



Vision and Commitment 2018
A year to focus on discipleship

Every day, in
everything
&
everywhere

Speaking Up: Testifying (Matthew 21:12-17)

You will need:

Bibles
Pens
Paper

Introduction

- What is the bravest thing you have ever done? Why did you do it?
- How did you feel afterwards? Were there any consequences, positive or negative?
- What is something that you are afraid of doing? Why? What do you think the consequences may be?

Reflection

Read out Revelation 12:10-12.

Ask each person to write down as many characteristics of Jesus as they can on a piece of paper. Write down why you think someone should want to encounter Jesus (if you think they should).

Share what you have written, and share also what it means for you to have encountered Jesus. How has this encounter changed your life?

Consider listening to the song 'I Shall Not Want' by Audrey Assad as you write your lists:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8WgHGOak1c>
or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e5xEYgGr6ms> (simpler accompaniment)

Discussion

Read Matthew 21:12-17.

- When does this story take place in Jesus' life? Is it at the beginning of his ministry, the middle, or near the end? Why might this matter?
- What are some of the results or consequences of Jesus' actions in this passage?
- If Jesus knew this would upset people, why would he do it? Why was it so important to interrupt what was going on in the Temple? What was he so passionate about?
- We often focus on the cleansing of the Temple, but what else did Jesus do in the Temple setting in this story?
- Why does Matthew make note of the children in the Temple court shouting 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' (verse 15)?
- What would be an equivalent type of action to the Temple cleansing in our modern context? What would be the consequences if someone did it?
- Have you ever had to face genuine persecution for testifying to your faith in Jesus? Is it something that causes you any fear?





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- How does fear of upsetting people or facing opposition affect our witness, both personally and corporately? What exactly are we afraid of?
- What are you passionate enough about to risk the kind of consequences that Jesus faced for his actions? What, in other words, is worth the risk?

Action

Take the list of characteristics of Jesus you wrote in the worship time, and read it through again. Ask God if there is anyone in your life who needs to hear about Jesus in this way. Maybe it is someone struggling with pain who needs to know that Jesus is a healer. Maybe it is someone suffering from injustice who needs to know that Jesus loves justice. Maybe it is someone trapped in sin and shame who needs to know that Jesus is a Saviour. Pray for that person right now, and all this week, and ask God for an opportunity to share Jesus' love with them. (Report back when your group meets again about how this went.)

Leader's Guide

This passage is set near the end of Jesus' ministry, just after he has entered Jerusalem on a donkey to the sound of the crowds chanting 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' (Matthew 21:9). This is a prophetic, messianic, and even royal type of entrance. Matthew 21:10 says that the whole city was 'stirred' by this event. They have heard of Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth, and know that his appearance in Jerusalem is going to shake things up.

What we see in the passage is a conflict of authority. The Temple was the centre of spiritual, cultural and political power in Jerusalem. Jesus is the true King in the line of David, and also the Son of the God whose Temple he is in. Yet the chief priests and Temple officials do not recognise this authority, and react to Jesus' actions with shock and indignation.

It is often suggested that Jesus was angry at the money changers because they were cheating the people, or because it was wrong to be handling money within the Temple courts. This is probably not correct. Sacrifices required the work of commerce, as people bought and sold animals and had to change money to do so. Jesus was not trying simply to stop certain abuses within the Temple (though there may have been abuses); he was interrupting the entire sacrificial system. He was not simply claiming prophetic authority to tell the priests to clean up their act. He was claiming divine authority to announce that the fulfilment of the sacrificial system had arrived, and to enact its ending. The Temple sacrifice, as it existed then, was now over. Those who had authority within the Temple system had failed to recognise who Jesus was, and were robbing from the glory of God. The 'den of robbers' quote - a combination of Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:8-10 - is instructive. A den is a place where you feel safe and secure after committing the crime. Jesus is saying that this safety is an illusion, that the Temple system will not save them. The focal point of salvation is not the Temple, but Jesus himself.





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Jesus demonstrates his authority to make this judgment on the Temple system by healing the blind and lame who were brought to him. The children who witness this correctly begin to call out 'Hosanna!' again. They have recognised, in some way, who Jesus is, and their chanting really gets under the skin of the chief priests who did not recognise Jesus as the Son of David.

Now, Jesus did have the rightful authority to take these actions. That doesn't mean, however, that there weren't going to be consequences. It was this action that seemed to mobilise a concerted effort to have Jesus finally and fatally dealt with. Jesus surely knew that this would be the result of his cleansing of the Temple.

So Jesus' actions in the Temple had to be worth that. He was not simply angry about injustice, though injustice is something that should make us angry. His shocking actions in the Temple were a religious pronouncement about where salvation was to be found, and where it was not to be found. Jesus' actions, and the response of the children to his healings, were therefore a testimony. We don't normally imagine giving our testimony in such dramatic ways. The Early Church, however, understood that to stand for Jesus meant to risk everything. The word they used for 'witness' came to be the same word that is used for 'martyr'. When we choose to follow Jesus, our lives and words are meant to be a living testimony to him, and this often comes with a cost. We have to determine if we really believe that the witness is worth the risk.

Further resources

The album *Inheritance* by Audrey Assad is a beautiful collection of older hymns and original music which speaks powerfully of a passionate commitment to Jesus Christ. One song in particular, 'Even Unto Death', was written in memory of several Syrian Christians who were martyred by ISIS in 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAfp8vg4Jz8>

