

Matthew 21-10-31a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace & Truth Bible Church. This is the 31st day of October, 2021. And we continue our study in the Gospel of Matthew.

Come to a very important section here in this appearance of the Lord Jesus in Jerusalem. This will be his final time to present himself to the nation, to the Capitol. And we saw the tragic nature of the presentation last time.

We're going to pick up this morning at verse 12. So Matthew 21, verse 12. We'll take just a moment to go to the Lord in prayer and then we'll begin.

And Father, we are so grateful to spend this time together, fellowship, mutual enthusiasm for the truth of your word and the wonderful provision that you have made for us. Based on the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have access to your throne of grace. We have the presence and power of your spirit.

We have the wisdom and guidance that comes from your word. And we pray that as we look at this portion together and see the tremendous example of the Lord Jesus in his faithfulness and obedience, that we will be inspired to follow in his footsteps, to walk the narrow road that he walked and to justify and vindicate your saving work on our behalf, to prepare ourselves for service and function, both now and in the ages to come. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

Let's read our passage. I assume you will remember the nature of the journey from the Mount of Olives down its slopes through the Kedron Valley and up the other side through the Eastern Gate and into the city with people shouting hosannas to the son of David, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, hosanna in the highest. And the theme is salvation.

You remember that Hosea is based on the same word that Jesus' own name comes from, Yeshua. It is the same as the prophecy in Zechariah 9 that says that to the daughter of Zion, behold, your king is coming, he is delivered, very same word. So the theme is deliverance, the theme is salvation.

This is the formal presentation of that salvation. This is the final time. The Lord Jesus has been making it clear now for three years.

It is the season of Passover. There is an enormous crowd of people gathered from all over the country. And remember the males were the ones who assembled.

They are the heads of household. They represent and head the households. And with their knowledge, with their decision, when they look at the Lord Jesus, this is representative of their clans and their families and their tribes, as well as their individual

households.

So it is a momentous occasion. And in verse 12, having come in, Jesus on the first day of the week, Sunday, we know from the other gospels, went to the temple, looked around, and then departed. And this is actually Monday.

So verse 12 picks up on Monday of what has been called Passion Week, the last week of the Lord's life before the crucifixion. So then Jesus went into the temple. You can scratch out of God.

It's never called the temple of God. God's presence is not there. The Ark of the Covenant never returned to the second temple, was never put in the Holy of Holies.

There was never a glory cloud, such as was experienced when the tabernacle was finished or when the Temple of Solomon was completed. The Ark of the Covenant, as you know, disappeared around the time of Nebuchadnezzar's invasion and destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. There is a strong Jewish tradition that says that Jeremiah had something to do with spiriting it away from the temple and securing it, hiding it, putting it in a safe place.

The mount on which the city of Jerusalem is located, the eastern slopes of that Mount Zion is honeycombed with tunnels, caves, caverns, many of which have not been uncovered or discovered or explored. Extremely difficult to do so due to those who currently control that area. But if you've ever looked at a documentary or read anything about New York City, there have been movies that have been set under the city, a whole series, the Ron Perlman thing where he's an ugly guy and there's another gal there, Beauty and the Beast, I think they made a series.

Anyway, he lives and his little hench people live underneath the surface in what actually exists, which are extensive tunnels going back to the early days of the city, many of which are unmapped and unexplored and there's all kinds of denizens that dwell down there. Jerusalem's slightly different in that these are ancient tunnels, ancient caverns, ancient passageways. The access to some of them has been closed off, covered up and they've been unexplored for centuries, but there are anecdotal accounts of people getting in there and finding chambers and things.

And it is believed by many, and I'm one of them, that the original throne of David and Solomon, the Ark of the Covenant and perhaps some other artifacts are under the city proper, ready to be revealed at the last time. Could be wrong, but that's what I think. At any rate, it is not the temple of God, it is just the temple of God, is not found in the better manuscripts and nor is it found anywhere else in Matthew's account.

It is just called the temple. And it's significant because this temple is a place to come and worship God. Those who love God would spend time here.

You go back to the birth account, the beginning of our gospel here, and Simeon and Anna and others who loved God and were waiting for the hope of Israel spent time here. Nothing wrong with going to the temple, but it is a symbolic rather than an actual place of meeting between God and man because of the failures of the nation of Israel in previous generations. Jesus went, and it says, into the temple.

This is not into the building, of course, this is into the temple courts. When you say into the temple or go to the temple, still only the priests would enter those precincts, the holy place, high priest once a year into the Holy of Holies. But once again, symbolic, there is no arc that would be touched and have the breach of Uzzah kind of thing take place.

Much of this has just become traditional rather than actual in the centuries following the destruction in 586. Jesus went into the temple precincts, into the courts, the court of the Gentiles being outermost, and then into the courts where the Israelites, the Jews could come and offer sacrifice and then into the courts where the priests functioned, where you had the altar and the laver and so on. And he 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.

This is an interesting come to pass. Keep your finger here and turn quickly over to John chapter two. As you will no doubt remember, Jesus did this once before.

In chapter two, you have the account of the wedding feast at Cana, the turning of water into wine. And in verse 12 of John two, after this, Jesus went down to Capernaum, he, his mother, his brothers, and his disciples. And they did not stay there many days.

So they went from Cana to Capernaum. And from there, Jesus and his disciples are going to go down to Jerusalem. And this is one of the first recorded instances of Jesus going there.

In the early phase of his ministry, the Passover of the Jews was at hand in John two 13. So Jesus went up to Jerusalem. On the map, it's down, but it's always up to Jerusalem in the Bible.

And he found in the temple, those who sold oxen and sheep and doves and the money changers doing business. What is this all about? It puts me in mind of the story of Paul when James encourages him after he's been out ministering to the Gentiles and he has collected a gift for the poor saints in Jerusalem. And Paul, against the advice and counsel of his fellow workers, against the witness of the Holy Spirit through prophets and others, such as Agabus, binding his wrists and saying, this is what awaits you if you go to Jerusalem.

Paul says, I'm willing to endure anything. I'm going to Jerusalem. You read Romans nine and you understand his heart for the people.

But just because you have a passion for a thing doesn't mean it's the plan and purpose of God. Paul had a passion for his own people. Jesus had already detailed 11 other disciples to be apostles to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria until the end of the age.

But Paul decided he wanted to go into their territory despite the fact that from the outset on the Damascus road, he had been commissioned to go to the Gentiles. His assignment is the Gentiles. First point of observation and application, we have to know our assignment and not covet someone else's assignment, not tread over into their bailiwick, muddy their water, intrude into that which has been assigned to someone else.

How do we know what we should and should not do? This is why we have the spirit. This is why we have the word. This is why we have prayer.

And if there is any doubt, a godly hesitation and a godly consultation with the Lord himself is in order. Believe me, God will speak. God will let us know when it is time for us to enter into witness ministry function, the desire to be a blessing to others, to share truth with others, to share the gospel with others.

God has a plan. God makes the assignments and we sometimes forget this and we think, well, I'll just find where God is at work and join him in his work. You may recognize that phrase, it is misguided.

And I say that on the authority of the word of God. God chooses our place, our time, our function. There is a time to speak and there's a time to be quiet.

There is a time to put a shoulder under someone's load and there is a time for people to bear their own burden. We have to know when it is time for us to shoulder our own burden and to bear it ourselves. And when we can either look for help from our fellow believers or be a help to our fellow believers.

But we cannot be blind in this. We can't be impulsive. We can't just rush in assuming that we know what we're doing when we don't.

God knows all of the causes and conditions and successions and relations, the impetus, the effect, the long-term picture. And even though there is a way that seems right to us, it doesn't always result in fruit that abounds to the glory of God. We can think we're doing right and we're doing wrong.

A thing can be right. All you have to do is think about Saul who got impatient waiting for Samuel to show up before the battle. He saw his troops melting into the surrounding wilderness and decided he had better offer a sacrifice to God and go launch the battle.

There is nothing wrong with sacrificing to God. There is nothing wrong with fighting a battle with the enemies of the Lord and with the enemies of the people. And yet Saul commits an error so grievous that the kingdom is taken from him and given to a man

after God's own heart, not his own heart.

So there is a time and a place to be passionate, to be zealous as we're going to see this morning. And the Lord Jesus exemplifies it, but it is intelligent zeal. It is informed zeal.

It is guided zeal. There's a place and a time to throw ourselves into that which God desires. So in John 2, after the wedding feast at Cana, after going to Capernaum with his mother and brothers, Jesus and his disciples go down to Jerusalem in verse 13, or up to Jerusalem, and he found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves and the money changers doing business.

At the feast times, instead of trying to take a lamb or a goat or a young ox all the way down from Galilee and then up to Jerusalem, it was easier to travel and to take money, which is easier to carry, buy a sacrificial animal, and then offer that. Nothing intrinsically wrong with that. However, this had become a lucrative business and it was not conducted elsewhere in Jerusalem.

It was conducted in the temple courts. And so this was, fleecing the Lord's sheep right there in the courts of the temple. And you don't have to look far in the modern day to see the merchandising that goes on in the name of Christ and under the banner of Christianity.

Books are written and sold. Resources are sent for a gift and so on. And everyone has to be accountable before the Lord.

I am not here to say that anybody who sells a Christian book has done wrong. I own shelves and shelves of books that I was glad to pay for and I'm glad the authors received a recompense for going through the work and labor, not only of the scholarship and of gleaning and parsing and preparing and presenting truth, but making it available in a published form. That's a wonderful thing.

And the workman is worthy of his hire. Don't muzzle the ox that treads out the grain. I think that it is between an author, a pastor or a scholar and the Lord as to what the motivation is, what the intent is, the extent to which there is an actual useful resource shall we say that is genuinely intended to benefit believers as its primary goal, rather than wouldn't it be great if I could get another book published and get a revenue stream so that I can do the things I wanna do.

And this is the murky depths of the human heart. Many times our motives are mixed and yes, we do wanna help people, but we also wanna pay the bills or launch a project or raise money. And we'll do this to raise money.

It's the Lord's business to adjudicate that I will just say that it is definitely wrong to intentionally overcharge and defraud people who are coming to worship God. And that's what these people were doing in the temple precincts. They were marking the animals

up exorbitantly, their fee for changing money because the Roman currency of the day could not be used at the temple.

And so the money changers were there to convert this to the old fashioned Israelite coinage, the shekels and so on. And the fees that were charged for changing money on site were unfair, exorbitant. The ancient writers have documented this.

So this was taking advantage instead of offering a service, instead of being fair with the amount of money that the temple was bringing in from self-righteous Pharisees and others, they could have offered this money changing at no charge. But of course they did not because look how much money we can make, et cetera. Well, notice in verse 15 of John 2, when Jesus had made a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple with the sheep and the oxen and poured out the changers money and overturned the tables.

And he said to those who sold doves, take these things away. Do not make my father's house a house of merchandise. And this is something that ought to be taken to heart in a serious way, everywhere in the Christian world.

Do not merchandise, do not commercialize, do not monetize worship. Coming to God, understanding God, teaching the truth of God, presenting the gospel. And I applaud the churches and ministries who seek to do this, as we like to say, on a grace basis.

I don't use that phraseology myself because the source of all grace is God. We can be gracious, we can be giving, but if love is sacrificial to self and beneficial toward others, intrinsically you are not going to try to get recompense for that which we offer because God has been gracious to us. What do we have that we did not receive? Freely you have received, freely give.

This is the concept. And we have, at Grace and Truth, we have always been wonderfully blessed and sustained by people who, without request, without pressure, have decided that our fellowship and our Bible studies are something they would like to help support. And I've never mentioned it, we've never passed the hat, and yet people guided by the spirit of God and blessed have forwarded that blessing to our group.

And God in heaven loves a cheerful giver and keeps track, and he knows when that happens. That was not happening here by any stretch. It was rapacious, it was taking advantage, and the Lord Jesus sees it and says, you are making the house of the Lord a house of merchandise.

It's interesting to me in John that Jesus used the whip, I think, primarily to drive the animals out. And these are the oxen and the sheep, large animals that are drivable with a whip of cords. And it doesn't say that he struck any people with the whip, but the fastest way to move cows is to give them encouragement on their flanks.

Those of you that ever worked with cattle know this. I haven't done sheep, but I would

expect they're similarly motivated. So Jesus drove the people, the sheep, and the oxen out with his whip of cords, and he poured the changers' money out and overturned the tables.

Interestingly though, he speaks to those who have the doves. The doves are helpless birds, they're in cages and so on, and Jesus speaks to those who sell doves, take these things away, you pick them up and take them away. He didn't smash the cages, he didn't hurt the animals.

He spoke to those who had the cages and said, pick these up and carry them out of here. It's just a little flash of insight into Jesus' care. Even though he is passionately cleansing the temple precincts here, he's not wild in his anger.

He is not lacking in self-control. He knows exactly what he is doing, and he takes care. Doves being a symbol of the Holy Spirit, it's just interesting to me that he pays attention to the doves and treats them differently than he does the other animals.

Then the disciples remembered that it was written, zeal for your house has consumed me, has eaten me up. And this is from the Psalms. We'll look at this shortly in Psalm 69.

But this is the first cleansing. This is the first time Jesus has come to Jerusalem in the ministry phase of his life. Of course, he was there at the age of 12.

He's gone up probably every year for the feasts, but in the formal launching of his visible public ministry, this is the first. So when Jesus goes to the temple and makes an issue out of worship and what is happening there and what ought to happen there, this is introductory. This is one of two bookends to his ministry in Israel.

That's John 2, verses 13 and following. Now we come back to Matthew chapter 21. And on Monday, following what has been called the triumphal entry, I don't see anything triumphant going about it, Jesus went into the temple 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.

He didn't overturn the dove cages. He overturned the seats where the people were sitting who sold doves. He's just always looking out for the doves.

They're mentioned in both occasions. 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. How many times did Jesus cleanse the temple? Twice.

There are those who try to conflate these and say that for literary purposes, John takes what we're reading about in Matthew and moves it to the front of his gospel. That is wrong. It is false.

There are distinct differences and it is important to note those differences just as it is important to note the difference between passages that talk about the second coming and those that talk about the rapture. People wanna conflate and mash those all up into one event and they are not. At the second coming, at the end of the tribulation, Jesus will come to the earth.

His feet will plant on the Mount of Olives, which will split. At the rapture, Jesus does not descend and stand on the earth. He comes and with the shout, the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, the dead in Christ rise.

Those who are alive and remain are caught up together to meet the Lord in the air. Meet him in the air. So those are two distinct events separated by some seven years.

In the same way, these cleansings are distinct and separate. One at the beginning, the first time Jesus comes to Jerusalem in his formal role as presenting himself to Israel and here in our passage, the last time. Differences in Matthew in this Monday episode, Jesus does not make a whip of cords.

We have a greatly condensed version of this. You can read the parallel account in Mark chapter 11 where we just have four verses devoted to this. And the account that Peter gives through Mark, Jesus went into the temple in 11:15 of Mark and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves.

He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. Others were trying to come in and bring, you can imagine the trinket shops, the souvenir sellers. Oh, get this year's souvenir for coming to Jerusalem for the feast.

And Jesus wouldn't allow the trinket sellers and the souvenir sellers to come in. Then he taught saying to them, is it not written? My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations, but you have made it a den of thieves. You go to the third account in Luke chapter 19.

Luke chapter 19. He went into the temple in verse 45, began to drive out those who bought and sold, saying to them, it is written, my house is a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves. All three accounts are important.

All three of them shed light on this. And what is the purpose? What is the reason that Jesus does this? Well, you can look at the first time. Why did he do it the first time? He did it because it gets attention and he gets the attention of all of the assembled men of the nation who are there by command.

And he makes an issue of himself, of his identity and of his relationship to the father. He has authority to cleanse this place because it is his father's house. Notice what he says every single time.

My house shall be called a house of prayer. My house. Of course, he's referring to the father.

My house shall be called a house of prayer. You have made it a den of thieves. Well, as we go to our break here, think about, we're gonna go back to Psalm 69.

We're gonna go back to Psalm 8 when we come back from the break. But note here the intentionality of this. Jesus does this on purpose.

It is provocative. Jesus sparks confrontation. He has just raised Lazarus from the dead.

We know this in John chapter 11, right before John 12. And we know that the parade has happened the preceding day. Everyone knows Jesus is in town.

And when he goes to the temple, they heard yesterday that he was proclaimed. And he is going to make a demonstration at the temple. Does Jesus know that this is going to be provocative? You look at verse 15 of our chapter 21, when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did.

They are amazing things. This is the Thelma collection of words that means they were thunderstruck. They were in wonderment.

They were amazed. They were confounded by what Jesus did. He makes a conscious fulfillment of Zechariah 9 on Sunday.

He comes back to the temple and makes a conscious issue out of what is going on at the temple. He condemns it. He cites scripture in support of that condemnation.

And he is pretty much poking his finger in the eye of the people who are in charge of worship at the temple. He didn't do this every year. There are three assembly feasts.

Jesus has been to Jerusalem any number of times, but only at the beginning and only at the end does he make an issue out of what is going on there. And he does this on purpose. Why? It is time for the cross.

It is time to force a decision from the people of Israel and from their religious leadership. Jesus forces the issue. He could have stayed in hiding.

He could have come in surreptitiously. He could have stayed out of sight. He makes a bold announcement on Sunday and he makes a bold announcement on Monday and he is forcing the hand of the chief priests, the scribes and the Pharisees.

They have got to do something about him. They either have to accept him or they have to condemn and destroy him. God picks the timing for this.

The Lord Jesus knows that it is time to wrap his hand around the cup that the father has

assigned to him and to drink it down. Jesus forces this. Remember when he says, no man takes my life from me.

I lay it down of my own accord. I lay it down freely. This is Jesus provoking the arrest, provoking the trial, provoking the crucifixion.

He does it consciously. He does it knowingly. He is right in what he does, but Jesus knows the timing of the father.

It is not always time to cleanse the temple. He doesn't cleanse it every time he goes there. He and the disciples have sat in Solomon's porch in those colonnades.

They've watched people come and drop money in. They've gone to the temple any number of times. How did Jesus know that this is what he should do? Man shall not live by bread alone, but every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Jesus' mind is full of the word of God. We're going to look at the Psalms that are guiding his decision and guiding his action and guiding his wisdom in knowing that this is the time to force the people in Israel to put up or shut up, to either submit themselves under the mighty hand of God or to show their true colors. The superficial reception that he got on Sunday, this is the test.

Do you really believe that Jesus is the son of David? Are you really ready to say, Hosanna and blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord? This is the test. Wonderful demonstration. The seed has sprouted up from the shallow stony soil and with joy has received the parade.

What do you do when it's time to put that presence into action? Are you ready to recognize his authority over the temple, his authority over worship? He's either the king or he's not. He's either the Lord or he's not. And saying he's the Lord is one thing, acknowledging and submitting to him as Lord is quite another.

Think about Sunday, think about Monday. It's not what you say. It's what you do.

It's not what you agree with. It's the thoughts and intents of the heart. And the display of the previous day is shown for what it is on this Monday.

So we can look at ourselves and say, am I a demonstrating Christian or am I a practicing Christian? Am I a genuine, humble, submissive, prayerful, guided by the word, guided by the spirit believer, or am I taking the bit in my teeth and going my own way, just saying the right things, superficially going along and fooling myself into believing that that is soil in which the roots of the word have sunk deep, when in fact I'm stony soil? That's a question that we in the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit have to ask and answer each one for ourselves. Well, it's powerful stuff, but we're going to look at the foundations for what Jesus is doing in the Psalms and in Isaiah when we come back from

the break. Thank you.