

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Commission: A Study of Matthew 21–28

STUDY TWO

When Jesus Lowered the Boom

Matthew 21:12–22

Jesus did what was right even though it enraged the leaders. He was a marked man, but here He was, cleansing the temple. We have to admire Him.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE setting for Jesus' final days on earth was Jerusalem, a city located at a site with deep spiritual roots. Two thousand years earlier, long before the city existed, Abraham laid his precious son, Isaac, on an altar here as a sacrifice. But God stopped the Patriarch, providing a ram as a substitute, which he "sacrificed . . . as a burnt offering in place of his son" (Genesis 22:13).

A thousand years later, King David made Jerusalem the capital of Israel and the future site for the temple. For generations, at this place where God provided a ram for Isaac, priests offered substitutionary sacrifices for Abraham's descendants. Now, to this same hilltop, God brought His precious Son during Passover as an offering, not just for the Jews but the whole world.¹

The blood of a million sacrifices called Jesus to Jerusalem to offer Himself as the ultimate sin offering. As the Son of God, He was the perfect sacrifice—divinity and humanity in one person. As the Son of David, Jesus was the rightful king of Zion. As heaven's high priest, He was the ideal mediator. As the model prophet, He was God's voice of truth and sword of judgment.

The first stop on His redemptive mission was the temple, *which had turned into a carnival of corruption!* As king in the line of David, He had the authority to drive out the crooks and reform temple practices. As the Son of God, He had the right. After all, this was His Father's house.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

When Jesus Lowered the Boom

Matthew 21:12–22



PREPARE YOUR HEART

We need not fear the Son's zeal to cleanse His temple . . . nor to purify our lives. When He scrubs away sin, He frees us from guilt and gives us a sense of newness and health. His cleansing invites us to walk with Him in "a rich and satisfying life" (John 10:10). Open your heart to Christ's refining touch as you open this study.

Father, thank You for making me "the temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:19). I invite Your Son to do His cleansing work through the power of the Spirit and help me realize the wholeness and life You have in mind for me, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Matthew 21:12–22* slowly. Don't skip though the verses. Let Matthew be your guide as he reveals the scenes, some harsh and some hopeful. In the space below, write down your initial impressions.



Observation: Clearing Out and Condemning

Observation lays a solid foundation on which we build the next elements of Bible study, which are interpretation, correlation, and application.²



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Clearing Out the Temple—Matthew 21:12–17

What strong verbs did Matthew use to describe Jesus' actions in *Matthew 21:12*? What do these words communicate about Jesus' emotions?

Just imagine yourself in the courtyard hearing tables crash and coins skitter across the stone floor. Bleating sheep bolt for shelter. Merchants scoop up their goods and beat a path to the exit. *Such passionate zeal for the purity of God's house (John 2:17)!*

According to *21:13*, Jesus quoted lines from *Isaiah 56:7* and *Jeremiah 7:11*. What did the Lord want His temple to be? How did the priests and merchants veer from this intent?

How did Jesus restore the temple to its true intention, according to *21:14–15*? How is the children's response similar to the blind men's in *9:27* and *20:30*, the Gentile woman's in *15:22*, and the crowd's at the triumphal entry in *21:9*?



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Contrast the Lord's *righteous* indignation with the priests' *unrighteous* indignation in *Matthew 21:15–17*. How did Jesus point out their sin by quoting *Psalms 8:2*?

Condemning an Unfruitful Tree—Matthew 21:18–22

According to *Matthew 21:18–20*, what did Jesus do the next morning, and how did the disciples respond? How does Jesus' reply in *21:21–22* logically relate to the disciples question?

The chief priests behind the corruption in the temple wore robes of religion. They looked religious, but their religious deeds were empty pretense. They were studies in hypocrisy.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: What Do Jesus' Actions Mean?

To understand the meaning of Jesus cleansing the temple, we need to examine the corrupt practices He confronted.



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Reform and Restoration

The setting was the Court of the Gentiles, a large courtyard circling the temple open to all people. As Jesus quoted from Isaiah, the Lord envisioned His temple to be “a house of prayer *for all nations*” (Isaiah 56:7, emphasis added). However, instead of opening their arms to welcome foreigners, the guardians of God’s house were picking these worshipers’ pockets.

Use your resources to find out how the moneychangers and priests extorted temple pilgrims. In his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll describes the corrupt practices on page 150. Summarize the dirty dealings.

Jesus’ first task as king was to clean up corruption so people could offer their lambs without getting fleeced themselves! Second was to heal the blind and lame who were excluded from worship, allowing them to offer their sacrifices.³ Jesus’ actions display His *authority* and His *heart*. How is His response to corruption and restoration of the broken instructive for us today?

Seeing Jesus lower the boom on the bad guys, the children echoed the triumphal entry chant, “Praise God for the Son of David” (Matthew 21:15). The King had shown the right use of anger, which wasn’t the raging storm of an impatient man but lightning flashes of God’s holy passion for what’s right and good.



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Fruitlessness and Faith

The proud religious leaders, however, weren't interested in dealing with their sin. So, the next day, Jesus illustrated what lay in store for them and, tragically, the nation. In [Matthew 21:18–20](#), how did the tree symbolize the spiritual condition of Israel's leaders? What did Jesus' action foreshadow? For help, read pages 153–154 in Pastor Chuck's commentary.

Having just witnessed hypocrisy on parade at the temple, Jesus used the cursed fig tree as an illustration of the fruitless, corrosive results of religion disconnected from God. Jesus also used the fig tree as a lesson in faith. Explain Jesus' teaching on faith, in [21:21–22](#), and why it's important for us today?

Some mountain-like situations are impossible for us to fix or change. But Christ can, and He tells us to have faith in Him because He's the mountain-mover. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Praying in Faith

Earlier in Matthew, Jesus taught that if the disciples “had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it would move. Nothing would be impossible” (Matthew 17:20). So, the *size* of our faith isn't the issue but the *object* of our faith.



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Some have concluded from Jesus' teaching on prayer in Matthew that we can claim any blessing we want if we pray in faith. But is that really true? How did John explain prayer in [1 John 5:14](#) and how does John's explanation correlate with what we've learned from Jesus in Matthew?

In conclusion, we trust God with our impossible situations and always pray according to His will. God tells us what pleases Him in His Word. If we make certain our prayers align with Scripture, we'll always know we're praying for what pleases God.



Application: Learning Some Valuable Lessons

On the first days of Holy Week, Jesus taught many valuable lessons about who He was and how we follow Him. Let's list four of them.

1. From His courage to confront evil, *we learn not to be afraid of feeling angry if it's the right kind of anger.* Avoid passivity in the presence of abuse.
2. From His rebuke of the corrupt priests, *we learn to steer clear of all things hypocritical.* Ask the Lord to cleanse the temple of your heart.
3. From His cursing of the fig tree, *we learn that life is about producing the fruit of the Spirit not growing leaves.* Focus on your inner character.
4. From our understanding of Jesus' teaching on prayer, *we learn to guard against making the extreme our standard.* Focus your prayers on God and His will.



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Which of these principles is the Spirit prompting you to apply? How can you do so?

To the very end, Jesus kept on confronting sin, showing compassion, and teaching. He's a model of perseverance. May the Lord give us the same courage and faithfulness to follow Him into the storms of our lives, trusting Him to go with us.



A FINAL PRAYER

Dear Father, the image of Your Son confronting powerful political and religious people of His day inspires me today. That kind of courage doesn't come naturally. Fill me with His courage as I stand up for Christ's cause in my world. I know You are with me to do the impossible as I step out in faith and in the name of Your Son. In His name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. "Jesus probably entered Jerusalem through the sheep gate. . . . This gate pierced the eastern city wall to the north of the temple enclosure. Worshipers brought sheep into the city through this gate for sacrificing because it was the closest gate to the temple. It was fitting that the Lamb of God should enter Jerusalem through this gate." Thomas Constable, "*Matthew 21:10–11*," *Constable's Notes*, netbible.org.
2. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "*How to Study the Bible for Yourself*" at insight.org.
3. The blind and lame were historically excluded from the temple (*2 Samuel 5:6–8*), but Jesus made it possible for them to worship too.

