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**Passion**  
**Part 2 – Clearing the Temple**  
Pastor Ted Cunningham

Good morning, church family. Welcome to Woodland Hills; we're glad you're here. Everyone outside, welcome. All those church at home family, we welcome you to our gathering today. I must start with an apology from two weeks ago. I, before every service or between the first and the second service for sure, grab a cup of coffee back there. I usually grab the coffee back there and walk down the side and try to get in here before the first song and I sit right there. I set the coffee down, and it's in that one slot, and I come up for the first service. And then for the second service I usually leave it there. I grab a cup, come down, remove that cup and put it up behind this thing and set my new cup down.

So, two weeks ago, I walked down and there was a gentleman sitting in that seat, that I've never met before in my life. I give that friendly "welcome to Woodland Hills" nod. I take his cup of coffee out of the cup holder, hide it behind this thing right here, put my coffee in the cup holder and the whole time the guy is watching me do this with a confused look on his face. When I put my coffee in, I gave him the nod. This whole time, I'm thinking it's my cup of coffee. Stephanie does child dedication. I sit back down, give him a third nod that says, "I'm glad you're here." We sit down and he looks at me and says, "Would it be okay for me to get my coffee back now?" Most embarrassing moment in the life of my church.

I love my church family and I would never assume that is my... So, I just want to remind everybody that the cup holder doesn't belong to you and all Woodland Hills people said... Amen. Just like your seat doesn't belong to you. And all Woodland Hills people said... Now, see, I didn't get as many on that. So that was our second service, and that guy hasn't been back yet. So, hopefully, he'll be here at the 11:30. By the way, Rhonda, he wasn't from Treasure lakes was he. Okay, good, because I would like to pay for his week at the campground. I will pay you five dollars a night for his space out there at Treasure Lake.

We think a lot about our guests, and we would never steal your cup of coffee. If someone has done that to you, they need the Lord and that's why they're here too. We want them to get saved. And all God's people said... Amen.

We take an offering at our church. There are several ways you can give, and we encourage generosity. We say thank you for how well you've been giving. You can give in the offering boxes in the back, the Church Center app, which we encourage you to go on there not just for giving, but for all that's going on and all that you can sign up for. You can also hit the "Give Online Now" button at [woodhills.org](http://woodhills.org). And you can text any amount to 84321.

We're doing something a little bit different leading up to Easter. Instead of Palm Sunday on Palm Sunday, you know you got Palm Sunday last Sunday as we kicked off this series. Adam kicked us off with The Triumphal Entry. We're going to take a day from the Passion Week each Sunday leading up to easter.

Today, it is Sunday but we're talking about a Monday. We're talking about the clearing of the temple. There are some people in here right now that are like, "Yes, I love this story. I love it. Drain the swamp. We're going to fix some things around here." And we're going to start with you this morning because we need to make some observations about what this story is not before we even get to the reason Jesus cleared the temple.

How many of you know an angry person that's just mad all the time about everything? Don't raise your hand. I mean it doesn't matter; there's always going to be a new issue. This last week it was gas prices. They are fired up about everything. Maybe one day it's their spouse and then the next day it's their boss. People change. Issues change, but they're always mad. Some of you are going, "That's my Uncle Frank."

Today, we're not talking about your grumpy uncle. That's not the point of this message. We're not directing our thoughts toward him... although he needs this message. We're directing our thoughts and we're learning this great lesson from a story that is relatively light on words but heavy in meaning. It's covered in all four gospels – Matthey, Mark, Luke, and John. It's going to help those of us... And I've learned so much about myself during this week, and some practical application out of this story. It's for those of us who are passionate about things that are affecting our faith.

When someone comes against our faith, when an issue in culture or the world is challenging our worldview and we just feel it welling up inside and we are ready to throw tables, throw things over, throw things at people. That's who we're coming after. We're coming after every republican in the house today... okay? Please hear me on this. I have my own passion – my passion is for marriage, for the local church. If anybody comes against the local church, I feel it rising up in me. If anybody comes against marriage... I spend every day of my life fighting for marriage. I get the passion, but what do we do with that?

We're going to look at how Jesus cleared the temple and then we are going to look at why. And it's very important... The first observation we need to make is this story, in light of all the gospels... Imagine you went to see the Jesus play at Sight and Sound, which if you haven't, I highly encourage you to go and see Jesus. They do a phenomenal job of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. But if you were to go to that show and you're not a believer and for two and a half hours, they show you a scene of Jesus whipping people, throwing things, yelling at people, you'd think *this guy has a real temper; he's got something going on.*

If a believer who has studied the Bible for a while goes and sees a show like that for two and a half hours of this guy yelling and screaming and throwing things, you'd be like, *They didn't get the whole picture of the gospels.* Because this is an exceptional scene in the life and ministry of Jesus, not normative. Some of us, as believers, have turned this into a normative scene to justify our hair-trigger temper.

Some of us want to point to this story as the reason why we can speak our mind anytime we want. And if you are wrong or coming against my faith or my worldview, I will tear you to shreds because we have a story in the Bible.

Let's start in Matthew. We're going to go through all four gospels because each one gives us a little bit different perspective and a little detail that is very important us to understand the why and the how of the clearing of the temple.

We'll start in Matthew 21. Again, relatively light on words – a short account. **12 Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.** Hold this because this is very important; we're going to talk about it in a little bit as we come to the end of the message, but doves were the sacrifice that those who were impoverished could afford. We're going to see the heart of Jesus for the marginalized in our churches today. **13 "It is written," he said to them...** And now he's going to quote Isaiah 56: 7. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all quote Isaiah 56: 7 or have Jesus quoting Isaiah 56: 7. But Matthew is going to add just a little bit more details and it's so important for us to understand why Jesus is clearing the temple. **"My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it 'a den of robbers.'"**

John gives us more detail behind the clearing of the temple. We read in John 2, **14 In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. 15 So he made a whip out of cords...**He didn't even find one; it's like, "This is the deal; I'm going to make this thing." He makes the whip **...and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle...** So, the pictures you've seen in Christian book stores or online are inaccurate. They are not as messy as what we're reading right here. Do we have any cattle ranchers or farmers in here? When I'm driving out sheep and cattle, that's a mess. And with the doves, the feathers are flying. You can call this a chaotic scene.

**...he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.** This is a great part of the production of *Jesus at Sight and Sound*. **16 To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!"** And Jesus is going to get very serious about worship.

Here's the very first thing we need to gather from this specific story. I read a lot this week and the one that made me laugh out loud a little bit was Beth Moore. I quote Beth Moore because there are ladies in here that are very interested in what Beth Moore has to say. Here's what Beth Moore says about the scene. "Don't think for a moment Jesus can't make a mess of things." Does that sound like someone from Southern Texas right there? Sometimes the only way to sufficiently clean house is to turn it upside down. The women right now are going "That's right!" Spring cleaning is here!

That's my wife. My wife is passionate about turning a house upside down. My wife has two love languages – acts of service and quality time. You've heard me say this. That means I serve her for long periods of time. And she has a love language in between those two called deep cleaning. Oh, does she love deep cleaning. I want to reorganize the garage; she wants every single item in the garage brought

out into the driveway. We're going to sweep, we're going to scrub, and we're going to throw half of what I just took into the driveway away.

Can I just encourage us? Where this message is going today and what Jesus has for us today. Is it is good for you and I to clean out the clutter in our hearts, for us to clean out the clutter in the church that keeps people from gathering to meet the Lord? That's where we're going today with this. It's in our culture in Branson, in the church; it's what we call folk theology. And folk theology is where we read the Bible, we study the Bible, we learn what the Bible teaches, but then things are said or done over here, maybe in tradition, and we like to add that in. Sometimes we have to separate the two. We want to keep scripture in the driver's seat; we don't want to put tradition in the driver's seat.

I fear today that a lot of us are getting our theology from memes. We see something that's funny or that's cute or that's strong and passionate and we're like, "Uh huh, that's now what I believe." But let's be very careful that we are clear about what's going on online. Like this guy right here on a flight over spring break. Zoom out from this picture and you see what's really going on. That's someone on a budget, but he wants to impress you that they did something fun over spring break.

I grew up in Illinois, The Land of Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln said this: "Don't believe everything you read on the internet just because there's a picture with a quote next to it." Do you know believers are falling for this stuff each and every day? And with the clearing of the temple, how many times... This is like the favorite meme of clearing the temple. "If anyone ever asks you what would Jesus do? Remind them that flipping over tables and chasing people with a whip is within the realm of possibilities." People read that and are like, "I get to take people out today."

Pastor Bret Hammond said it this way and about this meme specifically. "This one seems to be a favorite for those who long to excuse their tempers and turn their bad attitudes into something holy. They see Jesus' actions in this story as giving them permission to fly off the handle and offer someone a beat down – y'know, just like Jesus."

Here's where we start with understanding the story today. Jesus didn't clear the temple so you and I could point to it as justification for our hair-trigger temper; that's not the point of this story at all. That's not the point of this Monday in Passion Week at all. To be very clear, Jesus is not throwing a tantrum here. This is a very thoughtful action. It's not even an immediate response to what he saw going on.

When you get to Mark, Mark gives us a couple of very important details. We start in Mark 11, **11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts.** So, after we looked at the triumphal entry last week, Jesus goes into the temple courts, but that's not when this is taking place. Mark tells us, **He looked around at everything...** He was taking in the scene in the court of the Gentiles. He was taking it all in. He looked around at everything, **...but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.** So, Jesus sees what's happening and puts some space and time between the situation and what he's going to do about it. What a lesson for us followers of Christ who are passionate about what we believe. We need to start putting a little space and time between what someone says to us and what we do about it. We need to take a moment... Quit giving your kids a timeout and give yourself a timeout.

Spend time with the Lord. Have a thoughtful response to things rather than this hair-trigger “I’m going to give you a beat down because that’s exactly what Jesus would do.”

**15 On reaching Jerusalem...** so now we’re on Monday. **Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, 16 and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts.**

One of the lessons I take from this, and it’s important for me to take it, especially after the week we’ve had... I know many of you were worked up over the young lady who took second place in the 500 meter in the NCAA tournament. As one who fights for marriage, as one who is passionate about what the Bible teaches about marriage and sex and sexuality and gender, I can get passionate about that, and I can respond to that. I haven’t really said anything. I put something online last night, but I just know immediately it’s not good for me. I don’t think it was an accident when that story came out and then the story from Florida came out that they want small children to start figuring out their identity at three, four, and five. I know my first thought was this is why God gives children parents. And the way that came out, I was like what can I throw. I need to throw something. I get there.

How about this. The next time someone challenges your faith or mocks what you believe, what if you walked away and waited a bit before you said or did something about it? What if you just gave it some time and space instead of reacting or going off. I don’t think it was an accident when those two stories came out this week and knowing what my passion is that I was spending the week in Southern California with my family. I told Amy, “What a great opportunity for me to practice kindness, patience, care. I found myself walking up to people and smiling and engaging them in a way that they needed to be engaged – to know that you are created in the image of God with automatic, high, intrinsic value.

Maybe some of you would be in those moments like, *I have to walk away from that person and never return.* We’re not talking about walking away and never returning. There’s a big difference... Oh, we have to see this today. There is a difference between standing for your faith and being quarrelsome. Scripture calls us to not be quarrelsome people. We can stand for our faith, we can stand against the devil’s evil schemes. But Jesus didn’t clear the temple so you and I can keep pointing back to it and going, “This is why I have to constantly, at family gatherings, yell and scream at my family members who don’t think like me, look like me, act like me...” No, don’t be quarrelsome.

In 2 Timothy, Paul tells young Timothy this and again a reminder coming out of the Example series... He’s a young pastor. Paul says, **23 Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.** Talk about a convicting text for me. **24 And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome.** When I read that, I am immediately convicted because I like to stir it up. Can you be honest and raise your hand if you enjoy stirring it up from time to time just to tick off Uncle Frank. On the way to family gatherings, you actually think, “*Oh I hope I’m sitting by Uncle Frank. I’m going to ask him because I know he’s going off on gas prices. I’m going to lead out with, “Keep the oil pipeline shut down,” just to tick him off.* You know that’s quarrelsome. That’s picking a fight. In our marriage, I’m the flight one. Amy’s fight and I’m flight. I like to stir it up a little bit and then get out of the room as quickly as possible because I know I can’t win.

Let's read it again. The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome. When you read the gospels, you do not get that picture of Jesus going around picking fights. This was an intentional, deliberate moment – him cleaning house and getting us back to the true purpose of worship. And not just the true purpose of worship, but those who gather for worship as we'll see in a second.

Now look at this, not just not quarrelsome **...but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful**. Truthfully, this is the one of the passages why I'm just not on Twitter a whole bunch anymore. Pretty much all I see my colleagues doing on Twitter these days... Every now and then, they will post verses, but it is so quarrelsome. If you read the comments, it's just going at each other. Some of you are like, "Ted, be in the world, but not of the world." I get it. Some of you need to be on Twitter, you need to share the gospel on Twitter, but for me, it just stokes the fires of my quarrelsome nature. And I know it is healthy for me walk away and post pictures of fish. Even that will get people worked up. "Did you release it, or did you eat it!?" Well as a conversationist, I tell them I ate it. "I filleted it in the parking lot, bro." Do you see! That's quarrelsome. That is not righteous anger. That is me being a jerk. And we don't have this story to turn Christians into jerks.

If you do want to be quarrelsome, Verse 25 and 26 are going to tell us what happens if we'll just get out of the way and quit being quarrelsome. **25 Opponents must be gently instructed... With kindness. ...in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth...** How many times do I go at someone with this truth, but my approach is terrible. Am I really saying to God, "Hey, you sit this one out; I got it. When I'm done with them, they will so want to be with you and spend time with you; just wait"? No, God will grant them repentance, leading them to a knowledge of the truth. **26 ...and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.**

We haven't even gotten to the "why" yet. We're getting to the "Why" right now, but before we do, this is just the conviction of the Holy Spirit on me, on each one of us that has that quarrelsome, pick a fight, be competitive, stand up for Jesus in a smack down kind of way.

I need to care less about winning arguments and care more about winning people. You're like, "That's Dale Carnegie." No, that is Jesus. And I need to care less about winning and getting my point of view across and convincing you I'm right because we want to see people come to Jesus.

My friend Dave Adamson... He lives in Australia now, but he was in Atlanta for years. He said this and I think it's so wonderful. "If the world hates you because of Jesus, that's expected. If the world hates Jesus because of you, that's a problem."

Jesus told us this: "The world hates you. Don't be shocked, don't be surprised. They hated me first so that's expected. But Jesus didn't say that to us to give us a challenge to see if we can get people to hate us. If they are hating Jesus because of you and your approach and your smack downs, that's a major problem.

Then Mark gives us the detail. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all have Jesus saying, "My father's house shall be a house of prayer." – Isaiah 56: 7, but Mark adds this detail. **17 And as he taught them, he said, "Is it**

**not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer...** And here's the key – **for all nations?** All of this money trading and all of these sales, all this marketplace activity were taking place in the court of the Gentiles, the place where all nations, non jews were to enter, and they were crowded out. Mark is reminding us this is for all nations, and you have turned this into something it was never meant to be, crowding people out. **...But you have made it 'a den of robbers.**

Pastor Parnell has great commentary on this – Jesus quoting Isaiah 56: 7-8. He says, *“There was nothing soft and tender on display when Jesus, in Jeremiah-like fashion, pronounced a resounding judgement on Israel. According to Isaiah’s vision (if you keep reading in Isaiah), eunuchs would keep God’s covenant, and foreigners would join themselves to him, and the outcasts would be gathered with his people. But Jesus approached the temple pulsing with buying and selling. The court of the Gentiles, the place designed all along for foreigners to congregate, for the nations to seek the lord, was overrun with opportunists trying to turn a profit. And the Jewish leaders had let this happen.*

This is why we take our role as leaders in the church so seriously. We have to make sure that we're a decluttered church and we don't have roadblocks that stand in the way of people finding Jesus and that we don't put unnecessary roadblocks in place with our traditions and things that have built up over time and things we're doing that we haven't given enough thought to.

Pastor Parnell says and ends with this: *“The great sadness of this scene wasn't so much the rows of product and price-gouging,”* Because that's what would happen in that day. All these travelers would come to offer sacrifices and if it was a long journey, they wouldn't bring it with them; they would buy it there at the temple. So, there was price gouging going on as well. They knew they had them. They needed something for sacrifice so they could charge them whatever they wanted to. That can get us fired up. But that's not the greatest sadness. *“...but that all this left no room for the gentiles and the outcasts to come to God.”*

Here's where we get into the heart, the why, the why did Jesus turn the temple? Why did he make a whip of cords? Why did he drive out the cattle, sheep, doves? Why did he do all of that? It was because it was keeping people from coming to him, from coming to God.

The question I want to close with today, as we talk about this, is **does our gathering on Sunday reflect the heart of God, who gather the outcasts and socially marginalized?** I was convicted again this week. And this is what the scripture should do, but what can we do to reach more people in the hotels on the Strip in Branson? Instead of driving by with our judgmental attitude, which we can all admit we've hid it from time to time. What are we doing, as a church, to create space for them to feel welcome? Or what spaces have we created that are crowding them out? Are we doing anything that stands in the way of people coming to Jesus?

By the way, I don't think this is just a Branson thing. We can get picked on sometimes, but everywhere I go, in the country and in the world, there is attitude between people groups and kind of a standoffishness. Greg, you travel around the world, you've seen this. I go to Tanzania and Kenya and I know the attitudes between them and Uganda.

I was just in Southern California this week. I had an event in Irvine and an event in Bakersfield. When I told the people in Irvine I was going to Bakersfield, almost every single person responded with, "Oh, don't go there. Why would you go there? Do you have to go? Is someone making you go?" What is the issue with Bakersfield? I landed in the plane and one guy goes, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm heading up to Bakersfield tonight." He goes, "Yeah, I'd stay here."

I don't know what's going on. Greg's from California; he gets it better. This attitude is everywhere. "Those aren't my people." And we kind of push them out. You can tell that's why I led out with that. That's why when I'm taking this guy's cup of coffee, I want you to know that is my slot. "Your coffee is going over here. You don't even get it the rest of the service." That's what was going on in me. Some of you are like, *You're reading way too more into that.*

We're just going to share one detail of Luke. I think, for those who are passionate about people coming to Jesus, that's the question for us today. What do you get worked up over? I would love to see a church get worked up over outsiders coming in to the church. Getting worked up like everybody make space, clear a room. But when the 10:00 gets too big and we ask people to go to the 8:30 or the 11:30, the answer is "No! we will not go to 11:30." What if you made space for those who don't know the Lord? "I've been coming to this service for 10 years." Okay, back it down a notch.

Luke gives us this detail: **...he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it.** – Luke 19:41  
Passion has a lot of outlets. It's not just this fiery let's get something done. Mourning is an expression of passion. Weeping is an expression of passion. This week, as I read news stories about a nation shaking their fist at the imago Dei, the image of God in men and women, my first response... I know I can get worked up, but I want my first response to be sadness for people who are blinded, for people who are caught in the devil's trap. I'm wondering if that is where we need to do more heart work and clear the clutter out in our lives, that as we see someone that we really want to go after – they are going against our beliefs, against what we stand for – there needs to be more weeping, there needs to be more mourning.

In John, the disciple, after seeing all of this scene, John 2: 17 tells us, ***His disciples remember that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."***

I think there are two types of churches, and we don't want to become this first church where we are a church that focuses on insiders. It's very easy to do so. I get it. I've been coming here for twenty years. We'll be 20 years old on Mother's Day. Many of you have been coming here for a lot of years. It's very easy for us, on a Sunday morning, to move toward the people we know and want to engage in conversation with and let all sorts of people we don't know just go on by. Where are the outcasts? Where are those who don't fit in. Where are the marginalized. We want them here. We want diversity. We want all nations represented. All the nations that are in Branson that they would feel welcome here at this place.

But it's easy to focus on insiders. I had a friend that came to me years ago and said, "I feel judged at Woodland Hills." I asked him why he felt judged. My friend is tatted up and a believer in Christ and loved the Lord.



I said, "Have you looked around the church. There are a lot of people with more tattoos than you and more piercings than you. But if it would make you feel more comfortable, I'll get a tattoo." Now don't take that the main point at the end of this message. Some of you leave here... "I'm 80 years old. I've gone my whole life without a tattoo. Ted wants me to get a tattoo to welcome people into Woodland Hills." You know that's not my point. But when a church focuses on insiders... We know things that are going on, we know where things are, but there are churches that focus on outsiders, and we've always had a heart at this church for people who are far from God. Never let the message get out from here that we are a bunch of good people inviting bad people to come and be good. That's not the message at all.

The message is we are redeemed people. Sinful, broken, but through the blood of Jesus Christ, saved, redeemed, reconciled to God our father. And we go out and tell other people who need to be redeemed to come to this place to meet Jesus. And we are going to remove every barrier and distraction to that we can. Be a part of that. Let's prepare our hearts and environments to welcome outsiders.

Can I give you one challenge, one encouragement? I know some of you walked in here and you walked out. We get these messages a lot. Our welcome team does a phenomenal job at this church leading and greeting and welcoming people. But it doesn't just fall on them. That it would be all of us. Now, please don't overwhelm the first person with a tattoo you see leaving here today. That's not what we're wanting to do either. Give yourself some space and time... I know you have to drop the kids off, get your coffee, find your seat. Then you have to get out to the car and beat all these other people.

Maybe give a minute or two to finding someone here you don't know and you've never seen before. Go up and introduce yourself to them. More than just "Hey, we're glad you're at Woodland Hills. Where are you from?" That's the easiest, lowest barrier entry question you can ask. "Where are you from?" "From Bakersfield." "We're glad you're here." "And I'm sorry that Southern California rejected you, but you are welcome at Woodland Hills Family Church." May we always be a place... let's clear out the clutter in our heart and our environment. Let's clear every barrier that keeps people from finding and following Jesus. That's the heart of this church. And that it would be your heart and that it would be my heart in this time.

Father, it is in the name of Jesus that we don't want our quarrelsome attitudes and nature to keep people from you. May we not have anyone today hating the church, hating you because of a snarky post online, because of a snarky comment tomorrow at work, because of something snarky said at the next family gathering. May we welcome people. May we make room for all those who are far from you. May we have the heart, the eyes, of Jesus to see people, to see where they are and where they are not. Always use Woodland Hills as a place where people can come and find hope.

We pray all of this in the authority of the name of Jesus. Amen.