

GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

65 – “Minor” Issues

Announcements:

4/24 @6:30 -

Men's Discipleship
- Question 9

4/26 @7:00 -

Prayer

4/27 @6:30 -

Grace Group

4/30 @8:30 -

Sunday School

5/2 @6:30 -

Women's
Bible Study

ICE BREAKER: Are you more of a “big picture” person or someone who focuses on the details?

READ: Matthew 21:12-17

Like many of the passages that we have looked at in Matthew, this one is chalk full of things that we might overlook if we are not careful or, like is the case for most of us, we are just not familiar with many of the current issues that Matthew was writing into. For most of them we can understand the heart of what Matthew is saying without a full grasp, so we might be tempted to look at them as more like minor issues. For example, we can understand the nature of the Parable of the laborers in the vineyard without knowing exactly how much a denarius is, or the point of a demon being cast out without an intimate knowledge of the geography of Gadarenes. But it is, in fact, one of those “minor” things that I would like to look at today, for what we will see is that it is really not that minor.

One thing that is fairly easy to overlook is the nature of *where* in the temple this whole scene takes place. The temple, it turns out, was really big. There were different sections and places, each one for a certain thing, and each one with rules as to who or what could be there. As a way to think it through, I could say to Jayden: we are eating dinner at home tonight. But does that mean we are eating as a family at the table, or reheating leftovers individually, or even in the living room as we watch a movie together? All of those things are eating dinner at home yet all very different. So here Jesus enters the temple, but specifically he enters what is known as “The court of the Gentiles”. What makes this important is that this was the only place in the temple that any gentiles were allowed to go. So while for the Jewish people it was easy to turn it into a busy place of commerce, because they had other areas they could go, for the gentiles (known as the “God fearers”) this was their whole temple experience. So the first thing this communicates is that concern for others is actually a part of worship?

DISCUSS: In what ways is this same thought (that concern for others is a part of worship) still a concern today?

But what is possibly more important in thinking through this location is what it communicates about Jesus as a savior. By showing so much concern for the Court of the Gentiles as a part of the house of God he was saying in not so many words, that he was *their* savior too. Jesus is the lamb that comes to take away the sins of the world, and so he will get and deserves worship from all people. Whereas the Elites and the zealots among the Jewish people thought that it was for them and them alone, the Gospel that Jesus brings is for people from every tribe and tongue and nation. As one commentator put it: “Contrary to the expectations of the people, Jesus did not cleanse the temple *of* the Gentiles, but rather he cleared it *for* them.”

DISCUSS: Why is it important to see the scope of Jesus work even here in a passage like this?

The final thing I would like to look at today is less of a minor issue and more of one we just may not even think about. In doing what he did here, Jesus would have subverted all the expectations of the people all around him. For here he comes into God’s temple, the place of worship and a place of great importance for the people, and he pronounces Judgement. Rather than blessing the temple (the expectation) he curses it! As O’Donnell says: “By overturning tables, driving out those who sold the animals *necessary for sacrifice*, our Lord is doing something radical, perhaps his most revolutionary action to date. He was making a prophetic protest and pronouncement. He was not cleansing the temple, rather he was *cursing* it! He was withering Israel's Fig tree.” There is the same thread here that runs through the interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well. She inquires about the *location* of worship and Jesus teaches there (as well as here) that it is the heart that matters. “The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:23)

DISCUSS: What wisdom do we gain from understanding the heart of this interaction? What warnings, promises, or truths can we find here?