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Sermon Notes

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Jesus Purifies the Temple of God

Matthew 21:12-13

In the Book of Revelation, John had a vision of Jesus as both a LION and a LAMB... the Lion is characterized by strength, power, regal bearing, ability to tear enemies limb from limb, utter fearlessness, decisive action... this is a LION

A lamb by contrast is characterized by meekness, lowliness, quietness, submission to being led, and in the Old Covenant, by slaughter, blood, death

Jesus is BOTH Lion and Lamb

Last week, in the Triumphal Entry, we saw Jesus in His LAMBLIKE qualities... humble, meek, lowly, riding on a donkey, entering Jerusalem, weeping over it, tender-hearted

Today, we see Jesus in His LION-LIKE bearing, powerfully cleansing the temple... fire in His eyes, zeal in His heart, fearlessly taking on the most powerful men of His time

Both the Lamb-like and Lion-like aspects of Jesus' ministry tend toward the same end: the PURITY of the DWELLING PLACE of God... Christ, like a lion, purifies the temple, cleansing it from all defilement... like a refiner's fire He comes

Malachi 3:2-3 But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. ³ He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness

And as a LAMB, Jesus dies humbly, shedding His blood for the sins of His impure and guilty people, and in His humble death on the cross working a perfect purification from sin that will enable all who trust in Him to stand holy, blameless and pure before God on Judgment Day

Last week, we saw Jesus as humble as a lamb

This week, He will roar like a lion!

I. A Stunning Beginning to Jesus' Final Week

A. Following the Triumphal Entry

1. A visit not to the Palace but to the Temple
2. A supernatural kingdom... heaven come to earth
3. A different kind of Kingdom than they supposed

B. A Passion for Purity

1. God is light
2. Heaven is perfectly pure
3. Earth is corrupted beyond all measure
4. Earthly religion among the most corrupted and detestable aspects of human life

C. The Alpha and Omega of Jesus' Ministry

1. John 2: at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry
2. Matthew 21: here at the end as well
3. How grievous that Jesus has to do this TWICE... His hatred of the Temple excesses was already established at the beginning of His ministry... but like a persistent stinkweed, the root had not been severed, and it quickly grew back up again

Matthew 15:13 "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots.

Matthew 13:30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."

Jesus must act again to weed the holy house of God from the weeds of human greed, unbelief, and idolatry that grew up so persistently

II. The Temple: God's "House"

A. The History of the Temple

1. Predicted in the Song of Moses

Exodus 15:17-18 You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance-- the place, O LORD, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, your hands established. ¹⁸ The LORD will reign for ever and ever."

2. Pictured by the Tabernacle

Exodus 25:8-9 "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. ⁹ Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.

3. Established in the Law of Moses

Leviticus 26:11-12 I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. ¹² I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.

“the place the Lord your God will choose from among all your tribes as a dwelling place...”

Mentioned TWENTY TIMES in the Book of Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy 12:5-7 But you are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go; ⁶ there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. ⁷ There, in the presence of the LORD your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the LORD your God has blessed you.

Deuteronomy 16:2 Sacrifice as the Passover to the LORD your God an animal from your flock or herd at the place the LORD will choose as a dwelling for his Name.

4. Envisioned by David
5. Built by Solomon
6. Corrupted by Israel's Sin
7. Preached Against by Jeremiah
8. Destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar
9. Rebuilt by Haggai
10. Adorned by Herod

B. The Defilement of the Temple by Annas

1. High priest, the most powerful Jewish man in Jerusalem
2. Controlled the temple sacrificial system, the center of the Jewish religious system
 - a. According to the Law of Moses, all Jewish men had to appear together three times a year at the location God chose

Deuteronomy 16:16-17 Three times a year all your men must appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles. No man should appear before the LORD empty-handed: ¹⁷ Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you.

- b. Those three festivals unified all Israel
 - c. No Israelite man could appear empty-handed... they would bring the required sacrifices
3. Practical wisdom in Deuteronomy: buying animals and changing money foreseen

Deuteronomy 14:24-26 But if that place is too distant and you have been blessed by the LORD your God and cannot carry your tithe (because the place where the LORD will choose to put his Name is so far away), ²⁵ then exchange your tithe for silver, and take the silver with you and go to the place the LORD your God will choose. ²⁶ Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice.

So the buying and selling of animals for the sacrificial system was perfectly fine... but the issue was the COVETOUSNESS and GREED of the temple officials who did it

4. Extortion in the temple... I've never heard it described so clearly as by John MacArthur
- a. Annas: probably legitimately had the right to be High Priest... probably as from the line of Aaron
 - b. Actually was High Priest during the years AD 6 to 15... the childhood years of Jesus
 - c. In AD 15, Annas was pressured out of the office of High Priest by the Romans, because they wanted such a powerful office to be merely a puppet under their control... and Annas was much too powerful to be a puppet
 - d. OT regulation: High Priest was a lifetime office... that was far too long for the Romans
 - e. BUT Annas was so powerful that when he was removed from office, he actually controlled who would be named as his successor: seven of his successors were relatives... five were his sons, one a grandson, and Caiaphas, High Priest during that fateful Passover, was Annas's son-in-law

- f. To become High Priest: kneel, kiss the hem of Rome's garment, and come up with a HUGE amount of money; Annas had the money to keep the Priesthood in his control...
- g. Where did all that money come from? Temple concessions
- h. Not concessions like at a modern ballpark—hot dogs and souvenirs; no, these were religious concessions... directly tied to the sacrificial system

MacArthur: You say, "Why did they have concessions in the Temple?" They were concessions for the sale of animals for sacrifices. When people came to make their sacrifices, they first entered into the outer court of the Temple called "The Court of the Gentiles." In this court, concession booths had been set up for the exchange of money because the people had to pay a Temple tax. Anyone who possessed foreign currency had to have it exchanged. Annas also had a monopoly in the sale of sacrificial animals because the Old Testament law required that any sacrifice be without spot and blemish (Ex. 12:5).

So a man would leave his field and go to the Passover bringing his own sacrifice -- carrying a little lamb under his arm. Annas had stationed inspectors of sacrifices in the court. Each sacrifice had to pass the inspection before it could be offered. Naturally, nobody's sacrifice ever passed. As a result, the suggestion was made to obtain an approved sacrifice for sale at a certain booth in the Court of the Gentiles. And it would usually be sold at five times its actual value. In addition, anyone attempting to change their money found themselves cheated about five to one. So, Annas had a real good thing going. As history has indicated to us, at least one Passover time they sacrificed a quarter of a million lambs. That was a lot of money. Annas made his money in extortion. In fact, the entire Temple ground became known as "The Bazaar of Annas."

The Jews hated Annas. The Talmud says of Annas: "Woe to the house of Annas! Woe to their serpent's hiss! They are High Priests; their sons are keepers of the treasury; their sons-in-law are guardians of the Temple; and their servants beat the people with staves." They had a monopoly; they were in control of everything. So, the Talmud gives us an indication of the Jewish hatred of Annas and his house.

This is the "DEN OF THIEVES" Jesus spoke of

They had turned the sacrificial system into a huge machine for making vast amounts of money

Forgetting that each animal that was sacrificed represented some SIN, some rebellion, some defilement of God's people and breaking of God's Law

These sacrifices should have been offered with weeping and broken hearts

Psalm 51:16-17 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

III. The Zeal of Jesus: Perfect Purity

Matthew 21:12-13 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. 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.'"

A. A Night to Think About It

1. Mark: after Triumphal entry, Jesus went into the Temple

Mark 11:11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

2. John 2: sat down to make whip... no thoughtless action or the losing of His temper then
3. So also here... He took a night to think, to pray, to respond
4. The next day, He came into Jerusalem and went right for the Temple to clean it out
5. How perfect a picture of God's patience is this...

Psalm 145:8 The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.

B. Zeal for God's House Still Consumed Jesus

1. Zeal: a passionate fire, burning in Jesus' heart... Jealousy for the glory of God and for the purity of God's people
2. John 2: John directly ascribes Jesus' actions then to zeal

John 2:17 His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

3. Amazing: a quotation of Psalm 69, plumbing the depths of Jesus' heart to give the motive of all His actions
4. So also, another way to translate Psalm 69 is this:

Zeal for your house has EATEN ME UP... or DEVoured ME

At the human level, it was zeal for the house of God that brought Jesus in direct conflict with Annas and his henchmen, and made them determined to kill Him: zeal for the purity of the temple was a major factor in the decision of the High Priest and the Sanhedrin to put Jesus to death—Jesus had TWICE exposed their corruption

But at a DEEPER LEVEL, the real issue was Jesus' stance before the thrice-holy God on behalf of the defiled people of God... In effect Jesus was saying:

"I am willing to DIE an infinitely painful death on the cross that God's House be pure from sin!"

Sin is the great defiler of God's universe, of God's land, of God's city, of God's house, and especially of God's people

You cannot measure the fire for holiness that burns within Christ's heart for HOLINESS... total purity from all defilement

Jesus would pour out His lifeblood, crying out under the wrath of God so that God's true Temple—the people of God—could be purified from their sins

C. His Passionate Actions

Matthew 21:12-13 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.

1. A picture of God's passionate hatred of sin
 - a. God is not lukewarm about sin... He HATES IT

Romans 1:18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness

- b. We should not imagine that there is the slightest hint of a shade of a difference between God the Father and God the Son on this issue
 - c. Jesus hates the defilement of the Temple as much as does God the Father
2. A prophetic depiction of the destruction of the Temple under the Romans
 - a. Someday, Jerusalem itself would be surrounded and destroyed
 - b. Jesus Himself, Sovereign over the universe, would pour out His Judgment on the unbelieving Jewish nation
 - c. He would prophecy this later in Matthew's Gospel

Matthew 24:1-2 Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. ² "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

3. Matthew 21: This was a surgical strike... God is slow to anger, very careful about the displays of His wrath... no humans were harmed in any way; no

animals either... just some furniture overturned and some coins spilled all over the ground

4. We can imagine some idolatrous money-changers crawling like lizards rapidly over the ground to grab as many rolling coins as possible before the huge crowds grabbed them

D. His Scriptural Reasons

Matthew 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.'"

1. Foundation to all true Spiritual Reformation: What does the Scripture say??
2. Jesus re-establishes the true purpose of the Temple: a house of prayer for all nations
 - a. Isaiah's vision for the future of the Temple of God

Isaiah 56:7 [Foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord in a covenant]... I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.

Awesome vision of the future of the true people of God... true believers from every tribe and language and people and nation, uniting together to worship and serve the one true God

- b. The Temple Area was divided by a series of BARRIERS, in effect saying "Thus far you may come and no farther:

The Court of the Gentiles (beyond which the Gentiles could not go)

The Court of women (beyond which women could not go)

The Court of Israel (beyond which no one but Levites could go)

The Sanctuary (beyond which priests could not go)

The Holy of Holies (into which NO ONE could go, except the High Priest, once a year, with the blood of the sacrifice)

Now, if Gentiles were going to come to the House of God in Jesus' day, they could only pray in the Court of the Gentiles... but if they did, they would be praying in the midst of a busy marketplace, a swirling bazaar of commerce, run by Annas and his greedy henchmen

By the end of that incredible week, Jesus' own blood shed on the cross would end all barriers forever:

Hebrews 10:19-20 we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body

Ephesians 2:14-15 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations.

- c. But while Jesus in cleansing the Temple, He has in mind Isaiah's vision of the House of God as a center of prayer for Gentiles
 - d. Jesus' heart burns for this... to see all the people of God united in prayer for those nations (Gentiles) who have not yet come to faith in the true, the living God
3. Jesus also EXPOSES the sin of the money-changers, and of Annas and his henchmen behind them: YOU ARE MAKING IT A DEN OF THIEVES
- a. Again, a Scriptural quotation, this time from Jeremiah 7
 - b. Jeremiah 7: the prophet is attacking the Jewish confidence in the Temple of the Lord... the Jews of Jeremiah's day believed that the mere fact that they had the temple of the Lord would keep them safe from any Gentile attacks

Jeremiah 7:8-11 But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless. ⁹ "Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, ¹⁰ and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe"-- safe to do all these detestable things? ¹¹ Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD.

- c. Jeremiah makes it plain that their trust is completely misplaced... God will be perfectly willing to destroy His own sanctuary if it becomes an idol itself

4. Summary:

The Temple represented the dwelling place of God with His people in the Old Testament

Central to the Temple were two things: the sacrificial system and prayer

The Jews in general violated the spirit of the sacrificial system by trampling His court with endless and meaningless sacrifices

The Jewish leaders in particular defiled the temple by their greedy abuse of the temple concessions, seeking to make money in every way possible from the sins and devotion of the people

Jesus twice cleansed the temple, burning with zeal for the House of God

IV. The New Temple: The People of God

A. The Old Temple Abolished

Hebrews 8:13 *By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.*

Matthew 24:2 *"Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."*

B. The New Temple Established

1. Individual Christians

1 Corinthians 6:19 *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?*

Picture Jesus going through your heart with a whip to PURIFY IT from all defilement!!

2. The Church as a Whole

1 Corinthians 3:16 *Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?*

Ephesians 2:22 *And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

C. Christ's Zeal Undimmed: The Purity of the New Temple

1. If Christ was so zealous for the purity of the Old Covenant SHADOW, how much more zealous is He for the New Covenant reality
2. Jesus' heart burns with the desire that the Church, His Church, His bride, be completely PURE from ALL DEFILEMENT
3. He moves through our hearts and our lives, sometimes with a WHIP in His hand, purifying us from all wickedness
4. His eyes are burning fire, His feet burnished bronze, and His work is in purifying us from everything that defiles us

D. The Ultimate Cost of Purity: The Blood of Christ

Hebrews 1:3 *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*

John 2:17 His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

1 John 1:7 the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

V. Application: Let Jesus Purify His Temple

A. Understand How Zealous Christ is for Purity

1. Meditate on Christ with a whip in His hand and fire in His eyes
2. This is as essential a vision of Christ as His gentleness displayed in His Triumphal Entry, riding on a donkey
3. Realize what Jesus was willing to do to make us a PURE PEOPLE

Titus 2:13-14 Jesus Christ ... gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

B. Hunger and Thirst for Purity

1. Your own purity... complete freedom from everything that defiles... YEARN FOR THIS... desire it with all your heart, hunger and thirst for HOLINESS
2. Purity for all of God's household, the Church: desire to see the church of Christ (FBC, other local churches around the world) pure, holy, blameless
3. Ask Jesus to CLEANSE your own heart and work purity in this church and in His people around the world

NOW... what do I mean by purity? And how should we seek to purify ourselves?

Two key kinds: purity of the heart and of the life

2 Corinthians 7:1 Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

C. Purity of the Heart

1. Sincere, pure devotion to Christ
 - a. That Christ would be uppermost in your own affections
 - b. That you wouldn't trust anything for the payment of your sins but the shed blood of Christ
 - c. That you wouldn't boast of your own righteousness or good works

- d. That the esteem of Christ and His praise and what He thinks of you would be infinitely higher in your estimation than any praise from men
 - e. That your central desire at every moment would be “How can I glorify Christ? How can I please Christ? How can I advance Christ’s Kingdom?”
 - f. Sincere pure devotion to Christ
2. Freedom from all idols
- a. Especially that you would not cherish any earthly, material thing above Christ
 - b. That you would purify your heart from WORLDLINESS... attraction to WORLDLY things

James 4:4-5 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?

James 4:8 Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Double-mindedness means your HEART is DIVIDED... you’re trying to serve two masters, Christ and some earthly IDOL

D. Purity of the Life

- 1. Cleansed from everything that defiles you
- 2. Four major areas
 - a. Sexual purity

Ephesians 5:3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.

- i) Overwhelming danger in every age... very much so in our age
- ii) Saturated with sexual images, barraged by sexual temptations, Christ commands us to be pure from anything that will defile us sexually
- iii) “Not even a hint of sexual immorality” said Paul... no sexual innuendo, no sexual lusts resting in your heart, no defilement with images or movie scenes, or internet pornography

- iv) Christ desires us to be a PURE PEOPLE... FEAR HIM, fear the whip in His hand

b. Speech purity

Ephesians 4:29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

- i) Our mouths defile us every day
- ii) We speak impure words... gossip and slander, talking about others behind their backs; complaining: murmuring against God; arguments—with spouses, family members, church members, outsiders
- iii) We speak prideful words... boasting about ourselves
- iv) We speak untrue words... lying, shading the truth to suit our purposes
- v) We speak hurtful words... cutting others down, discouraging them, hurting them viciously with our unkind comments
- vi) GOD YEARNS for our speech to be PURE from all this... allow Jesus to purify your mouth... to FILTER it, letting NOTHING come out of your mouth but ONLY what it helpful for building others up

c. Relationship Purity

- i) By this I mean getting rid of all things that ruin relationships: factions, dissensions, conflicts, fits of rage, brawling, sinful anger, etc.
- ii) God desires the husband-wife relationship to be pure from anger and selfishness; He desires the parent-child relationship to be pure from pride and tyranny on the part of parents, and disobedience, disrespect and rebellion on the part of children; he desires the master-slave relationship (employer-employee) to be free from domination on the one hand or insubordination on the other
- iii) He wants churches free from relational impurity too: church members submitting to godly leaders, godly leaders leading like Christ did with servant hearts; purity from factions, envy, church squabbles, etc.

d. Lawful pleasures purity

1 Corinthians 6:12 "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be enslaved by anything.

Hebrews 13:5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have

- i) Gluttony with food, hobbies, pleasures, possessions, trips, houses, cars, clothing, electronic devices
- ii) None of these are sinful, but ALL of them can ENSLAVE our hearts
- iii) Christ wants us to enjoy the good gifts of God with a clear conscience... but He also demands that we keep our hearts PURE from ENSLAVEMENT to anything earthly

E. Confess Sin to Christ... Allow Him to Purify You

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

F. Humbly Accept Discipline from Christ

The battle for purity of heart and life is too hard for us... our bent toward sin is too strong; sometimes we need more than mere confession of sin and spiritual cleansing

Sometimes God will take the switch to our backs in the form of discipline for impurity

Hebrews tells us to submit to this discipline as a necessary part of our sanctification:

Hebrews 12:4-6 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.

Final vision: TOTAL PURITY in HEAVEN... God's final dwelling place with man

Revelation 21:2-3 I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.