

JESUS AT THE TEMPLE

Matthew 21:12-17

Key Verse: 21:13

"`It is written,' he said to them, `\"My house will be called a house of prayer,\" but you are making it a \"den of robbers.\"\""

The title of the previous passage was "The Triumphal Entry." Jesus entered into Jerusalem on a donkey's back, but we call it the "Triumphal Entry." Through this event we learned the Lordship of Christ. When the disciples were ordered to bring another's donkey and a colt, they went and brought them. The two disciples could do that because Jesus told them, "If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them...." (21:3) Because they took Jesus' words "the Lord needs them" to their hearts, they could do so. Through this event we learned that we must believe in Jesus that he is not only our Savior, but also the Lord of our lives and our future destinies. We also learned that Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a donkey is the triumphal entry, because he was entering into Jerusalem to destroy the fortress of Satan and the power of sin and death through his death and resurrection. In history, there was no one who was truly a triumphant general who made a triumphal entry like this into the capital city. In today's passage we learn another side of our Lord Jesus Christ. As soon as Jesus entered into Jerusalem on a donkey, he entered the temple and drove out all the merchants and money changers, and rebuked those who made the temple a trade center and a den of robbers. In this passage we learn that Jesus is not only the God of mercy, but he is also the God of righteousness.

First, Jesus entered the temple (12-13). Look at verse 12. "Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves." In order to understand this passage well, we must know the background of the temple. As we know well, King David fought and defeated all the neighbor enemies. In the course of defeating the enemies and establishing the theocratic kingdom on earth, he shed much blood. But he was sure that God was with him. Psalm 23 summarizes his faith and life. He confessed, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want...Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me..." (Ps 23:1,4). When he was in deep trouble, his confidence was that he would be a final victor and he would have a great banquet for his final victory. So he said, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life..." (Ps 23:5,6). David loved God. He served God. He thought of God as his Shepherd. He fulfilled God's mission for him in his own time. The author of Acts said, "For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep..." (Ac 13:36). Because of his love for God, God promised that from his family the Messiah would be born. 2 Samuel 7:12 says, "When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom." God loved David so much that he wanted to raise the Messiah from his family line. King David knew he was the chosen servant of God and the shepherd of Israel.

He also knew that God exalted him as the second King of Israel. He was so grateful for God's love and grace. So he had a heart's desire to please God by building a temple for God. But God refused his petition. In 1 Chronicles 22:8-10a God said to David, "You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight. But you will have a son who will be a man of peace and rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side. His name will be Solomon, and I will grant Israel peace and quiet during his reign. He is the one who will build a house for my Name." King David's request to God was rejected. But he did not stop there. He began to prepare all the necessary materials to build a temple in the time of his son, King Solomon.

Roughly speaking, Solomon's temple was the first temple. It was built by King Solomon with the material King David had provided. There was also Ezekiel's Temple. The next temple was Zerubbabel's Temple. The last one was Herod's Temple, which was demolished by Roman General Titus.

The temple was built as a place to worship God. The structure first had a porch, next a holy place, and next a most holy place. On one side of the holy place was the lampstand, and on the other was the table. The last sanctuary was called the holy of holies. There, the ark of God was placed. The ark of God was covered by the mercy seat, which was the symbol of forgiveness of sin through the blood of sacrifice. Inside the ark was the Ten Commandments, the holy word of God given to Moses. The temple was the place where people prayed for the forgiveness of their sins and to accept the Ten Commandments newly and annually.

The temple was also designed to turn the hearts of the Israelites to God. Even though King David established a united theocratic kingdom on earth, there were many pagan idols. Especially, the Israelites had a background of having a long time of slave life. So many kinds of idols were passed on by Israelites to their descendants. Therefore, to have one temple was good. The temple offered the Israelites the practical good of centralized worship. We learn in the Bible that all Israelite males above the age of twelve made a pilgrimage annually to Jerusalem. As soon as Jesus became twelve years old, he went to the Jerusalem Temple with his parents. The temple was a central power house which was very important to the covenant of Yahweh with Israel. People expressed their loyalty to Yahweh by their sacrifice and offering. When we look back at the history of the temple carefully, we learn that the temple of God existed in order to help people to worship God and live their lives centering their hearts in God. Thus they were identified as God's people.

When Jesus entered into Jerusalem, he first entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer," but you are making it a "den of robbers." It is surprising that humble Jesus who entered into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt entered the temple and drove out all the merchants and money changers, especially those who were selling doves. The priests were selling doves so that people might offer sacrifices. This picture

describes the spiritual condition of the contemporary religious leaders. They did not worship God. They did not teach people to worship God. The chosen people and priests became like big grocery store managers. In other words, they were most interested in making money from God's people who came to the Jerusalem temple to worship God. They let people go astray. They also took all the money from their people. What is worse, they made the holy temple, where there was the holy of holies and the ark, into a marketplace. Jesus saw that the religious leaders of the time, who were chosen people to take care of God's sheep, were totally corrupted. They were misusing the temple and they were abusing the innocent flock of God. According to Jesus, they were making the temple of God a den of robbers. The priests were called to carry out the job of being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. In short, they were called by God to shepherd his suffering people. But they were like robbers instead of being priests and shepherds. When Jesus looked at them, he saw that they needed God's righteous anger. So Jesus rolled up his sleeves and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. Those who offered doves as a sacrifice were very poor people. But the priests squeezed even poor and suffering people. Jesus could not leave them alone. Jesus had to clear the temple. So he cleared the temple out of his righteous anger.

Second, "my house will be called a house of prayer" (13). This verse is the explanation of clearing the temple. This is the starting point of destroying the fortress of Satan. This is Jesus' rebuke to the priests who did not show a good example by going ahead of the sheep. Jesus rebuked them because they blocked God's flock from worshiping God. Jesus rebuked the priests that they made the temple a marketplace. Originally the temple was built so that people could see the temple and come back to God moment by moment, and remember God's grace of delivering them from slavery in Egypt.

Jesus said to them, "It is written, "My house will be called a house of prayer," but you are making it a "den of robbers."" Here we learn that the temple is God's house and also the temple is a house of prayer. The house of God must be used as a house of prayer. Mark 11:17 says, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."

In order to understand Jesus' words "a house of prayer," we must think more about the word "prayer." What is prayer? Prayer is talking to God and listening to God. Mark 1:35 says, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." From the outset of his earthly Messianic ministry, Jesus had to work from early morning to late night healing and preaching. Therefore, he had no time for himself. But he did have time. It was in the early morning. He got up early in the morning when his disciples were sleeping. He went to a solitary place and prayed. Generally people think that prayer is requesting something for a better life. I heard on the radio an announcer reading prayer requests. One grandmother asked prayer that her youngest grandson would eat better. One of the rich husbands requested prayer that his wife would no longer be a spendthrift. One middle-aged woman requested prayer that her husband would quit drinking whiskey every night. One boy requested prayer that his parents would not quarrel every day with trivial matters. No one prayed to serve God

for the glory of God. No one prays to fulfill God's mission these days.

Prayer is primarily listening to God. Jesus went out and prayed in the early morning. Jesus prayed in the middle of the night. Once Jesus prayed staying up all night in order to make a decision to drink the cup of suffering. We learn that Jesus was not only making petitions but his prayer was mainly listening to God. God had a world salvation plan and purpose. Jesus came to fulfill God's world salvation plan and purpose through his death and resurrection. There is a strong impression that whenever Jesus prayed he was sitting quietly and listening to God's voice. After Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, a voice came from heaven and said, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Mk 1:11). Here we learn that God spoke to Jesus first. When Jesus prayed in the solitary place, it is clear that he did not only petition so that God would listen to him for this and for that, but Jesus knelt down and first listened to God very carefully what he should do. Therefore, we also must listen to God through the word of God in our prayer. By listening to God in our prayer, we must renew our calling and mission. By listening to God in our prayer, we must correct our life direction and purpose. Next, we must pray to fulfill God's salvation purpose and plan. The disciples did not know how to pray. So once they asked Jesus to teach them how to pray (Lk 11:1). They asked this not to learn how to pray, but because they envied John's disciples who knew how to pray better than they did. Anyway, Jesus taught them how to pray. As we studied in Matthew chapter 6, Jesus taught his disciples the Lord's Prayer the pattern prayer. The first half is for the glory of God. The last half is for ourselves. Matthew 6:9-10 says, "This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." This one verse clearly tells us that when we pray we must listen to God how to glorify God's name and how to extend God's kingdom in this world while on earth. Matthew 6:12 says, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." The Lord's prayer first emphasizes to extend the kingdom of God on earth and that his name be praised. The next half is to forgive our brothers' sin. Therefore we must listen to God how to extend the territory of the kingdom of God on earth and how to forgive our brothers in the name of Jesus.

Once Paul wanted to pioneer Asian nations first because he thought Asians were under the power of Satan; they were also under the power of sin and death. So he wandered around Asian countries and delivered the message of Jesus. One night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, he got ready at once to leave for Macedonia (Ac 16:7-10). Paul had a strategy of world salvation. He wanted to pioneer Asian countries. But in a vision God showed him a Macedonian person calling him with a dried hand. So he concluded that God had called him to preach the gospel to them. Macedonia is now very famous because of the bombing in Yugoslavia. In Paul's time, Macedonia was the door to European countries. So Paul canceled his prayer topic and strategy of his mission and he listened to God. This is Paul's way of prayer. He listened to God, canceling his own prayer topic.

Jesus said, "My house will be called a house of prayer" in Mark's

Gospel, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Mk 11:17). Paul urged intercessory prayer. In 1 Timothy 2:1-2 he said, "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." Here we learn that prayer should be intercessory. Since Jesus said, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations," we must also pray intercessory prayer for all nations. We must study the Bible and listen to God that we should be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. In short, each individual person should be a sanctified person and we should be a shepherd nation. This is why we pray so much for America, saying, "May God make America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." This is why we pray for Russia that the Russian government may return the land to the farmers and other owners so that Russians may be motivated to work in their farmland. They have huge farmlands. But the land is not at all cultivated because the government still possesses it as government property. So every time we pray for Russia, we pray that God may move Russian leaders to return farmland to the owners so they might be diligent people.

Third, Jesus' compassionate heart (14-17). After Jesus cleared the temple and taught the priests that they must pray, what did he do next? Immediately he saw the needy people around the temple. What did Jesus do for them? When Jesus saw them his compassion went out to them. He saw the blind. He felt as if his only daughter was blind and standing there. Jesus had cried because of corrupted priests and rebuked them for misusing the temple and God's flock of sheep. But Jesus was full of compassion. As soon as he saw the blind and the lame who came to him at the temple, he healed them (14). Then, the blind person could see the beautiful temple. When the blind person met Jesus he became very happy. The lame person could not go around the temple to see the beauty and skill used in erecting the temple. But now he could jog around the temple and see everything about the temple. What happened then? Look at verse 15. "But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant." They were very unhappy even though they saw the glory of God in Jesus. They were unhappy even when they saw the blind receive sight and the lame jog around. When they had no compassion of God, they became bitter people. Even though they were so-called servants of God, they were bitter people. Even though they were so-called servants of God, they were very angry people. Even though they had much money through the temple business, they had no eyes to see the wonder of God. They had no eyes to see Jesus as the Messiah they had been waiting for. On the other hand, the children who came to the temple began to shout, "Hosanna to the Son of David." It is quite certain that the children were dancing, rejoicing and praising God.

To have the compassion of God or not to have the compassion of God makes people very different. The Pharisees did not have the compassion of God, so they were evil. Their tears were dried up and their joys were gone, and they were heart disease candidates because they worried about their money. One who has the compassion of God is an endlessly happy person. The other day one shepherd had the compassion of God on a woman who looked as though she has suffered until her face was spread by splotches. So the shepherd wanted to take care of her. In order to

take care of her he brought her to his house and shared dinner, and they sang together for a long time. Then the woman became very bright and her face was shining. When the shepherd who cared for her saw her, he was so happy to look at her. To have the compassion of God is the wellspring of happiness and real joy. Many people don't want to commit their lives to God, thinking that they cannot enjoy worldly sinful pleasure and they will have no more fun. But it is not true. There is a physical pleasure; there is also spiritual joy and happiness. Those who love physical pleasure depreciate themselves and take drugs. Those who have the compassion of God sacrifice so much to care for others. But they are always full of joy and happiness from above. There was a great contrast: the Pharisees and teachers of the law were very unhappy, but the pure children were very happy and they stood amazed. Soon they jumped around and danced and sang in their spiritual joy and happiness.

Look at verse 16. "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. Yes, ' replied Jesus, have you never read, "From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise"?' " Jesus told them that worldly-minded religious leaders are unhappy, but children are unutterably happy. Here "children" means those whose spirits are pure. After this, Jesus left them and went to Bethany, where he spent the night.

Today we learned that Jesus is also the God of righteousness. Jesus teaches the religious leaders to pray instead of making use of the temple for their benefit. Prayer should not be selfish; it should be intercessory prayer for all nations. Today we learn one important thing. There are praying people and there are not-praying people. Praying people will listen to God and be strong in fulfilling his mission. But not-praying people will only be busy and tired for nothing. Therefore let's pray. When we pray, we must first listen to God through the Bible and next we must request that God's kingdom come, that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Let's learn from the children that there is a spiritual joy so that spiritual joy can be overflowing in our souls.