

Jesus Cleansed the Temple

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to clearly explain that Jesus offered Himself as the promised Messiah and that all people must make the choice to either accept or reject Him. In this topic, we will see how the chief priests and scribes responded to this offer.

Matthew 21:12-16a says, “Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, ‘It is written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer,” but you have made it a “den of thieves.”’” Then *the* blind and *the* lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant and said to Him, “Do You hear what these are saying?”” Here, we see that the first thing Jesus did after He arrived in the city of Jerusalem was to cleanse the temple. Jesus had cleansed the temple at the beginning of His ministry (see John 2:14-17) and now He cleansed the temple a second time as He neared the completion of His ministry on earth.

The Jews were using the large temple courtyard known as the Court of the Gentiles as a place to make money by selling doves and sheep for sacrifices. There were also Jews who worked as moneychangers by exchanging Roman coins and money from various other countries into the money being used to sell these birds and sheep to Jews who came from other areas of the world to Jerusalem for the Passover. The Jews did not feel that Roman coins and other money was acceptable to purchase animals that would be used as sacrifices in the temple. Both the money changers and those who sold sacrifices to the people were apparently charging excessive amounts because Jesus said that they had made the temple a “den of thieves”.

We see that Jesus explained the real purpose of the temple in Jerusalem. Isaiah 56:6-7 says, “Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants—Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast My covenant—Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices *will be* accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.” Here, we see that the temple was to be a house of prayer for the people of all nations. This included those who were foreigners, as well as those who were Jews. Jeremiah 7:11 says, ““Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen *it*,’ says the LORD.” Jesus said that those who were exchanging money and those who were buying and selling had made the temple a den of thieves instead of recognizing that the temple was to be a house of prayer for all nations.

After cleansing the temple, we see that the blind and the lame came to Jesus in the temple and He healed them. This caused the chief priests and scribes to become angry as they heard the children

speaking with loud voices saying “Hosanna to the Son of David” and saw Jesus healing the blind and the lame. The chief priests and scribes were very familiar with Isaiah 9:7, which says, “Of the increase of *His* government and peace *there will be* no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” All of the Jews were looking for the Messiah that would be the Son of David who would rule forever. This was why the chief priests and scribes were angry. They knew the children were using the title for the Messiah. They had already been planning to kill Jesus for a period of time because they viewed Him as a threat to their power and control over the people. That was why they said to Jesus, “Do You hear what these are saying?”, because they knew that Jesus was being called God.

Instead of telling the children to be quiet, we see that Jesus spoke to the chief priests and scribes. Matthew 21:16b-19 says, “And Jesus said to them, ‘Yes. Have you never read, “Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise”?’ Then He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and He lodged there. Now in the morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, ‘Let no fruit grow on you ever again.’ Immediately the fig tree withered away.” Here, we see that Jesus accepted the words of the children by quoting from Psalm 8:2, which says, “Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger.” Psalm 8 is about the glory of God. It also speaks about the fact that the Father would make the Messiah, for a short time, a little lower than the angels before crowning Him with glory and honor.

Hebrews 2:9 tells us why Jesus was made a little lower than the angels for a short time. That verse says, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.” Jesus was made a little lower for a short time, so that He could experience death for everyone. Jesus then left the temple and went out to Bethany to spend the night. By these actions and words, Jesus made it clear that He was not going to silence the children. Instead, He was accepting their words that He was the Son of David who came in the name of the Lord. In the next chapter, we will see that Jesus will question the Pharisees about whether the Messiah is the Son of David. They were not able to answer and none of the religious leaders asked Jesus any more questions.

We see what happened the next morning, as Jesus was returning to Jerusalem. Jesus saw a fig tree by the side of the road. However, when Jesus and the disciples came to the tree, they found nothing but leaves on the tree. Jesus chose to use that tree to teach the disciples a very important lesson. Jesus cursed the tree and said that nothing would grow on that tree in the future. As a result, we see that the fig tree withered away. In Hosea 9:10, the Lord used the fig tree to picture the rebellion of Israel as the nation turned away from Him. That verse says, “I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season. *But* they went to Baal Peor, and separated themselves *to that* shame; they became an abomination like the thing they loved.” Here, we see that God compared Israel to the first figs from a fig tree in its first season of bearing fruit. However, instead of following the Lord, Israel turned from the Lord and began to worship Baal. As a result, Christ may have cursed the fig tree to show that judgment

would come on all the rebellious of Israel.

However, we also see that the Lord used that fig tree to teach the disciples another important lesson. Matthew 21:20-22 says, “And when the disciples saw *it*, they marveled, saying, ‘How did the fig tree wither away so soon?’ So Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ it will be done. And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.’” The fig tree had quickly dried up. As the disciples looked at the tree after it had withered away and dried up, they were amazed to see how quickly the tree had become unable to even produce leaves any more.

Here, we see that Jesus used what had happened to the fig tree and the nearby Mount of Olives to teach the disciples a lesson about faith. Several months earlier, Jesus had taught the disciples and the father of a demon-possessed boy about faith. Jesus had been transfigured on a mountain and Peter, James and John had seen Christ in all of His glory. Then, they returned to the other disciples who had not been able to cast the demon out of the boy. Jesus told the father, in Mark 9:23-24, “Jesus said to him, ‘If you can believe, all things *are* possible to him who believes.’ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, ‘Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!’” The disciples had seen that day that it was possible for Jesus to do anything that is according to His will.

In these verses, we see that Jesus taught the disciples that all things would be possible for them, if the things for which they prayed were according to the will of God. That same thing is true for us today. These verses showed that faith without doubt is all that is required if we are praying according to the will of God. John may have remembered that day as he later wrote in 1 John 5:14-15, “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.” The disciples later certainly recognized that God would answer their prayers as they prayed according to the will of God.

Jesus gave two illustrations to the disciples that day. The first illustration they had recognized as they saw the fig tree that had withered away. Then, Jesus went on to give a second illustration. At that moment, on the way from Bethany to Jerusalem, Jesus and the disciples were going around the Mount of Olives. Jesus pointed out that if it was the will of the Father, they could ask Him to remove that mountain and their prayer would be answered. Zechariah 14:4 tells us that mountain will one day split and move. That verse says, “And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, *making* a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south.” In the same way, we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn that they can expect the Lord to answer their prayers as they pray according to the will of God. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to pray in faith.