

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Jesus - for the Other

(Studies of Jesus)

When the King Gets Good and Angry Study #6

(Matthew 21:1-13)

(Pastor Manuel Abarca of Encuentro will be providing Spanish interpretation for the message.)

Introduction: Barrier breakers...

Barriers have their place, and some barriers are very helpful.

With the help of some insurance money, we recently replaced the roof on our home. A roof is a good barrier against the rain. Our neighbors are glad for the chain link barrier that keeps our two dogs out of their yards.

My digital identity was stolen a few years ago. So now, every year, the Internal Revenue Service sends me a special number to include when filing my taxes. It's a barrier against further identity theft. You put passwords in place to guard against the same thing on important internet accounts.

It's smart to put some barriers in place. It's hard to defend building some other barriers, though.

Some of these barriers are real, but invisible. We may erect relational barriers that keep even those we love at arm's length.

Or, we may send a message - maybe silently - that "the other" isn't welcomed here, whether "here" is our personal space, our neighborhood, or even our church. Some barriers keep others from access to opportunity - for jobs or for promotions.

Today, as usual, we see Jesus - but the Jesus we see is angry. He is angry because a group of people had erected a barrier that kept others from access to God. And, as we know, Jesus is for "the other."

There are several recorded incidents of Jesus, angry. Here His anger turns violent. Not that He lost control. But this is extreme anger. And seeing His anger will help us see His heart.

Going "up" to Jerusalem

When we turn to Matthew chapter 21, Jesus and His disciples have finished an exhausting, uphill, twenty-mile hike from Jericho to Jerusalem.

This is Jesus' last trip to Jerusalem. He has come to Jerusalem to die on a cross for your sins and for mine.

He arrived on a Sunday. We call this Sunday "Palm Sunday." And before we get to the scene of Jesus' anger, we watch as He makes a royal entrance into the royal city.

He wanted this entrance to be "just right." And what we see going on here is unlike anything we've seen from Jesus to this point. Here, He is orchestrating.

The King's Royal Entrance (Matthew 21:1-11)

King Jesus Orchestrates a Grand Entry (vv. 1-7)

Instructions (vv. 1-2)

[1] When they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples,

[2] saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to Me."¹

In the ancient world, a king would ride a harmless donkey into a city to make a statement. Riding a donkey said, "No worries. I'm not here to make war. Relax. Peace is here."

Jesus' choice to ride a donkey said to the crowds who were streaming in to Jerusalem for Passover, "Relax. I've got everything under control. The Kingdom of God is just where I want it."

He needed a donkey, though, and He didn't have one. So, how was He going to secure a donkey? Simple. He would take it! The King can do that.

Jesus even told His disciples how to handle any resistance that might arise.

Preparations (v. 3)

[3] "If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them."

So, two unnamed disciples went to the village opposite Bethphage (which would have been Bethany), got the donkey, and brought it back to Jesus.

We read that the disciples **[7]...laid their coats on them; and He sat on the coats.**

Jesus then began riding from the Mount of Olives toward Jerusalem.

¹ Jesus is arranging His entrance to fit the pattern laid out by the Old Testament prophets. They pictured Messiah's entrance into Jerusalem as He rode in on a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9)

KING JESUS - For Once, NOT Incognito! (vv. 8-10)

Treated like royalty (v. 8)

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, it was the season of Passover - the same time of year we are in now. And the road He was traveling was crowded with Jews on their way to celebrate Passover.

He rode down into the Kidron Valley and then up toward the wall that surrounded Jerusalem. He was heading straight toward the Golden Gate, the gate through which the ancient kings had always entered Jerusalem.

On that day, the people on the road with Him were on the road because it was Passover, not necessarily because they were following Him.² But some of them had heard the stories of His miracles. They knew of His teaching.

And when this multitude saw Jesus riding on a donkey the last mile to the Royal City of Jerusalem, they put two and two together, and figured, "This is it! He's come to set up the Kingdom!"

And they began to treat Jesus the way people in a monarchy treat their king.

[8] Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road.

See, you don't want the king to get His feet dirty. You don't even want the king's donkey to get dirty hooves. So, they made a branchy carpet for Jesus' donkey.

² Jesus traveled to the city at the time of the Jewish Passover, the yearly festival that commemorated Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Passover celebrated the salvation of the Jewish first-born males of those families which had sprinkled lamb's blood on the doorpost when the death angel came through Egypt. In Jesus' day, huge crowds flooded Jerusalem and the surrounding areas during the week of Passover, since Jews from all over the world were required to observe Passover in Jerusalem. (Estimates range from hundreds of thousands to as high as three million - although that higher number is very doubtful)

They treated Him as their king and they spoke to Him as people speak to a king. Each word in their cheer is significant.

Welcome, King Jesus! (vv. 9-10)

**[9] The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting,
“Hosanna to the Son of David...Hosanna in the highest!”**

“**Hosanna**” means “*Save us NOW!*” It is a cry of desperation from someone who knows he needs to be rescued.

Here, the people shout “**Hosanna!**” realizing that HERE was a Man who held the key to their salvation.

They saw their desperate plight. They knew that they could not save themselves. They begged King Jesus for deliverance.

They also cried out, **[9b] “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”**

That is a quote from Psalm 118, a psalm that was read in ancient times as Israel’s king led the people to worship in the temple. In Jesus’ day people quoted that line to express their hopes for the coming of the Messiah.

All their hopes and dreams revolved around the coming of Messiah. And on this day, Palm Sunday, the crowds saw in **JESUS** the fulfillment of those hopes and dreams.

And THAT is Palm Sunday. That is Jesus’ Triumphal Entry.

On another occasion, after Jesus had fed five thousand people with a few fish and loaves, they tried to force a crown on Him.³ At that time, He would have nothing of it.⁴

³ Read about this in John 6.

⁴ He even preached a special message just for that occasion, too, (we refer to it as “The Bread of Life” sermon) and the upshot of that sermon was that His followers dropped from thousands to exactly twelve.

But here, on this Palm Sunday, He received the praise of the crowds. Here, He drank it up.⁵

Granted, it was a short-lived popularity. It lasted as long as it took for Jesus to ride on the back of a donkey from the Mount of Olives to the Temple Gate. What could that be - an hour? Half an hour?

Yet in that brief time span Jesus presented Himself as the king He truly was.

Responding to King Jesus today...

From the very beginning of His life, some people had understood that Jesus was a King.

For one, Herod the Great was so convinced of Jesus’ royalty that he ordered the slaughter of all the babies around Bethlehem so as to do away with his competition.⁶

For most of His life, though, Jesus was a King *incognito*. Unrecognized. We have just seen the one glaring exception to the general rule of His life’s commitment to stay under the radar.

On Palm Sunday, the veil was ripped away because He wanted everyone to see that He was the king!

It is hard for Americans to know how to relate to royalty. Here in the USA, we see each other - including our leaders - as equals. We even vote *FOR* or *AGAINST* our leaders.

But that’s not how it is in a monarchy. We don’t know how to respond to royalty. So, here’s the quick and dirty low-down on how to respond to a king. You *submit* to him. You *obey* him.

⁵ On this day, as He said in Luke 19, if the crowds of people had been silent, the rocks would have cried out.

⁶ Matthew 2. The Gospel of John tells us that Nathaniel, one of Jesus’ first disciples, said to Jesus, **[John 1:49] “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.”**

“JESUS IS LORD” has been the cry of the church for two thousand years. It is our cry this morning. Jesus is Lord. And what do you do with a LORD? You follow where He leads. You do what He says.

This morning, after the second worship service, a few of our friends are going to be baptized as a testimony to their submission to the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who saved them.

Today, Jesus is calling you and me, who have come to know Him as our Savior, to obey and submit, because He is the King.

And we keep watching King Jesus.

He is about to exercise His kingly authority as He moves through the Golden Gate and into the royal city. He moves purposefully, to the site of the temple.⁷

The King’s Justifiable Anger (vv. 10-17)

Entering Jerusalem; Entering the Temple (v. 10-12a)

[10] When He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, “Who is this?” [11] And the crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee.” [12a] And Jesus entered the temple...⁸

⁷ In relating this incident, Mark’s Gospel gives us a chronological timestamp that Matthew doesn’t (neither does Luke). Jesus entered Jerusalem on the first day of the week (Sunday), went back to Bethany to stay in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and then returned to the city on Monday. Passing through the gate on Monday morning, Jesus and His disciples made their way to the temple, at which time He cleansed it, as we read here in Matthew.

⁸ In the Old Testament, we read about a temple built by King Solomon. This is not *that* temple. That temple was destroyed by the Babylonians when Jerusalem was sacked by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. A century later, the Jewish temple was rebuilt when Zerubbabel and other returning refugees re-established the worship of God in the city.

The temple into which Jesus walked was the temple that King Herod had upgraded and expanded during his long reign. This temple was less ornate and beautiful than Solomon’s, but much more massive.⁹

Once He got to the temple, Jesus saw something that made His blood boil.

House-of-God Cleaning (vv. 12b-14)

The need for marketplace activity

The kinds of activities that Matthew will describe - money-changing; buying and selling - were legitimate and necessary activities.

The Jews were required to pay a temple tax. That tax had to be paid in Jewish currency, so money had to be changed from Roman denarii to Jewish shekels.

There was a need for the purchase of animals - doves, goats, and lambs - so that they could be offered as Passover sacrifices.

The Mount of Olive Market

And for all of these transactions there was a market. It was already in place on the Mount of Olives, outside the walls of Jerusalem. The market was set up like a typical middle-eastern flea market and was operated by the Jewish leadership.¹⁰

You could exchange your money and you could purchase animals for sacrifice at this market.

Temple protocol

The reason the market was placed outside the temple was so that marketplace activities would be kept separate from worship. The temple was for worship. Period. End of story.

⁹ Jerusalem was destroyed - along with Herod’s Temple - in AD 70 by the Romans.

¹⁰ Actually, by the Sanhedrin.

At the center of the temple was the Holy of Holies. Only the High Priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), to offer sacrifice for the sins of the nation of Israel.

Outside of the Holy of Holies was the Holy Place. In this area was the altar of incense and special items used in worship. Only priests entered the Holy Place and its court.

Beyond the Holy Place was an area called the Court of Israel, where non-priestly Jewish men were allowed. And beyond that was the Court of the Women.

Beyond this area, between the Court of the Women and the walls of the temple was an area called the Court of the Gentiles.

The Court of the Gentiles - which was the largest court within the temple precincts - was the one place in the temple where non-Jews could worship the one true God.

Gentiles might travel hundreds of miles to visit Jerusalem and to worship Israel's God. They worshiped in the Court of the Gentiles.

The temple was all to be used for nothing but the worship of God. No buying and selling. And there was no need for flea market activity at the temple because of the market that was already set up on the Mount of Olives.

A Temple Market?

However, Caiaphas, who was serving as the Jewish High-Priest at this time, decided to open up a market in the temple in direct competition with the Mount of Olives market - sort of like Walgreens will open up a pharmacy across the street from CVS Pharmacy.

There is a lot WRONG going on here. For one thing, a whole lot of what was going on in the temple market was corrupt.¹¹

¹¹ When Jesus walked through these temple markets they were little more than flea-markets. As well, inequities abounded in the temple market. The merchants who

But - and here's the main thing - the market shouldn't have been set up there in the first place because the temple was for worship. And when Jesus saw what was going on, He unleashed His righteous anger.

Jesus' anger, unleashed (v. 12)

[12] And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves...

This was not an impulsive outburst. It was pre-meditated. He knew exactly what He was doing, made a plan and carried it out.¹²

We are to picture knocked over furniture, frantic, stampeding animals, and merchants forced out of the temple by this unpredictable and justifiably angry Jesus.¹³

This isn't the only time we see Jesus angry in the Gospels. But it is the only time we see Him violent. And He now explains why He acted with such strength.

set up shop there were selling animals at exorbitant prices. Money-changers were fleecing worshippers who had to exchange their currency for "temple coins."

¹² I have always liked the way author John White puts it: "*Jesus would have been sweating and panting with exertion, and yet there would have also been a calm purposefulness in His eyes that people could not face... Unsuspecting merchants arriving with more animals would be startled to find their way barred. They would find a whip gripped in the menacing fist of the Man with the unflinching gaze. It is false to assume that there was something supernatural about the awe He created. He was God, but He called down no legion of angels to help Him, nor is there any evidence that a mystical terror paralyzed the merchants. His control of the crowds was by a moral force, forged by His total lack of ambivalence and the moneychangers' uneasy consciences.*"

¹³ With the flea market gone, worship and ministry took place, as it should.

[14] And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.

House-Keeping for the Sake of “the Other” (v. 13)

[13] And He said to them, “It is written, ‘MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER’¹⁴; but you are making it a ROBBERS’ DEN.”

If you had asked Caiaphas, “*What are you doing, setting up a market in the temple?*” he probably would have said, “*Hey, what’s the big deal. It’s not really the temple. This is just the Court of the Gentiles.*”

That’s where he set up the market - in the Court of the Gentiles. Every other place in the temple was set up for the people of God. The Court of the Gentiles was the one place for the one who was not. This court was for “the other.”

Just imagine that you were a non-Jew who had traveled to Jerusalem, hungry to find out about Israel’s God.

You arrive at the temple, knowing that there is a place for you - but you find the way blocked by a barrier. There is a flea market. There’s no place for you to learn about God.

How bitterly disappointing. How awful to find no place in God’s temple.

And it was this - GOD’S PEOPLE GETTING IN THE WAY OF OTHERS WHO WERE FAR FROM GOD COMING TO GOD - that provoked Jesus to violent anger.

Conclusion:

Throughout His life, Jesus experienced the whole range of human emotions. He grieved at the death of loved ones and rejoiced when His disciples learned. He also knew what it was to be angry.

He expressed anger at hypocrisy and at cold-heartedness.

But in all of the times when we see Jesus angry, the only times He got violent and took physical action were when He cleaned out the temple so that those who were far from God could come near.

And it is here that we see King Jesus’ heart for those who are lost. We also hear that we, His people, should never put up barriers that would keep those who are far from God from coming near.

If that is the point of Matthew’s telling of the cleansing of the temple - and I think it is - then what are we to do with it? Here are two thoughts.

First, the Bible teaches that we who have believed in Jesus are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:8; Ephesians 1:13-14)

And what do you call something/someone who is indwelt by God’s Spirit? A temple. You are a temple of God and so am I.

All of us who are God’s temple should ruthlessly root out anything in our lives that might be a barrier to someone who is far from God coming to Jesus.

The Bible gives lots of reasons why we who have believed in Jesus should pursue holiness and should put away sin.

Here’s one to add to our list -

When I’m tempted to sexual sin, or when you’re tempted to resort to crude language, or when we’re tempted to fudge, financially, or to gossip, or to post something iffy on social media, our mes-up might lead someone who doesn’t yet know our Jesus to not take our witness very seriously.

Jesus’ cleansing of the temple invites us to self-inspection. If there is something that might make my witness less credible, I am to turn from it. You are to turn from it. Now.

Holiness is that serious. The stakes are that high.

¹⁴ Marks’s gospel is the only one that records the words found in Isaiah 56:7 - a house of prayer FOR ALL THE NATIONS/PEOPLES.

Second, since we are - together - what the Apostle Peter calls a ***“living temple”*** (1 Peter 2:9) there should be nothing about the way we relate to each other that would be an impediment to others drawing near to Jesus.

Jesus said that the way we love each other will be a dead giveaway to a watching world that we are His disciples. He said that our unity will testify to the truth of the Gospel.

I can't think of a greater reason to love each other, to pursue peace with each other, to reconcile with each other if there is tension, and to deeply engage with each other than this: How we relate to each other speaks volumes about the reality of Jesus. When we break down barriers and love each other, we break down a giant barrier to those who are outside looking in.

Our love and care for each other will act like a magnet, attracting those who are far from God to Jesus.

Today we have seen something that was close to Jesus' heart. He was passionate and desperate that no barriers be put up that would keep those who are far from God from coming near.

What we have seen of Jesus in the temple wakes us up to just how much He loves those who are far from God. A few days after He cleaned out the Temple He will die for them.

So, if our hearts would beat with the heart of Jesus we will make sure that we never do anything that would put a barrier between God and those who need the Gospel.