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Matthew 21:10 - 21:14



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg delves into the biblical text of Matthew 21:10-14, exploring the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. He notes that the occasion was likely known to the Romans, who were skittish about any Jewish uprisings. Gregg also describes how Jesus' cleansing of the temple was an act of great offense to those who saw the temple as a type of church and a house of prayer. By healing the blind and the lame, Jesus shows that the true purpose of the temple was to provide a place of spiritual healing and redemption.

Transcript

In Matthew chapter 21, we read of the so-called triumphal entry of Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday upon a donkey, and the people hailed him as the Messiah. And they said, Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest. Now we're told that there were multitudes who came out to meet him with this kind of greeting. However, of course, they did not represent the total consensus of the people of Jerusalem.

There were great numbers of people who were infatuated with the ministry of Jesus. Some of them might have truly been disciples. Some of them possibly had been healed by him.

Others perhaps had only heard of him and had been convinced that he would hopefully be the Messiah who had set them free from the Romans. But they were still not the majority perhaps of the people, and certainly not everybody was in this crowd crying out, Hosanna. As a matter of fact, in one of the other Gospels, we find that the Pharisees showed up, and that they were very unhappy to see this situation.

In fact, they told Jesus, Jesus, rebuke your disciples. Tell them not to say these things. And Jesus answered, well, if these would be quiet at this time, then the rocks themselves would cry out.

Now, what I find interesting is that the Romans, who were very skittish about anything that looked like a Jewish uprising of any kind, did not show up on this occasion, or if they showed up, they did not intervene. Now, the Jews around this period of time had many false messiahs who had arisen, and many of them sought to do exactly what most of the Jews wanted the Messiah to do, that is to overthrow the Romans, and they would lead a revolt against Rome. And, of course, they would always be put down, because Rome was too strong to overthrow.

However, the rise of these kinds of people on a frequent basis gave some real headaches to the Roman armies there, and to the Roman government in Israel. And here, one would think, there's a multitude of people gathered proclaiming Jesus to be the Messiah. You'd think that the Romans would be very concerned about this, that they would be very threatened by this, that they would show up and put this whole thing down, and arrest Jesus, and take him away, and scatter the crowds, and so forth.

And yet, we don't read that there were even any Romans paying attention. Now, in my opinion, the Romans must have known this was happening. It was their business to know whenever anything of this kind was going on, and this was a huge mass of people proclaiming Jesus the Messiah.

However, my suspicion is that the Romans could tell, either by just seeing the demeanor of Jesus, or perhaps even having researched him, because he had been around for a while. They knew that he was not interested in being that kind of a Messiah. They must have known that, or else they would have shown more concern about him.

Even later in the same week, when Jesus was taken before the Roman governor, Pilate. Pilate does not seem to be threatened by Jesus in the sense of a political rival. He is definitely threatened by Jesus in terms of his conscience before God, but he does not see in Jesus a political threat.

And that is rather interesting, given the large number of false messiahs that the Romans had had to deal with, who were indeed political threats. This simply shows how clearly Jesus was not promoting a political kingdom, because even the Romans did not find him threatening in this respect. Now, after we are reading of the triumphal entry, it says in verse 10, this is Matthew 21, verse 10, And when he had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? So the multitude said, This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee.

So, notice it says, the city was moved, and everyone is saying, Who is this? So, the vast majority of the persons in the city did not know Jesus or come out, but there were still multitudes of those who did. And when asked who Jesus was, they said, He is the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee. Now, in saying he was a prophet, that does not mean they did not think him to be the messiah.

We know that Jesus is more than a prophet, and as such, we may be a little bit more sensitive than we should be about people calling him a prophet. We might say, Oh, he is not just a prophet, he is the son of God. And he is, of course, the son of God, but he is, of course, also a prophet.

And they knew him to be a prophet, and they just figured that a man could be a prophet and be the messiah too. After all, David was, in the Jewish mind, the prototype of the messiah. And he was a prophet, David was, and he was a king and a prophet.

And so, that is how they apparently viewed Jesus also. Then Jesus went into the temple of God, and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold doves. And he said to them, It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.

Then the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. Now, Jesus here is portrayed as cleansing the temple of all of those who bought and sold, the moneychangers and those who sold doves and so forth. And this has been a matter of a problem for some, because there are two gospels that record Jesus at this point in time coming into the temple and doing this.

And then there is a third gospel, John, that also records Jesus cleansing the temple, but places it chronologically in a very different place. In the gospel of John, Jesus cleanses the temple right at the very beginning of his public ministry. It's in John chapter 2. Before Jesus had even done any public preaching, he is seen driving the moneychangers out of the temple in John chapter 2. But now we read of Jesus doing this, and it's positioned at the end of his ministry, not the beginning.

Now, John does not mention Jesus doing it at the end of his ministry, and the other gospels do not mention Jesus doing this at the beginning of his ministry. And so what we really have is three gospels mentioning the cleansing of the temple, and John places such an act at the beginning, and the other two gospels place it at the end of Jesus' ministry. This has been thought by some to be a contradiction in the gospels.

However, it is my belief that Jesus cleansed the temple twice, that he did it once at the beginning of his ministry, and once at the end. John does not record the second, but he records the first. The other apostles do not record the first, but they do record the second.

Now, one might say, well, why would they do it that way? Well, I cannot say why the disciples, I don't know why Matthew and the other synoptics would not necessarily tell of the first cleansing of the temple and only tell of the second. But we do know that they don't tell everything that Jesus did, and if they only recorded one, that's not a problem. That John would leave this one out and tell of the other one is quite consistent with his

general pattern of trying to supplement the material in the other gospels.

John deliberately does not repeat much of what the other gospels tell us, and he deliberately seems to supplement new material that the others have left out. And so we really put John's gospel and the synoptic gospels together, and we get the whole picture that Jesus actually drove out the money changers twice in his ministry. Now, he came into the temple of God, it says, and he drove out those who bought and sold in the temple.

And he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. Now, how did he dare to do this? He was in what we might regard as a public place, and he's a private citizen, and he comes in and here's some men who have money tables for exchanging money. These are the people who would, when pilgrims would come to Jerusalem from faraway countries with their sheep and so forth, or maybe even without sheep to offer, they would end up, if they had sheep, they'd have to often exchange them, because the priests would find something wrong with the sheep that were brought in, so the people would have to buy sheep at the temple.

And if people came without sheep, then of course they'd have to buy sheep at the temple, and they had to do so with the temple currency. And people coming from foreign countries would have probably their local currency, and therefore you have a money changer there to take the local currency and exchange it for the official temple currency. Now, as I understand it, this rate of exchange was somewhat exorbitant, but that's not necessarily the most important thing here.

They didn't belong there. Making money in the temple was not what the temple was for. And so Jesus turned over these money changers' tables, and he drove out those who sold doves.

It's funny, it says he turned over the seats of those who sold doves. One has the image in the mind of these people sitting there selling doves, and Jesus comes and turns over the chairs while they're sitting in them. Now, this is a little different, of course, than his actions in John chapter 2, where he took some small cords and made a little whip, and he drove the animals out of the temple, and apparently the owners of the animals followed their merchandise.

Here we find him turning over tables and turning over chairs and telling the people to get out. He said to them, It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves. Now, the reason Jesus felt at liberty to throw these people out is because he said it was his house.

Actually, in John chapter 2, he said, It's my father's house. And Jesus was the heir, the son of the father, and therefore he had the right to throw out people who were abusing his house. Now, when Jesus said, My house shall be called a house of prayer, that is a

quotation from Isaiah 56, 7. It actually says, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.

So that the prophecy actually is that all people, Jews and Gentiles, will be able to approach God and to worship him. And his house, which is today the church, the people of God, is the house of God. And it is to be an institution of prayer.

It is to be a praying community. And the temple in Jerusalem, which was the type of the church, or the foreshadowing of the church, it was to be a house of prayer. And yet these people had turned it from a spiritual experience to a merchandising experience for people to come to the temple.

Jesus says, But you have made it a den of thieves. This expression, a den of thieves, is taken from Jeremiah 7, 11. So Jesus takes portions of Isaiah 56, 7 and of Jeremiah chapter 7, verse 11, and he puts them together.

He says, The house of God is supposed to be a place of prayer. It is supposed to be a place where people approach God and commune with God. It is supposed to be a place of spiritual encounter with God.

And yet you have turned it into not only a place of merchandise, as he said in John chapter 2, but here a den of thieves, which suggests that it was not only inappropriate to sell merchandise, but that they were being dishonest about it. They were thieves. And that they were probably gouging in their rate of exchange of the monies and so forth.

And so he was very offended by this. Now there are still, of course, in the temple of God, which is the church today, there are those who would turn it into a house of merchandise, and sometimes even a den of thieves. There are people who will exploit Christians with the claim that they are too part of the church.

There are, for example, business directories for Christians, where the businesses that advertise claim that they are Christians as well. Sometimes they'll put a little Christian fish on their advertisement so that you will trust them, that they are Christians. It's a sad thing because there are, of course, true Christian businessmen, who I do believe we should give them our business because we should help support the brethren.

But unfortunately this has been turned into a scam by many, because there are dishonest people who put a fish on their ad, put it in the business directory, and have the confidence of the Christian community, and yet are dishonest. I know this because my father had a very, very bad experience with such a person down in Orange County, California. There was somebody who was a carpet cleaning company, and they had a fish on their ad, and it was in a Christian business directory.

But it turned out that these people were just con artists, and they cleaned up more than just the carpets. They actually took my father for a lot of money, and they were

conscienceless about it. They were not Christians at all.

And so because the church or the people of God have become a marketplace, there are those who are dishonest, who will take advantage of it and have turned it into a den of thieves. There are even those who are not necessarily dishonest, but have simply turned it into a house of merchandise. It's two different things.

In John chapter 2, Jesus complained that they turned his father's house into a house of merchandise. Now, that's not necessarily complaining about thievery or dishonesty. It's just inappropriate.

It's people trying to make money off of religion, off of the religious sentiments of others, trying to sell them the stuff for their sacrifice. Now, I'm not sure how to apply this when it comes, for example, to the modern Christian merchandising, through direct mail and even through Christian stores. I want to just say right now I'm glad there are Christian stores because I'm glad that I can buy a Bible.

If there was not some place to buy a Bible, I would be very, very sad. I'm glad that there are places I can go and buy Bibles and even to buy good books. However, we can see that in addition to good books and Bibles, there is a tendency for Christian marketing to go overboard and to sell all kinds of little trinkets, coffee mugs and belt buckles and badges and all kinds of things that have maybe a fish or a dove on them and therefore are marked up considerably over the price of their actual value.

I remember that years ago I used to carry a small, complete Bible on my hip because I like to have a Bible with me at all times and yet I didn't want to have one hand full at all times with a Bible. I wanted to have my hands free sometimes. So I went to a sporting goods store and I bought an ammunition pouch that was made for carrying 36 cartridges.

It was just the right size to put my Bible in. So I wore my Bible on my hip in this pouch for many, many years. I had friends who thought, hey, that's a good idea.

So they went out and they bought some too and they wore their Bibles too. One of my friends said to me, though he was joking, he was doing it as a parody really of the way the Christian merchandising is today. He said, you know, these pouches, we paid \$10 for them at the store.

He says, we could go out and buy a bunch of these and we could stencil a fish or a dove on them and we could sell them for \$24.95 to Christians. Now, of course, he was kidding, but unfortunately there are people who have seriously done just that kind of thing. Take an item that you can get for a certain price and then put something on it, a Christian scripture or a Christian symbol, and make a ton of money off the Christian sentiments of God's people.

This is turning God's house, the church, which is his people, into a house of merchandise. And that is something that Jesus objected to. And then, of course, when you add to that dishonest practices, then you have turned it into a den of thieves as well.

I think that the modern church would do well to examine its practices in these areas and to clean up its act a great deal. As a matter of fact, I said that I'm glad there's Christian stores because I'd like to be able to go and buy Christian books and to buy Bibles, though I would think it really much more agreeable with the spirit of the New Testament if books and Bibles were published by not-for-profit organizations and basically sold at cost or given out on a donation basis. If someone says, well, that's not very realistic, I happen to know otherwise.

There are ministries, including our own, that do provide literature for free on a donation basis. It's true that if people do not donate, then the cost of printing and so forth cannot really be covered. But it leaves it up to the people and to God to lay it on the hearts of the people to contribute whatever they can afford.

And it then makes the Word of God without charge. It seems to me that the whole idea of Christian retail has got a lot of things about it that need to be reexamined. And I say that without any desire to condemn those who are involved in it or make their living in it.

I'm just saying that it's one of those things in our Christian culture today that has, I think, just been accepted without examination. And it should be examined because there are people who are making a lot of money off the Word of God. The Apostle Paul said that he would not sell the Word of God.

And yet, you know what it costs to buy a Bible these days? I mean, a good Bible with a good sturdy leather cover, well, that can cost you a small fortune. And yet, it doesn't cost us quite that much to produce it. Fortunately, there are people like the American Bible Societies and so forth that put out inexpensive Bibles and make them available.

But still, it's still a matter of selling. It seems to me that Jesus said, freely you have received, freely give. And when it comes to the Word of God in particular, I don't mind paying a price to get a Bible because it's worth it to me to have one.

But it still raises questions as to whether that's really what God desired, that people would mass produce Bibles for profit. Again, I'll just have to leave that to the conscience of each person involved in that whole industry. I myself am an author and I have published works.

And one of my published works is published and handled by a for-profit publisher. I don't get much profit off it. I get about 75 cents per book and the book sells for \$29.95 in the stores.

But the literature I print myself, and we do have evangelistic and discipleship literature

at the Great Commission School, we do not charge for that. That's free. It's on a donation basis, as is this radio program and everything else that we try to offer.

But it's very important to me, and I would hope it would be more important to more Christians than it seems to be, that we examine all of our practices, even those by which we make a living, in light of the Word of God, and especially in light of the sentiments of Jesus, because he, of course, is the one before whom we will have to stand in the last day. And Jesus said, He that rejects my words has one that judges him. The words that I've spoken to you will judge you in the last day.

It would be a very sad thing, it seems to me, for Christians to have to stand before Jesus on the Day of Judgment, having felt like they'd been, you know, faithful ministers of the Gospel, and be told, no, you were actually, you turned the house of God into a house of merchandise. And it's important for me to clarify that when I talk about the house of God, I'm referring, as the Bible does, to the church, which is the people of God, made up of living stones. We're not talking about a physical house.

God does not live in houses made with hands, the Bible says. He lives in his people. And his people, the church, are the house of God.

And it's very important for us to look at the words of Jesus through a fresh light, because we often become numb to the practices of the church in our own age, just like a fish is not aware of being wet, because it has lived all its life in an environment of being wet. It has nothing to compare it with. We often are not very sensitive to some of the wrong things that we do in the Christian culture here, because it's been done all our lives, and maybe we're converted into a circumstance where these things were taken for granted.

I should say we should take nothing for granted. Jesus said many will take for granted their salvation, and he'll say, I never knew you. We ought to be more concerned about our souls than that.

And so we ought to examine ourselves and see to what degree we may be guilty, as were the money changers, of turning the house of God into a house of merchandise, or even worse, into a den of thieves when things are done dishonestly in the name of Jesus.