

Message: Turning the Tables

Sermon Series: Helping Others Follow Jesus

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Matthew 21:12-17

Jesus was angry. He was furious when the religious leaders were ripping off worshipers. There IS a time to be angry. It has been called “righteous indignation.” Jesus didn’t sit on His emotions. He did not look the other way. He acted. Jesus didn’t make a big deal over trivial matters—this was a big deal. In turn, when the chief priests and scribes became indignant that Jesus was receiving praise, Jesus defended the actions of His worshipers. Once again, He referenced the truth of scripture (verses 15-16, citing Psalm 8:2). Assertiveness is understood as behaving confidently and not being afraid to say what you want, need or believe. Jesus was (and is) His own man. He knew who He was, and He was comfortable asserting Himself when necessary. Ecclesiastes 3 tells us there is a time for everything, including “*a time to keep silence and a time to speak.*” APPLICATION: What does today’s scripture reading tell you about Jesus’ character? Why do you think people commonly depict Jesus as being passive and weak? How do you handle your anger? Are you able to regulate your behavior & respond in appropriate ways? Are there areas in life where you are run over by others and need to assert yourself? If this is difficult for you, remember you have the Helper (the Holy Spirit), the example of Jesus and other followers to help you learn and practice this.

“**Wesleyan Quadrilateral**” – Scripture/Tradition/Reason/Experience

“The **Humor of Christ**” by Elton Trueblood was written bc of an encounter when reading Mt. 7 to his 4-year-old son. He was startled when the little boy started laughing. His son thought it absurd for someone to have a LOG in their eye and try to take a SPECK from another’s eye. Elton had read the text so many times and was so familiar with it that the absurd had lost its impact. It was funny hearing it the 1st time. Jesus used the absurd a lot. That’s what He meant by straining at a gnat to swallow a camel. A Pharisee was so focused on the cleanliness of his cup but only looked at the outside and not the inside. We drink from the inside of the cup, but the Pharisee forgot. Dirty as it was, he left it untouched & unclean. Then he set about straining what he will drink – another elaborate process and the series of sensations – the long hairy neck of the camel slid down the Pharisee’s

throat— then a hump, then 2 humps both slid down – and the 4 legs – the big padded feet. He swallowed a camel & never noticed it (Mt. 23:24). It's the mixture of realism with absurdity. It's funny. It's delightful & memorable. We're so familiar with the words of Jesus they often lose their impact.

There's another side of Jesus, however. While Jesus had some remarkable people skills and had "soft skills," He exercised genuine kindness – He told the truth to people.

Jesus was like us in every way, except w/o sin (Heb 4:15). He showed anger, too, but His anger was always righteous and always under control. He spoke directly but He never hit anyone.

*The **temple*** as the Most sacred spot sits on about 35 acres (about the size of Asbury's tract of land). The Holy of Holies; then the Holy Place, the Court of Priests (the altar and where sacrifices occurred); the Court of Israelites (Jewish Men); Court of (Jewish) Women; the Court of Gentiles (non-Jewish converts to Judaism). The Court of Gentiles was the only place non-Gentiles could worship. Jesus SAW this sacred area had been turned into a circus-like atmosphere, so He DID something about it. He walked into the Temple to judge those who were doing wrong & to save the poor in spirit.

Matthew 21:12-17

*And Jesus entered **the temple** and **drove out** all who sold and bought in the temple, and he **overturned** the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. ¹³ He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers." ¹⁴ And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the **wonderful** things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were **indignant**, ¹⁶ and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, "'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise'?" ¹⁷ And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.*

5 things made Jesus angry:

- 1.) His **disciples**. Peter really seemed to tick Him off at times ("Get thee behind me, Satan.") Jesus was frustrated with James/John for fighting over who gets to sit at the right/left side of Jesus; and when they gleefully wanted to call fire down from heaven;
- 2.) Those who practice **Injustice**. Money changers. *drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold pigeons* Some of these vendors may have retaliated by

crying for His crucifixion a few days later. Jesus drove out all who were buying & selling. “Moneychangers” refers to the extortion of the people for shekels. Pigeons were for the poorest people to make sacrifice, so we may infer the poor were being taken advantage of. The temple was a busy marketplace, especially during this festival season. People were making a lot of money, and since the vendors and moneychangers had to have permission to be there, the religious leaders would get a cut. They were working on commission.

We’re sensitive to the abuse of money in religious places. Like anything, money can be used for good or for ill. Because some abuse we shut down opportunities for others to use their money for good and godly purposes.

3.) The **self-righteous**. Couldn’t stand ‘em. ¹⁵ *But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant, ¹⁶ and they said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?”* “they were indignant” – clearly J was not interested in people pleasing or trying to “win friends and influence people,” or get “likes” on his FB page. *house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers.* They tended to keep others away from God. ¹⁴ *And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them.* J’s ministry consisted of preaching, teaching and healing.

4.) Those who **harm children**. Mt 18:1-6 *At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.* Humility + faith were characteristics of kids – & all people who followed Jesus. What a contrast between children and the self-righteous and the unjust.

5.) **Unfruitful**. Later in the text He cursed a fig tree. Was just having a bad day and was hungry and like a vending machine that swallowed His quarters w/o giving a Pop Tart, He was furious. But Jesus wasn’t taking out his frustration on some tree. The fig tree, in scripture represents Israel. The analogy is clear – Israel wasn’t doing what it was intended to do. Popular Jewish ideas about the Messiah at the time was that He would come and purge the Temple of the Gentiles and foreigners. Jesus completely flips this. The Gentiles and the poor and lame were being kicked out and instead of the Temple being a house of prayer it had become a den of thieves.

APPLICATION:

James 1:19-20 let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

James doesn't say NEVER be angry but be slow to it and don't expect "the anger of man" to achieve God's purpose. Jesus knew how to use anger appropriately. Sometimes the church struggles with this – and frankly, the culture does too.

We don't want to merely be Passive and not correct injustice. On the other hand, we have to be careful about letting our anger become too aggressive. There is a third option: "Option C" i shaving Crucial Conversations and taking decisive actions. Genuine Kindness is telling the truth in love.

We must recognize our inability to perceive truth and approach others with humility.

Jesus was heavily invested in children. He was also concerned about those who needed health care and assistance. He was in the process of teaching His disciples. On Asbury's "Groundbreaking day" this is exactly what we're trying to do. Our major investment is for a Student Ministry facility as we want to help our students follow Jesus. Having them in this building will greatly help us. Our doors are already open to Restore Hope Ministry. They help those who need food and rent assistance. We are already open now to Asbury Seminary, as we are helping others follow Jesus who will serve in leadership positions in ministry. Our doors will open to 2 other ministries – both fit what we see Jesus advocating for in this text: the blind and lame – Good Samaritan Ministry + Building All Children.