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Jesus Cleanses the Temple

Mark 11:15-19

Prayer: *Father, I just again, I thank you for gathering us together again, I thank you for just the cross that we are celebrating today. I continue to pray for the grace, strength, insight and wisdom that we need to truly understand the depth of what it is that you went through for us. I pray that you would open our eyes, our ears, our hearts and our minds by the power of your Holy Spirit as we explore your life. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, this is a day that we remember Jesus Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night before he died, as you probably know, he met with his disciples to celebrate for the last time a Passover supper. It's found in *Matthew 26*, which says: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*

I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

So Jesus took the bread and he took the wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and blood and then he asked his disciples to do the same, to eat the bread and drink the cup in order to symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood, and he asked them to repeat that remembrance on a regular basis and we call that "the Lord's table." And we celebrate it once a month. We do so by meditating on what it is the Lord Jesus Christ did with his life and his death, by examining ourselves and that means asking God's Holy Spirit to point out areas in our lives where he's convicting us of sin, by confessing our sins and then by participating in the elements. *John 6:53* says: *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

We've been following the life of Christ in the gospel of Mark. At this point Jesus is on the final stretch of his public ministry, his crucifixion is just days away, he's just finished his triumphant entry into Jerusalem; it's now the day after. And last time we focused on Jesus undertaking his most misunderstood and frankly bizarre miracle of all the miracles that Jesus had done. This is *Mark 11:12*, it says: *On the following day, when they came*

from Bethany, he was hungry. And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.

And we saw last time that God is determined to produce fruitfulness in our lives and that he's quite willing to discipline us in order to produce it. We found out that we, too, can look at ourselves as that fig tree. We can work to put all of our energy into producing these bright, shiny leaves that make us look exceptional on the outside while being fruitless on the inside. We can put our energy into abiding in Christ so that we can spend the rest of our lives being fruitful.

There's one particular fruit that we want to look at this morning; it is self-control. We want to examine how Jesus, cleansing the temple, how was Jesus cleansing the temple a perfect example of that fruit being displayed. And so we're going to look at this next section of scripture. It's verses 15 through 20 which covers the incident of Jesus cleansing the temple.

This is *Mark 11:15-19*. It says: *And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and*

those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching. And when evening came they went out of the city.

This is what we call an incident. Incidents are like accidents, I mean, oftentimes they have witnesses and the witnesses themselves, they see, they hear, they repeat the facts as filtered through a grid of their own personal experience. This morning I want to look at four different individuals or groups, each of whom witnessed this incident. First of all, there was the Pharisees; second of all there was not just the Pharisees, there were the people that were surrounding the Pharisees, then there's us believers who are reading about this thousands of years later, and then fourth there's Jesus himself participated in this incident. I want to examine how each one's personal experience influenced exactly what they heard and saw take place with Jesus as he's cleansing that temple.

So the first witness I would call would be the Pharisees. I mean, they were the ones who were thought to be in charge. They were the ones who would be directly affected by somebody kind of walking into their turf, into their territory and making a declaration such as Jesus made when he said: *"Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."*

So I want you to imagine for a minute that you're a Pharisee. You've heard about this obscure religious leader from Nazareth, how he's getting more and more popular and how people are saying he's doing these miraculous things. Suddenly you hear that he's entered the sacred temple and he has the gall to call it "my house." You think, excuse me? The temple that Solomon built, the one that Herod rebuilt, the temple that God himself designed, you're going to walk into that sacred place and call it "my house"?

Furthermore, this Jesus appears to have flown into some kind of a rage. He's flipping over tables, he's forbidding people from carrying goods through the temple. Your first thought has got to be, "Who does this guy think he is?" He's had this great entry into Jerusalem but it's clearly gone to his head. He's walking into the temple like he owns the place even though he's an absolute nobody from absolute nothing town and now that he's attracted a

following, he thinks he's some kind of religious authority. We Pharisees are the authority when it comes to the temple. Where does this Jesus of Nazareth come off as having the authority to do this?

Well, we know this was their thinking because there's an actual account of a dialogue that takes place between the Pharisees and Jesus and it's just a few verses later. Some time soon after this temple cleansing has taken place and Jesus, once again he's walking in the temple and he's confronted by this group of Pharisees. This is verse 27. It says: *And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him, and they said to him, "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?"*

Well the Pharisees, they're obviously rattled by the way Jesus had comported himself. They didn't realize that no human being is even remotely capable of matching wits with Jesus. The Pharisees are going to quickly learn it's a fool's errand to try. He clearly acted as if he had the authority to cleanse the temple; and knowing that he met none of their criteria for that kind of authority, they want to know why are you acting this way. It was a very delicate situation. You see, they knew full well that Jesus at that moment

enjoyed overwhelming popularity of the people and it was a popularity that they never enjoyed. And so the question was something that had to be tackled with a lot of discretion. Jesus was having none of it. In verse 29, it says: *Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me."*

Now it was a very simple question but it instantly put the Pharisees in a box that they knew they couldn't get out of. And Jesus furthers his claim to authority by demanding of them an answer. Verse 31 says: *And they discussed it with one another, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But shall we say, 'From man'?" -- they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet. So they answered Jesus. "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."*

He's speaking to them like he's the adult and they're the children. And that experience had to be extraordinarily unsettling for the Pharisees. I mean they were not used to being challenged in the way that they couldn't respond to. And so they start to see Jesus as an existential threat; that is, a threat to their very

existence. Verse 18 says: *And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching.*

Okay. That's our first witness, that's the Pharisees; the second witness is the people. This is the crowd that observed the interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees. They certainly saw Jesus -- quote -- "sticking it to the man," so to speak. They actually saw somebody speaking truth to power and power itself starting to look weak and foolish.

Well, the third witness, that's us; it's us believers. Thousands of years later we're looking at this and we wonder how do genuine believers look at what Jesus said and did when he entered that temple? Because truth be told, for all intents and purposes, it looks like Jesus just simply lost it when he went into that place. Flipping over tables and blocking the entrance to the merchants, physically driving them out of the temple, that sounds like somebody going off the deep end. And this is not the first time that Jesus had done this. John's gospel tells us he did the very same thing before he was driving out merchants, he made a whip out of cords and he physically whipped them out of the temple.

And so we wonder, what does this say about Jesus' character,

because time and again we're told that Jesus is the embodiment of the fruits of spirit. *Galatians 5* says: *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.* Well obviously the one fruit that jumps out here is self-control. And so we're left with the question, I mean, how is a person flipping over tables, whipping people and physically driving them out the door, how is that consistent with that particular fruit?

We know scripture tells us that anger has its place, we know why it says so. If you love someone deeply, you're going to respond to threats and attacks on that person with some kind of anger. I mean, if you're indifferent and you shrug your shoulders at seeing your mom beaten by somebody, there's something clearly wrong with you and your love. So we know that anger can be a healthy thing, I mean, it's okay to be angry, it's okay to be filled with wrath at things that are worthy of anger and wrath; but it's just that there needs to be some boundaries around that anger. Paul said in *Ephesians 4*: *Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.*

So we reflect this morning because communion is actually time to ask ourselves a whole host of questions, and this one this morning is what kind of fruit are we producing particularly when it comes

to the issue of self-control?

As the elders begin passing out the bread, let me read to you from *1 Corinthians 11*. It says: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.*

And I repeat this every month, I proclaim that communion is an incredibly serious undertaking and that to enter into communion in an unworthy manner as to court disaster. I say if you're not absolutely confident that you're a child of the King, if you haven't trusted in Christ as your personal savior, then you need first and foremost to get that accomplished. If you need to be reconciled to your brother and sister before you bring the sacrifice of yourself to this altar, then do not participate, just pass the elements on. If you don't feel right about it, err on the side of caution and get right with God first.

And then as I also point out, you can make the mistake of thinking that you have to be perfect in order to take communion. The enemy

loves that mistake as well. Being a child of the King doesn't mean that you don't sin and that you don't fail. It does mean that we recognize salvation as a gift no one is ever capable of earning by being good. And so we repeat Dane Ortlund's quote. He says: "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do."

And you know, it also means that when we fail, we are aware of the fact that we failed, the fact that we've sinned because we have the gift of God's Holy Spirit inside of us, convicting us of sin. And so we grieve and we grieve as children who know that we have a Father who longs to forgive us and cleanse us. God says: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

So being a child of the King doesn't mean you're sinless, it means that you understand that when we do sin, we have an advocate with the Father. That's just a fancy way of saying we have someone up in heaven itself speaking on our behalf. 1 John tells us: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.*

And that's the key right there, it's because we have this foreign righteousness, an alien righteousness, it belonged to Jesus, he gave it to us, and because we have his righteousness we can stand on that righteousness before a holy God. So if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus purchased for you. As I said, he lived the life we were supposed to live, then he died the death we deserved to die in our place so that we could have that privilege, so that we could be here right now at his table.

So before we participate, I would ask you to ask God to show you what kind of fruit am I bringing to him? That's my question.

1 Corinthians 11:23 says: For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." So take and eat.

Well, I think it's safe to say that Jesus was angry as he was cleansing the temple. So the question that we're asking this morning is did Jesus go too far? And you can certainly make the argument that, well, he was simply fulfilling prophesy. *Psalm 69 says: Zeal for your house has consumed me.* And we know that after Jesus cleansed the temple the first time *John 2 says: His*

disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." We know that both of these temple cleansings, Jesus was neither polite nor calm as he whipped the merchants out the door. You might say he was flipping out.

And the question we want to raise is, is flipping out or, as the disciples say it, being consumed by zeal for his Father's house, is that an appropriate response for someone who's living a perfect life? The Pharisees saw Jesus as an upstart, unqualified rebel, claiming an authority that didn't belong to him in the slightest. We believers look at Jesus's response, with all due respect, we wonder how that lines up with the perfect expression of the fruit of the Spirit that he represented, and we wonder was that perfect self-control?

So far we've looked at three of the witnesses to this incident. We've seen the Pharisees, they were appalled; we've seen the people, that is the crowd itself, they were gratified that Jesus was giving the Pharisees their comeuppance; and now we're examining how we thousands of years later as believers witness these events wondering is this self-control perfect?

And at this point it's important to bring out our fourth witness, and that's God himself. I want to look at this cleansing of the

temple from God's perspective. See, from the Pharisees' perspective Jesus had no right whatsoever to criticize, I mean, he was an outsider, he was someone who in their view had not established any type of bona fides that would entitle him to exercise that authority. I mean, for them healing the sick and feeding the hungry, even raising the dead didn't qualify because in their mind nothing would qualify.

So looking at it some 2,000 years later we have to qualify our understanding of Jesus based on the myths that the 20th century has created about him. See, most people think of Jesus today as this passive, nonviolent embodiment of love. But he wasn't passive; he certainly wasn't above shoving these people outside the temple or flipping over the money tables. And so the question remains, did Jesus exercise perfect self-control or not? And the answer to that question lies in understanding what self-control is from God's perspective.

I taught about that a few years ago when we did the series on the fruit of the Spirit, and back then I said self-control means specifically putting the control of your spirit under the control of God's Holy Spirit. I think the first thing that folks think of when they think of self-control is the ability to control your anger. You know, folks think a self-controlled person is someone

who's mastered the art of saying, "serenity now, serenity now." He's not going to lose his temper. He's mastered the art of counting to ten but that's not what self-control is really about.

Self-control is more the act of putting my will under the active control of the Holy Spirit. James says anyone who's able to control his tongue is able to bridle his own body. He says this in *James 3:2*, he says: *If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well.*

You know, a bridle is a small bit of metal that goes into the mouths of horses, it enables the rider to make the horse go wherever he wants it to go. What he's saying is in the same way self-control bridles the entire body so that you and the Holy Spirit are making the decisions as to where that body goes instead of the other way around. And every one of us knows how difficult that is, I mean, we've all experienced what it's like to have our bodies tell us what it's like to go to in terms of what we're going to eat, how long we're going to sleep, what we're going to watch on TV or on the net, how we're going to interact with our fellow human beings. We all know what it's like to let our bodies or our minds get the best of us. We call that losing self-control.

The apostle Paul describes self-control in terms of athletics. This is what he said in *1 Corinthians 9*. He said: *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.*

Now it's likely Paul, while he was in Corinth, he witnessed the athletic games that were taking place back there and athletes back then, just like today, these were people who exercised great self-control over their bodies. They used discipline in order to win a temporal prize that begins perishing as soon as you get it. And we have a far, far greater prize. We have a prize that never perishes. It's the crown of glory in eternal life. Our goal is a race well run, glorifying God with our lives. But to do that we have to exercise self-control. It's something that I maintain Jesus did his entire life and that he did it perfectly.

I want to look at four different instances in scripture where self-control is shown being exercised; one was by Paul, the other three are by Jesus. And we'll see Paul, we'll see him exercising self-

control well, but then we see Jesus exercising it perfectly.

The first instance takes place in the book of Acts. Paul is being dragged before the Sanhedrin, he's told to explain all of the accusations that the Jews have toward him. So he starts out, he's defending himself amongst his fellow Jews. This is Acts 23. It says: *And looking intently at the council, Paul said, "Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day." And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.*

Imagine being publicly humiliated like that. Jewish law provided everyone was entitled to a trial or a hearing without this kind of violence, without this kind of humiliation. So much for Jewish law. Verse 3 says: *Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?"* Well, this is the old Paul, this is the Paul reacting as anyone might to the humiliation of being slapped in the face for no good reason. He's angry and he's cursing, I mean, in the literal sense that's what he's doing. He's also name-calling. "Whitewashed wall" may not be a well known expletive in our day but everyone knew back then he was describing his attacker in very unflattering terms. But then Paul hears this verse 4. It says: *Those who*

stood by said, "Would you revile God's high priest?" And Paul said, "I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"

So here we have the new Paul. This is the new Paul with his tongue sufficiently bridled and his emotions now under his control and the Holy Spirit's control. This is what self-control is all about. It's putting my will and control under the power of the Holy Spirit. So regardless how unfair and how wrong it is to be slapped and humiliated publicly, Paul immediately recognizes a position and authority and a structure that God has imposed that gives even these wretched law breakers a respect Paul instantly provides.

Now if you reverse the camera and you go back 20 years, Stephen's sitting in the very same Sanhedrin, he's under a similar attack for believing in the risen Christ and Paul's right there in the thick of it and he's persecuting the church. Well, twenty years of the Holy Spirit's presence and Paul had made him so tuned in and sensitive to God's order that his desire to honor it was greater than his desire to respond to the humiliation of being publicly slapped.

But, you know, almost the exact same thing happened to the Lord

Jesus Christ. And where Paul responded in a way that illustrated that he had grown in his ability to be self-controlled, Jesus' response proved that he had mastered it perfectly.

It's the night of Jesus' arrest. He also is brought before the Sanhedrin. This is *John 18*. It says: *The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said."* When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, *"Is that how you answer the high priest?"*

Now there's a number of notable differences between Paul's account of what happened and what we read here happened to Jesus. You see, both Paul and Jesus, they opened up by speaking the truth simply and honestly but both were publicly slapped. And they were slapped not only to humiliate them, but they were perceived of being out of order. But here's where the difference between Jesus and Paul becomes highly evident. See, the person who slaps Jesus, he just takes it on himself to humiliate somebody he thought was not showing the proper respect to the high priest. Little did he know

that Jesus was the high priest. *Hebrews 2* says: *Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*

See the fact is Jesus was the one who created the office of high priest thousands of years previously. And Annas, the man who was the acting high priest, who was the acting high priest at the time, he was a crook, he was a fraud, in fact the entire examination was a farce and a fraud, and Jesus had every right to point that out. Instead he simply counters with these words, he said: *"If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?"* In case you're wondering, that's what perfect self-control looks like.

These temple cleansings that we're looking at this morning, they're actually the other examples of self-control that Jesus exercised that I want to illustrate because both examples might have you scratching your head. I'm going to look at the first one. It's in *John 2:12*. Describing Jesus, it says: *After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days. The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers*

sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

Now you might think that's hardly a good example of self-control. I mean, he certainly seems to lose it in this passage. I mean, where's the gentleness, where's the patience, where's the self-control? Well, like much in scripture this one requires that we take a look under the hood for some background information to understand what's really going on. And to do that we have to go back to the temple.

Solomon's temple was one of the seven wonders of the world. He had spared no expense in terms of labor or materials to build it because God was willing to dwell in that temple. According to 2 Chronicles 2, 70,000 laborers, 80,000 stone cutters, 3600 foremen all who took some 7-to-20 years of labor to produce that first temple. And this is the temple that got sacked and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in the fifth century BC. And by the time of Jesus' era the temple had been restored by Herod to where it was once again nothing like it was originally but it was a highly imposing

structure. It covered 35 acres and that's about the size of a shopping mall.

So Jesus goes into this temple where verse 14 says: *He found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple. So we say, okay, where's the self-control there?* Then it seems to get worse. It says: *And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. I mean he's flipping over the cash registers, he's flipping tables, it's a picture of somebody just kind of flipping out. So where do we get the idea of self-control in this?*

We have to understand there's two very different types of merchandising that's going on here that we need to look at separately to get a sense of what's actually happening. And the first is verse 14, Jesus find these merchants are selling oxen, sheep and pigeons. So we got to ask, where do these merchants come from?

Well, centuries before God had instituted a sacrificial system as a means of providing a bridge between God and his creation because God was holy and man no longer was. Since the fall of Adam we were sinners separated from God by our sin and so in the Old Testament

God had created a way to bridge that gap by the use of sacrificial animals. These animals represented innocent life that had to be sacrificed, blood that had to be shed in order for sins to be paid for. But God said all of these animals, they could only cover sin; only one sacrifice could remove it, and Jesus came to be that sacrifice.

When John the Baptist is baptizing he sees Jesus coming towards him to be baptized and he makes a statement sums up what all the sacrificial system was designed to portray. This is John's words. He says: *He saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."* You see, all the blood of all of those animals, they served only to cover over those sins until the time when God himself would come to be the final offering for those sins.

But now at this time when Jesus is appearing in the temple, those animal sacrifices because the cross hasn't taken place yet, they're still being offered. And the way the Jewish sacrificial system works was that anyone was free to bring a sacrificial animal to the temple but only the priest could certify whether or not it was blemish free. And the idea of lugging an animal miles and miles to the temple only to have it be disqualified made it so most folks, they just decided I'll buy my animal at the temple. Verse 14 says:

He found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple.

I just want you to picture a cattle auction taking place during a church service, and you get kind of an idea of what's going on here. But it gets worse. You see, every male Israelite had to pay a yearly temple tax of a half shekel. And the problem was not only did he have to pay but he can only pay it in Palestinian silver. And at the time there was a slew of different coins on the market. There were Persian, Tyrian, Syrian, Egyptian, Greek and Roman coins, all of them had to be exchanged for Palestinian silver. That was the money changer's job. And typical of many Middle Eastern exchanges, there's the constant din of haggling going on.

So in order to put Jesus' response into context, you first you have to picture the scene. Understand, the temple is the sacred presence of God on the earth. It's the place where his servants acknowledge his greatness and their sinfulness. It was the place to offer God a substantial sacrifice that pointed to the blood atonement that came only through the cross. It was the most sacred place on the planet. It was the place where the creator met with his creation. Well, that was the theory.

See, the practice was entirely different. You see, years and years had dulled the senses of the people. It turns out they had no fear of God whatsoever, and so the temple had become a bazaar. And the silence of worship had been replaced with the din of trade and haggling and argument and additionally, right alongside the haggling of the coin changers is an ongoing cattle auction. Again, I want to point out this was the most sacred place on the planet and now that place is full of dirt and noise and filth and bellowing animals. It's thick with the stench of dung and urine.

And this isn't the only incident. The second instance in which Jesus reacted strongly to this type of activity is the text we're looking at this morning. This is *Mark 11:15*. It says: *And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."*

Once again Jesus, he's flipping over tables of the seats of those who sold pigeons. And since the first time -- we find out that since the first time he's cleansed the temple things seem to have

gone from bad to worse. The temple is now being used by these merchants as a shortcut between the city of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. If you remember, the temple took up 35 acres. Just picture the size of a shopping mall. Well, merchants could either go all the way around the temple at a considerable distance or they could take a shortcut right through this sacred place in order to save time and money. Merchants would actually drive their carts with their animals and their wares right through the center of the temple in order to save the trouble of going around it. Hence the text says: *And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.* We put up signs that say "No Thru Traffic" in areas where traffic's inappropriate; these folks never got the memo.

So before you accuse Jesus of losing his self-control, I want you to consider our fourth witness; that's God himself. This is God who is due all worship and honor and glory. He's now receiving huge doses of scorn and derision and mockery; and it's not from the devil, it's not from his enemies, it's not even from the pagan world, it's from his own chosen people.

I mean, if self-control is placing the control of my will under the power of the Holy Spirit, may I suggest to you that the Holy Spirit of God was righteously outraged. And if ever there was a time when Father, Son and Holy Spirit altogether practiced astonishing self-

control, it was in that temple that was now a cesspool.

And not only was Jesus exercising extraordinary self-control, he was doing it within the context of fulfilling prophesy. Again, *John 2:17: His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."* And *Malachi 3* says: *"Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts."*

There's only one word to describe God's unwillingness to annihilate these people, that word is grace. Grace expressed in the fruit of the Spirit of self-control. If self-control is my will placed under the power of the Holy Spirit, then Jesus' self-control in that temple was off the scale.

As the elders distribute the cup, I just want us to consider this whole picture. You know, it took years and years for the temple to go from being the most sacred place on earth to being a grotesque mockery of everything that God stood for, but it happened, and it happened because the people let it happen and it's still happening today.

You see, in some places church is still serves the purpose of making people think that they've met God when all they've really met is sellers of cattle, sheep, and doves and exchangers of coins. They don't understand what the sacrifice was all about. *1 Samuel 15* says: *"Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams."*

And you know, as Jesus went further into the temple he found the money-changers, they're haggling and they're arguing because they had the Palestinian silver, they had the coin of the realm, they had an inside track to an acceptable offering. And many of the ancient Jews must have thought, well, here you go, I got blemish-free animals, I got Palestinian silver, I'm all set. They were dead wrong. *Proverbs 21* says: *To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.* See, God says an acceptable sacrifice is obedience, it's justice, it's mercy, it's humility and none of that comes in a checkbook. They come from a relationship with Jesus Christ.

You see, the fruits of the spirit are not things that anyone can manufacture or supply for us. They're parts of our character that flow freely when we've been with Jesus and dry up when we haven't. It is really that simple, and there really are no shortcuts. And

again, communion is a time when we ask God to humbly examine us.

And so we ask the question: Am I growing in my effort to abide in Christ, to learn self-control from the only one who ever exercised it perfectly? So take a few moments to ask God this morning to grow your love for Christ by growing your desire to abide in him. Think on that.

1 Corinthians 11:25 says: In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." So take, and drink.

Well, this is the part, the practical part, the head, heart and feet part that we try to understand some kind of practical ways of remembering Jesus. And the one practical way of addressing that is to just ask the question: How do I grow more self-control? Well, the answer is actually quite simple. You grow more self-control by abiding in Jesus. I mean in *John 15*, Jesus says: *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

And again we look at how did Jesus respond to being slapped in the face in the middle of a kangaroo court, and Jesus says: *"If what I*

said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?" And so we ask, how did Jesus react with such calm and such grace?

Well, Peter tells us exactly how he was able to do that. And a large part of abiding in Jesus is simply soaking in his word, learning how he handled the extreme challenges to his self-control. This is how Peter put it in *1 Peter 2*. He said: *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.*

And there it is: *He entrusted himself to him who judges justly.* Practically speaking, what does that mean? That means the next time someone or something threatens you or reviles you or invites you into suffering of some type, any type of situation that you find where you're really questioning what's going on, consider how Jesus handled it. You see, Jesus knew that nothing, nothing happens by chance, and he also knew that nothing happens outside of the sovereign will of his Father, even a slap in the face. It gave him the ability to put everything into perspective, to view everything that happened in his life as an opportunity to increase

his trust in the one who judges justly.

And so it's going to happen the next month or so, the next time you're insulted, next time you're offended, the next time you're put down, do what Jesus did, attempt to follow in his footsteps, recognize that nothing happens by chance and that God is still sovereign and that you can trust him even in that particular circumstance. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for who you are; I thank you for your Son. I thank you for the example that he has given to us of perfect self-control. And Lord, it would have been absolutely right and just and proper if you had incinerated that entire temple instantly, turned it into ashes and dust. That's what it was deserving of. And yet your self-control was so overwhelming that you simply rebuked, clearly and plainly and obviously what was taking place. Lord, I pray for us that as we abide more and more in you, as we learn more and more of who you are and how you handled the slings and arrows of day-to-day life, how you did it by trusting in your Father's sovereign control over everything, I pray you would give us that grace, that strength and that wisdom as we experience the difficulties of life. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.