

[4 : 59] And then word begins to spread. We've seen him and he's heading toward the city. And so all of these Galilean pilgrims, they start to line the road on either side and they take palm branches and they begin to sing the familiar words of Psalm 118. But they're directing these words to Jesus.

Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest heaven. It's a royal procession. It's a kingly procession. And it says when he enters the city, the whole city was stirred. And all these city people begin to ask, who is this?

Who is this? They're trying to make sense of it. You know, I was living in Boston in 2004 when the Red Sox won the World Series. It was a quarter to midnight on October 27th. They won their final game against the St. Louis Cardinals. Sorry if you're a Cardinals fan, three to nothing.

And the whole city was stirred. The whole city was, there were car horns blaring, cabs pulled over on the side of the road and people were just hammering on their horns and screaming and yelling and parties that had previously been indoors just spilled out onto the streets everywhere. Bar doors open and people flooded into the streets and there was just collective cheering and celebrating everywhere.

And I was in the crowd. I was wearing my Red Sox hat. I was jumping and cheering with my friends and everybody. The only problem was I wasn't really a baseball fan. Not really a baseball fan. And you're like, the moment was wasted on you. It was. It was a complete, I wish you had been there instead of me.

[6 : 35] But, so I didn't really understand the significance of the moment. I was hanging out with my friends. We're watching a baseball game and everybody starts freaking out and I'm like, well, something great is happening. And I start cheering. But I didn't really get it until later. And somebody explained to me, it's been 86 years since they won. And they won with one of the greatest comebacks in all of baseball history. And I was like, oh, well, that's pretty great. I think there were a lot of people in the crowd that day, a lot of people in the city of Jerusalem who kind of got swept up with the excitement. Their friends were there and it seems like something great is happening. But they failed to understand the significance of what was actually happening. And I think that's because a lot of those people were blinded by their own personal agendas. You know, when you're so fixated on your own hopes, your own idea of what's good for the world, your own agendas and priorities, you can sometimes miss what's right in front of your face. And there were several agendas circulating. The Romans had a very clear agenda. The Romans who were there, their agenda was to stay in power. The Roman emperor, about 30 years before Jesus was born, that Rome shifted from being a republic to being, the emperor began to claim that he was divine, that his father was divine and that he was the son of God. And so they began to send the news out all around the known world, the good news that the emperor is the son of God, the king of the world. Does that sound familiar? So the emperor was being worshipped as the son of God and the king of the world. So the Romans are looking at Jesus and they're looking at this kingly processional happening and they're hearing all the chants that are being chanted and they're trying to figure out, is this some celebrity influencer in joining in five minutes of fame? Or is this a rival to Caesar? A rival to the throne and someone who needs to be put down swiftly and painfully. So that's the Roman agenda. So when they see all of these people saying in treating Jesus like a king, they get very nervous because their agenda is being threatened.

There was also a Jewish agenda. The Jewish agenda was to get their power back. Once they had been a great nation under King David back in the good old days, but things had declined and now they're living under Roman occupation, which is humiliating if you're God's chosen people.

So they want Jesus to come and to make Israel great again. They're tired of feeling weak. They're tired of feeling angry. They're tired of feeling afraid. They're tired of being made fun of. And anytime people feel weak, anytime people feel angry and afraid, they long for a champion, someone who will make them feel tough and strong and vindicate them so that nobody will laugh at them. But then they see that Jesus isn't riding a war horse like some conquering king. He's riding a donkey. Now it's hard to get excited about a champion riding a donkey. This isn't a symbol of war and conquest and power. It's a symbol of peace and humility. And that makes the Jews very nervous. The question that we need to ask, friends, is, are we willing to receive Jesus as he truly is or do we have an agenda that gets in the way?

I think there are a lot of agendas circulating when it comes to religion. Religion can be a very powerful force for good or for evil. A lot of that depends on our agenda. Some people want to co-opt Jesus into their politics. We want a champion. We want a champion of tradition. We want a

champion of national identity.

We want a champion of inclusivity. We want a champion of social change. And so we tend to highlight the parts of the Bible that fit with our agenda. We tend to kind of quietly and politely ignore the parts that don't. I think some people simply want a therapeutic Jesus. We want his advice, but not necessarily his authority. Maybe we want a champion of Jesus to help us achieve our biggest dreams, to help us change the world as long as he doesn't try too hard to change us. You know, for me, I just, most of the time, I want Jesus to follow my sense of timing. You know, I told him very clearly when I wanted to move in here.

[11 : 12] And I've had to realize that everything happens according to his timing and not mine. The point is, if we want a relationship with Jesus Christ, and I mean the real Jesus Christ, not some God that we have created in our own image. If we want to follow and know the real Jesus Christ, there comes a time when we have to be willing to lay our agenda at his feet.

When we have to be willing to say, not my will, but thy will be done. Which is exactly what Jesus will say over the course of his time during the Passover, when he goes to his knees in the Garden of Gethsemane, just a few days from this day. And he knows what's about to happen. He knows that he is about to suffer unimaginably to set his people free.

The ultimate Passover. And he prays to his Father, if there's any way to allow this cup to pass from my lips, may it be so. But ultimately then he prays to his Father, not my will, but thy will be done. Jesus will never fit into our categories. Politically, socially, whatever you think he stands for that aligns with what you stand for, there will be things that you find that challenge that.

Chances are, if Jesus fits neatly into your category, then you're not dealing with the real Jesus. Jesus will never bow to our agendas. The question is, will we bow to his agenda or not?

[12 : 49] So that's what we learned from his entry into the city. But then, immediately, Matthew skips straight to the temple. In Mark's gospel, we learn that he actually spends the night. And then the next day, the first thing he does is he goes to the temple. And it says this, I'll read it for you.

Jesus entered the temple courts and he drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. It is written, he said to them, my house will be called a house of prayer, but you're making it a den of robbers. See, people had to have money to go to the temple. It was a business. You had to, everybody, every male had to pay the temple tax to redeem their soul. So you had to pay half a shekel.

And then you had to atone for your sin by offering animals to sacrifice in the temple. And you had to get the animal somehow. And if you're traveling from far away, like a lot of people did, you couldn't just find an animal. You had to buy the animal. And so there were animal vendors. And so there were all of these vendors that were there. And then you couldn't use the money that the Romans and the Greeks used. You had to use special temple money. And so there were all of these vendors that were selling animals and that were exchanging money. And so a whole market had grown up around this. And with that, of course, came a certain amount of corruption. And it's easy to read this and to think that Jesus came in, he saw all the money and the commerce, and that there was corruption, and he got angry and he drove everybody out. But I would suggest that that's not what's happening here. I think it's part of it, maybe. But if we look at what Jesus says, there's something else going on here. Because as Jesus drives everybody out, he quotes a particular passage, Isaiah 56, verse 7. And if you look at that verse, God is talking about all of the non-Jewish people in the world, people who want to have a relationship with him. And it says there, these, God is speaking, these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar, for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations. So the reason, friends, that Jesus gets so angry and drives out the vendors is not just because of the corruption. It's because the vendors are filling up the part of the temple known as the court of the Gentiles. It's a special place in the temple for all of the non-Jewish people who want to come and worship God and have a relationship with him. And see, in the past, all of these vendors had been located outside the temple in the Kidron Valley, and there hadn't been an issue. But when Caiaphas became the high priest, he let all those vendors move into the temple and into the court of the Gentiles. He let them all come in and take over.

It's far more convenient, and if it's more convenient, you're going to make more money. So it made sense from an economic perspective. But it had a drawback. The court of the Gentiles was now so packed with vendor stalls that there was no room for non-Jewish people to come in and to pray and to have a relationship with God. And so they were prevented from doing so. So Jesus gets angry,

and he drives them all out, and he quotes this passage, and he says, my house should be called a house of prayer for all nations. Let them come. And what we see here is that God wants all people to come to know him. That this faith is not a faith for a certain type of person. It's not a faith just for Jewish people or just for Christian people or just for people who are religiously inclined.

That God wants the good news of his saving actions in history to go out to every man, woman, and child on the planet. He wants everybody to come to know him. And so right now, if that is true, which we believe it is, it says in the book of Acts that God places us where and when we live, and that his desire is that we would feel our way toward him and find him. And what that means is that God, the Spirit of God, is at work in the lives of people all around this city. The Spirit of God is at work in the lives of people all throughout this neighborhood. And the Spirit of God is at work in the hearts and the lives of people gathered in this room right here. It means that God is already at work bringing people to himself. So some people might hear this and say, well, okay, what does that have to do with me?

[17:30] You know, in the Old Testament, in order to encounter God, and this wasn't just the Jews, everybody knew in the old world, in the ancient world, if you wanted to have a relationship with God, you had to go to a temple. Everybody knew. You can't just talk to God on the sidewalk.

You got to go to a temple. That's where God lives. He lives in the temple. That's what everybody thought. So you had to go to the temple. You had to offer your sacrifices. You had to pay your temple tax, and then you could, or you had to come into the court of the Gentiles, then God could hear you.

And then you say, well, what about in the New Testament? Where do we see the temple in the New Testament? Well, actually, one of the reasons that Jesus is so hated by the religious leaders is he does away with the temple, at least the brick and mortar temple. Where's the temple in the New Testament church?

In some ways, it's analogous to a building like this, absolutely. But theologically, in the New Testament Christian church, if you are a Christian, you are the temple.

You're the temple. Because the great mystery of the gospel is that somehow God's presence and life dwells inside you when you come to faith. So if you understand that, and then you understand this, that even though God can reach people any way he chooses, through any method he chooses, that somehow in the great mystery of God's wisdom, God chooses to work through his people to reach other people. So let me ask you this question. Class, where is the court of the Gentiles?

[19:10] The court of the Gentiles is the time and the space that you carve out in your life to have a relationship and to befriend and to love and to serve people who don't know Jesus. It is the margin that you allow yourself to have if you're a Christian. It's that margin, that space that you carve out, that you keep, you prevent it from getting cluttered, and you keep it open, so that when somebody comes along and God is at work in their life, and they're open, and they want to talk about faith, and they have questions about Jesus, that you have time to sit down with them and have that conversation. The court of the Gentiles is the space that we carve out for those kinds of relationships. And I'm speaking from experience. It is so easy to allow yourself, especially if you're a Christian, to allow your life to get so filled up with religious activity, with things that are all important, they're all good, they're all necessary, between your family and your job and the things that you're doing at church, and it all matters. But you're like, when is the last time I spent any time with somebody who didn't know the Lord in a meaningful way? Not just talking about faith, talking about anything. Is there margin in my life for that? You know, this is illustrated for me all the time when I fly. You know, it's a difference between me and my wife. When I get on an airplane,

I'm a hardcore introvert that cosplays as an extrovert, and I get on a plane, and my most powerful inclination is I want to pull out a book, or put in a podcast, or do something and kind of huddle over, and just make it really clear that I'm not in the mood to converse. And some of you are like that, okay? No judgment, because I'm like that, okay? Now you should see my wife when she gets on a plane. My wife will fly from here, she'll get on a one-hour flight. And somehow she sits down, and she just has this posture of openness toward whoever the Lord places in the seat next to her.

And I cannot tell you how many times at the end of that flight, this person has just opened up, the tears are flowing, they're bonding. I'm like, well, who's coming over for dinner tonight?

Who, what person from wherever is now our best friend? Because they've bonded, and very often these questions, these conversations turn to conversations of faith. I think about a conversation recently with somebody who had been in the faith, and then had thought he had walked away from

it.

Thought it, and maybe some of you feel that way, and yet he felt like God won't let him go, and he's like, God just keeps pursuing me, and I don't know what to do with that. And Laura and I were talking, it's like, I think God put you there for that conversation.

[21 : 59] But see, that's because she has space and openness in her life and in her heart to receive that person into the court of the Gentiles. So the question, I think, that we should meditate on here at church, if Jesus were to cleanse the temple of our lives, what would he have to clear out?

What would he drive out in order to make room in our lives for the people that he wants to reach? That's the second thing we'll consider together. Now lastly, in this story, Jesus enters into the city, Jesus goes immediately to the temple.

He drives people out, he opens the court of the Gentiles, and then we see this amazing thing begin to happen. You know, throughout the Middle Ages, there was a kind of a myth, this idea that lasted for centuries and centuries and centuries, beginning around the 10th or 11th century, of the kingly touch.

The idea that king, that you know a true king because they have a healing touch. So they can heal skin diseases and other things, and that's how you know true royalty.

And, you know, some of you who are Tolkien fans know that J.R.R. Tolkien picked this up in his Lord of the Rings. In that series, the hope of the world rests in the return of the rightful king.

[23 : 23] And there's a prophecy about the king that's coming. The hands of the king are the hands of a healer, and so shall the rightful king be known.

The hands of the king are the hands of a healer, and so shall the rightful king be known. And this myth, this idea, is ultimately rooted in something that is true. It's ultimately rooted in Scripture, in prophecies like Isaiah.

And Isaiah says that when the true king of the world comes, when God's king comes, you know, it says earthly kings do what? The earthly kings exploit. Earthly kings crush the weak.

Earthly kings grab power and hold on to power at whatever cost. And Isaiah says, no, but when the true king comes, here's how you're going to recognize him. Because he's going to give sight to the blind.

Because the lame will leap like a deer. Because he'll be the kind of king who binds up the brokenhearted. Because he'll be the king that proclaims freedom to the captives. So no sooner does Jesus clear out the court, than people start to come.

[24 : 32] But who comes streaming into the temple? It's not the religious leaders. They're standing off to the side angry, frustrated. It says the blind come.

The lame come. People who can't walk. Now you need to understand, under the law of Moses, the blind and lame were limited. They were restricted from full temple access. That meant, that symbolized the purity that would be expected to be displayed by those approaching God.

So if you were blind or lame or had other debilitating conditions, you weren't, you didn't get full temple, you were restricted. So the religious leaders see all these, all these ne'er-do-wells, all these obviously cursed people, all these dregs of society, all these outsiders and outcasts and rejects. The religious leaders see all these people coming to the church and they're indignant and they're angry and they're disgusted and they're condescendingly looking down to these people. Who let this rabble, ragtag bunch in here?

But Jesus not only welcomes these people, but he begins to heal them. He begins to heal them. And as he does, it's so beautiful, the children begin to sing, Hosanna to the Son of David.

[25 : 43] And you know, the word Hosanna is both, it's both a praise, royal praise, praise you Lord, praise you King, but it's also a cry for help, save us, save us. And they begin to chant, Hosanna, Hosanna to the Son of David.

So here in the temple, Jesus is showing the world that the true king has come and his hands are the hands of a healer and so shall the rightful king be known. And of course, if we know how this story progresses, we know that the deepest healing we need is not social, it's not physical, it's not psychological, it is spiritual.

The deepest healing we need is to be forgiven and reconciled to God. And if you are here this morning, that is the most important thing in your life, is whether or not you have been forgiven and restored to the living God or not.

And if we know how this story goes, we know what this healing king has to do. We know that in order to make that kind of healing possible, his healing hands have to be pierced. His healing hands have to be wounded. Just days after he cleanses the temple, Jesus is going to be arrested, he's going to be falsely accused and tried, he's ultimately going to be executed. [27 : 00] But then we know that by that death, sin and death themselves are defeated. And because of that, because of what we're going to celebrate over this coming week, Jesus offers ultimate healing to the whole world.

The spiritual healing of being reconnected to the source of life himself. So what we see here, friends, is that two activities mark Jesus' presence wherever he goes. Worship and healing. So when we gather together into this space, we should expect nothing less. Right?

This is a place where we come expecting to encounter God. God. We don't come just to rehearse tired stories from 2,000 years ago. We don't come just to contemplate advice from some guy up front who offers a way to improve this or that in your life.

We're not here just to sing. We're not even here as fun as it is just to enjoy being together. All of those things are great. But we're here because we come together expecting to encounter the living God.

[28 : 07] And we expect to be transformed by that. This is a place where weary souls are going to find rest. Right? This is a place where struggling marriages are going to begin to heal.

This is a place where anxious minds are going to find some measure of peace. It's a place where addictions are going to be overcome. Those battles will start in these pews, in these chairs.

This is a place where shame is going to give way to grace. It's a place where the lonely are going to finally find a family. It's a place where justice and mercy are going to prevail and overcome all of the injustice and oppression in the world.

This is a place where faith is going to be rekindled by people who thought they outgrew God. But all of that is only possible because when we come here, we will encounter the living God.

So this is not a church, no offense, for people who are impressive. You can come. It's not really for you. It's not a church for people who are polished.

[29 : 14] You're welcome. It's not really for you. It's not a church for people who have it all together. This is really a church for people who actually know that underneath the polish, we really don't have it all together.

We clean up well on a Sunday, but we don't have it all together. This is a church for people who struggle to fit in. This is a church for people who feel left out, forgotten, excluded, marginalized. This is a church, friends, simply put, for people who know they need Jesus, who know they need those healing hands, who know that whatever is happening in here, that they need to be changed, they need to be transformed, that something needs to happen.

Because when Jesus takes over a space, we recognize that the reason our church has to be that way is because when Jesus takes over a space, he fills it with the very kinds of people that the world often overlooks.

Those are his people. And if we ever build a church, and I'm aiming it, if you're part of our church, if you're a guest coming for the first time, I'm really aiming this, the people who are part of Church of the Advent.

[30 : 31] If we ever build a church that excludes such people, then we will have excluded Christ himself. Because he is to be found wherever those people are, the people who most need him.

So how do we enter into this new chapter of our church, friends? How do we enter it well? How do we steward the gift that we've been given? How will we be known in this neighborhood and in this city?

First, may we lay down our agendas, and may we commit ourselves to Christ, that we would be known as a community with uncompromising commitment to his word, his way, his mission. May we be known as a church that prioritizes reaching those whom Jesus is calling to himself, people who need the hope and the freedom of the gospel, and may we not be ashamed or embarrassed to proclaim that gospel.

And may we be known as a place that welcomes all who need to be healed and transformed and renewed. May this be a place where lives are changed, where the Holy Spirit is powerfully at work, and where we encounter the living Christ together.

[31 : 48] Amen? Amen. Let's pray. Our Lord and Heavenly Father, we thank you, we praise you, and it is the name of Christ that we enter into this space, Lord.

May you lead the way. May we follow your example. May you do in our midst what we cannot do on our own, and may you thereby glorify your name above every earthly name.

And we pray this in your holy and beautiful name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.