to protest his actions.

Let me make just a few observations about the meaning of this event.

First, although traditionally this has been called the “cleansing” of the Temple, it is perhaps better to see it as a **judgment**. This is a small expression of the wrath of God against a people who had turned from worship of the one

true God to selling religion for a profit. There can be no doubt but that what Jesus did in 30 a.d. was an act of **prophetic symbolism**. This was a preview of coming attractions. That is to say, what we see here was a foreshadowing of what would happen 40 years later in 70 a.d. when the Roman army under Titus would lay siege to Jerusalem and utterly destroy both city and Temple.

**Second**, needless to say, this story tells us a lot about God's attitude toward **commercialized religion**. By this I mean using spiritual things and activities to make a personal profit unrelated to ministry or the needs of God's people.

**Third**, it's important for us to remember that Jesus **not only cleanses** the Temple, he **not only judges** the Temple, **he replaces the Temple!** In John's gospel, there was an exchange of words between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. See **John 2:18-22**.

The place of God's dwelling is the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true Temple of God. He is the center and focus of all worship! And as both Paul and Peter will later tell us in their letters, we, the Church, because we are the body of Christ, we are the Temple of God in whom the HS now dwells. We, in fact, are the only Temple in which God will ever choose to dwell again!

**Fourth**, and finally, let us look closely at **what this story tells us about Jesus**. We first see him riding into the city on a donkey, a sign of his humility, his lowliness, his gentleness. But this Jesus is also capable of holy indignation, of righteous rage directed angrily at all that defiles the sacred place of worship. If that were not enough, ***we then read something here in Matthew 21 that is almost too shocking to believe***. It seems at first glance to be so out of place, so inconsistent with what we've been reading. It is nothing short of breathtaking . . . See **Mt. 21:14** . . .

Think about what is happening. Try to get a grip on what the people would have witnessed. Here we see **the anger and righteous indignation of Jesus vented at full throttle**. His rage at the self-serving hypocrisy of those who should have been helping the people finds expression in an unprecedented physical outburst by our Lord.

**This is the last place one would expect to see tenderness and love**. This is hardly the time, or so it would seem, to display kindness towards those in need. This is hardly the context or atmosphere in which one would expect to see compassion or mercy. Indeed, **it is difficult for us to understand how anyone can consistently be both enraged and compassionate at the same time**.

Hold your breath and observe what happens next: "***And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them***" (v. 14). You could probably still hear the echoes of our Lord's angry voice bouncing off the walls of the Temple! The men selling animals for sacrifice were running for their lives. It was obvious to them that Jesus was not someone to be trifled with at this time. Whatever else they may have thought of Jesus, this was no time to stand toe to toe with him.

It's nothing short of breathtaking when you remember that earlier in the gospel of Matthew Jesus had called people to himself based on the fact that he was "gentle" and "lowly in heart." Do you remember the words of Matthew 11:28-30.

**Is this the same Jesus? Has he suffered a mental or emotional breakdown?** We hear often of people who suffer from a stroke or some great emotional trauma and turn from their normal ways as kind and patient to someone who is mean and demanding. So how do we account for this stunning turn in temperament? Jesus has just wreaked havoc in the Temple like the proverbial bull in a china shop! He overturns tables and the coins are probably still rolling down the hallways. Yet, without missing a beat, without so much as a deep breath to regain his composure, he turns his attention to the blind and the lame and in tenderness and compassion and love and gentleness he heals them all!

**So who is this Jesus?** Is he still the humble servant, riding on a donkey, offering himself to Israel as their Messianic King and savior from sin? Is he still the holy judge who is enraged with the unrighteous ways of the religious leaders? Is he at the same time the Good Shepherd of the sheep, tender and meek? At one moment his eyes flashed like fire! No one dared make eye contact with him. A split second later his eyes are filled with tears of love and compassion.

How would you have handled the situation? If I were Jesus I think I would have said to the sick and disabled, "I'm sorry, but you're going to have to come back later. I'm a little out of sorts right now. I need some time to catch my breath and bring my temper under control. I'm in no mood to deal with your needs right now. Please speak to my secretary and set up an appointment for next week!" NO!

Was there a transformation in Christ's character? Did he experience regret and thus repent for getting so angry and suddenly say to himself, "Oh, my, that was out of character. I've got to do something nice after having been so mean"? No!

*Our Lord is at one and the same time holy and loving; at one and the same time both just and kind; at one and the same time both powerful and tender; at one and the same time both enraged and brokenhearted; at one and the same time both filled with wrath and love; at one and the same time both authoritative and humble; at one and the same time both the Lion of Judah and the Lamb that was slain. And he does it without the slightest tinge of inconsistency or hypocrisy or psychological imbalance.*

Contrary to what we might otherwise have thought, the anger doesn't quench the Spirit by whom he healed the sick! In other words, the Holy Spirit through whom Jesus performed all his healing miracles is not grieved by the sudden and violent outburst that led to the routing of the religious leaders.

Jesus cares compassionately for those who are no more than a meddling inconvenience to others. These broken, crippled, handicapped folk must have been hanging around the temple for years, perhaps begging as did the man born lame in Acts 3. Nobody paid them any attention. They were, at best, an eyesore, an embarrassment to the religious establishment. Yet, as Joni points out,

"Jesus, the Son of God, stops right in the middle of bringing down divine judgment on that place, sets aside His anger, and shows tender compassion to that little band of forgotten 'nobodies.' In the midst of revealing His power and judgment, Jesus paused to display His compassion. That, to me, is a stunning sketch of our Lord and Savior. And it's one of many in Scripture.

We see His greatness complemented by His goodness.

We see His holiness contrasted by His mercy.

We see His tremendous power balanced by His tenderness and gentleness.

There is no room in Scripture for a one-sided view of our Lord. He points an angry, righteous finger at the hypocrites on one hand, yet reaches down to gently touch the need of the lowly with the other. He turns a face as hard as steel to the religious phonies yet smiles encouragement at those who reach to Him in simple faith."

Think about these poor sickly folk for a moment. Why weren't they frightened? The Jewish leaders certainly were. Why weren't they offended? Why didn't they run away? They had just witnessed a remarkable outburst of anger and righteous rage. Why didn't they say: "I don't want to be anywhere near that man. He's as likely to hit me as to heal me. He seems to me to be devoid of love and tenderness."

The answer is that they saw, or in the case of the blind sensed in their hearts, that this man who hated sin loved sinners. They sensed that this man who brought judgment on the unrepentant and the prideful also showered love and mercy on the broken, the contrite, the lowly, and the needy.

This is the beauty of Jesus. This is the reason he is so worthy of our praise. Jesus is not schizophrenic. He is the perfect embodiment of precisely what we should be by the grace of God: both angry over unrighteousness and loving toward the broken; both intolerant of unrepentant religiosity and patient and longsuffering toward those who sincerely seek him for help and mercy.

Isa. 35:3-6 . . .