

STEPS TO THE CROSS

The Heat of Holiness

Matthew 21:12-13

INTRODUCTION: For seven weeks we are studying the steps of Jesus in the final week of His earthly life, as He marched steadfastly toward the cross and the resurrection.

Remember how we described Jesus' first steps when we talked about it last Sunday? We called attention to the fact that

- **The Son of God shined His light into the eyes of blind Bartimaeus,**
- **into the dark heart of Zacchaeus,**
- **and offered the light of His salvation to all who were in the city of Jerusalem.**

And that should not surprise us because

- 1 John tells us that "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all."
- And Jesus said of Himself, "I am the light of the world."

But you know, light does two things.

- It lights up dark places. If we turned off the lights in here, it gets dark! If we blocked the light coming in the doors, it would really be dark. Light illuminates the darkness. That is one thing that light does.

But there is another thing light does.

- Light can burn. If you were to get on a tall ladder and touch one of the light bulbs above when it was turned on, what would happen? It would burn you! Because light energy is often converted to heat energy, and the same light that eliminates darkness can also burn.

Folks, God's light does both things as well.

- **God's light comes from His holiness.**
- **And when we open our hearts to the light of His holiness, His light shines in our lives and lights up our souls.**

But the Bible says that the holiness of God is like a consuming fire.

- And especially **if we are not mindful of His holiness,**
 - **When we are negligent about His holiness,**
 - **When we are indifferent to His holiness,**
- we can be burned by it.**

God sometimes warned people about being disobedient or indifferent because they could be consumed, or burned, by the holiness of the Almighty God.

In the first of Jesus' steps toward the cross in the final week of His life,

- Our Lord showed us the side of the holiness of God that shines into lives and lights them up.
- But the next day, the steps of Jesus demonstrated the side of the holiness of God that shows us the Heat of God's Holiness.

Perhaps the title of this sermon describing steps taken by our Lord seems strange to some of you. A lot of people have a distorted picture of Jesus. They think of Him as "gentle Jesus, meek and mild." Now it is not improper to use any of those words to describe our Lord.

- Jesus could be and often was gentle. When the Pharisees were about to stone the woman caught in adultery, Jesus protected her, spoke to her with tenderness and love, and sent her on her way to live a new life.
- He was certainly meek, but not in the popular sense of the word. Biblical meekness means power under control like the power of a stallion who has been broken and trained. But the world often equates meekness with weakness, and this is the quality too often wrongfully attributed to our Lord.

- And His words were often mild. When others spoke harshly and rashly, He spoke tenderly and kindly.

So I do not find fault with those particular words used to describe the Master, but with the picture some are trying to create with their combination.

- Some use these words to paint a portrait of our Lord as timid, almost effeminate,
- A never kick up any dust kind of guy.

People who think Jesus fits this mold have never done any serious reading of the gospels.

- These perfect records of the life, work, and words of our Lord show Jesus as the God-Man
- who in the man portion of that expression was a real man's man.
- He was everything God created man to be
- and more than any other man has ever become
- because the stain of sin never touched His body or His soul.

As we look at the next steps of Jesus toward the cross, we clearly see a picture of the strength of Jesus in body, soul, and spirit. We see a clear portrait of the perfect Man Jesus was.

But we also see here a portrait of God that a lot of people miss in the Bible or deny is a part of the character of the Almighty. We see here a glimpse of the holiness of God and His resultant wrath against sin.

Jesus perfectly displayed God's character.

- In Him we see the love of God and the mercy of God.
- But in Christ we also see the character of a Holy God offended by sin and the wrath that stirs within God's heart because of iniquity and wickedness.
- This is not necessarily an enjoyable vignette to watch, but one that is sorely needed in our day and time.

- For we live in a world where many people believe that if there is a God, that He is nothing more than a great big granddaddy in the sky who loves everybody and everything and what we do does not matter one whit to Him.
- That is the devil's lie, and this day in the life of our Lord, the steps Jesus took expose that lie for what it is.

On this day, Jesus let the heat of the holiness of God burn. We see that

I. CHRIST WENT INTO THE TEMPLE AND SINGED THE SELFISH. (MT. 21:12-13)

Matthew 21:12–13 NKJV 12 Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. 13 And He said to them, "It is written, '*My house shall be called a house of prayer,*' but you have made it a '*den of thieves.*'"

History tells us that

- Merchants sold sacrificial animals in the temple at rates that amounted to robbery.
- Pilgrims were forced to buy these animals or not offer a sacrifice.
- Even the sacrifices of locals were often refused by temple "inspectors" because of some supposed "flaw."
- Moneychangers also made an unreasonable profit in exchanging common currency into the coin acceptable for the temple tax.
- All of these people were preying upon those who had come to the temple to offer true worship to the living God.
- These are the people Jesus drove out of the temple.
- Putting together Isa. 56:7 and Jer. 7:11, Jesus said, "It is written, '*My house shall be called a house of prayer,*' but you have made it a '*den of thieves.*'" Matthew 21:13

What did all of those who were driven from the temple have in common?

- **They were using the temple, which God had built as a place of worship and prayer, for their own selfish purposes.**
- They were not assisting people who traveled long distances by making animals available for purchase because it was impractical to carry them on their journey.
- They sold them at lucrative prices because they could! The pilgrims who wanted to worship the Lord by offering the proper sacrifice were over a barrel. What could they do but pay the ridiculous prices of those who for selfish gain sold animals in the temple.
- Those who desired to honor the Lord by paying the temple tax were not allowed to pay it in the Roman coins carried in their purse or pocket. No, it had to be paid as the Jewish shekel, so the conversion was done at a criminal level of exchange.

And the Lord today shines the light of His holiness on our lives to ask, **why have we come to church today?**

- **Have we come for God to be pleased or for ourselves to be pleased?**
 - When a song starts, is our first thought about whether we like the song or not?
 - Do we say, “Oh no, here comes another new-fangled song, and it will take me six weeks to learn the melody, if it has a melody.”
 - Or do we say, “Oh that song is so 70’s. Why can’t they pick one like I heard on Christian radio this week?”

OK, now that I’ve made everybody mad, everybody listen.

There is nothing wrong with having a preference. There is nothing wrong with liking one style of music over another, and one style of music is not holier than another. None of us here prefer the style of music sung by the temple choir or used by Jewish worshippers in the synagogues in Jesus’ day.

There is nothing wrong with liking one style of music over another. Here is what is wrong, and it is the same issue Jesus was addressing when He drove the salesmen and money changers out of the temple.

- When the song starts, if our focus is on whether we like it or not, then our focus is on self.

- We want self to be pleased. We want to gain enjoyment from the style of the song.
- Listen, this is not an issue with any single age group. We all battle this temptation from young to old.

- The last two weeks we have sung Unstoppable God.
- I love the lyrics

Freedom conquered
All our chains undone
Sin defeated
Jesus has overcome

Mercy triumphed
When the third day dawned
Darkness was denied
When the stone was gone

What Christian could not love those words?

- The first time I tried to sing that song, I just could not keep the rhythm. It has this little pause right in the middle of some of the lines, and I kept singing the next word while the band and the teens around me were in pause.
- I finally resorted to watching Bro. Doug's mouth. When his mouth didn't move, I didn't let mine move either. Letting Doug lead me made the song go easier and I could focus more on the words.
- The next week we sang it, I remembered I needed to watch Doug. I still missed a pause or two and did some single word solos, but I was able to sing the song and really let it be for me an act of worship.
- Has the song become one of my favorites? You know, folks, that's the wrong question.
- Because the purpose of singing the song is not to please me. The purpose of singing the song is to worship God, to glorify God, to honor God.
- And we must not make the assumption that God likes our own personal style of music the best.

- Do you know what songs God likes best?
- Well God loves truth. Jesus told us, “Those who worship the Father must worship Him in spirit and in truth.”
- God’s Word is truth.
- So God likes songs whose words are consistent with the Scripture.
- It is not the melody or lack thereof. It is not the rhythm. It is not the volume, it is not the age – new or old. It’s the lyrics; do they communicate biblical truth.

Back to the main point.

Jesus drove them out because they were in the temple for their own selfish purposes. They were not there to pray or help others pray.

They were not there to worship or help others worship.

They were in the temple not for God, but for themselves.

That is why I am asking,

- **Why have you come to church today?**
- **And if the answer has anything to do with pleasing self, it is the wrong answer.**

And folks this does not just apply to music.

Some come to church to see their friends.

- Now I hope you have friends at church and that you make new friends at church regularly.
- Fellowship among God’s people is a good thing.
- But church is not a Country Club without an annual membership fee.

Some come to church to enhance their business. Jesus went to the temple to do His Father's business.

Some come to church to draw attention to themselves.

- This is a danger of which us pastors and other leaders must be aware and avoid at all costs.
- I must avoid preaching to please the congregation. Listen, if everybody likes a sermon, it probably wasn't needed.
- I must focus on preaching for an audience of One. At the end of the day, my desire must be that Jesus was pleased with the way I explained the Word of God and helped people understand it and apply it to their lives.
- If I come to church desiring that a bunch of people are going to tell me what a great sermon that was today, then I am among the crowd Jesus would have driven out.

Are you catching on?

Folks, it's not about us and what we want and what pleases us.

Church and worship is about what pleases God.

Church and worship is about **what honors the Lord.**

Church and worship is about **what glorifies Him.**

- We should begin our Sunday with the prayer, Lord, may you be pleased with my worship today.
- Our focus while we are at church and in worship should be
 - am I pleasing God with the way I am listening
 - am I honoring God is the way I am singing
 - am I glorifying God with what I am doing while someone else is praying

- We should catch ourselves when things about what we like begin to grab our attention.
 - I don't like this song.
 - I don't care for this lesson.
 - I don't like this sermon.
- We must remember, it's not about what pleases us. It is about what pleases God.

Now, let me address the elephant in the room at least some of you have noticed.

Some are asking in their mind, **“Then why are we about to start having our two Sunday worship services in two different styles: band led and choir led?”**

The answer is **“Because some worship better with one style and others worship better with another style.”**

A part of my responsibility as pastor and a part of the responsibility of our staff is to help our church to worship. We believe that having our worship in these two styles will help people worship in spirit and in truth, focusing on what honors and pleases God rather than thinking about what pleases self.

All of us need to examine ourselves and by so doing prepare ourselves to be better worshippers in the weeks and the years to come.

- In what ways, have I made my worship about me and about what I like?
- In what ways have I focused on myself in my small group?
- How have my motives for coming to church and to worship been centered upon myself rather than on the Lord?