

Matthew 21.12-17

The Temple Judgement Scene

Introduction:

This passage immediately follows from Jesus' public praise and adoration from the crowds as the king of Israel. It's a famous scene from the life of Jesus and this episode challenges readers with a Jesus who practices righteous anger and judgement.

Text:

Verse 12-14

Jesus forcefully drove out those who were buying and selling in the temple. His indignation wasn't directed at everyone in the temple but only those who were involved in financial business in the temple. Matthew highlights four groups Jesus opposed: those buying, those selling, the money changers, and specifically those who sold doves. These economic practices happened within the temple and were inappropriate according to Jesus. The fact that Matthew mentions doves were sold alerts us that financial exploitation was present. Doves were sacrifices that poor people made (Lev. 12.8; 14.21-22; Lk. 2.22-24). They were the most sold animal at an expensive price.

Jesus then quotes from Isaiah 56.7 and Jeremiah 7.11. God's house is meant for praise, prayer, and acceptable worship but the businessmen were buying and selling, exploiting poor people, and placing profit over worship. Jesus' description of a "robber's den" comes from Jeremiah 7 where the God denounces his people's worship. They commit terrible acts but then come to God's house, worship and say all is well. But God says he sees their true intentions.

Jesus' healing of the blind and lame further demonstrates the life-giving power of Jesus and how God's house should look like contrasted with those buying and selling.

Verse 15-17

This section brings attention again to Jesus' status as the Son of David, the king of Israel. Matthew tells us that Jesus' opponents didn't get upset with the crooked commerce activity in the temple but when Jesus healed sick people. The children's acclamation of Jesus irritate the chief priests and scribes.

Reflections:

1. How does this scene of Jesus's anger change or affect how we think of him today?
2. If we are to become like Jesus in our Christian walk, how can we practice righteous anger and in what situations is that appropriate?
3. Jesus recognized corruption and exploitation taking place in God's house and called it out. Have you ever seen or experienced sin in the church and was it corrected?