

February 28, 2016 - 11:00 a.m.

Pastor Jonathan Falwell

One Week to Live: Getting the House in Order

Scripture: Matthew 21:10-14

Summary: Pastor Jonathan begins a series on the final week of Christ's life, today emphasizing the importance of putting our house in order via obedience and holiness.

Today we are beginning a brand-new series that will take us all the way up to Resurrection Sunday where we celebrate the fact that Jesus is no longer in the grave, that He did exactly what He promised that He would do, that He rose again. Three days after He paid our sin-debt on the cross, He arose and He walked out of that grave victorious over sin, Satan, and death, to give us the opportunity, to give us the privilege, to give us life in His name.

And so today what we're going to do is spend the next few weeks looking at the week leading up to that occurrence, the week leading up to that moment that Christ rose again. There are many different statements, many different names or titles for that week: Passion Week is the one that comes to mind most often, and we are going to take some time to look at that last week, that one week to live, where Jesus walked into the city of Jerusalem on that Passion Week, that Passover Week, and we are going to pull out a few very important statements that Jesus made not only by word but in action that we can implement and apply to our lives today to make us more like Him, to bring us in a better and a closer relationship with Him.

And today I would ask that you turn in your Bibles to Matthew 21, and we are going to start in this passage today looking at something that is very important; something that is critical; and that is one simple word, and that is the word *holiness*—that God expects, that God desires, that God commands His children to pursue holiness at all costs. And going along with what we're going to be talking about today, I want to give you our memory verse for this week, and it's found in Joshua 3:5. It's on the screen, and today we're going to read this out loud together as we set up this time together talking about holiness.

“And Joshua said to the people, ‘Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.’”

Now this, as you will recall, is a passage of Scripture where Joshua was leading the children of Israel, after the death of Moses, to go into the land that God had promised them. He was leading them in God’s direction and in God’s leading to go into that nation to defeat the ones who were holding that land and God was going to give that land to the people of Israel if they did exactly what God told them to do. That’s a perfect way for us to begin our conversation today as we begin the conversation about holiness.

We’re going to look at Matthew 21. I’m just going to read a few verses today, beginning with verse 10, and it says, And when He [Jesus] had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, “Who is this?” So the multitudes said, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee.” Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’”

Now let’s take just a moment, if you will, to kind of walk through, talk a little bit about the setting, of what took place leading up to the words that Jesus just shared a moment ago. Here in Matthew 21, if you go back a few verses in that passage, you’ll see that this was when Jesus entered into the city. The first part of Matthew 21 talks about the triumphal entry, when people gathered along the side of the road and they threw palm branches down on the road. They took off their coats and laid them down on the road as Jesus entered the city and rode in and they cried out, “Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

You know what took place during that time. It was a very emotional, a very powerful moment when Jesus arrived in the city. And when He arrived in the city, it’s interesting that one of the first things that He did was He went up to the temple and He cleansed the temple by getting rid of all the people that were there that were perverting the temple of God, who were taking advantage of the people who were coming to worship God, who were trying to oppress those who came and didn’t have much, trying to take advantage of them and steal money from them. He went up and He turned over the tables and He threw them out and He called them to stop doing what they were doing.

In other words, what Jesus did when He first arrived in the city in Matthew 21 is He knew that He had to get His house in order to prepare for what was to come that week. And today that kind of sets the stage for what we’re going to talk about, what we’re going to focus on and look at today of getting our houses in order.

Now what took place here, and the reason that Jesus had to do what He did when He arrived in the city, when He went up to the temple, is because this was the time when people were traveling from all over Israel, coming to worship at the temple. They were coming there to bring sacrifices. They were coming to be in the very presence of God on the Temple Mount. And what was required when they went into the temple, according to Exodus 20, they had to give a half a shekel to the temple.

As you know, Jerusalem in that time was not under Jewish rule; it was under Roman rule. And so the money that was used from that time was the Roman coin, not the shekel, because the shekel was a Jewish coin. So what people figured out that they would do, kind of an entrepreneurial spirit, if you will, is they decided, we know that people are coming from all over Israel to come to the Temple Mount this week; we know they're going to be coming here to worship God; and we know they have to have a shekel, and they are probably not going to have a shekel when they get here, because they use Roman coins in this land.

So what they did is they would sit there, and as people walked in, they would allow people to exchange the Roman coin for the Jewish shekel so they could go in. And as most times happens, you know they didn't get exactly the best exchange rate.

How many of you have ever traveled overseas somewhere? You know the first thing that happens when you get off the airplane in another country after you go through customs, immediately you are confronted with these booths that are set up all over the airport that talk about money exchange or money changing, and you go in and whatever nation that you're in, the idea is you bring your money there and you exchange it for the money that they use in that country.

I was just in Guatemala last week, and right in the airport there they had it there and said you can come in here with your American dollars. I could walk up and exchange it for the Guatemalan quetzal so I would have money to use throughout the week. And they do that, and of course, as you know, they do not give you a very good exchange rate. In fact, they cheat you big time. They don't take care of you. It's not like they're like, "Let us help you." No. They're there to take advantage of you, and the exchange rate is far worse than if you'd gotten it at the bank or in some other place. And so they do that.

That's exactly what people were doing in the temple. They were there to take advantage of the people who were coming from all over the land to come in and worship in the temple of God, and Jesus saw that as people who were trying to take advantage of others, of those who were trying to do the right thing by worshiping God, and Jesus knew that He had to cleanse the house of that kind of activity.

There were also people there, as we read a moment ago, who were selling doves, and they were selling pigeons there. And the reason, if you go back into the Old Testament, you'll find that the sacrifices that they had to make were of pigeons and doves, so they were there selling those things because, let's be honest, when people are traveling from all over the country and going all the way up to Jerusalem, they're probably not bringing their own pigeons and their own doves with them.

And so they set up there and they would sell those things, and again, as we've already talked about, they were taking advantage, selling them for far more than what they were worth, far more than what they should have sold them for, so they were, in essence, taking advantage of people who were there to honor God.

And Jesus knew that if God's name was going to be honored; if God's house was going to be respected and kept holy, there could not be a setting where people were stolen from, taken advantage of. And so Jesus said, "no, we've got to cleanse this place. We've got to stop this." And that's why He went in and threw over the money tables. That's why He went in there and stopped them from doing what they were doing.

Now today I want to spend some time talking about why it is necessary that we get our houses in order; why we do everything that we possibly can to ensure that we are preparing our temples—1 Corinthians 6, our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit—that we prepare our temples, cleanse our temples for the presence of God, how we can get our houses in order.

And the first thing we've got to do here in order to make that happen is to recognize who He is. It is impossible to get our houses, our lives in order without a recognition of who Jesus is. Jesus, as He says in John 14, is the way, the truth, and the life, and no man comes to the Father except through Him. Jesus is not just a good teacher; Jesus is not just a good rabbi; Jesus is not just a prophet; Jesus was not just a good man who lived thousands of years ago that we can learn from and we can learn how to live and how to be a good person. No. Jesus is God, and until we recognize who Jesus is, that Jesus is the Son of God who was sent to save all of mankind, it is impossible to get our houses in order.

Look what it says in verse 10, "And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?" So the multitudes said, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee." They recognized Him for who He was.

As all the people were coming from all over Israel to come there for Passover Week, I can promise you there were not people lining the streets with palm branches and with their coats on the ground for everybody who showed up in Jerusalem that week. That was unique. It wasn't like they had a welcoming committee that every time somebody walked through the gates, "Oh, Hosanna! Hosanna!" No. It was for Jesus and Jesus alone, because they knew that He was different.

In our lives, we have to get to that same place of recognizing who Jesus is. We must understand and be aware of the presence of Jesus in our lives in order to get ourselves in shape for Him to do His greatest work. We've got to recognize who Jesus is.

We live in a culture today that is doing its level best to lessen the impact of the name of Jesus. We live in a culture and a society today that is going in every direction possible to try to wipe the name of Jesus from history, to keep us from using the name of Jesus. We have generals that are telling their chaplains that they can no longer pray in Jesus' name in the military. We have schools that are no longer allowed to talk about Jesus. We have the public square, where Jesus is no longer allowed to be mentioned.

There will probably come a day, some day in the future, when they will try to tell us as people of faith that we can't even use the name of Jesus in doing what we are doing. We already have situations, these cameras that are around here, that there are some places right now where this

broadcast, this television program, this church service that goes out around the world, where when we talk about Jesus, they don't want that program.

What I decided many years ago, and my dad before me decided many years ago, that's just their problem. We're going to keep talking about Jesus. We don't change the story for anybody. But we live in a culture that is trying to take away the name of Jesus. We, as followers of Christ, will never be able to get our houses in order if we do not recognize who Jesus is. But we also have to take it another step, because we also must recognize what Jesus expects of us.

Look what it says in verse 12, "Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves." Now He went into the temple because He had to cleanse it; He had to make it holy. And when we ask Jesus to come into our heart, when we ask Him to save us, I promise you, when Jesus shows up He has the same desire and the same plan to cleanse your temple, to change you, to get rid of all the filth as He did in the temple that day.

You see, what Jesus expects from us is one simple word, and that is the word *holiness*. Remember Joshua 3:5? the first part of that verse says, "And Joshua told the people, "Sanctify yourselves." Remember that? Well, the word *sanctify* is the same word as *consecrate*, and what it literally means is setting yourselves apart, is doing something different than what you've always done. The way you live now, is no longer allowed; that's no longer permitted; that's no longer desirable. Joshua is telling the people that if you're going to see God do what God wants to do, you have to set yourselves apart. Or in other words, you have to be different.

And God is calling us to be different from the world. And far too many Christians try to do all that they can to get as close to the world as they possibly can. How far over there can I get? What can I get away with? Let me just tell you something: When Jesus shows up in your life, the question should not be what can I get away with? The question should be what do I need to do away with so I can know more about Jesus?

It's kind of like the idea when you go on diets. When you go on a diet, you know that the only way you're going to lose weight is when you actually do something different than what you've done before. If you want to lose weight, you have to start eating right. You can't keep eating the same things that you ate before. I promise you. You can't decide, "I want to lose weight," and then for breakfast have Pop Tarts and for lunch have cheeseburger and fries and dinner have pizza. It doesn't work. I know! You have to do something totally different.

I had a friend in college who decided one day that he wanted to lose some weight. He wanted to change the way that he was doing some things, and so he told us one day, "I'm going to lose some weight, so I'm going to go on this new diet. It's called the Weight Watchers Diet." So back in those days—and I'm not sure, they may still do it now, but in those days they had these little frozen dinners that had the entire meal in there, pop them in the microwave and heat them up and then take it out and eat that. And if you only eat that, if you stay with it, you'll lose weight.

So he went out and bought like thirty of these frozen meals, and he had them all in his freezer, and I was over there one day and saw them all lined up. It was great. He said, "I am committed. I am going to lose weight. I'm going to do this on this Weight Watchers Diet."

Well, one night we went over to the apartment and were asking him, "How are you doing on your diet? How are things going?" "Oh man, great. Great. I'm eating these dinners." And we happened to look there on the table, and we realized there were three empty meal boxes there. And we said, "Is that for all day today?" He said, "No, that was dinner." You see, what he was doing was eating three or four per meal because he was still hungry. But it was Weight Watchers, so it's got to be good for you. The only way to lose weight is to do things differently. The only way to pursue holiness is to do things differently, to live differently.

If we are going to be the lighthouse that Jesus intended us to be, if we're going to be that light that shines in the midst of darkness as Jesus intended for us to be, if we are going to be the church that the gates of hell cannot prevail against, then the church of Jesus Christ needs to be full of people who don't try to figure out how close to the world they can get; they try to figure out how much like Christ they can be.

We have to pursue holiness. So we have to recognize what it is that He expects. We also must recognize what grieves His heart. We have to recognize what breaks His heart. Look what it says in verse 13, "And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"

Sin always grieves the heart of God. There is no sin that God is okay with. If you look in Scripture, nowhere is there a list like these are the really bad sins and these are the medium sins and these are the okay sins that you can do. No. There are no degrees of sin. Sin is sin is sin is sin. And the sin of stealing a cookie from the cookie jar after your mom tells you not to or the sin of murder, there is difference between the two. There is a difference in consequences, absolutely; but there is no difference in sin.

When we do that which we know is sin and dishonors God, it is sin, and we have to know that that grieves God's heart. Look what it says in Isaiah 53:7, which Jesus quoted here in this passage. "I will bring them to my holy mountain of Jerusalem and will fill them with joy in my house of prayer. I will accept their burnt offerings and sacrifices because my temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations."

Jesus had expectations, and anything that took that expectation of what His house would be away from what God intended it grieved God's heart. I know that's true because if you look over in Luke 19, in another place in the gospels where this account of the cleansing of the temple took place, it says that as Jesus approached Jerusalem, He looked at Jerusalem, and He began to weep. He began to cry. His heart was broken. Why? Because He saw a city, He saw a people that knew that which was right to do, but decided to do otherwise.

Let me ask you a question: Do you think if Jesus wept when He looked at Jerusalem two thousand years ago what do you think Jesus does when He looks at some of us? What do you think that Jesus does when He looks at our culture today? I think probably there are lots of

moments and lots of days where we break the heart of God, because Jesus expects something different.

A. W. Tozer said it this way, “Holiness, as taught in the scriptures, is not based upon knowledge on our part; rather, it is based upon the resurrected Christ indwelling us and changing us into His likeness.”

You see, it’s impossible to clean the temple without the presence of Christ. Holiness only happens in Jesus’ presence. But the good news is that when we pursue holiness, when we want to be what God wants us to be, then we must then recognize what happens next.

Look what it says here in verse 14, “Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.” What happens when we do all that we’re supposed to do? What happens when we recognize who Jesus is? What happens when we recognize that we must set ourselves apart? What happens when we recognize that Jesus is different?

It tells us that after He cleansed the temple all the people started to come to Jesus. Not the Sadducees, not the Pharisees, not even the priests; the people wanted something to happen in their lives and they ran straight to Jesus. And what happens when we put away the world and run straight to Jesus? We are healed.

Anybody here today need to be healed? I’m not talking about just simply physical healing; I’m talking about spiritual, emotional, mental, every kind of healing you can think of. That’s what God can do when we pursue the kind of holiness that God wants us to pursue. When we are who God wants us to be.

Joshua 3:5, the last part of that verse, after Joshua told the people, “Sanctify yourselves,” what did he then say? In the last part of that verse he said this, “For tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.” That’s where I want to live. I want to live in the second part of that verse, where I spend every possible moment of the day trying to do all that I can to set myself apart from the world so that at the end of the day I know this: I know that God will do wonders. Wonders.

Malachi 3:10, the last part of that verse says, “God said, ‘I will open the windows of heaven for you and I will pour out a blessing so great, you won’t have enough room to take it in.’” And then He goes on to say this in the New Living Translation, “Try it. Put me to the test.”

When we recognize that holiness is what God expects, and when we recognize that that should be our life’s pursuit, when we recognize that everything that we must do is to seek after and to pursue God at all costs—It’s that Paul says, “Imitate me as I imitate Christ” thing—what happens is that God realizes we’re doing the work of cleaning the temple, of getting our house in order. And what happens is that God opens His arms wide and does for us what only a holy God can do. It’s time for the church of Jesus Christ to recognize that we can’t expect the blessings of God without walking in the presence of God. We can’t expect God to do His greatest work when we are doing all that we can to avoid the God of the work.

We have to live our lives pursuing holiness. And today what I think that means for all of us is that we have to dig deep to look inside and ask ourselves, What do I need to do to cleanse this temple, to get my house in order so that God can show up and do His greatest work? That should be our prayer. It's what Jesus did when He showed up in that week before He died on the cross, before He did His greatest work. He had to prepare the house. Let's make the decision today that we are going to do all that we can to prepare this house for God's work.

Keywords: Matthew 21:10-14, Joshua 3:5, passion week, triumphal entry, holiness, purity, sanctification, healing, wonders, imitate Christ, recognize who Christ is, pursue holiness