
Jesus Cleanses the Temple Courts

SCOTT HOEZEE

Palm Sunday, Passion Sunday, the Triumphal Entry. Christians sometimes use different words to describe the last Sunday in Lent, and the day that begins Holy Week; but whatever the title, the story is the same in all four gospels. It is the story of how Jesus approached and entered Jerusalem to begin his final week of earthly ministry; but with the exception of one gospel, the story that comes next represents an even greater teaching event than the Palm Sunday processional itself, namely, the cleansing of the Temple. Why did Jesus do that? What was the lesson we are to draw from this acted-out teaching? Today on *Groundwork*, we will ponder Jesus' cleansing of the Temple. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, with this program, we are beginning a series of seven programs that will take us across the season of Lent, and will bring us, actually, right up to Easter. What we are going to be doing in this seven-part series is looking at the things—the series of things—that Jesus taught during that last week of his life, right before the resurrection.

DAVE BAST

Right; and the gospels are full of this. In fact, someone has said that each of the four gospels is essentially the passion story with an extended introduction...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, yes.

DAVE BAST

So a lot of material that the evangelists record for us about what Jesus said and did falls in those last few days, really, just a week from Sunday through Friday—the crucifixion—where Jesus was in Jerusalem, and daily he would go back into the Temple and teach the crowds there. So, we are going to look at that from the four gospels, but it begins with this story of Palm Sunday, as you mentioned, Scott, and what happened right after that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; the dramatic event of Jesus cleansing the Temple, as we sometimes refer to it as the throwing out of the moneychangers; but he goes into the Temple and creates quite a ruckus, and that is going to be the focus of our program; but before we get into that, we need to note something that a lot of people already know, or notice eventually, and that is that in Matthew, Mark and Luke, the Temple cleansing, as we just said, happens right after Jesus enters Jerusalem riding on a donkey's colt; and I think most scholars agree that that is when this happened, too, right at the beginning of Holy Week, after he entered the city; but, readers of John's Gospel know that John moves it. It happens right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. We read the cleansing of the Temple in John in John Chapter 2 already.

DAVE BAST

Exactly; and that is another reason why John is often distinguished from the first three gospels, known as the Synoptics because they have kind of a common viewpoint—that is what the word synoptic means. They basically follow the same chronology of Jesus’ ministry; but here is John taking the cleansing of the Temple, and it happens all the way back in Chapter 2, almost at the beginning of the gospel, and the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. So some people have puzzled about that and said: Well, maybe Jesus did this twice...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Which does not really seem very likely...

SCOTT HOEZEE

No.

DAVE BAST

But scholars, including evangelical scholars—conservative scholars—have often pointed out that the gospels are not written with the intention of being like a diary...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Of everything on each day in exactly the same order.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; if we insist that the gospels have to be like a modern-day history book or biography or some newspaper-like account, well then there is a big problem of John moving an event so far out of its actual timing and chronology, but they are not. The gospels, and John himself, make no bones about it. He says: Look, I just selected and edited these things so that you may believe Jesus is the Christ; and for John, presenting Jesus as the true Temple was a huge theme in John’s gospel; and so, it was very important that he get Jesus in the Temple right up front—front and center—in his gospel because that helped him kick off what will be a gospel-wide theme for John in terms of Jesus as the true Temple.

DAVE BAST

Exactly; and in fact, if you look at what John says about this incident, it is possible to draw different lessons from the simple act of Jesus sort of throwing out the moneychangers and the people who were buying and selling things in the Temple courtyard. So, John wants to draw attention to what this says about Jesus’ person. In fact, let’s just read that account and talk about it a little bit. We are going to spend most of our time in Matthew, but here is how John describes the cleansing of the Temple.

2:13When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14In the Temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves; and others sitting at tables exchanging money. 15So he made a whip out of cords and drove all from the Temple courts, both sheep and cattle. He scattered the coins of the moneychangers and overturned their tables. 16To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s House into a market.” 17His disciples remembered that it was written: Zeal for your House will consume me. 18The Jews then responded to him, “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?”

SCOTT HOEZEE

19Jesus answered them, “Destroy this Temple and I will raise it again in three days.” 20They replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” 21But the Temple he

had spoken of was his body, ²²and after he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he said and then they believed the scripture and the words Jesus had spoken.

So again, for John theologically in his gospel it is so important to say Jesus is the real Temple, because he was not referring to the physical building of brick and mortar and limestone and pillars, but of his own body; and so, John is saying: Look, everything you have ever associated with the Temple, that is Jesus now.

DAVE BAST

Yes; so, for John, again the key thing here is it is a sign. John loves the idea of signs. He has seven of them, many scholars would say, pointing to the miracles. The first of those happens just before this incident in Chapter 2; it is the turning of water into wine at Cana. John calls that a sign; and here the Jewish authorities ask Jesus for a sign. So we will talk in the next segment about the driving out of the moneychangers and all that, what that means—the cleansing of the Temple; but here for John, the key thing about the incident is that it triggers this request for a sign from Jesus, and Jesus says: I will tell you what the sign is, the Great Sign is going to be the resurrection. That is the ultimate sign of all as to who I am.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, Jesus says: I am the sign; and so, if we think about then what Jesus is saying is that he is the true Temple, for Israel, the Temple was the intersection point between God and humanity...

DAVE BAST

Heaven and earth, we could say.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and now Jesus is that intersection point. The Temple is where God dwelled among his people. They pictured God as seated on the Mercy Seat—the throng of God on the Ark of the Covenant. Well, now Jesus is God with us—God among us. The Temple is where you went to sacrifice to atone for your sins. Now Jesus is the once for all perfect sacrifice...

DAVE BAST

Absolutely...he is the Mercy Seat. He is the point of sacrifice.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is the Temple. The Word was made flesh, John told us in his first chapter: The Word was made flesh and he pitched his tabernacle among us, and we have seen his glory. So, Jesus is appropriating to himself here everything that was ever associated with the Temple, including the glorious presence of God, but certainly including also the forgiveness of sins.

DAVE BAST

So, some of the details that we think of when we think of the cleansing of the Temple actually come from John's gospel: the whip of cords for example, and all the animals and the overturning of the tables; and we will see some of those details reiterated in Matthew's account when we look at that in just a moment. What we really want to focus on, having recognized John's lessons drawn from this incident, is the point of the actual cleansing. What is Jesus saying there? What does it suggest to us? What does it mean for us; and that is where we will turn next.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and Scott, we are talking today...it is the first of a series on Jesus' final week of teaching before his crucifixion...we are talking about the incident that began that week that triggered

everything else: the cleansing of the Temple, where Jesus came in and threw out the moneychangers and the people who were buying and selling animals. It is the thing that makes many of our churches uncomfortable with selling music CDs after the service, you know, when a special group comes in. Do not turn the church into a marketplace.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; but as we will see, that is far from the main point. We read John's account, which as we said, he puts at the beginning of his gospel for theological and spiritual reasons in the presentation of Jesus; but Matthew, Mark and Luke have it right after the Triumphal Entry; and actually, there is a slight difference. In Matthew and Luke, Jesus goes straight from riding the donkey to the Temple and then does all the cleansing. Mark is a little different. Jesus does go to the Temple, but then he kind of looks around and says: Uh-huh; I see what is going on here; and then Mark says he leaves the city for the night, goes to Bethany, stays overnight with Mary and Martha and Lazarus, comes back the next day, and *that* is when he then comes in with a full head of steam and cleanses the Temple. So, a slight variation there in Mark's telling of it, but all of them agree that he went straight to the Temple and eventually does all of this cleansing business; and it all ties in with the nature of who is Jesus as King. The Palm Sunday celebration hailed Jesus as King; the disciples did, some of the crowds did, but what kind of a king is Jesus? The people and the disciples all had the wrong idea.

DAVE BAST

Exactly; they were looking for a political ruler. It makes me think of a little Christmas poem I ran across some years ago: They all were looking for a king to slay their foes and raise them high. He came a little baby thing that made a mother cry...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

So, they wanted a champion. They conceived of the Messiah, and had done so for generations as a literal warrior—a political leader—a great general who would marshal the troops of Israel and defeat their enemies in battle. It was a very physical, earthly, political kind of vision for who the Messiah ought to be.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; but Jesus knew he was there as a different kind of king. He was there to target spiritual concerns, first of all. That is why, by the way, in Luke's gospel Luke alone records this one detail, but right in the middle of the Palm Sunday celebration...although there are no palm branches in Luke...but right in the middle of the celebration, Jesus breaks down and weeps.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He kind of spoils his own party. He laments over Jerusalem for not really understanding who the Messiah was...

DAVE BAST

Right. "How often I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks, but you would not...you refused me."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, it seemed like they were doing the right thing in hailing Jesus as King, but Jesus knew that in their hearts they had the wrong idea. So, his crying in Luke was a signal of that; but what he does at the Temple next is also a sign of that, and we are going to stick with Matthew's account; but basically, Jesus is performing a huge critique...a very, very big criticism of how God's covenant people were living and how they were

treating the Temple and how they were treating other people. Jesus is going to offer an action of judgment here.

DAVE BAST

Exactly; and we will read that in just a moment, but maybe before we do, just by way of background, you might be thinking, what is going on here? Why are there so many animals in the Temple? The Temple courtyard, especially the outer court, the largest area outside the Temple, was called the court of the gentiles; and it was a convenient space for a couple of reasons: First, the Temple authorities required that if you are going to bring a sacrifice, you had to get your sacrifice from them—you had to buy the animal from them; so it had become a real money maker; and then secondly, as far as moneychangers were concerned, they also required that the annual duty that had to be paid, the so-called Temple tax, had to be paid in a special coin. You had to change into this special Temple money. So, it was big business. There were lots of people who had set up, both to sell animals and to change the money for the Temple contribution.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, here is Matthew 21, at the 12th verse: Jesus entered the Temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers 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.” ¹⁴The blind and the lame came to him at the Temple and he healed them; ¹⁵but 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,” Jesus replied. “Have you never read, ‘from the lips of children and infants, you, Lord, have called forth your praise?’” ¹⁷He then left them and went to Bethany, where he spent the night.

DAVE BAST

So there is the story from Matthew, and it is a powerful one; and we want to pick up especially out of this story a couple of quotations that Jesus actually says. He quotes from the Old Testament twice; once from the book of Isaiah and once from the book of Jeremiah, and in those two quotes really lies the heart of the significance of Jesus’ act here.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so, the first thing he says is from Isaiah 56: My house will be a house of prayer for all nations; and if you look at Isaiah 56, it is a vision—a prophetic vision—of Isaiah in fulfillment of what God first told Abram in Genesis 12, that through you (Abram) all the nations of the earth will be blessed; and so Isaiah has a vision of *all* people coming to God from all nations; but, as you said, Dave, the court of the gentiles was a space reserved for non Jews who feared God to come and pray, and guess what? There was no room. There were too many cows and cattle and doves. They had no room; so Jesus was literally clearing room...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

For people from all nations to come to God. So, that is the Isaiah 56 passage...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then the Jeremiah 7 one may be even more significant.

DAVE BAST

Exactly; so, you read this initially and you see that Jesus is upset. Perhaps what bothered him was the fact that they were price gouging, or they were being unfair in their practices of buying or selling, or they were

just trying to make a lot of money for themselves; and that may have been happening...some of that may have been going on, but that is not really at the heart of Jesus' objection here. We can see what is going on in his mind if we read the Jeremiah passage that he quotes.

So, here it is from Jeremiah Chapter 7:

^{2b}Hear the Word of the Lord, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the Lord! ³This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Reform your ways and your actions and I will let you live in this place. ⁴Do not trust in deceptive words and say, 'This is the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord!' ... ⁸You are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless. ⁹Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, ¹⁰and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my name, and say, 'We are safe—safe to do these detestable things?' ¹¹Has this house which bears my name become a den of robbers to you?"

SCOTT HOEZEE

The "den of robbers" reference is a reference as though this is a criminal hideout. All week long they are gouging prices, as you say. They are mistreating the poor. The people of God are leading immoral lives, and then they come to the Temple on Sunday and say: Well, God won't see our immoral deals here if we just say, you know, Temple of the Lord, Temple of the Lord, Temple of the Lord; hey, hey! Right? We are safe here; we are free from judgment; and God says: No; I want people who are transformed from the inside out. There cannot be a Sabbath you and the other six days of the week you. You have to be a consistent witness to God, and they weren't. They were using the Temple as a spiritual hideout—a cover—a place where they would come and almost celebrate their hypocrisy...

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Jesus says: No.

DAVE BAST

If we are going to put it in our terms, what we need to recognize is: You can be a regular church attendee, and that is not going to be enough...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

If from Monday through Saturday, you are an immoral person—you are an unscrupulous person—you do people in—all this stuff that is going on. It cannot be covered over by religious hypocrisy—by showing up for worship.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think that is one of the main lessons we want to draw from this; and there is one other detail in the Matthew account that we will look at when we close out this program in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are looking primarily at Matthew Chapter 21, and the story of Jesus cleansing the Temple as he entered the city at the beginning of Holy Week, really, on Palm Sunday. One little detail that we sort of skipped past in talking about the significance of this action, but we want to come back to it now and think about that some more: It is the sound of the children as they are praising Jesus in the Temple; and so, here is verse 16 again, Matthew 21:16:

“Do you hear what these children are saying?” the Pharisees asked Jesus. “Yes,” replied Jesus, “Have you never read: ‘From the lips of children and infants, you, Lord, have called forth your praise.’”

So, the children are crying: “Hosanna! Save us!” to the Son of David. They are praising Jesus, and the Jewish leaders in the Temple are scandalized.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So Jesus, in answer to this, quotes Psalm 8. Most of recognize: O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth...and so forth and so on; and from the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise; so, he quotes Psalm 8. Now it is easy to read this here and think Jesus is saying: I love it when children sing...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Don't you? What is wrong with you Pharisees? Don't you just love a good children's choir. I love...

DAVE BAST

How great every year to have the children's Christmas program and hear them singing the songs...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Let them sing...but that is actually not at all what Jesus is saying, and the Pharisees probably picked up on it, because if you are going to quote Psalm 8 about children who are singing to you, and say it is appropriate, what you are saying...what Jesus was saying is: I am Yahweh. I am the Lord, O Lord in Psalm 8, whose name is majestic over all the earth...I am God. Their praise is right, that is what the Psalm 8 quote means; and there are not too many ways to take that. That is either blasphemy or the gospel truth.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; and in a way, it brings us right back to the opening of this program, where we looked at John's treatment of the Temple cleansing, which he puts at the beginning of the Gospel, to stress the fact that Jesus is making a claim here to be the Temple—to be himself. His physical body is the dwelling place now of God among his people. He became flesh—the Word—and dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory, like the glory of the Temple—the *shekinah* of the presence of God. So, as with the song of the children, Jesus is saying something far more powerful than just: I am a prophet. I am kind of bringing to life the words of Isaiah and Jeremiah. No, Jesus is saying: I am the one where God can be met—where God can be worshipped—where atonement can be made; and it is right that all should praise me—all should worship me.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and so, you have to make your choice. The Pharisees chose to chalk him up as a blasphemer. We, as Jesus' latter-day disciples, worship him as God; and so, that kind of begs the question: Do we see Jesus as the true Temple? Do we worship Jesus, not just on Sunday, but all week long? We now are living, walking, breathing temples of the Holy Spirit—the Holy Spirit dwells in us; so the question becomes: What about us? Here, in the cleansing of the Temple, Jesus is making room for all people. In fact, we did not talk about that, but it is interesting that as soon as Jesus clears out those gentile courts, Matthew tells us that the poor and the lame flocked to him. Well, where did they come from? They had been there all along...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They just never had a place in the Temple. Now that Jesus made room, he is a magnet for these people; and so the question becomes: Are we? How do we live our lives every day of our life? Not just how we behave on Sunday mornings, but every day, are we a welcoming presence? Are we looking to bring in all nations and

all peoples? Is there room for them in our churches, in our lives? Those, I think, are the interesting and maybe somewhat uncomfortable questions that this particular last teaching of Jesus forces upon us.

DAVE BAST

Well, and we are thinking about this in the context of the season of Lent, Scott, and Lent is not supposed to be a comfortable time. It is supposed to be a time when we ask ourselves questions that may cause us some pain. We have seen, I think, as clearly as we are able to articulate it, that the problem here in the Temple is hypocrisy. The problem is playacting at being religious, while in fact, going out and doing in your fellows. We are all hypocrites to some extent. We all put on a better show maybe, and that is maybe not all bad either; but self examination...to look inside and ask: Am I really, truly committed to the Lord Jesus—to the one who welcomed the poor and the lame and the blind and the foreigner, and opened my arms? Am I willing to do that? Am I willing at least to change and to ask God to work in me to get rid of those things that would resist his Spirit in me?

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so...and there again, Jesus is our role model, right? There was never any difference between the Sabbath Jesus and the Tuesday Jesus or the Friday Jesus; and so, for us too, we say: Is there a difference between the Sunday Scott and the Wednesday Scott? There shouldn't be; but if there is, that is a challenge, as you say, Dave. All of our lives are expressions of gratitude for the grace that has saved us, and that needs to be consistent in how we live and talk and witness and behave every single day.

DAVE BAST

And there are things about myself that occasionally I will have an insight and say: I really do not like that...I do not like that in me. So then, the question is, do I just glide over that and go on in my normal way, or do I say: Lord, come and cleanse me; cleanse my temple; do what you did so long ago; come, Lord Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast and Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we discuss how Jesus' encounter with the fig tree offers us a serious warning about living our faith and teaching us about how and why to pray. So connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com, to let us know what scripture passages or topics you would like to hear discussed on *Groundwork*.

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