

His Final Steps Led to His Father's House¹

- ✦ A house that needed cleansing.
- ✦ A house intended for healing.
- ✦ A house meant for praise.

In the name of Jesus, our merciful and faithful High Priest, dear children of the heavenly Father:

How very excited Jesus must have been the first time he could remember coming to **His Father's House**. He had been a 12-year-old boy back then, traveling with stepfather Joseph and Mary on a five-day journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem. According to one source, he may have been getting ready for his bar mitzvah when he would join the religious community as a son of the commandment. Jesus must have felt so very at home; He was certainly having a good time. But that was not the case for his parents. Remember how they journeyed a day away from Jerusalem thinking that Jesus was with the relatives, only to find out that night that he wasn't there? How distressing to rush all the way back to Jerusalem and then have to look another day, only to find Jesus sitting in the temple just listening and asking questions. You can surely see why Mary asked, *"Son, why have you treated us this way? See, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you."* Jesus' answer was so classic: *"Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be taking care of my Father's business?"* And then Luke tells us, *"...He was always obedient to them....[that he] grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people."* (Luke 2:48-52 EHV) The perfect Son whose perfection counts for all who put their trust in Him.

That's all we have of the silent years when Jesus was growing up. Interesting that Jesus was in **His Father's House**. But then John's Gospel account shows how Jesus cleansed the temple the first time. Remember John was inspired to fill in the gaps that the Holy Spirit left in the *Synoptic Gospels* (Matthew, Mark, Luke). In John 2, Jesus shouted, *"Get these things out of here! Stop turning my father's house into a place of business!"* Tonight, **His Final Steps Led To His Father's House** once more as...

✦ A house that needed cleansing

Right after Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, He went up to the temple. Then Monday morning of Holy Week our Lord was right back again. (Mark 11) What we see is a rare glimpse of God's "angry love," as Luther called it. This is what Isaiah spoke about the Messiah: *"There will be no limit to his authority and no end to the peace he brings. He will rule on David's throne and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from now on, into eternity. The zeal of the LORD of Armies will accomplish this."* (Isaiah 9:7 EHV) To find **His Father's House** trashed, upset Him!

That outer court of the temple was for the Gentiles to come and pray to the one true God of all creation. But how could they when the Jewish merchants had set up a market for sacrificial animals and money changers. Who can imagine the noise of shouting hawkers or the stench of the animals? Maybe it comes wafting back from the first time you stepped into the "mud room" of a dairy farmer. Or your first experience in a farrowing barn with newborn pigs when the ventilation fans were broken.

And yet there was a stink of sin in the temple that day that seared the soul of the Savior deep inside. Jewish temple law would only allow the shekel of Tyre to be used, despite the image of Melqart, a form of Baal. Evidence suggests that temple authorities were even counterfeiting these coins, plus exchanging them at exorbitant rates on a captive clientele. If you brought one of our own animals to

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sacrifice, didn't matter how fine it was, it would always be condemned. You'd be forced to buy from the flocks and herds of the chief priest at their high prices. Truly this was **A house that needed cleansing!**

Temple guards and husky officers of the temple police would brutalize Jesus later that week. But on Holy Monday, no one could stop the Son of God from cleaning out the temple of animals, merchants, and a multitude of noisy onlookers. He turned **His Father's House** from *a den of robbers* back into a *house of prayer for all nations* (Mark 11:17).

But God knows how self-righteous as we can be, thinking, "How low God's people, the Jews, had sunk! They cared more about the almighty shekel than worshipping and praying!" Don't we have to be careful thinking that way? In recent years the coronavirus panic has given us an unpredictable market ups and downs. So, what are we often thinking about? Our investments? Retirement? Are we maybe a little bitter or angry or afraid, at least distracted from God's house of prayer? God wants cleansing here in all of us too, beginning with our confession: "Father, I've sinned." Then be specific and fill in the blank. Then listen to that word of grace that says, "***The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.***" (1 John 1:7) In fact, as David asks, "***Who can understand his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.***" (Psalm 19:12 TPA) All our sins were nailed to the cross with Jesus and washed away with His holy precious blood. They're gone! We are free to worship God in the beauty of His holiness and pray with honest, sincere hearts. We get to follow Jesus' **Final Steps To His Father's House...**

✦ **A house intended for healing.**

You might have missed verse 14 when I read it. That's too bad because Matthew is the only one of the four Gospel writers who shares this information with us. Let's try again to see God's mercy here! "***The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them.***" (Matthew 21:14 EHV)

No, this was not the first time. For His whole three-years of ministry Jesus did more miracles than anyone else ever did. (John 7:31) Most were all about mercy for the suffering like the official's son at Capernaum, or Peter's mother-in-law, the centurion's paralyzed servant, the paralytic let down through the roof, entire crowds – healed one-by-one so personally, Jairus' daughter raised from the dead. And don't forget the son of that poor widow at Nain! Have you noticed how Jesus refused to do any miracles for His own benefit – even when the devil tempted Jesus after forty days in the desert?

More amazing still that Jesus did these miracles knowing full well how his enemies would react. "***When the chief priests and experts in the law saw the wonders he performed... they were indignant!***" Actually, that's a bit of an understatement. The Holy Spirit inspired Mark (11:18; Luke 19:47) to report that just the words of Jesus made them want to kill Him. Jesus did not shy away from doing miracles for fear of what might happen. He was fulfilling prophecies about the Messiah like Isaiah 35:5f – "***Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unplugged. The crippled will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will sing for joy. Waters will flow in the wilderness, and streams in the wasteland.***" (Isaiah 35:5f EHV)

Hurting sinners like you and me need these **Final Steps** of Jesus that **Led To His Father's House**. We need the devotion of God's sinless Son and His dedication to His heavenly Father. "***For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin. So let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.***" (Hebrews 4:15f EHV) Truly this is...

✦ **A house meant for praise.**

Does the reaction of the chief priests and experts in the law seems strange to you? When they saw the wonders Jesus performed and heard the children shouting in the temple, "***Hosanna to the Son of David***" they said to Jesus, "***Do you hear what they are saying?***"

In a way you could say they were upset about heaven's signage. Some of you are aware of the challenges for our New Life signage. There are city rules about how long an image must stay on our highway sign for cars passing by at 45 mph. Eight seconds, isn't it? We had to get a special variance just to use color instead of all amber. Former neighbors sometimes complained about lights shining through their windows. So, trying to be good neighbors ourselves, we adjusted those lights and timed them so that people can sleep at night and not be bothered by our signage. And then there's the story of one of our teenage boys mowing with our first tricycle tractor and sickle bar. He swung that sickle bar around and sliced right through a 4x4 post holding up our first sign. Signage is challenging, isn't it?

But Christ our Lord, coming to **His Father's House**, in **His Final Steps**, will not be silenced in a **house meant for praise** or be shut down in the dark. As John says in his first chapter, *"The light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."* (John 1:5 EHV)

The *Hosannas* of the little children in the temple courts shouted louder than all the bells of an old city when the church bells were still allowed to ring. Jesus' great miracles were flashing neon signs that lit up every street. And Jesus knew that those same crowds would either disappear by Good Friday or just turn against Him as crowds do, so that there would be no support against the cries of *"Crucify him!"* But Jesus is the promised one, the Messiah, the Son of God our Savior. He would not be put off or stopped until He had won the eternal blessing and joy of heaven for God's family.

Our Father's house is still a place where praise needs to be heard. Praise from little children and nursing babies. Praise from teens and college students, young families, the middle-aged, single and married. And praise too from the elderly who struggle to get into church and out again. Praise and thanks to God that Jesus did not turn away from **His Final Steps**. Instead, he took each step for us all.

The last verse says, *"He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there."* The Holy Spirit's choice of powerful verbs in the Greek original shows the pathos of Jesus' Passion. Another day of grace is past and gone for the Jewish religious leaders. They are running out of time to repent before they crucify the Lord of glory. Our sins were nailed to the cross with Him too. May we all confess with the hymn writer, "Jesus I will never leave!" And, confessing our sins in true repentance, find reassurance from God's own sacred promise, *"I will never leave you, and I will never forsake you."* (Hebrews 13:5) Amen.