

# Out with the Old

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, whenever there's a procession or a parade, one thing that everyone wants to know is! What's the route going to be? Perhaps for parking, perhaps for just getting about, perhaps you looked! even on the council website last Sunday to see, because of course there was a historic, not to say once in a lifetime parade through our city just last Sunday. The Dons rode the open bus top from the end of Union Street. They turned off actually just the corner, just up the road here, and on to the townhouse, where I believe they went out onto the balcony with the Lord Provost to lift the Scottish Cup, and then I guess on to Pitodry. Lots of us will have got the bus down Union Street, but of course this time is different, isn't it? It was symbolic of something much, much bigger, the destination said something about the city's pride in their team's achievement.

Or think back to the king's coronation and the procession from Westminster Abbey to Buckingham Palace, all those troops. How many tourists have walked those streets between those two places through London, but the procession routes, where it started, where it ended, were significant.

Now last Sunday we witnessed the arrival of God's long-promised king into the royal city Jerusalem. He rode, as the prophet had said, on a donkey, and the crowds cheered for him as the rightful heir to the throne of God's kingdom, the son of David. But where does the procession route go now?

Okay, there's no time that passes between verses 11 and 12 in our passage. The word and is the big giveaway at the beginning of verse 12. So Jesus has not gone home in between, okay? Between last week and this week it's only as if we've pressed pause on the TV and that image of Jesus entering the city has been frozen on our screens. But this morning we press play and he carries on. So where does the king go now?

Where does his procession route end? Not at the governor's palace, not at the high priest's house, but verse 12, Jesus entered the temple. Where does the king go? But right to the heart of God's kingdom, the place on earth that had been built for God's people to come to God's throne and into his presence.

[ 2 : 5 6 ] It's the Buckingham Palace, or it's the Pataudry of this story. It's the spiritual home, in this case of God and God's kingdom. And Jesus going straight there from his triumphal entry says something to us about the purpose of his coming. It is very significant. His place at the heart of God's kingdom. What he does there, how people treat him there, will send out ripples through history and eternity. The king is very much in the building. How many people had walked that way through the city of Jerusalem on pilgrimage or for Passover to worship? But this time is different. This time is different.

Our passage shows us why we've got two points this morning. Firstly, the arrival of King Jesus clears out corruption. Now, what is Jesus' first act as the coming king? Well, we read, don't we, Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple. And he overturned the tables of the money changes and the seats of the seats of the seats of the seats of the seats of the seats of the people who sold pigeons. It's really shocking. What words would you choose to describe what's happening?

Confrontational? Violent? Those things are true. This is a side of Jesus that we have not seen in the gospel so far, is it? We've seen people bring the fight to Jesus. Here is Jesus bringing the fight to them.

I wonder how does this fit into our view, our vision of Jesus? Last time we saw, didn't we, Jesus is the humble king. He is gentle. He is kind. He is full of love.

We see that even in our passage, the way that he welcomes and heals the blind, the lame. He receives the children. He has not stopped being all those things. And yet at the same time, brothers and sisters, he is still, isn't he, the righteous king, pure, uncompromising with the truth. And he has never not been those things either. So when Jesus comes to the temple as king, his first act is to clear out corruption. That's why he flips the tables. He chases the traders away because he says, verse 13, it is written, my house shall be called a house of prayer, but ye make it a den of robbers.

[ 5 : 56 ] See what he's saying? The people of that day had turned God's temple into something that it wasn't. It wasn't just a small and innocent tweak, but the very opposite thing. The temple was built as a house for people to sit down together with God and talk. But it had become a safe place, a hiding place for people with dirty hands and impure hearts to come and hide and take refuge. It had gone from being a holy house to being a filthy hole. It's really important that we understand what kind of corruption Jesus came to clear out. We often imagine, perhaps it's just me or maybe you've been told or heard, that Jesus' issue with the traders in the temple is that they were taking advantage of people financially. So maybe they were charging kind of unfair, inflated or high prices, something like that.

Perhaps that is what Jesus means by the word robbers. But there was actually nothing wrong with what these guys were doing in and of itself. They were actually providing a service people needed. You know, imagine you're setting out from home. You're going to the festival in Jerusalem, the Passover. You're going to be walking perhaps two or three days. You're not going to bring your sheep or your bird or whatever you're going to offer with you. You'll pick it up when you're there. The issue is you don't have the right currency. So when you get there, you'll have to change your money for temple coins. And then you'll have to find somewhere to buy your animal. And that's what these guys were here for, right? The money changers and the traders so that pilgrims coming to worship didn't have to bring animals from home.

So there's nothing wrong in and of itself with them buying and selling. So why does Jesus confront them? Well, not because they're buying and selling, but because, verse 12, they are buying and selling in the temple. The problem is not what they're doing. It is where they are doing it. See, that the business of the temple that was there to enable people to meet with God in the temple had actually taken God's place in the temple. Friends, understand, Jesus isn't there to confront financial corruption, but spiritual corruption. You know, I'll never forget the first time I walked into Marshall College.

I've walked past it a number of times. You know, the towers, the stonework, beautiful. Amazing, isn't it, isn't it, to look at from the outside. And then I walked in, white ceiling panels, carpet tiles, LED lights. I've got nothing against the council. But a building that looks awesome from the outside is lifeless and soulless on the inside. That's what's happened in God's temple, but spiritually.

It's if Jesus has pulled back the curtain in front of the most holy place, the holy of holies, you know, the centerpiece of this holy place. And what he's found there is not God's throne, but a checkout and a card reader and some plastic carrier bags on the floor. If that was on the street outside, that would be fine, but it has no place being in God's place. The temple looks full of life, busy, bustling. But at its heart, says Jesus, it is dead. It is lifeless. It is something it was never meant to be. We're going to loop back to that idea later in our passage. But just while we're here, I think it's worth us just pulling in for a second to see how that might happen for us today. Okay, how might we put the business of running the church, say, in God's place? Sometimes it's true. Money, giving, buying, selling does become the big thing in churches. Finance is important, but when the cash flow becomes the big thing in church, then money has taken the place of God in his holy temple. And that is corrupt. It is wicked and twisted. But I don't think that that is an immediate risk for us here. Perhaps more something for us to just keep an eye on is if ever things like rotas or teams or service or programs or activities, which are good and important and necessary, but if they ever were to become the very life or the heartbeat of our church, instead of being simply the scaffolding that supports what we're really about, which is meeting with and knowing the living God, well, has that taken the place of God in his holy church? We're a busy church family.

[ 11 : 30 ] Lots of us are serving in lots of different ways. That's right. We love that. But because our hearts are corrupt, that brings its own risks, doesn't it? Martin Luther famously spoke of sin as being curved in on ourselves. And friends, that can happen not only to us as individuals, but us as churches, where we become so absorbed in our own life as a church and keeping everything running becomes an end in itself. Whether that is a packed schedule of activities or whether it's just keeping the doors open and the lights on. Churches where that happens, big or small churches that curve in on themselves like that, they can become, can't they? They can become dens of robbers, great places for glory thieves to come and hide. Who want to be seen and noticed for what they're doing, instead of pointing people to God, giving him the praise and recognition that he deserves. You don't need to be handling cash to be a spiritual robber. A friend of mine said recently, I found this really quite challenging, probing. He said, sometimes I think it's easier to love the work of the Lord than to love the Lord himself.

It's a great question to ask ourselves, isn't it? Has the work of the Lord become more precious to me than the Lord himself? Are we becoming curved in on our own life and work rather than beholding the king in his temple? Friends, no sooner has the king arrived than he clears out that spiritual corruption from God's place. And that has two consequences that we see in the following verses. Firstly, surprisingly, the humble gladly come to him. All right, I wonder, how would you feel going up to somebody who has just been flipping tables over? We might feel quite terrified of that person, might we?

Is Jesus someone we can be safe around? Well, there are some people there that day who think he certainly is, and they're right. Verse 14, the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. And who else? Verse 15, children crying out in the temple, Hosanna to the son of David. Children have this kind of innate sense, don't they, of who can be trusted. If a child feels safe around you, it really says something. Isn't it really interesting that these small, vulnerable, weak people, even children feel safe around Jesus at this point? They feel they can come to him when he's just been driving others away? Again, we're brought up, aren't we, against the mystery of Christ, his dominion and majesty and authority are not in competition with his compassion and mercy and mercy and grace? If we struggle to imagine that, think of it like this, you know, a place where glory thieves are fighting for the spotlight, well, that isn't a safe place, is it, for the weak and the vulnerable to be? Those with little to spend, few ways to serve, will be trampled and sidelined in that place. So by clearing the robbers out of the temple, Jesus has made space for others to come safely to him. The blind, the lame, the children. Friends, churches can be the most dangerous places on earth. Partly that's because we think that it's the safest place for us to be. But remember back to

Jesus's teaching in chapter 18, three things are needed for church to be safe for us. Humility, repentance, forgiveness. Humility, repentance, forgiveness, because we are sinners and we sin. We wrong each other. You are going to hurt and be hurt by the people sitting around you. But if we know that about ourselves, if we acknowledge that and know that's who we are, we will be quick, won't we, to humble ourselves. Open to challenge, quick to admit fault, quick to turn from it, and even more ready to forgive others. If we don't humble ourselves, admit that we're spiritually the blind, the lame, well, we won't be coming to Jesus and we won't be being healed. And unless we're coming like that to Jesus, humbly being healed, well, we won't last long as a church. And this won't be a spiritually safe place for young, weak, vulnerable people to come to him. Friends, if that's you today, know that Jesus welcomes you. He is safe for you to come near to. He uses his power and might to defend the humble.

Perhaps particularly if you have been hurt or trampled by Christians or churches, cry out to him with the children. Save us, son of David. Save us, heal us. We need his rescue and protection, his healing, his welcome. Come near to him with the least and the last and the littlest today.

[ 17 : 30 ] The second consequence, though, of Jesus cleansing the temple's corruption is that the proud angrily oppose him. See that? When the chief priests and 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. See the irony of that, that we're told they are indignant about the wonderful things that Jesus did. Healing the sick, how dare he? Children crying out praise to him. What are they doing? Others, the crowds, the sick, the children, can see that Jesus is the king, but not them. The chief priests and scribes were responsible for the temple's running, but their response shows that they very much see the temple as their house, our stomping ground. In their eyes, Jesus is trespassing. They'll make these feelings known even more clearly in the verses, the chapters to come, but in fact, the temple is not their house.

Whose house is it really? Well, what does Jesus say? The chief priests and scribes say with, you know, steam coming out of their ears, can you hear what these children are calling you?

Yes, says Jesus. And as if this should have been obvious to them, he says, have you never read Psalm 8? Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies, you've prepared praise.

See what he's saying? What were you expecting people to do when I got here to my house? Oh, Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. Who gets praised in the temple? The Lord Jesus, says Jesus.

And with that, he leaves his house for the night, and the caretakers are blowing a fuse. I'm on a bit of a Lord of the Rings run at the minute. I know after last week, you'll have all gone home and watched the trilogy again, the extended versions. If you didn't do that, there's a really nasty character in the third movie called Denethor.

[ 19 : 56 ] Denethor, he is the caretaker or the steward of the kingdom of Gondor. His one and only job is to look after the throne for the true king until he comes.

But when he hears that the true king is on his way, Denethor can't take it. My crown, my throne, my kingdom, even though the kingdom's falling to rack and ruin, and it's not his to begin with.

Doesn't that remind you of the chief priests, the scribes in the temple, no, king, Lord, we're fine without you. You are dismissed. Friends, if we ever begin to think that the church is our church, or that we have a greater claim to it than others, we will be super angry when Jesus starts moving the furniture around and getting the spotlights.

Church leaders can sometimes be the worst for that. Sometimes you hear pastors talk about my church or my people. If you ever hear me say that, will you just take me aside and have a word? Because it's Jesus' church, and we are his people.

More widely, it's the reaction we can expect from people, even leaders in our culture, who think that church is fine as long as it meets their agenda, or what they think is important, meeting felt needs, perhaps hunger, anxiety.

[ 21 : 30 ] Those are important things for us to care about. But tell people that church is actually about Jesus, and praising Jesus, and see what reaction you get.

Better still, tell people that we raise our children for the purpose of praising Jesus, and see what reaction you get. Friends, the proud angrily oppose King Jesus and his reign and his place at the heart of God's kingdom and his people.

But that is no threat to Jesus, because our second big point, and more briefly this morning, the arrival of the king spells the end of an era, verses 18 to 22.

What about the fig tree? Okay. The atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell spoke about Jesus cursing the fig tree in his famous lecture, *Why I'm Not a Christian*.

Now I hope that this fig tree thing isn't such a big stumbling block to any of you today, although I'm sure we have questions. But, context is king.

[ 22 : 41 ] Okay. And, hopefully in light of Jesus clearing out the temple, we'll understand more about him cursing the fig tree. See, fig trees and grapevines are often used as symbols of God's ancient people, Israel, in the Old Testament.

So even knowing that, the whole thing, right, has a much deeper message than we get from a surface level reading. Jesus was really crossed with a tree, right, or something. No doubt he could have eaten a fig.

We're told he was hungry. But the timing of it and the location of it tell us this is about something much, much bigger. See, Jesus has just gone to the temple, beautiful, and his judgment is that it has become a spiritual shell, beautiful on the outside, but dead on the inside.

Now, on his way back into the city, heading back towards the temple, he finds a fig tree that has lots of leaves, beautiful on the outside, but no fruits, dead on the inside.

The fig tree has always been a symbol for Israel, but this particular fig tree is a very powerful picture of Israel at this point in history.

[ 24 : 01 ] And Jesus' judgment on it in that light, far from being silly or petty, is sobering and profound. Verse 19, he said to it, may no fruit ever come from you again.

And the fig tree withered at once. Translation, time for the old order represented by the temple to wither and die.

End of an era. Notice that he doesn't strip it of fruit that is there. Notice he doesn't stop it from producing something good. He's condemning what is already fruitless, already lifeless, to perpetual fruitlessness and lifelessness.

In other words, there is no way back now for the temple as the way for people to come to God. Jesus is saying it's past its use-by date, it's gone off and the smell of decay is all around it.

And so, says Jesus, what is true on the inside is about to become true on the outside too, withered, dead. It's the end of an era. Now, why does he have to act that out with the fig tree, right?

[ 25 : 15 ] Why not just say that? Well, because he had kind of said that the day before and the disciples didn't get it. They need to get it because they're actually going to be part of it.

See, yesterday, Jesus did what Matthew calls marvelous things in the temple, but it's only now that Jesus curses the fig tree and it withers that the disciples, verse 20, they marveled.

They didn't marvel at the marvelous, so Jesus has to do something that they cannot now miss. And why does Jesus not want them to miss it? Because he tells them, verse 21, truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain be taken up and thrown in the sea, it will happen.

Remember what the fig tree represents, the temple and that whole way that had become so corrupt. So what will it now mean for them to do what's been done to the fig tree?

These men will consign that old order to history. They will wither the temple, so to speak. Read on through Acts, and watch these men go in and out of the temple and win the crowds over and silence the chief priests and scribes through their preaching of Jesus' death and resurrection.

[ 26 : 44 ] Watch them tear apart the spiritual foundations of the old order that Jesus first cracked on the cross. Remember, the temple curtain tore in two upon Jesus' death and these men will not stop pulling the loose threads until the whole thing is unraveled.

they will say to the temple mount, to this mountain, be taken up and thrown in the sea, be gone, and it will happen. Indeed, in their own lifetimes, in the next 40 years, they would see the temple pulled down when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, never to rise again.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus is not telling us that we will move spiritual mountains if only we believe hard enough. He's saying that these men will demolish temple mounts if their trust is in him.

Jesus, the true temple, the final sacrifice, the new and living way that he had opened up through his flesh. So the king passes judgment on that old order and the apostles would bring it to an end at last.

But friends, what do we do with that? Right? The temple is ancient history. So what can we learn today?

[ 28 : 06 ] Well, there is still such a thing, is there not, as green and leafy religion that doesn't bear fruit. And that kind of religion can grow anywhere because it grows in the soil of the human heart.

Now, don't mishear me. I'm not saying that unless dozens of your friends are turning to Christ or you're doing extraordinary things for the Lord, you're not being fruitful. But what's the fruit that Jesus says that he is after?

What did he want to find in the temple that wasn't there when he went? It is written, my house will be called a house of prayer.

It comes back again, doesn't it, at the end, verse 22, whatever you ask in prayer. Jesus says prayer is the fruit of a living relationship with God.

Think about it, relationships don't last if you don't talk. If God is our Father in heaven, then one of our greatest joys as his children should be to talk with him.

[ 29 : 13 ] Obviously, Jesus is not saying, is he, that God will give you whatever you ask for if you believe hard enough. He's saying, if we really know God, we'll learn what his will for us is and that's what we'll ask him for because we want to please him.

Relationship, communication, intimacy, love. That's why the house was built in the first place, says Jesus. The family home, it was a house of talking together, a house of fellowship with God or we might even say, might we, communion.

Communion. Friends, beware becoming a prayerless Christian. Beware becoming a prayerless Christian because Jesus has consigned that kind of religion to the history books.

That is not how it's going to be among his people anymore, he says. We're on speaking terms now. Through his death, we're reconciled to God and it's never going back to silence. Sometimes, can't we, when we pray, we can do that leafy green thing, can't we, and sound really great, but what's in our heart?

The test is, what do we pray when we're alone, isn't it? What do we pray when we're alone? Good prayers don't have to be long and wordy. When the disciples asked Jesus, teach us to pray, he gave us a prayer that takes 30 seconds to say the Lord's Prayer.

[ 30 : 40 ] It doesn't have to be long, it doesn't have to be complicated, but friends, we can use our personal prayer life, whether we pray, how we pray, what we pray, to take the temperature of our hearts.

Robert Murray McShane famously said, a man is what he is, on his knees before God and no more. And we want to add women into that as well, don't we, of course.

Brothers and sisters, however Christian we look or sound, this is the fruit of a spiritually alive heart, personal intimacy and fellowship with God.

That's what the old temple was meant for and lost its way, but we have a true temple in Christ that will never go away, never be corrupted.

We have a new and living way to God through Jesus' broken body and that way will never close, never be shut to us so that those who come to him in humility will be healed.

[ 31 : 47 ] We will never die. Our relationship with God will never end and we will delight in that as we pray.

and we'll see. Let's do that together now. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.! Let's pray together.