

**“Making a Messiah” Series / Luke - The Closing Arguments
Sermon 4: “Cleansing the Temple” / March 4, 2019**

Key Texts: Luke 19.45-48

Key Words: Power struggles, Crown me, Kill me, Temple, Passover, Annas, Lamb, Pick a fight, House of prayer

Summary: The temple was the center of Judaism, the path to doing life with God, for God, God’s way. When Jesus entered the temple and disrupted the buying selling of Passover lambs, he was throwing down a gauntlet: “Crown me, or kill me - but you won’t ignore me!”

No matter where you look, there are all these power struggles: “What I want,” “What I like,” “What I need.” “My rights.” It seems like for so many, life is just a sequence of power struggles.

- At home: Who’s really the boss at your house? Mom? Dad? The kids? In a whole lot of houses it’s the baby, isn’t it? For some of you guys, maybe even the dog, or the cat?
- Who gets to control the remote?
- Who gets to decide whether you have to get up ... for church?
- And it comes out in so many other ways: What’s wrong with slipping a little money under the table to give your kid an advantage ... at school?
- Power struggles: How about at church? Who’s really the boss at church? So often - way too often -- there are all these power struggles.
- Who has right to set the direction for the church? The preacher? The elders? Those who have been there the longest? Those with the most money? The loudest?
- Who gets to decide what kind of church this one will be?
- Or culturally ... there all these power struggles. How about one of these:
- A woman has the right to choose, doesn’t she? After all, it’s her body? Right? What gives you the right to be the boss of me?!
- Or, Who do you think is the boss in DC, even? Trump? Pelosi? Mueller? Ocasio Cortez?
- Or, Do you think it is okay to crack an egg over the head of someone who is saying something you disagree with?

Power struggles: “What I want,” “What I like,” “What I need.” “My rights.” All these battles over power, over control. We’ll get back to that stuff a little later.

... You want to talk about power struggles, this is the temple mount, in Jerusalem. It’s still in the news! It’s always in the news! If you want to stir a fight, just mess with the delicate balance there, the delicate balance everyone hates. Muslims, Jews, Christians - all of them jockeying for power, all of them: “What I want, what I like, what I need, my rights!” Right now the temple mount itself is under Islamic control. In fact the Al Aqsa Mosque has been there for over 1300 years. That’s a long time! The Mosque, and the Dome of the Rock up on that mount are considered the 3rd holiest site in the world for the Muslims. But that’s where Solomon’s temple was too, 3000 years ago. And that’s where the Jewish Temple still was in the time of Jesus, 2000 years ago. And it is the single most holy site in the world for quite a few Jews, and even for quite a few Christians, with a Mosque sitting where God’s temple should be ... they think! So every once in a while some Jewish group, or even some Christian group will stir things up by talking about tearing the Mosque down, and rebuilding the Temple. And if you want to poke at a hornet’s nest, just start stirring things up on the temple mount. In this last month there have been over 60 arrests of agitators there, and firebombs.

And it’s not just about what’s on top of the Mount, even the edges. There are these huge stones - still there - that were part of the wall around the temple in the time of Jesus. It’s called the Western Wall, or by some, “The Wailing Wall.” For the Jews today, it’s as close as they can get to the place where the God of Israel promised to dwell with his people. So they go there to pray, and some of them write their prayers on slips of paper and slip them into the cracks between the stones. Some of you guys have been there, seen that. It’s pretty cool! For the Muslims, it’s where Mohammed tied up his horse on his night journey to Jerusalem before ascending to Paradise. Do you want to stir a hornet’s nest? Create a scene right there, right in front of the Wailing Wall, and see what happens. It’s an emotional place!

And guys, all that is just child’s play compared to the emotions that were attached to the Temple back in the time of Jesus. Do you want to stir a

hornet's nest? Do you start a fight? Do you want to die? Create a scene ... in the Temple. Pick a fight in the Temple! Which is exactly what Jesus did! I told you last week, he went to Jerusalem this time to pick a fight. And what he did, and what he said boiled down to this: "Crown me, or kill me, but I will not let you ignore me!" And without doubt what he did in the Temple that day was one of the big reasons they finally decided that had to kill him.

Guys, the Temple was the heart of Judaism back then. It was the symbol of Judaism; it was where so many of Israel's greatest stories had gone down; it was the subject of some of their greatest songs! You don't mess with the Temple. That would not only ... enrage ... the Jews, it would stir up the Romans too. They didn't let people mess with temples, because it would always stir people up. Think about how people respond today when they hear about a bombing or a shooting in a Synagogue, or a Mosque, or a Church. 50 people gunned down in a mosque in New Zealand, just last week. 11 gunned down in a Synagogue in Pittsburgh a couple months ago. Church shootings in Texas, and Tennessee, and South Carolina over the past couple years. People get fired up. Now, imagine our emotions on steroids! That's how it was back then.

Back then, for the Jews, the Temple was an irreplaceable piece of how to do life with God, for God, God's way. It was way more important to them than a church like this is for us Jesus followers. It was, kind of like, God's house on earth. Now they were smarter than that. They knew that God couldn't be contained in some building, no matter how big, no matter how magnificent. They knew God is ... omnipresent ... he is everywhere, all the time. But they believed the Temple was kind of the touch-point for God's presence on earth.

In fact, they even narrowed it way down. Back then there were all these courtyards. When you passed through one of the gates of the outer walls, you entered into the courtyard of the Gentiles. Even then Gentiles could enter into the outer courts ... just no further in. In fact, there was this fence you had to go through to move further in. There were signs on that fence: "If you are a Gentile, and you pass this fence, you die!" It would be like us putting up signs in our foyer: "Citizens can pass through these doors; illegals will be shot if they try." And back then they'd do it! The next courtyard was for the women - Jewish women.

They could get closer than the Gentiles, but they couldn't get as close as their men. The next courtyard was for the Jewish men. But even they couldn't get as close as the priests. And even the priests couldn't enter the Holy of Holies. Just the High Priest. And just one day a year - on the Day of Atonement. And only if he entered with a blood sacrifice, and a rope around his ankle. Because if he had a heart attack or a stroke while he was inside, they had to have some way to pull him out ... because no one else could go in! It was the presence of God on earth! You don't mess with the temple!

Back then, for the Jews, the Temple was how to do life with God, for God, God's way. It was the place they offered their sacrifices to God. In fact, it was the only place where they could legitimately offer their sacrifices to God. Now this sacrifice stuff is pretty weird to us, but that's how they did it back then. If you wanted your sins forgiven, if you wanted to be spiritually clean, if you wanted peace with God, you offered him sacrifices. So, if you mess with the sacrifices, how will your sins be forgiven, how will you be spiritually clean, how will you have peace with God?

Every day the priests were in the temple offering these sacrifices to God. Every day Jews would go to the temple to offer these sacrifices to God. There were these different kinds of sacrifices for different part of their life with God. They had these "burnt offerings" and these "peace offerings" every day - kind of like their daily "Lord's Supper." And then people would bring these "Sin offerings," and "guilt offerings" to cover their sins, or to get rid of some ritual impurity. These things were necessary, they believed, to do life with God, to be acceptable as his people. You don't mess with the temple!

Even Rome understood that the temple had to be protected. In fact, the Romans had a fortress built into the wall of the temple so their soldiers could respond immediately to any kind of civil unrest there. And the Priests protected the temple. In fact, they had their own temple police who could respond to any kind of civil unrest there. And the Jewish people ... You just don't mess with the Temple! ...

So ... when Jesus “messed with the Temple,” he was picking a fight! “Crown me or kill me, but you will not ignore me!” Here’s what happened. Let’s back up, just a little.

It’s a Sunday, or maybe a Monday, somewhere around the first of April, 30 A.D. Up till now, whenever people started saying out-loud that Jesus might really be God’s Messiah, he’d try to hush them up. Because he knew that once he admitted that out-loud they’d try to kill him. And he wasn’t ready to die yet. He still had things to do, things to say, things to teach.

But now everything changes. This is his “coming out,” his “going public,” his pulling down the veil. He tells his disciples to get him a donkey - a young one. Because Zechariah the prophet had predicted that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem on a young donkey. And he chose to ride into Jerusalem on a road that went through the Mount of Olives. Because Zechariah the prophet had predicted that the Messiah would stand on the Mount of Olives. And when the people started putting their coats on the road in front of him, and waving these branches, and praising him as God’s Messiah, he just let them. In fact, when the Jewish leaders asked him to hush them up, Jesus said, “If they hush up, the rocks will start praising me.” He was coming to town to pick a fight! “Crown me, or kill me ... but you will not ignore me!” We talked about that stuff last week. If you weren’t here, and you want to dig a little deeper, you can go to CapCity.info and go to the Messages tab. All our sermons are posted there.

Well here’s what happens next. Remember, Luke researched all this carefully by talking to people who were there. SO there is this cheering, and this jeering, and then Luke tells us that “As Jesus came closer to Jerusalem and saw the city ahead, he began to weep. “How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace. But now it is too late, and peace is hidden from your eyes.” And then Jesus says, “Before long your enemies will build ramparts against your walls and encircle you and close in on you from every side. They will crush you into the ground, and your children with you. Your enemies will not leave a single stone in place, because you did not recognize it when God visited you.” (Luke 19.41-44)

In case you can't read between the lines, let me make what Jesus said perfectly clear. Jesus is weeping, he's crying, because he knows what's going to happen. He knows that most of them are going to turn their backs on him. They're going to kill him. In one week they're going to kill ... their God. And even after he walks out of his tomb 3 days later, most of them are still going to reject him ... their Messiah. And it breaks his heart! And within the lifetime of many of those who there, the Romans would surround Jerusalem, and they will crush it. Tens of thousands of Jews would be killed or enslaved. And their temple would be torn down. So, do you think Jesus was picking a fight ... saying these things?

And what he does next ... well ... Jesus just keeps piling it on! Some people have this notion that Jesus was always meek and mild, calm and gentle, kind of soft. Really?! That Jesus is a myth. He is good, but he is not tame! He had come to town to pick a fight, a fight he intended to lose ... kind of ... at least for a couple days. And if you really want to pick a fight, just poke at the biggest bully in the neighborhood, and do it right out in public, in the prickliest hotspot in their world.

It's their Feast of Passover. 10s of thousands of Jewish pilgrims are flooding into Jerusalem from all over their world to celebrate the Exodus, when Moses led the people out of Egypt and God gave them their own land - this land. As prep, every group of pilgrims had to acquire a lamb for their sacrifice. Josephus, the Jewish historian of that time, tells us that 255,000 lambs were bought, sold, and sacrificed during Passover week. That's a lot! A quarter of a million lambs! Most of the pilgrims couldn't bring one with them, so they needed to get one in Jerusalem, one that was pre-approved. So most of the lambs were bought and sold in the court of the Gentiles, and all of them later would be sacrificed further in. So can you imagine what that Court of the Gentiles looked like, and sounded like, and smelled like? Think New York Stock Exchange, and add livestock!

Now they had to get these lambs somewhere! Every family unit had to have a lamb, without blemish. Most of them couldn't bring one with them, so they had to get it there. So a guy named Annas had an idea. Annas had been the High Priest for a while. And then he passed the job around to his sons. He was the power, he was the big dog, kind of the

godfather of the temple. And he had his guys set up these “bazaars” where the pilgrims could buy their lambs - and a little extra for his pockets - for the convenience. And he set up these booths where people could exchange their coins for Jewish money - the only kind the Temple would accept ... for a fee. Annas was a very, very rich man.

Well, here’s what Jesus does next. Luke says, Then Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out the people selling animals for sacrifices. He said to them, “The Scriptures declare, ‘My Temple will be a house of prayer,’ but you have turned it into a den of thieves.” (Luke 19.45-46) It’s kind of like Jesus is saying: “This is my temple - this is my house - and I get to make the rules for my house. And I said it was to be a house of prayer.” And if you go over to Mark’s account of this same incident, he adds this little phrase. Jesus says, “My house will be a house of prayer ... for . all . the nations!” (Mark 11.17) “And here you are, in the only part of the temple the nations, the Gentiles, the rest of the world can come, and you’ve turned it into a Walmart on Black Friday! This is my house!”

Guys, Jesus goes into the temple of God and starts rearranging the furniture. The only guy with the authority to do that is the owner ... of the house! What would you think of some stranger came in here this morning and started flipping over some chairs, and chasing some of you guys out of here - because he thinks you are here for the wrong reasons!, and flipping over some worship stations, and then climbing up here and smashing a couple guitars and then saying to you, “This is my house! This is my house! I’ll decide what goes on here. My rules!” There might be a few of you who would gently disagree ... right? Or not so gently?

So what do you think Annas and his minions are going to think when Jesus begins driving out those manning his Bazaar, or those changing the money? Jesus has come to pick a fight! And not a little one! A fight he intends to lose ... it seems ... at least for a couple days. And he pokes at the biggest bully in the hood, right out in public, in the prickliest hotspot in their world, at the very worst time possible ... as the pilgrims are streaming by the thousands into Jerusalem for the Passover. “Crown me! Or kill me! But you will not ignore me!”

Guys, books have been written about this scene, and what it meant.

- Some guys think Jesus was just cleaning it up. He wasn't really dissing the Temple, he was just trying to restore God's purposes for it. It wasn't supposed to be a place for lining your pockets, it was supposed to be a place of prayer, for all the nations. And it wasn't! So he's just cleaning it up.
- And other guys think it's way more than that. Because of a couple other pieces, which I don't have time to unpack today, they think maybe Jesus was signaling that the time for the Temple was about over. It was the old way of doing life with God. Jesus was about to give them a new way. Could be!

Bottom line, for whatever other reasons Jesus did it ... Jesus was picking a fight. And he was picking a fight with the biggest bully in town. And he chose to do it at a time and in a place where they could not ignore him. "Crown me, or kill me!" Guess which one they chose? Very next verse: Luke tells us that "After that, Jesus taught daily in the Temple, but the leading priests (Annas' guys, the godfather's guys), the teachers of the religious law, and the other leaders of the people began planning how to kill him." (Luke 19.47) And by the end of the week they got it done.

"My house," Jesus says. "Not your house, my house!" "I am your messiah, I am your Savior and your Lord, I am your ... God! This is my house! And I decide what happens in my house!" Do you think Jesus had that right? If he really was God's Messiah, if he really was the Son of God, do you think Jesus had that right? Do you think Jesus has authority over his house?

Well, let's take that idea and kind of lay it over a couple other contexts, where we live. What does this mean to me ... and to you?

Now, Julie and I, we're kind of weird. A couple years back we decided to downsize. Our kids were gone, and we didn't need the room any more, or the bills. But I got this crazy idea. What if?! ... My favorite place to live growing up was on a little farm, on the coast of Oregon. I loved the farm; and I loved the idea of going back to that kind of life. But I couldn't afford a farm. And Tommy and Alatheia, my daughter and my son-in-law were kind of looking to move too. And weirdly enough, we get along quite well. So I said, "What if throw in together, old style?"

And we did. We bought a little farm. It's just a play farm, but it's a great place to play. None of us has the time to take care of a real farm, but all of us together: we can do okay with a play farm! And, believe it or not, we all live in the same house. Four generations: Julie's dad, Julie and I, Tommy and Alatheia, and two of my grandkids: Morgan and Steven. Isn't that crazy?

Now ... whose house is it? Whose house is it most? Lemond's the oldest; is it his house the most? Julie and I are the wisest? (By the way, that's humor!) Is it our house the most? Tommy is the strongest. My daughter Alatheia is the strongest willed. My grandkids are the loudest. Whose house is it most?

Whose likes, and whose wants, and whose needs, and whose rights go first? The oldest? The strongest? The one who pays the biggest chunk of the bills? The one who whines the most? I have seen families that model every one of those, haven't you? How does it work at your house?

What if? ... What if? ... And I know this is going to sound crazy ... to some of you. What if God is part of our family? What if ... really ... and I mean this literally ... what if our house - our little play farm -- is really God's house? Would his likes, and his wants go first? Would his rules trump any of ours ... if they ever clash? Would he get to dictate how we treat each other? Would he get to have a say in how we spend our money, and our time? How would he complete this sentence: "My house ... shall be a house of ..." I'm telling you guys, if our families here at CapCity actually believed this, and if we actually lived this out, every family in this church would be healed! Every family! Do you believe that?

Or how about this context? Just out of curiosity, how many of you were part of this church family before I got here 24 years ago? Would you stand? Guys, these guys are incredibly faithful, and remarkably tolerant! Why don't you give them a hand ... And how many of you guys have only been connecting with this church family for a year or less? Even if you are not officially "a member" yet, you've been coming to church here for a year or less. Would you stand? Guys, thanks for coming! Why don't you give them a hand ... Your being here means a lot to all of us!

Now ... Who is more family? The old timers, or the newbies? Whose house is it most? The old timers, or the newbies? And whose likes, and wants, and needs, and rights ought to be put first? The old timers, or the newbies? Or maybe we should put a few more options on the table. The oldest, or the youngest? The strongest, or the ... powerless. Jesus always leaned in to the powerless, didn't he? Those who contribute the most money? Those who are the loudest? The holy men, like me? (By the way, that's humor.) I have seen churches driven by every one of these, haven't you? In fact, every church will drift towards one of these ... unless ...

But what if? What if? And I know this is going to sound crazy ... to some of you. What if God is part of our family? In fact, what if, in reality, this is really God's house, God's family? Would his likes and his wants go first ... every time? Would his rules trump any of ours ... if and when they clash? And they will! Would he get to dictate how we treat each other? Would he get any say over how we spend our money, and our time? How would he complete this sentence about CapCity: "My house ... my house shall be a house of ..." I'm telling you guys, if we actually believed this, and if we actually lived this out, this church family would not only be healed, we would be on fire ... for God. We'd pack this room and fill this baptistery!

One more ... context. One more place this big idea applies. One of the most powerful Christian leaders in the early church was this guy named Paul. At one time, Paul hated Jesus, and he hated Jesus followers. If you are suspicious of Jesus followers, you might like Paul. But he had this encounter with Jesus that turned his life around, and he became the powerful Christian teacher in the early church. In fact, 13 of the 27 books of our New Testament were written by this guy, Paul.

Listen to what he says. He says, "Don't you realize that your body - your body -- is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God?" Your body, my body, every body of every Jesus follower is a temple of God's Holy Spirit who lives inside us. Paul says, "You do not belong to yourself, (you don't own you!) for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body." (1 Corinthians 6.19-20) Do you believe that? Do you really?

You are going to hear them tell you, in this abortion debate, “No one can tell a woman what to do with her body. It’s her body! It’s a woman’s right to choose what she does with her own body.” Guys, no Jesus follower can say that; no Jesus follower can say that. That’s almost blasphemy, on the lips of a Jesus follower. It isn’t your body! You don’t own you; I don’t own me. This is his temple; this is his house! What he likes, what he wants ... His rules trump ours whenever they clash ... every time! Do you buy that?

Guys, we do it too. We says stupid things like, “I’ll put into my body what I want.” “I’ll use my body, I’ll pleasure my body however I want!” “It’s my body!” “It’s about what I want, it’s about what I like, it’s about what I need, it’s about my rights, right?” And Jesus comes along and says, “This is my house!” How would Jesus complete this sentence, with respect to your body: “My house will be a house of ...”

It’s a question of authority, guys! Jesus is making a staggering claim! I am your Messiah, he says. I am your Savior and your Lord, he says. I am ... your God ... he says. Now ... Crown me, or kill me. And if you kill me, you’d better hope I stay dead!

Some of you guys are willing to acknowledge - intellectually - that he probably was God’s Messiah, in fact he may even have been the Son of God, in some way. The evidence is pretty overwhelming. But believing that intellectually is not enough. And some of you guys are willing to admit that you need some saving, and you are willing to ask him to be your Savior. Which is so cool ... and it’s not enough. Are you willing to accept him as both your Savior ... and your Lord ... your God?

Invitation / “Greater” (You are greater, and I have to become less!)

** Close with Teaser, Invite Cards, Bapt Sunday (April 14); Seder (April 18); Easter (April 21)