

**Midweek 3**  
**His Final Steps Led to His Father's House**  
**Sermon Text: Matthew 21:12-17**

Was a bounce in our Savior's steps as he "*traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival*" with his parents, Mary and Joseph (Luke 2:41)? It was a five-day journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem. And Jesus, now 12 years old, was going along, probably because he was preparing for his bar mitzvah, which is kind of like our modern-day confirmation. Jesus was about to join the religious community as a son of the commandment.

Did Jesus' muscles ache a bit and his step slow as he and his family made their way up the steep grade that stretched for miles leading to the walls of the city of Jerusalem? And once the boy Jesus saw the temple mount and the great temple rebuilt by Herod, did our Savior's heart skip a beat? Did he think, "I'm home at last"? He certainly acted as if he were home, didn't he? For when Passover was finished and his parents left on the return trip to Nazareth, it took them a day before they realized their son wasn't with them! After a frantic three-day search, "*they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us this way? See, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you.'* He said to them, '*Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be taking care of my Father's business?*'" (Luke 2:46-49). This is the only account in Scripture that touches on the so-called silent years of Jesus: a span of time that stretches from when he was less than 2 years old to when he began his ministry at age 30. This single account tells us about the boy Jesus at home in his Father's house.

Then, as an adult, he started to preach. He started to teach. John informs us that the Passover was drawing near, and so Jesus "*went up to Jerusalem*" (John 2:13). He went to the temple, where he "*found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and money changers sitting at tables*" (John 2:14). Our Savior single-handedly drove out all the sheep, all the cattle, all the merchants, and all the money changers while he shouted, "*Get these things out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a place of business!*" (John 2:16).

Given this history, it shouldn't surprise us that in the last week of his life, Jesus went back home.

**His Final Steps Led to His Father's House.**

- I. A house that needed cleansing.**
- II. A house intended for healing.**
- III. A house meant for praise.**

**I. A house that needed cleansing.**

In Mark's gospel, we learn that after Jesus' Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem, the first place our Savior went, the very same day, was the temple. "*[He] looked around at everything. Since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve*" (Mark 11:11). First thing Monday morning, Jesus was back. He had business to take care of—his Father's business. That meant turning upside down the corrupt business of the merchants and the money changers who had set up shop in the outer courtyard of the temple. Shocking! Because that's the place where the Gentiles were supposed to worship and pray! But how could they? How could they even hear

themselves think over the haggling that took place in the marketplace? How could they possibly focus when they had to be ever so careful about where they stepped or stood, lest they land in something left behind by sheep or cattle? And the smell? What about that? But what stunk far worse was knowing that all of this business was sanctioned by the high priests. They got a cut of the obscenely overpriced animals available for sacrifice. Yet they had the Gentiles between a rock and a hard place! For if they brought their own animal or bought one from a merchant outside the temple courts, the temple priests would probably reject the animal as unfit while directing the people to a temple court merchant instead.

And the money changers? Why were they there? The temple leaders insisted that all the worshipers, all the religious pilgrims, had to exchange their coins for the shekel of Tyre. That was the only coin that could be used to pay the temple tax. You will likely find it disgusting that this particular coin had an image of the god Melqart on it. That's a form of Baal. You'll probably find it even more disgusting that historical evidence indicates the temple authorities counterfeited these shekels of Tyre. And if that wasn't bad enough, they cheated on the exchange rate.

It was all about the business of making money. But none of it was God's business. A cleansing needed to happen. So our Savior's final steps led him back to his Father's house. *"Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all those who were selling and buying in the temple. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. He said to them, 'It is written, "My house will be called a house of prayer," but you are making it a den of robbers!'"* (Matthew 21:12,13).

Twice in three years, one man single-handedly cleaned out the temple! All the animals—which probably included hundreds and hundreds of sheep, cattle, goats, and doves. One man single-handedly drove out all the merchants and overturned all the tables of the money changers and all the seats of those selling doves. One man against a multitude—this would have been impossible for you and me. And did I mention that they had temple guards? Temple police! Most of the officers were Levites, and they weren't a bunch of 98-pound weaklings! Later in Holy Week, those same temple police, together with the Roman soldiers, would be the ones Jesus allowed to brutalize him.

But not this day! Not when **the Son cleansed his Father's house.**

Dear friends, I think it is far too easy to read an account like this and feel a tad bit self-righteous. To think, "How low God's people, the Jews, had sunk! They cared more about the almighty shekel than about worship and prayer." But I'd be careful about walking down that path. I'm not sure we're that much better. With the coronavirus panic in recent years and unpredictable market ups and downs, what have you and I been thinking about far too often? Our investments? Retirement? "Well, the market just nixed any thoughts about that for a few more years!" Are we bitter? angry? afraid?

Even as we sit here in God's house, is it hard for us to focus on why we are here? And what this place is really all about? I firmly believe a cleansing still needs to happen every time you and I get together in our Father's house. It's a cleansing that begins with our confession: "Father, I've sinned." Then we fill in the blank with a particular sin that troubles us. How about if I give us all a minute to do that right now? Make a silent confession to your Lord of your sin. I will do the same. Let's pause . . .

Was that enough time to bare your soul? Then what a privilege I have to tell you and what a comfort it is for all of us to hear that *"the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7). The sin you just confessed, the sin I just confessed—they are gone!

Washed away in the blood of Christ! Nailed to his cross! That's what makes our Father's house so special! Because this is the place where we drag ourselves in, tired and worn out, and this is the place where we learn, time and time again, of the one who took **his final steps** all for us. All out of love.

That's why **his final steps led to his Father's house.**

## II. A house intended for healing.

After our Savior cleansed his Father's house, the temple courts were ready to be used the way our Lord intended. So now we come to verse 14. I wonder when the last time we even paid it much attention was. "*The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them.*" By the time we come to the last week of our Savior's life, miracles of healing seem almost routine. There have been so many! The official's son at Capernaum; Peter's mother-in-law; the centurion's paralyzed servant; the paralytic let down through the roof; not to mention the entire crowds our Savior healed more than once in his ministry; not to mention that little matter of raising the daughter of Jairus from the dead or interrupting a funeral procession in Nain to raise a widow's son from the dead!

It's far too easy after a long day to yawn at this verse: "*The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them.*" But I pray we won't! Because there was nothing routine about these miracles for those who were healed! Nothing routine for those families who were so blessed and touched by their Savior's love! Families who would not soon forget how Jesus had miraculously restored sight or how he enabled others—perhaps in a few cases, at least—to take their first steps ever.

It's important not to ignore this verse about healing because of how it also plays into God's overall plan. Jesus performed these miracles knowing full well how his enemies would react. "*When the chief priests and the experts in the law saw the wonders he performed . . . they were indignant*" (Matthew 21:15). Because, you see, they put two and two together. The miracles Jesus performed were signs that he was indeed the promised Messiah. Everything was falling into place, just as Isaiah had foretold: "*Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unplugged. The crippled will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will sing for joy*" (Isaiah 35:5,6).

Yet Jesus didn't shy away from performing those miracles, even though he knew this would be yet another straw that would break the camel's back. This was yet another reason for his enemies to move forward with their insanely jealous plan for his capture, even during the festival of the Passover, and then his immediate crucifixion.

Jesus couldn't shy away from those hurting sinners any more than he can shy away from you and me. His selfless love won't let him. His devotion to his Father and dedication to all of us won't allow him to. As the writer to the Hebrews observed, "*We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin. So let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*" (Hebrews 4:15,16).

How humbling and how comforting to see how **his final steps led to his Father's house.**

## III. A house meant for praise.

Jesus' miracles were signs alright! As effective and powerful as any massive billboard you've ever seen along a highway. As noticeable as the brightest flashing neon sign that ever lit up a city street. Even the children present in the temple courts that day got the message. For when they saw Jesus' miracles, they started to shout his praise: "*Hosanna to the Son of David!*" (Matthew 21:15). Jesus had heard the same cry just a day earlier, hadn't he? That was the welcoming shout of the Palm Sunday crowds as Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on the back of a donkey. The chief priests and the experts in the law didn't like it then, and they didn't like it now.

They knew what this title meant. Jesus was the Promised One, the Messiah, the Son of God! And so "*they said to him, 'Do you hear what they are saying?' 'Yes,' Jesus told them, 'Have you never read, "From the lips of little children and nursing babies you have prepared praise?" ' ' (Matthew 21:16)*. There's probably a smidgeon of sarcasm in Jesus' response "*Have you never read . . . ?*" The truth is, many experts in the law had memorized the entire Old Testament. So they had not only read Psalm 8:2, but they probably knew it by heart. But they didn't hold the meaning of the verse in their hearts. They had forgotten what the Father's house was supposed to be all about: a place where praise needed to happen for Jesus the Son, God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit as well.

Our Father's house is still a place where praise needs to happen. Praise from little children and nursing babies. Praise from teens and college students, young families, the middle-aged, and praise too from the elderly who struggle to get into this church and out again. Praise and thanks that Jesus didn't turn away from **his final steps**. Instead he took each one, all for us. Amen.