

## Prayer

Be close to me, Lord God, as I do my best to live my life according to Your standards of love. Give me a forgiving heart towards all other people, a desire to help meet their needs, the persistence always to work for what is right and true, and the courage to persevere through trouble and find peaceful solutions to conflict. You alone can help me live a life of practical love; thank You, Lord God: AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Rural Life

*Pray for those who own vast areas of land throughout the world. Pray that the land will be managed and protected well from unnecessary damage by thoughtless people.*

### On-going prayers

- Give thanks to God for the many good things He has given you
- Pray for DR Congo at this time of civil war and unrest
- Pray for those who live within the on-going violence in Iraq

## Meditation

I wonder how you see me, Lord?

Do You see me as the man or woman of God I think I am?  
Or merely as a shadow of the person You know I can be?

Do You find me true to Your Word and discerning of Your will?  
Or motivated by my own inner needs and personal interests?

Do You hear my prayers and know I long for truth and justice?  
Or do I try to use my faith to get my way above that of others?

Do You watch my daily work and see Your Kingdom built?  
Or am I distracted by the worldly opportunities before me?

Do You speak, advise and guide me, and know I will respond?  
Or do I need to be constantly reminded to listen to Your Word?

I wonder how You see me Lord?

Despite my faults and failings, and the fruits still waiting to grow;  
May I prove worthy of Your love and Your guidance for my soul.

## Bible Study - Matthew 21:12-17

<sup>12</sup> Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. <sup>13</sup> He said to them, 'It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer; but you are making it a den of thieves.'

<sup>14</sup> The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. <sup>15</sup> But when the chief priests and scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children shouting in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' they were angry <sup>16</sup> and said to him, 'Do you hear what they are saying?' Jesus said

to them, 'Yes; and have you never read, "Out of the mouths of infants and babies you have ordained praise"?'

<sup>17</sup> He left them, and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

## Review

This extraordinary episode describes one of the events people most frequently remember about Jesus, because He appears to have become angry! The 'cleansing of the Temple' is a story that generates controversy because Jesus burst into the Temple public courtyard and made a scene by turning over tables and scattering chairs. It is certainly something we need to investigate if we are to understand what Jesus was thinking and feeling as He came to Jerusalem.

Yet anger itself is not the right place to start; for if we think that by showing anger Jesus appears less of a Saviour than if He had kept His cool, then we are wrong. Jesus was truly human and did indeed demonstrate the human emotion of anger (see Matt 11:20; 16:23, 23:16f.), and was fully able to control His emotions. Matthew would not have recorded this story as an example of Jesus' anger, but as fulfilment of prophecy and also as an example of Jesus' prophetic action against the Temple authorities. In this way, He appealed to people to strip away false religiosity and use the Temple for worship and for prayer alone.

**Worship in the Temple** At the heart of the Temple was a holy place, set apart from a courtyard of priests. Priests alone saw the magnificence of the inner Temple, and Jesus never went there. Around the courtyard of the priests was the courtyard of the Israelites, where Jewish males worshipped in prayer, the chanting of psalms, and recitation of the Law. Around this courtyard was the courtyard of women, where Jewish women went for the same worship, but separate from the men. Jesus did not go there either.

The outer part of the Temple and by far the biggest was the courtyard of the Gentiles, so named because Gentile converts to Judaism could worship there; for they were not allowed into the other courtyards. People who were ill or disfigured were also able to worship from the courtyard of the Gentiles, and it was also a place where people first entered the Temple and prepared themselves for worship, usually by changing their money from Roman coinage to Jewish money suitable for the worship of God.

It was here that Jesus went and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and those who sold animals for slaughter; so why did Jesus do this? It certainly did not benefit the pilgrims, as it simply meant that they could not get what they needed for worship after journeying for many miles! The clues to this lie in the way that Matthew reports the whole event as a fulfilment of prophecy.

**A fulfilment of prophecy** The Messiah was expected to come to Jerusalem and go immediately to the Temple to cleanse it, in fulfilment of Malachi 3:1ff. Most thought that He would go to the 'Holy of Holies' and prepare it for God's coming to abide with His people forever, but Jesus 'cleansed the Temple' in quite a different way. He was not concerned about purity or rituals, He was concerned about the purpose of God to save and redeem humanity. In general, the whole incident fulfils a prophecy of Zechariah, who spoke about the coming 'day of the Lord' when 'there will be no longer any trader in the house of the Lord on that day' (Zech 14:21); but there is more.

Matthew gives three quotes from the Old Testament in this story, all within the words of Jesus. 'My house shall be called a house of prayer' is a quote from Isaiah 56:7, and 'you are making it a den of robbers' is a quote from Jeremiah 7:11 (21:13). Lastly, 'out of the mouths of infants ...' is a quote from Psalm 8:2 which comes later in the story (21:16). Jesus' first quote is from Isaiah 56, which is a prophecy about the future worship of God by all people, Jew and Gentile (56:3) including those maimed or imperfect (56:4) based on a

covenant relationship with God (56:6). The quote from Jeremiah referred not to the scandal of commercial trading in the Temple, but to the scandal of false religion in general which had drawn people away from God in past centuries.

**The shouts of children** Everything Jesus did in the Temple was in the outer Gentile courtyard, so the chief priests did not immediately see Jesus' actions as a threat. He had not gone to the Holy of Holies and upset anything there! The anger of the authorities was however raised by the shouts of the children, who had picked up the chants of the crowd from earlier in the day and were calling out to him 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' When this had been shouted earlier the authorities were not present, but now children with no inhibitions were effectively calling Jesus 'Messiah' right in the faces of the chief priests!

Jesus quoted to them the famous verse of psalm 8 'Out of the mouths of infants and babies you have ordained praise ...'. There is uncertainty about the real meaning of this verse today, but in Jesus day there was only one version of it (the Septuagint). Jesus accurately quoted this and its meaning was clear. Following His teaching about children and the Kingdom of Heaven (11:25 & 19:13-15), was it not conceivable that children could understand the things of God in a way that adults could not? Jesus was indeed the Messiah, and no amount of objection to the children would change that!

## Questions (for use in groups)

1. Why did Jesus Himself quote from the Old Testament during this event? What does this tell us about what Jesus was thinking?
2. Look up and discuss the meaning of the quotes made by Jesus in this story.
3. What can we learn about the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven from this passage of scripture?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*Jesus' action of 'cleansing the Temple' is found in all of the four Gospels but is recounted slightly differently in each. As such, it is one of only a few incidents which is covered so widely (apart from Jesus' death). For this reason, it must have had a huge impact upon the people of the early church, probably symbolising the break between the church and the Jewish community both in worship and in lifestyle. Through it all, the praises of children may well have represented to them the freshness and youth of the infant church. It is a tragedy that the only thing people can say about it today is that it may be an example of Jesus' 'anger'! What an insult to Jesus and scripture!*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- What does the issue of anger mean to you? Is it something you have control of, and can you be sure that you will not 'lose your temper'? Pray that the Lord will enable You to do and say what is right with full control of your temper.
- What is it that marks out your church as special to you? Ask the Lord to help you understand why it is you attend the church you do, and understand how it relates to His eternal universal church.

## Final Prayer

Holy Spirit, come and inspire us now. Give us an insight into the Father's will and His purposes for the Kingdom here on earth and also in Heaven. Guide us by grace and the