

Intro | the intentions of the King

In chapter 21, Matthew portrays a different Jesus than we have seen from the beginning. He is no longer hiding his identity, avoiding the crowds, or quieting their praises. Fulfilling the prophecy found in Zechariah 9.9 which said the King would arrive on a donkey, Jesus intentionally reveals Himself to be the promised Son of David. Expecting the King to reclaim His rightful throne by force, the crowds may be somewhat surprised to see Jesus enter the temple before going Pilate's palace—that day will come. Jesus does intend to reclaim His throne. His entrance into the temple reveals just exactly **WHAT throne He intends to reign from and WHERE His Kingdom is established, namely, in the Presence of God.**

The History of the Temple

Since the beginning of time, man has always had temples, altars, and holy places. Most, if not all religions, establish spiritual spaces where they perform various ceremonies in order to appease, beseech, or otherwise honor their various gods. Men do this because they know that there is some sort of spiritual chasm between man and god. Temples were a tangible means to bridge that gap with the help of professional mediators. Having exchanged the truth of God for a lie, these practices became more and more perverse and only served the separated man from their Creator even more. Nevertheless, the underlying desire to bridge the relationship is genuine—the gap is real.

The Tabernacle After the Exodus from Egypt, God leads them back to where God first spoke to Moses, to the base Mount Sinai. It is here that God formally covenants with his people, giving Moses the Law to help an unholy people maintain a pure relationship with a Holy God. God expresses his desire to dwell with them so He commands them to build a place for Him to live. **Exodus 25.8 ⁸ And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.** God' directs His people construct a tabernacle for God to dwell in and, the last few verses of Exodus we see the glory of God "FILL THE TABERNACLE". And it is through the various sacrifices for sin, that men are able to "dwell" with God.

The First Temple | The first tabernacle was portable. And, as history unfolded, King David desired to build a permanent 'house' for the Lord. The Lord rejects David's offer to build Him a house and, instead, tells David that He will build David a permanent Kingdom. David's Son Solomon builds the FIRST TEMPLE. and, after bringing in the Ark of the Covenant, **"a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord."** (1Kings 8.10-11). For 400 years, the priests mediated the relationship between God and his people until the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians. God raised up a nation of enemies to spank His own.

The Second Temple | Eventually, Babylon was destroyed by Persia. After 70 years in exile, fulfilling a prophecy by Jeremiah, God moves the heart of a secular king to send the Israelites in exile back to their land to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem (Ezra, Nehemiah) Most Israelites chose not to return to what was a decimated land/city. A remnant of people worked to clear the temple area of rubble and replace the altar. Within months, they had laid the foundation but then abruptly stopped when the neighbors got hostile. Instead of fighting, they turn to their private affairs. **God raises up the prophet Haggai** who condemns them for building their own homes and leaving God's house in ruin (**REPENT and REBUILD**).

Without Zechariah, we might be led to believe that the only thing that God cares about is buildings or our work. God wants his people to be **ready to worship when the temple is ready.** Two months after Haggai begins to speak, God warns his people through Zechariah not to make the same mistake their

father made who ignored Him. He not only calls them to REBUILD but also to RENEW their covenant—to “**RETURN TO ME**”. Then, through nine visions, God explains his plan to ONE DAY RETURN TO JERSUALEM PERSONALLY...on a donkey... to dwell in the city, to defend the city, to rescue his people from their enemies, to cleanse them from sin, and to restore their prosperity forever. The last words of Zech.: “**And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day.**” (Zech. 14.21)

The Cleansing of the Temple

Jesus action here is not spontaneous, it is calculated, as the Jews expected the Messiah to purify the temple. **Jesus cleansing of the temple is a prophetic, evolutionary, and violent act of judgement.** He overturns tables and deliberately disrupts business. He is angry, yet without sin; He is forceful, yet God-glorifying; He is rebuking, yet Scripture-driven. The temple court is not full of corrupt businessman extorted the masses by selling T-shirts and Roman sports drinks. On the contrary, the court is full of moneychangers, livestock, and birds necessary for the increased population participating in the Passover festival. In becoming experts at manufacturing a well-tuned sacrificial experience, they have forgotten the entire purpose of the sacrifice. Even though the temple was there to maintain their purity; it was no making them dirty. The sacrificial system had developed into something no longer acceptable to God. **In many ways, the Jews have become so efficient in their rituals that they have ceased to worship (CHURCH?)**

Jesus is not coming to give better rituals, but to restore right worship. The phrase “a den of robbers” comes from the prophet Jeremiah who revealed the true problem. **Jeremiah 7.8-11** ⁸“Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. ⁹ Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, ¹⁰ and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—only to go on doing all these abominations? ¹¹ Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD. In essence, God’s people lived how they wanted and believe that, if they went to the temple and preformed the rituals of religion, they were forgiven. The temple was supposed to be a HOUSE OF PRAYER—a **place to commune with God and give to Him worship.** It had become a DEN OF ROBBERS—a **place to HIDE from God and to TAKE from Him.**

The Healing in the Temple

No sooner had Jesus cleaned the temple of “buyers and the sellers”, he invited the poor and helpless to be healed of their brokenness. Ironically, when the court full of all of the busyness presumed necessary for worship, true worship was impossible. **The healings of Jesus are a result of the cleansing of Jesus.** For a moment, with the Son of God IN THE TEMPLE, we see the original purpose of the temple fulfilled. **Men are coming to meet God, to worship Him, and be restored. The temple is not left empty—it is filled with the presence of God (Col.2.9).** Through the prophet Jeremiah God says: ¹² **Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD,** ¹³ **for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water. (Jeremiah 2.12-13).** **CLEANSING ALWAYS PRECEDES HEALING.** When all objects of false worship that filled the temple were thrown out, **Jesus alone filled it.** And when Jesus alone fills the temple, true worship is possible. And when true worship RETURNS, we are healed (not. songs, sermons, or systems).

As Jesus does “wonderful things” the children take up the crowds original cries declaring Jesus to be the Messiah. .This annoys the chief priests who reject Jesus as the Messiah. In response, Jesus reminds them of

a Psalm which basically says God will prepare praise for Himself through babies. With that, indirectly claims to be God, drops the mic, and walks away. **Jesus has rejected them.**

The next day, a HUNGRY Jesus returns to the city. In a rather strange scene, Jesus sees a fig tree with leaves only. Considering the time of year, if there are leaves, there should be un-ripened “green fruit.” If a fig tree does not possess this early fruit, then it will not produce the later fruit during the actual season. In another uncharacteristically violent exchange, Jesus curses the fig tree and it literally withers into nothing. Matthew intends on connecting this story with Jesus’ actions at the temple. He condemns the tree for promising fruit but failing to provide it. **The Jews, with all of their temple worship, possess religion without godliness; spirituality without God’s spirit; salvation without a true savior.**

The Destruction/Construction of a NEW Temple

More than likely, the money changers and the pigeon-sellers all assumed the same places they had the previous day. Jesus did not return to cleanse the temple again. The cleansing of the temple did not signal its restoration **but its ultimate destruction which would occur in less than 40 years.** The temple was beyond restoration, it needed to be REPLACED. For hundreds of years, through the sacrifices of lambs, bulls, goats, and birds, God dwelled with Israel. But this was not the restored relationship that God ultimately desired. When Israel fell into idolatry, and were conquered by various nations, God spoke through his prophets about a day when he would dwell with them again. **27 My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 28 Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore” Ezekiel 37.27.** (perm. temple)

God says we still need a temple, we still need a mediator, we still need a sacrifice to BRIDGE THE GAP, but men’s efforts to worship always fail. Enter Jesus who, full of the glory of God, came and according to John 1.14 DWELLED with His people. . This is the same glory seen in creation, the same seen in redeeming Israel from Egypt, the same glory that fell on top of the mountain, the same glory that had filled the tabernacle, the same glory that had filled the temple. The word for dwelt is actually TABERNACLED, echoing back to the tabernacle in the wilderness. Jesus not only came to dwell, he came to die in order to build a NEW spiritual temple. **Hebrews 9.11-14 11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.** When Jesus died on the cross, the Gospel of Mark says: **the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom (Mark 15.38) Though men had torn the relationship, God the Father tore his own Son from the glories of heaven, He tore his Son to pieces on the cross, then finally tore the curtain himself to restore WORSHIP and build a new temple, new permanent HOUSE of prayer, in our hearts.**

A new House of prayer

We worship God now, not through temples and rituals, but through faith in Christ. **Heb. 10.19-23 19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.** Our worship is no longer external; our worship comes from the inside out.

THROUGH FAITH...JESUS STANDS READY TO CLEANSE US | ¹⁶ *What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; (2Cor 6.16).* In his epistles, Jesus tells us that we dirty ourselves often with idols. We fill our hearts with things that, like robbers, steal our affections from Christ. Some are bad things that aren't important; others are good things that have become too important. John reminds us to confess our sins for Jesus is our faithful priest, perpetually mediating our sins from the temple of our heart (1John 1.9).

THROUGH FAITH...JESUS STANDS READY TO HEAL US | Jesus not only cleanses us, he is perpetually renovating us—healing our brokenness as individuals and a community. ¹⁹ *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,* ²⁰ *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,* ²¹ *in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.* ²² *In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Ephesians 2.19-22)* . This is more than a little paint and washing the windows. In order to look like Jesus there will be ADDITIONS, SUBTRACTIONS, and MODIFICATIONS. **We are, individually and corporately, a redeemed work in progress. It would be appropriate to put an UNDER CONSTRUCTION sign on our front door.** As a work in progress, we are not complete. That is not the same as saying we are deficient, because God's Spirit has given us all of the materials are there to complete us. **It does mean, however, that our faith has unfinished areas, exposed areas, weak areas, even ugly areas.** But there is a sense that the slowly, over time, our faith, and our faith family, will take on the shape, beautify, and function it God planned for us with all grace, gratitude, and glory.

THROUGH FAITH...JESUS STANDS READY TO SEND US | ¹⁹ *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,* ²⁰ *for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1Cor 6.19).* We are cleansed and empowered to move mountains—to do the impossible. **The cleansing of God leads to the healing of God which leads to the empowering of God. This is worship. Worship is a deep satisfaction IN the glory of God which leads to a wide reflection OF the glory of God—living sacrifices as worship (Romans 12.1).**

CONCLUSION | cleanse.heal.strengthen.

It is certainly valid and important to ask if our church has a reputation as a house of prayer of a den of robbers; a gathering of givers or a club of consumers; a family of faith or a people with programs. But, considering there is a new spiritual temple that resides in us, perhaps we ought to ask that question of our own hearts. **Am I a house of worship or a den of robbers? Am I here to hide or be cleansed? Am I here pretend I can see or be healed of my blindness? Am I here to prove my righteous or receive Jesus righteousness?**