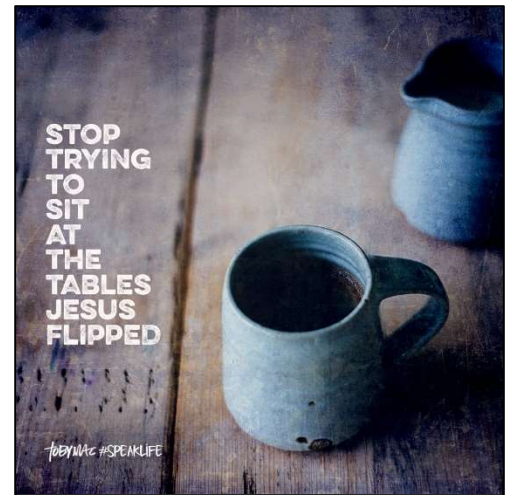


## Jesus Cleanses the Temple, Part 2: Righteous anger

Mark 11:15-18 || John 2:13-22; Matthew 21:12-17; Luke 19:45-48

1. Does this passage appeal to you? Why?
2. This is a favorite passage for “righteous anger.” Are we *sure* Jesus lost his temper?<sup>1</sup> Is “righteous anger” a legitimate reading or just a way to excuse *our* lack of emotional control?<sup>2</sup>
3. “I am not mad, just disappointed” —countless parents throughout time. Is it psychologically and spiritually healthy to show anger when disciplining your children?
4. Are there other examples of history of Christians losing their temper for a good cause? Can you think of a good example from the last twenty years? Is it notable that MLK is known for *not* stoking anger?<sup>3</sup>
5. Popular sentiment regarding this passage is well captured in the meme to the right. Are you metaphorically sitting at a table you should be flipping?
6. Prior to Jesus’ final trip to Jerusalem, he took pains to keep his ministry low-key; he taught in parables, he used the obscure “Son of man” title, he ministered up north, and when the crowds wanted to carry him off as king he slipped away (Jn 6:15).



Starting with the triumphal entry Jesus stops holding back. On his way into town (Mk 20:48), blind Bartimaeus calls him the Son of David and for the first time Jesus openly accepts the title. He enters Jerusalem in royal fashion, welcomes the acclaim of the people, and refers to the temple as “my house.”

When you talk to Jesus, do you talk to low-key, covert Jesus or to Jesus, master of the house, kicking tables and taking names? Is one more authentic? Which is the real Jesus?

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*Fun fact:* Only John mentions the cattle, sheep, whip. Proper translation of this passage [cf. NRSV] makes it most likely that the whip is used on animals, not people. The misleading/ambiguous translation [e.g. NIV] dates back at least to Jerome’s Vulgate. [Wayne Walden, *Restoration Quarterly* 57:2 (2015), 115]

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Jn 2:17; “zeal” (*zelos*, ζήλος) means, when positive, “zeal, ardor on behalf of, ardent affection” (Mounce). Note also, for what it is worth, the Fun fact: Jesus wasn’t described as using the whip on the people.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ezra 8:22; Isaiah 42:24; Deut 29:27. Also helpful: <https://bibleproject.com/blog/is-the-god-of-the-bible-an-angry-god/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2019/02/20/691298594/the-power-of-martin-luther-king-jr-s-anger>

## Bonus Question!

7. We previously discussed the primary point of the passage—i.e., was it about (a) Jesus' authority; (b) protecting access for Gentiles; (c) temple purity; (d) making money from religion; or (e) fulfillment of Messianic prophecy? We concluded that Jesus' primary motivation was protection of Gentile access, though all the other elements probably come into play as well.

As Michael Bird points out<sup>4</sup>, to protect Gentile access is also to condemn nationalism:

When Jesus entered the temple and overturned tables, he was not complaining about the mixing of religion and economics, as if objecting to a megachurch gift shop. Exchanging coins and providing animals for sacrifice was more a convenience than a con for travelers from far away. Rather, what was affronting to Jesus was the connection of the worship of God with Judean nationalism. In the Old Testament, the temple had been intended as "a house of prayer for all nations," which Jesus made clear by quoting from Isaiah 56:7. The people of the world, including Gentiles, were to throng to Zion and praise God in his temple. But over time, Gentile rulers occasionally encroached upon the temple, and many Jews were embittered by memories of pagan sacrifices being offered within its walls and Roman soldiers entering its holy places...

For [Jesus], the temple was meant to be a symbol of God's presence with Israel for the world. Instead, it had become an emblem of Jewish resistance against Rome, and Herod's refurbishment of it had only served to resurrect the fallacy that Zion was impregnable.

The fuel for nationalism was fear and anger. Bird sees Jesus as countering these with love and faith: "Jesus refused the temptation of a shortcut to power by playing on prejudices, goading grievances, or fomenting fear." In our era of rampant Christian nationalism, also fueled by fear and anger, what can we learn from Jesus in the temple?

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<sup>4</sup> *Christianity Today*, March 2021, 60-61.

## Leader's Intro:

Last time we discussed this question:

Is this passage primarily about (a) Jesus' authority; (b) Jesus protecting access for the marginalized Gentiles; (c) Jesus protecting the purity of the temple; (d) Jesus repudiating religion for monetary gain; (e) Jesus showing he is the Messiah by fulfilling prophecy and inaugurating his kingdom?<sup>5</sup>

If you are tempted to answer "all of the above," which was the most important message for i) cheering crowds of the day; ii) the early church; iii) us?

The answer is that Jesus is protecting Gentile access (b), showing his authority (a), all in fulfillment of prophecy (e). Jesus' "den of robbers" quote is a bit misleading; in Jeremiah you see that the list of sins being condemned is quite long and not limited to fleecing the people of God, though that's there. Also, commentators are a bit mixed on whether the prices were really jacked up (some certain, others not finding evidence). But it is reasonable to conclude that Caiaphas was using the temple courts in addition to the Mount of Olives because it afforded more temple income. So (d) is potentially legitimate too, and of course this all bears on the purity of the temple (c)—but see below, because Jesus' view of the temple was... complicated.

What was driving it all? Protection of purity or of people? Knowing Jesus, people first, but the whole oriental-bazaar-in-the-Gentile-court situation was a crap show which was wrong on many levels.

So this week we push a bit further to ask what this scene tells us about Jesus, and to address two basic questions: When is anger justified/godly? And when is confrontation godly? The Bible portrays God as getting angry at people, so anger itself is apparently not wicked. (And arguably to pretend never to be angry is deceptive of ourselves and others.) We could easily err in either direction, by becoming complicit by not being willing to engage in conflict (think of the church in Germany in the 30s), or by raging in when a deeper shalom is available through reaching out in love, failing to "seek peace and pursue it" (Ps 34:14; Heb 12:14; cf. also Romans 12:18). Why did Jesus choose the confrontational route this time? Maybe because this truly *was* his home turf? Maybe because he needed to provoke a response to usher in his passion? Possibly. Surely also because sitting down to talk with Caiaphas would have led exactly nowhere.

Note that it may be easy to fall into thinking, even without realizing it, that Jesus was objecting to improper use of sacred space. (After all, if it was all about the money changers, well, they were already operating on the mount of Olives, and surely when kicked out just moved over there. Furthermore, as mentioned above, there's no consensus that they were cheating visitors.)

As perhaps a relevant aside, Martin Luther King (and perhaps less so Martin Luther) has a reputation of calm persistence. If anyone was angry, it was the white supremacists MLK was fighting against. Actually, MLK struggled with anger and thought and it considerably. (Cf. <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2019/02/20/691298594/the-power-of-martin-luther-king-jr-s-anger>.) But he cautioned restraint on the part of his followers ([https://www.csuchico.edu/iege/\\_assets/documents/susi-letter-from-birmingham-jail.pdf](https://www.csuchico.edu/iege/_assets/documents/susi-letter-from-birmingham-jail.pdf)) not because anger wasn't justified but in order to not be consumed by anger. The Gentiles were in some ways the second-class citizens of Jesus' Jerusalem in the same way African-Americans were the second-class citizens of the civil-rights era South. While it's hard at this distance to judge, it seems

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Green, in his Matthew commentary (219-220) presents a very compelling parallel between Jesus' cleansing of the temple and Judas Maccabaeus' cleansing of the temple after the desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes, the difference being that JM cleansed it *from* the Gentiles and Jesus cleansed it *for* the Gentiles.

unlikely that development of a protest movement was an approach available to Jesus. Add to this the crucial point that Jesus' expulsion was followed by what appears to be days of teaching in the Gentile court. Jesus' action wasn't seen as threatening enough to oppose using the temple priests. The leaders didn't act right away because the people were on Jesus' side—quite different from MLK's situation. And notably, Jesus' actions led to his death, whereas MLK's nonviolent protests allowed him to continue his movement for years. So a simple comparison cannot easily be drawn between MLK and Jesus in this case; a more subtle, in-depth analysis is required due to the very different circumstances.

### **Themes and question ideas:**

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### **Extra questions and observations:**

1. ...