

21st May 2023

Malachi 3:1-4

3 "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

2 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, **4** and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.

Matthew 21:12-22

Jesus at the Temple

12 Jesus entered the temple courts 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.'"

14 The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. **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 courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant.

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, Lord, have called forth your praise’?”

¹⁷ And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

Jesus Curses a Fig Tree

¹⁸ Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. ¹⁹ Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, “**May you never bear fruit again!**” Immediately the tree withered.

²⁰ When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?” they asked.

²¹ Jesus replied, “**Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. ²² If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.**”

Sermon: Does our Temple need cleaning up? (Malachi 3:1-4 and Matthew 21:12-22)

Please have your **Bibles** open at **Matthew 21:12-22** to begin with.

You should have a **sermon outline** to take notes if you wish.

Let me **pray** first...

Context

Before we begin let's get the **context**

[Slide 1-Context]

Back in chapter 20 v28 – Jesus described His mission this way:

The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many

Then in chapter 21:1-11 – King Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday – and it's described as a triumphant entry – because He rides in to great excitement – the people identify Him as the Messiah – God's Promised One.

But remember His mission is to serve – not to be served

SO even though He's a King – He rides into Jerusalem knowing He's riding to His death in less than a week's time!

And we know from Luke's version of that triumphant entry – in Luke 19:41ff that as Jesus rode into Jerusalem - He wept over the city!

As we look at our passage this morning from Matthew 21:12-22 – we get the **reason why Jesus wept over Jerusalem!**

[Slide 2-Two Problems]

There are **two problems** that Jesus encounters...

1. The Temple (vv12-17)
2. The Fig Tree (vv18-22)

This morning we will look at these two problems and then see how they relate to us...

The Temple (Matthew 21:12-17)

1st then - the Problem with the Temple

[Slide 3-Heading]

We pick up the story in v12

Remember it's the **Feast of Passover** – so **Jerusalem** is **packed** to the rafters with people **from surrounding countries**

Jesus entered the **temple courts** and **drove out** all the **merchants'** selling animals for sacrifices and the **money changers**.

The temple courts – is the **Court of the Gentiles** and was accessible to **Gentiles (non-Jews), foreigners and visitors**. There, worshippers could mill about, **exchange money**, and even **buy animals for sacrifices**.

But look at **Jesus' reaction** in v12 – He's **very angry** – He **overturned** the **tables** of the **moneychangers** and the benches of **those selling doves**.

If I went up to morning tea – and **started overturning the tables** – you'd know there was **something wrong?**

What's the problem Jesus sees?

This **temple court** was the only place that the **Gentiles could come to pray**. But now the **focus** was on it being the place where **merchants in cooperation with the priests, cheated visitors** to Jerusalem **by forcing them to buy approved sacrificial animals at inflated prices**. William Barclay says “a pair of doves could cost as little as **4 pence outside** the Temple and **75 pence** inside the Temple. That's **inflation (x20)**.

What had begun as a **service and convenience** for visitors from other lands to obtain sacrificial animals had **turned into a lucrative business**.

The **sacrificial system** had become a **commercial exercise** rather than **heartfelt worship and confession of one's sins**.

There were **two problems for the visitors**:

a) 1st - **Temple tax** had to be paid in the **correct currency**; the **Moneychangers** **charged extra fees to change money** and a further fee for changing large amounts of money greater than half a shekel

b) 2nd - **Animals** for sacrifice could be bought outside the temple – such as doves. But these animals **had to be without blemish**. Inspectors inside the temple courts **would most likely reject** animals bought outside and **direct the visitors to the stalls and booths inside the temple** where they paid inflated prices!

No wonder Jesus reacts the way He does and so He says in v13

My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it 'a den of robbers.

Here **Jesus refers to the Temple as “my house”** – He can say that - because He is **One greater than the Temple** (Matthew 12:5-6) - because He is God!

Jesus quotes from Isaiah 56:7 – where God says through Isaiah “*my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations*”.

And Jesus goes on to say – quoting from Jeremiah 7:11 – “*you are making my house a den of robbers*”. The moneychangers and merchants are preventing proper worship by the visitors and have made the house of prayer into a 7/11 store!

What does this teach us this morning about God’s House here at Toukley?

[Slide 3a-worship and prayer]

Application – ***God’s house must focus on worship and prayer***

Whatever else we do here at church

Our worship of God – in prayer, in song, in Bible reading and preaching – **is the number one priority?**

Why?

Because without God – **we would have nothing!**

Without God – sending His Son -Jesus- to leave Heavenly glory – and lay down His life as a ransom – **for our sins to be forgiven** – **we would be going to Hell** – not Heaven

In our OT reading from Malachi 3 – **God promised 400 years before Jesus came to Earth** – that **He would send a messenger to prepare the way**. That messenger was **John the Baptist**. But God also promised through Malachi – that after this messenger – **the Lord Himself – Jesus – would come to His temple**.

That's what's going on - as Jesus comes to the Temple in our story from Matthew.

And Malachi describes Jesus coming to the temple – as a cleansing moment – He will be like **a refiner's fire** – sorting out the pure metal from the dross – and **washing people clean** – like washing with nappy-san.

As Jesus overturns the tables and cleanses the temple.

It's a picture of what Jesus does for all who come to believe in Him

Jesus cleanses us from our sins – and makes us a **white as snow.**

That's why God's house at Toukley – must focus on worship and prayer – in heartfelt thanks to God – **for His grace and mercy in sending Jesus.**

There are so many things that could distract us at Church –and in our busy lives – and as we observe other people around us – but our focus should be on worshipping God.

I came across this story recently – where a lady came to the minister before the service one Sunday and said she was leaving church – because she observed so many people in church being hypocritical. They weren't sitting there quietly praying or listening to the sermon – they were chatting – looking at their phone – or asleep – and some people didn't act like Christians – they were judgmental, critical and gossiping– and so she'd decided to find another church.

The minister asked her to do one thing before she made up her mind to leave. He gave her a glass of water – full to the brim – and asked her to walk around the church before the service started - and to not spill any of the water out of the glass. So, she agreed.

She carefully walked around the church – and when she came back with the glass of water – she hadn't spilt a drop – the minister asked if she'd noticed any people behaving badly – and she said – NO – I was focusing on the glass of water. The minister said to the lady – instead of worrying about other people's behaviour - that's what you should be doing focusing on worshipping God and listening to His Word, before and during the service!

(pause)

And when it comes to **focusing on prayer**

Application: God's house here at Toukley - **has a number of ways we can do that:**

- We have **two prayers** during the service - as well as the **Lord's Prayer**
- There's a list of **prayers listed with a sermon outline** each week
- There's a more **detailed list of prayers** – in our **prayer news** – which is **emailed** and **printed** (a few copies in the foyer) – and **we will even publish prayers**. Do we read these prayers – and pray them?
- Then there's the **Prayer Chain** –where **prayer requests are received** and wonderfully circulated and coordinated by Christine Warrell – **why not subscribe to receiving these prayer requests?**
- And there's also our **evangelism prayer meeting on Wednesday at 1pm** here at church – which David Hinton hosts
- And of course – **our own personal prayers?** Are we committed to prayer!
Charles Spurgeon said *"To pray is to enter the treasure-house of God and to gather riches out of an inexhaustible storehouse"*

Back to our passage from Matthew 21

Straight after Jesus overturns the tables in the temple court

In v14 – **Jesus healed the blind and the lame.**

Remember - the **blind and the lame** were seen as **outcasts in society.**

Why did Jesus heal them?

First **because He had compassion.**

Second, having cleansed the Temple of the moneychangers and merchants,

Jesus got back to the business of the Messiah's work, to show the power of God in the context of compassion and mercy. Which in turn, attracted people to follow Him.

This is a good example of where **those who think they are last** (the blind and lame) **become the first and are welcome;** whereas **those who think they are first** (the moneychangers and merchants) are **actually removed!**

What can we learn from this here in **God's House at Toukley?**

[Slide 3b-help and transformation]

Application: ***God's House is a house of help and transformation.***

So, as well as worship – we need to be looking out into our community.

As people come to us looking for help – **no one should be turned away – no one should be written off**

Rich or poor, sick or healthy, black or white, educated or uneducated, happy or sad, extrovert or introvert, Australian or migrants? **All are welcome! All must be helped.**

As Jesus' disciples – **we are called to serve others – just as Jesus does!**

A good example of that is our P.A.T. ministry – where we give **food and clothing** to those less fortunate than ourselves.

But I'd like to challenge us to look around – inside our church – and outside our church – **is there a need we have noticed** – **someone who needs help?** Can we help? Can our church help?

By Jesus healing the blind and lame – **they could now work** – they can **earn money** – they can **feed themselves**. Their **lives** are **transformed**.

As we help people – **their lives can be transformed** – and we can invite them to put their faith in Jesus – our Saviour – **who transforms lives spiritually too!**

God's house is a house of help and transformation.

(pause)

Jesus hasn't finished yet

As Jesus goes about His work in the temple

The **religious leaders** – in v15 – are **not happy at all** – because children are **praising Jesus** in the temple courts saying *“Hosanna to the Son of David”*

Ironically, the children had more spiritual insight than the religious leaders had!

Such hypocrisy from the religious leaders – **Greed and theft in the temple courts did not bother them** – but wonderful praise of Jesus, the Messiah, from children bothered them greatly – to the point that they plot to kill Jesus according Mark's gospel – because their status, power and popularity are being threatened by Jesus!

The religious leaders tackle Jesus in v16 – **implying that Jesus should stop the children.**

But **we know what Jesus thinks about children** from earlier in Matthew's Gospel – chapter 19:14 - ***Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.***

Jesus responds to the religious leaders by quoting Psalm 8:2 ***“From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise?”***

Jesus' point is - God loves praise from children – this is how they learn who God is and how and why to praise Him.

What can we learn from this here in God's House at Toukley?

[Slide 3c-children]

God's house is a house that welcomes children

Children are important to Jesus; therefore, they should be important to us!

Little children are trusting, innocent and pure and uncorrupted and show an undoubting faith that we all should have.

Children are the future of Jesus' Church – when we are long gone.

God's House here at Toukley needs to be a house that: **welcomes children;**

listens to children; **values children and **teaches** children.**

Are we praying for **God to bring families and children to our Church family?**

Are we praying for **God to bring children to Friday Jaffa – and in turn for **God** to bring them from Friday Jaffa to Sunday Jaffa – with their parents?**

Are we praying for our **Jaffa teachers as they prepare each week and as they teach the children about Jesus?**

Are we praying for our **Scripture teachers going into our schools each week?**

Are we praying for the Word of God to penetrate the hearts of the children?

God's house is a house that welcomes children

(pause)

The Fig Tree (Matthew 21:18-22)

That brings us to the next problem **Jesus encounters** – that's the **Fig Tree** – in verses 18 to 22...

[Slide 4-Heading]

Look at v18

It's the next morning and Jesus is hungry

V19 – He saw a **fig tree** on the side of the road – it had **plenty of leaves** but **no figs.**

There's nothing wrong with the tree – it's quite normal for it to have leaves a few weeks before the fruit appears.

But **the leaves without any fruit** – reminds Jesus of a **spiritual problem.**

Just like the temple should have been a place of great spiritual fruitfulness – **but had become anything but spiritual.**

The fig tree reminded Jesus of Israel – the leaves on the tree – **showed great potential** – but like Israel – **the tree showed potential but no fruit.** It showed promise but no performance.

So as Jesus curses the tree – in v19 – He's not having a tantrum because He's hungry and there's no figs – **He's passing judgment on Israel's spiritual life** – which bears no fruit.

The disciples are amazed in v20 – just **how quickly the fig tree withers**.

But it's a **picture of how drastic God's judgment is on sin and rebellion**.

In fact, Israel's continued lack of spiritual fruit and their rejection of Jesus – will **lead to the Temple being destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD**.

Jesus teaches the disciples in v21-22 – that if they have faith and do not doubt – **they can do what happened to the fig tree** – and **even move mountains!**

What can we learn from this here in **God's House at Toukley?**

[Slide 4a-faithfulness]

God's house is a house of faithfulness

Jesus teaches the disciples **to pray with faith** and they will receive anything they ask.

But we have to be careful that we don't take this as meaning - **we pray for ANYTHING WE want**.

Our prayers have to be in **Jesus NAME** (John 14:13-17)– **Jesus knows what we need** – and our prayers have to be - **according to God's will** – not ours (Luke 22:42).

And it's God's will **that everyone who looks to Jesus and believes in Him will have eternal life** (John 6:40)

So, our prayers in faith should be focused on **winning people to follow Jesus** so **that they get eternal life**.

If we look at our **Vision** for our Church here at St. David's

Our vision is by the year 2030 to transform our community with the love of our Lord Jesus

Everything we do here at St. David's **should be focused on loving people like Jesus would – so that they follow Jesus too.**

As Jesus puts it:

³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

And the **WAY – we accomplish our vision is through our Mission**

Our Mission is: Enabling and equipping people by God's grace to become, and grow into, **complete followers of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Everything we do here at St. David's **should be focused in making more followers of Jesus.**

So, **it's worth asking ourselves whether the ministry we are involved in – here at Church – is fulfilling our vision – and fulfilling our mission**

(pause)

The **other lesson we can learn from the Fig Tree is that**

[Slide 4b-fruitfulness]

God's house is a house of fruitfulness

The **Apostle Paul tells the Corinthian church** in 1 Corinthians 3

That **they are a temple of the Holy Spirit**

We at St. David's are a temple of the Holy Spirit

So, **we should exhibit the fruit of the Holy Spirit** (Gal 5:22-23)

Love

Joy

Peace

Patience

Kindness

Goodness

Faithfulness

Gentleness

Self-Control

How are we going – with **exhibiting the fruit of the spirit?**

What fruit are we lacking in?

What will happen to our Fig Tree at St. David's – if we **don't walk in the Spirit?**

Let's pray...

Father God thank you that we as your church are the body of Christ.

Help us to be a church that focuses on worship and prayer; a church that helps people and transforms people; a church that welcomes children; and is faithful and fruitful.

Thank you for your Spirit – and help us to walk in step with your Spirit. In Jesus name. Amen!

Benediction (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore, honour God with your bodies. Amen.