

When Insiders Get in the Way

Key Texts: Mark 3.5; Matthew 23.13; Mark 11.15-17; John 2.15; Ephesians 3.12

Key Words: Mad; Angry; Insiders; Cleansing the Temple; Indifference; Access; Judgmentalism; Hypocrisy; Legalism

Summary: We kick off a series on things that made Jesus mad, with a focus on the cleansing of the temple. We will discover that what angered Jesus most was whenever insiders blocked access to the Father's love.

- You all have seen this one: "If Momma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy!" I've heard it from some of you guys. And apparently it's not just people.
- Here it is (lions): "If Momma ain't happy, ain't no one happy!" You've got to admit, that's pretty funny.
- Now I ran across this one too: "If Momma ain't happy, No one's happy If Daddy ain't happy, No one cares." Except God. That one is awful! On the other hand, this next one is pretty funny.
- Here it is: If Mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy; if Grandma ain't happy, run!"
- Now let's get serious. If Jesus ain't happy if Aslan ain't happy, do you care? Should you care? Do you think!!

Bottom line, nearly everybody wants to like Jesus, even if it's some morphed Jesus of their imagination. I mean, Jesus was out there loving on people, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, befriending the marginal. A man of courage, speaking truth to power. Dying an unjust death. Even atheists. Atheists aren't atheists because they hate Jesus.

But too often the Jesus we honor has been sanitized. The real Jesus could make people really uncomfortable, especially good, religious people like us. The real Jesus made people mad enough they wanted to kill him. The real Jesus was not tame, he was not PC, he was not safe thank God. Let me show you.

- One time – maybe twice – Jesus channeled the Hulk in the temple, their most sacred space. Flipping over tables, chasing people out with a whip.
- He threatened people with hell. That would make you squirm, give you a few sleepless nights, wouldn't it?
- Sometimes he'd call people these terrible names. "Blind fools," "Hypocrites," "Snakes, Vipers," "Whitewashed tombs," "Double-damned, Children of hell." Try calling someone a "Child of hell" with a loving smile on your face!
- One time he said that it would be better for a man to have a millstone (something like this) tied to his neck and tossed into a lake than to sin one particular sin. We'll get to that one in a couple weeks. I know, Jesus preached forgiveness, and grace, and love an all that too. But there was a side to Jesus ...
- Another time we'll get to this one too, in a few weeks Another time, Mark says, "Jesus looked them in the eye, one after another, angry now, furious ..." (Mark 3.5 MSG) Imagine being in that room and Jesus looks you in the eye. And you sense that Jesus can look right through your mask, right through you, and he's mad, he's angry, he's furious. Guys, if that's not a wet your pants moment, you're clueless!

But, can you imagine what it would be like to be part of Jesus' media team? "You can't do that stuff, Jesus; you can't say that stuff, Jesus, or they'll crucify you!" Can you imagine what a field day the opposition's media teams, and what the press did with this stuff! "'Holy Man' from Nazareth goes nuclear again!" Inflammatory words, polarizing words, seditious and incendiary this this real Jesus.

How many of you guys have seen this WWJD on a bracelet, or a t-shirt, or a plaque, or a bumper sticker? One preacher up in Chicago said that one of his newbies saw the shirt and grabbed it because it thought it meant, "We want Jack Daniels." Sounded great! Well, WWJD became popular back in the late 1800's after a book by a guy named Charles Sheldon became a best-seller: "In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do." Great little book Great question: "What would Jesus do."

Well, here's another great question, maybe just as big: "What made Jesus mad?" "WMJM" maybe? No, that sound like a radio station: "Magic 101.3, WMJM, R and B and Classic Soul." Seriously, what made Jesus mad? That would be good to know, wouldn't it? You can learn a lot about a person by watching what makes them mad.

- When you're a kid, it's good to know what makes momma mad, right? If momma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy!
- And despite what the mug says, in my family it's good to know what makes dad mad. Because if dad is mad, you need to care!
- I know what makes Julie mad! We've been married 46 years. She knows what makes me mad.
- It's good to know what makes your friends mad, or your enemies mad, or your roommate, or your boss.
- And it's especially useful, and especially important that we Jesus followers know what makes Jesus mad right? Because, you don't want Jesus mad at you! I know he's all loving, and all grace, and all that, but sometimes he gets mad! And You don't want Jesus mad at you!

Now that bothers some people ... the idea that Jesus could get really mad.

- We like to picture Jesus as gentle, and peaceful, and sweet, like one of these classic pics. (Sallman / Sweet)
- Or, maybe he's hugging a little girl, or cuddling a lamb. Aren't those sweet? We like those pics. They work.
- Or, some people like to picture Jesus with a smile on his face, or Jesus laughing. I kind of like those pics, especially that one.
- Recently I've seen pictures of a ripped Jesus. A "crossfit Jesus." They're kind of fun! You can just hear him say it, can't you: "I'll be back!"
- But a Jesus that is mad, angry, furious? A Jesus flipping over tables, chasing people down with a whip? That doesn't fit the fairy tale Jesus imagined by so many people, even so many Jesus followers.

But guys, it is not a sin to be angry. In fact, the Bible says, "Be angry, but don't sin." Because sometimes it is right to be angry. Sometimes if you're not angry something's wrong with you. Be angry, when it's right, but don't let your anger control you, don't let your anger lead you to do something dishonoring to God, don't sin.

So, what made Jesus mad? This is really important to know, because when Jesus got mad, he was always right. When Jesus got mad, something really bad was going down. And when Jesus got mad, he never sinned: he never lost control, he never crossed the line, he never acted out inappropriately. And here's what will blow your mind: Every time we see Jesus getting mad in the Bible someone was getting in the way of God's love. Someone was hindering access to the Father. Someone was making it hard for somebody to find God's grace. "Woe to you, you teachers of the law and you Pharisees, you hypocrites! For you shut the door of the Kingdom of Heaven in people's faces. You won't go in yourselves, and don't let others enter either!" (Matthew 23.13) That makes Jesus mad!

And what blows my mind is that in the New Testament stories, when Jesus got mad, he was always getting mad at people like us – believers in God, God followers, when we were supposed to be bringing people to God, and instead we’re creating these roadblocks! Listen guys, Jesus died to rip down the veil in the temple that separated people from God. What makes him mad is whenever we try to stitch it back up. You’ll see.

Now maybe the scene in the story of Jesus that pictures what made Jesus mad most vividly is the cleansing of the temple. In Matthew, and Mark, and Luke it kicks off “passion week,” the week Jesus is crucified, and then raised from the dead. Probably Monday of Passion week.

And guys, it’s not about the building. I mean, the next day Jesus is going to tell his disciples – “This place, this temple, is going to get torn down!” “Not one stone of this temple is going to left standing.” And when he dies, on Friday, the veil in the Holy of Holies, the veil that separated people from God’s holy and omnipotent presence is going to be ripped in two, from top to bottom. It’s not about the building. We think he was mad about their desecrating a holy place. No. It wasn’t even just about the money – the money changing, the buying and selling in the courtyard, turning God’s temple into a street fair. We think that maybe there’s a problem with bake sales in the foyer, or coke machines in the fellowship hall. No. It goes way deeper than that. I’ll show you.

Now, the temple was in Jerusalem, back in the time of Jesus. It was an amazing place, and in their minds, the focal point of God’s presence in the world. This is a scale model reconstruction you can see at the Jerusalem Holy Land Hotel. It’s pretty amazing!

- Right there, in the center behind those doors, was the Holy place, and beyond that, separated by a massive veil, was the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant once stood. Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and only once a year.
- Around that was the courtyard of the priests. And then down at the bottom of those stairs was the courtyard of the men, the Jewish men, only Jewish men could go in that far.
- Outside those walls was a little courtyard marked off by a short fence. That was the courtyard of the women, the Jewish women. No Gentiles were allowed any closer to the Holy of Holies, the focal point of God’s presence in the world. In fact, there were signs on that wall warning any Gentile that if he or she crossed that line, they’d be killed, on the spot.
- And then outside that little wall was this massive courtyard, the court of the Gentiles, the courtyard of the nations.

Now here’s the deal: that “Court of the Gentiles, Court of the Nations” was where the vendors set up their shops during the great feasts. Bankers would set up tables to exchange foreign coins for Jewish coins, the only coins accepted. And others would set up these corrals where you could buy sheep or cattle for your sacrifices. Thousands of animals, for thousands of worshipers. Think stockyards.

So, when Jesus entered the temple that Monday, Mark says, he “started throwing out everyone who had set up shop there, buying and selling. He kicked over the tables of the bankers and the stalls of the pigeon merchants. He didn’t let anyone even carry a basket through the Temple.” (Mark 11.15-16) He kind of channeled the Hulk on them! And then he says this. He says, “The Scriptures declare, ‘My Temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations’ – for all the nations! -- but you have turned it into a den of thieves.” (Mark 11.17)

Well, what made Jesus so mad? We need to know!

- Was it the “den of thieves” part? I mean, it’s bad enough they turn the temple into a stockyard and a bazaar. Apparently the priests set the prices and pocketed boatloads of money. Would it have been okay if the prices were fair?
- Or, was it the fact that the shops were there at all? It was supposed to be a house of prayer! And there was so much chaos and so much noise, who could pray in that mess? It was supposed to be a house of prayer, right?
- Or, or, was it the “all the nations” part? Maybe, all that chaos was keeping people away from God. This was the closest the “all the nations” people could get to the focal point of God’s presence on earth. And all this madness was preventing them from sensing the presence, and the power, and the holiness, and the grace of our God. To get that close to the Father, and our nonsense prevents them from experiencing him!

Which is why, at the end of the week, Jesus rips the veil in the Holy of Holies from top to bottom. And within 50 years the temple is gone, no stone left standing. Because the temple wasn’t needed any more. Because, with Jesus, everyone – everyone has access to the Father.

But for the moment, Jesus channels the Hulk on them. The Gospel of John gives us the details. We don’t know if this is the same “temple cleansing” as the one described in Matthew, and Mark, and Luke, or whether Jesus cleanses the temple twice. But John says, “Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep and cattle, scattered the money changers’ coins over the floor, and turned over their tables.” (John 2.15) Holy cow! For some, it’s hard to imagine a good, and gentle, and gracious God acting this way? Did Jesus whip the people too? It looks like it! But it wasn’t just that they were disrespecting the room, the building, the temple, the church, their misbehavior was preventing precious children from connecting with their Father, their God! Jesus came into this world to reconnect us with our God, and it ticks him off whenever we do stuff to make that harder.

We do it in so many ways. We Jesus followers work against Jesus in so many ways. We throw so many roadblocks between people and God. And in the next couple months we’ll be touching on a bunch of them. But here are the big ones: When we are indifferent towards people God loves, when we are all judgmental against people God is trying to forgive, when we are so legalistic – when we care about rules more than we care about people, and when we are flat out hypocritical. Indifference, judgmentalism, legalism, hypocrisy, every one of these ticked Jesus off, because they hinder access to God. And I suspect every one of us Jesus followers battles every one of these sins. We are drawn to them. You’ll see. And yet every one of these sins hinders someone’s access to God’s love.

Listen, I can’t think of any Jesus story where he gets really mad at outsiders. He is incredibly patient with outsiders. And yelling at them really doesn’t work anyway. No, when Jesus really gets mad, he aims it at insiders, like us, who put obstacles between outsiders and God. Guys, don’t let your bad attitudes get in the way of God’s love! When Jesus was crucified God ripped the veil of the temple from top to bottom. God threw open the doors. Don’t try shutting them on anyone!

That’s where we’re going for the next two months: What made Jesus mad? We’re going to talk about indifference, and judgmentalism, and legalism, and hypocrisy. We’re going to try to get ruthlessly honest with God about every one of these things, and we’re going to try to root them out. Because here at Capital City we are on a mission from God – to bring people face to face with Jesus and to grow them up into Christ-Driven 24-7 Jesus followers. And we want to go to war against anything that would hinder us from carrying out our mission.

Now listen guys, if you are not a Jesus follower, yet, Jesus is not mad at you! He doesn't like your sin, because your sin is messing you up and separating you from your God. But he's not mad at you! He loves you so much he'd go to the cross just for you. He already has. If you are needing a hug from God, he's right here!