

SICK OF RELIGION?

Weekly Devotional

A ministry of Chapel Hill

chapelhillpc.org

WEEK 8

This guide pairs with Mark 11:15-19 and the sermon preached at Chapel Hill April 13-14.



Written by Tina Picard

Tina has been a member of Chapel Hill for 12 years, along with her husband, Howie. Mom to two grown daughters, and Grammy to three delightful grandchildren. As a staff member, Tina serves in the area of Next Steps, melding her work and passion for connecting people with their God-given abilities and interests. She also loves to study the Word inductively, and connect women to the Word and to each other. She considers herself fortunate to have opportunities within the EPC (at the presbytery and national levels) to do so.

LifeGroup Guide

Review

How has Jesus been challenging you this week? Where have you experienced transformation?

Story

Mark 11:15-19

Head

Consider how this incidence is a fulfillment of Mal 3:1-4 and Zech 14:21. In what way does Jesus “purify” the temple?

Reference Isaiah 56:7, the original context of Jesus’ words “a house of prayer”. What was the intended purpose of the temple according to this passage?

Who did Jesus offend in this passage? What was their response to his actions?

Heart

Jesus compares the people’s treatment of the temple to a den of robbers. This is a reference to Jeremiah 7:11. In both its original context, and here, the oppressive and violent behavior of the ruling priests defiles the temple. Those who are meant to be holy and without blemish, are instead full of sin. The issue was their sin compared to a holy God. Take a moment to reflect on your own attitudes and behavior in contrast with the perfect holiness of God. What sin do you need to confess to the Lord right now? How is God calling you instead to live a life “set apart” for his glory?

It is rare to consider Jesus’ anger—we prefer to dwell on Jesus meek and mild. This passage depicts a righteous anger against injustice, sin, and the defilement of God’s name. How can you relate to righteous anger? Where has God put a burning passion inside of you to fight against sin on behalf of the poor, the oppressed, the unjustly treated? When is it okay to be angry?

Hands

“A house of prayer for all nations”. This is both a reference back to Isaiah’s prophecy, and a reference forward to a future time when all nations of the world will worship together. In the “in between” times (now), one practical way we can become a house of prayer is to pray for our missions partners and those going on mission trips. Spend a moment praying for our Men’s Go Team leaving for Mexico May 16.

What’s one practical way you and your LifeGroup can engage in fighting against injustice? Plan a time to engage in practical service together one time in the next three months. For some ideas check here: chapelhillpc.org/ministries/missions/ways-to-engage/.

DAY 1 – Monday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 11:15-19, Malachi 3:1-4, Zechariah 14:21

Ask

Consider how this incidence is a fulfillment of Mal 3:1-4 and Zech 14:21. In what way does Jesus “purify” the temple?

Reflect

When we come to this point in Jesus’s ministry, we see that he had already made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, (Mark 11:1-11) and had already been to the temple. In verse eleven, we read, “And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.” It is only when he returns to the temple the next day that we see him act: he drives out the buyers and the sellers, he overturns tables and chairs, and he halts the movement of those carrying things through the temple.

All of these things that Jesus cleared from the temple related to the sacrificial system God had set in place for his people to be forgiven, albeit temporarily, of their sins. In the context of Malachi, we learn that God’s people were treating each other deplorably, and “robbing God” of the tithes they were to be contributing to the temple. The Zechariah passage speaks of a day when God will purify the pots meant for boiling the meat of the sacrifice, which is offered to the priest in the temple. How do you think this relates to what Jesus saw?

We get the sense that Jesus is quite angry, and that can be confirmed by a parallel passage in John 2:13-17, where it is written that Jesus used a “whip of cords” to drive them out. One can only wonder what had gone through Jesus mind, the night before, when he took it all in and “as it was already late, he went out to Bethany....” Was he calculating his response? At the late hour, had trading ceased for the day, and the stalls closed down? Whatever the reason, when Jesus returned, he took dramatic measures to clear the temple.

Consider Jesus’s anger in this situation. Ephesians 4:26 says, “Be angry, yet do not sin.” How did Jesus exemplify this principle? In what ways can we keep ourselves pure in a house of prayer?

DAY 2 – Tuesday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 11:17-18, Matthew 23:1-12

Ask

Who did Jesus offend in this passage? What was their response to his actions?

Reflect

In the past few weeks of study, we have quickly learned that the scribes and Pharisees were not pleased with Jesus's teaching. Why? "He taught as one with authority, not as the scribes." Mark 1:22. He taught with authority, he cast out unclean spirits with authority, he forgave sins with authority. Up to this point, the scribes and Pharisees were the authorities in the Jewish religion. They enforced the laws, they taught what was right and wrong, they oversaw the religious acts of the people.

In the Matthew passage, however, we see Jesus expose their hypocrisy. Read the seven woes Jesus pronounces upon these men in Matthew 23:13-31. He calls them hypocrites and blind guides. He accuses them of being outwardly righteous, but being inwardly wicked. He says that they make it impossible for others to practice righteousness, and indeed, that anyone they manage to convert become as wicked as they themselves. He challenges their righteous acts done before people, while behaving without character in private.

So they set out to destroy him, because they feared him. There are several words for fear in the Bible. Some mean to revere someone, others mean to be afraid. The word here in the Greek is *phobos*, from which we get the word phobia. As you know, to have a phobia is to have a fear of something or someone. The religious leaders had fear of Jesus, because the authority with which he taught amazed the people. The people believed him, and he was challenging their own teaching, which would expose them for who they really were.

Who would Jesus offend today by his teachings? Who would be threatened by Jesus's authority? Is there anything about Jesus's teaching that you find hard to believe, hard to obey, hard to accept? Spend some time in prayer, thanking him for his authority in your life, and talking honestly with him about your reservations.

DAY 3 – Wednesday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 11:17, Jeremiah 7:8-11, 1 Samuel 2:12-17

Ask

Jesus compares the people's treatment of the temple to a den of robbers. This is a reference to Jeremiah 7:11. In both its original context, and here, the oppressive and violent behavior of the ruling priests defiles the temple. Those who are meant to be holy and without blemish, are instead full of sin. The issue was their sin compared to a holy God. Take a moment to reflect on your own attitudes and behavior in contrast with the perfect holiness of God. What sin do you need to confess to the Lord right now? How is God calling you instead to live a life "set apart" for his glory?

Reflect

In the book of Samuel, Eli's sons, the priests in the temple, are taking advantage of the people who are making offerings and sacrifices. Essentially, they are taking a greater portion of the offering than that to which they are entitled. As we see in Jeremiah, the corruption of the priesthood, and the defilement of the sacrifice are common threads throughout the history of Israel. By the time Jesus appears at the temple in Jerusalem, the corruption has spread from the priesthood to the leadership of the synagogues. No wonder Jesus was upset.

One other piece of information we receive from the parallel John passage is that the time of year is Passover, the time of year when the people remember their flight from Egypt. How do you think this relates to what is going on in the temple? The Passover itself was a foreshadowing of the sacrificial system that God would hand down to Moses in the wilderness. The animals that were for sale in the temple were the requirements of the law for the sacrifice. For people who traveled to Jerusalem from outlying towns, these animals were a convenience to be able to purchase on site, instead of traveling with them from long distances.

Was Jesus saying that it was unlawful to make these purchases for the Passover? Probably not, however they could have been better sold off site. The problem for Jesus was that the leaders were enforcing the sacrifices, while they themselves were practicing lawlessness. In overturning the tables, Jesus was exposing their greed and hypocrisy. Instead of living a holy life, and inviting others into that practice, the leaders were demanding the holiness of those they lead.

As we prepare to celebrate the death and resurrection of our own Passover Lamb, consider how Jesus calls us to holiness. Does he practice one thing and expect another from us? Does he lord his authority over us, and demand our obedience? What is one way you can walk in holiness this week, as a living sacrifice for Christ, who shed his blood for you?

DAY 4 – Thursday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 11:15-17, Psalm 79

Ask

It is rare to consider Jesus' anger – we prefer to dwell on Jesus meek and mild. This passage depicts a righteous anger against injustice, sin, and the defilement of God's name. How can you relate to righteous anger? Where has God put a burning passion inside of you to fight against sin on behalf of the poor, the oppressed, the unjustly treated? When is it okay to be angry?

Reflect

We touched on Jesus anger on Day 1. We realize that Jesus does not sin when he is angry. Rather his righteous anger has a purpose. In the Matthew passage, his anger compels him to cleanse the temple, and then he begins to teach about why he was angry – the defilement of the temple by those in power.

In Psalm 79, we see a similar situation. The leaders of nations have laid waste to the temple, as a consequence of the sins of Israel. The psalmist asks, "How long will you be angry?" He acknowledges the sins of the people, and implores the God of Salvation to forgive them, and have compassion on them as a sign to the nations that he has not forgotten them, and still looks on them with favor. He also expresses thanksgiving and praise to God.

This implies that the consequence of their sins has been righteously executed in anger by a God who has every right. How does this sit with you? Do you affirm God's right to be angry with sin, our sins, the sins of those we love? Have you ever experienced the natural consequence of sin in your life, asked forgiveness, and thanked or praised God for his compassion?

Spend some time today grappling with these questions. Journal or write out a prayer to God, expressing your thoughts, and exploring what God would have you do. When do we have a right to anger? To challenge the actions of others, and stand up for justice? How do we express that anger, and sin not? How do we know our motives are pure in these situations? Can we be fully righteous in our anger? How?

DAY 5 – Friday
Daily devotional

Read

Isaiah 56:6-8, Mark 11:17, Jeremiah 7:1-11

Ask

“A house of prayer for all nations”. This is both a reference back to Isaiah’s prophecy, and a reference forward to a future time when all nations of the world will worship together. In the “in between” times (now), one practical way we can become a house of prayer is to pray for our missions partners and those going on mission trips. Spend a moment praying for our Men’s Go Team leaving for Mexico May 16.

Reflect

“A house of prayer for all nations” speaks to God’s desire that all nations should become disciples, and that salvation is open to all who seek it. In this regard, any time the temple was being defiled, so was the message of salvation. When the sacrificial system broke down, so did the message of salvation. No wonder Jesus was angry—the work of the kingdom was being maligned.

We have the great privilege of participating with Christ in furthering the gospel. It begins in our own hearts, as we have compassion on the lost. It is furthered in our churches when we value the mission of the gospel—to make disciples. And it is carried into the world, as we, and our brothers and sisters in Christ, serve the nations for whom God’s church is a house of prayer.

As we pray for the nations, and serve within their borders, we become a “house of prayer” to them and for them. As you spend time praying with your LifeGroup for our mission partners at Chapel Hill, consider how you might connect with the people for whom you are praying. Set aside a regular time to pray for them, and ask God how you might come alongside their ministry.

DAY 6 & 7 – Saturday & Sunday
Daily devotional

Author’s note: take one day to do these exercises and let the other be a Sabbath for your soul – on that day reflect on all you have learned and how the truths of this lesson show that Jesus might still offend “in the temple” today.

Read

Mark 11:15-19, Psalm 37:3-6, Micah 6:6-8

Ask

What’s one practical way you and your LifeGroup can engage in fighting against injustice? Plan a time to engage in practical service together one time in the next three months. For some ideas check here: <http://www.chapelhillpc.org/ministries/missions/ways-to-engage/>

Reflect

Even though God had established a system of sacrifice to atone for the sins of his people, throughout history mankind has corrupted the system and acted self-righteously, as did the scribes and Pharisees we have studied this week. From the beginning, God has been interested not just in our obedience, but also in our character. How did you see this in the week’s readings?

According to today’s readings, what is our responsibility in regard to justice? Who is ultimately responsible for the results? The scribes and Pharisees thought that enforcing the law – keeping God’s people from even coming close to breaking it – was their God-given task. Outwardly, these leaders looked like they had their own lives all together, but inwardly their hearts were wicked. What does the psalmist say about our righteousness?

James, the brother of Jesus, wrote that “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” (James 1:27) How does this contrast with the religion of the scribes and Pharisees? How does this verse inform our call to stand up to injustice? How does the phrase “keep oneself unstained from the world” relate to ministering to widows and orphans?

Take some time to consider all that you have studied this week. Spend time journaling, praying, and asking God what your next step is to participate with his work to stand up to injustice. Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you through the readings. Discuss these things with your group and see what God will do through you!
