



Vision and Commitment 2018  
A year to focus on discipleship

Every day, in  
everything  
&  
everywhere

## Discipleship Series Sermon - Speaking up (Testifying)

**Bible Reading:** Matthew 21:12-17

**Main Point:** Responding to the injustice we see in the world comes from a deep connection with the promptings of the Holy Spirit, a willingness to speak out rather than observe from a distance and a boldness to act for the sake of the Kingdom.

**Intended Response:** To challenge us to seek God's empowerment to be people who live out the Gospel in our words and actions with integrity and courage.

### Introduction

Visual illustration - Take a glass of water and place it where everyone can see it in the congregation. Now ask someone to come up to the glass and whisper to it! You should not see very much happen. Now ask the person to shout 'Hosanna' as loud as they can to the glass of water! There will be ripples (for an even greater reaction, play some music or ask someone with a brass instrument to play a long low note by the glass).

These vibrations through the water are like the way our words can vibrate through other people. They can challenge, they can heal and they can make a difference. When we 'speak up' it makes vibrations.

### Context

Jesus is at the height of his teaching journey, gathering crowds wherever he goes (Matthew 17:14), teaching in parables (18:21), challenging old ideas (19:1) and creating new perspectives (19:13).

In chapter 21 Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey, riding through the celebrating crowds to the shouts of 'Hosanna to the Son of David' (21:9), fulfilling Scripture and raising his already significant profile to an almost dangerous level. He could have taken his fill of this new celebrity status, but he did not. Preparing for his own death, celebrated by the masses yet disdained by the chief priests, he is at his most visible and most controversial.

- In verse 12 as he enters the Temple, he is indignant both at the misuse of a holy place of prayer and at the unscrupulous practices of the animal vendors. His reaction is swift, an outburst which prompted some to greater worship and others





to greater anger. Yet his response to the injustice he perceived can inspire us to speak out rather than sit by.

- **Verse 13** shows how the Temple was originally created to be a significant place of prayer and worship. Seeing it become a place for certified animal vendors employed by the High Priest's family to charge exorbitant prices, Jesus drives them out. Quoting from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 he calls the Temple a 'den of robbers'.
- In **verse 14** Jesus' outburst is followed by a realignment with the Temple's purpose as people come to Jesus for healing. Only when the injustice is spoken out about and the Temple returned to its proper use does he heal people there.
- In **verse 15** the chief priests see how their significant financial and positional benefits are challenged through the turning of their employees' tables, the inevitable mess, the disruption to their proceedings and the sound of children shouting praise to Jesus.
- In **verse 16** the chief priests challenge Jesus, 'Do you hear what these children are saying?' expecting him to reprimand them or denounce their lack of respect for such a sacred building. Instead he quotes from Psalm 8:2 and in so doing he does not rebuke their praise but states that it was ordained by God, prompted and pleasing to him.
- In **verse 17** Jesus leaves the city at night to go to Bethany. One can infer that this hasty removal from a city he had just entered may have been necessary due to the rising tensions of that day's events.

## Key Headings

### Look up

- How often do we 'look up' before we act, before we speak? How often do we check with God, confer with him in prayer before the major decisions of our life?
- Illustration - The BBC programme 'Do you have what it takes?' followed a group of would-be astronauts (members of the public) through gruelling physical and mental tests. One of the tests involved being capsized in a large boat and, by following correct procedure, getting out safely. One trainee, however, was so fearful of being under water that she made a serious mistake: she did not look up. She kept her eyes shut as the water came in; she kept them closed as she fumbled around for the door handle and panic set in as she struggled blindly to undo her seat harness. She made it out with the help of others, but failed to complete that task - all because she did not first **look up**.
- Before we take a stand, speak up, testify, we need to seek the will of God and ask for the Spirit's guidance in what we say, when we say it and how we say it. We





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need to ask ourselves 'Does this fit with Scripture? Does it reflect the heart of grace and mercy we are called to reflect? Will this stand - this testimony - encourage and challenge others?'

- Jesus' life and ministry was marked by periods of rest, reflection and 'looking up' immediately prior to his most extraordinary and controversial moments. (Matthew 14:22 for example). Before we speak up or stand up we must **look up**.

### Speak up

- There is power in the words we speak. They make an impact, they make vibrations upon the people around us, like the vibrations rippling through the water in the glass.
- Jesus' vibrating words were loud and clear (verse 13) and taken directly from the Old Testament scriptures; words the chief priests standing around him would have known very well. He used Scripture to first remind them of the ordained purpose for the Temple and then to rebuke them for its misuse.
- There are many things we see on our TV screens, on social media or in the papers which cause us to feel deeply indignant. It may be in our local community, in our region or a global issue. Whatever the subject, if the Lord has laid it upon our heart and we have sought his guidance first, we are called to speak up about it.
- We may think, well this is all very nice but I am too young, too old, not eloquent enough, it's not my place, no one will listen to me. The second group who spoke up in the text were children (v 15). They shouted praise to the Son of David and were commended by Jesus for doing so. Children, who culturally should have been seen and never heard. Jesus responded to their speaking up as 'ordained by God'. If children can **speak up** to the glory of God, why can't we? What prevents us from being bold enough, brave enough and humble enough to **speak up**?

### Stand up

- Jesus' earthly ministry is notable for many reasons. The extraordinary teaching, the parables, the intimate and controversial conversations with sinners, the challenging and courageous debates with religious leaders. And yet his was not solely a preaching ministry; his actions often spoke louder than his words.
- Within The Salvation Army we have an extraordinary heritage of letting our actions speak as loudly as our words, a heritage of standing up for others. Our actions in the earliest days were bold, controversial and dangerous. We bought a young woman to prove to society it could be done and should stop, we opened a match factory to prove that safe matches and safe working conditions were possible, we marched into places others feared to go and took the grace of Jesus with us.





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- What about today? Are we still fighting injustice as a movement, working to free those caught up in human trafficking, providing shelter for those without a home, offering hope to those caught in addiction, befriending the unlovable? Are we being disciples who 'speak up' at home, in the workplace, at school and university and even in our own places of worship?

## Conclusion

Jesus' turning of the tables had a ripple effect, one that we still speak of today, and yet in essence it was a small-scale reaction. A temple, in a city, in a local community. But even a small stand is still a stand. We do not have to look for a grand, global situation when there are also small, important but ignored injustices occurring right on our doorsteps.

## Application

Ask people what the Lord has laid upon their hearts to stand up for or to speak out about. It may be a long-standing concern or it may have come to your heart and mind today.

*Look up* - encourage them to bring it to Jesus in prayer, seek his direction, be sure it is in line with what the scriptures teach and ask for his wisdom and an opportunity to engage.

*Speak up* - then ask them to consider how they can speak into the situation: perhaps through a letter, an email, a conversation. And consider how they can make vibrations and influence others.

*Stand up* - challenge their actions to speak as loud as their words. Perhaps suggest they sign a petition, visit the place they are concerned about, actively go and support those they are speaking on behalf of. Ask for the words to say and the courage to say them, ask for the opportunity to engage and the boldness to take it.

**Response activity:** On the place of prayer (mercy seat/bench) place a card which reads 'Look up, speak up, stand up'. Ask people to take a card and write on the back the issue, great or small, which they want to bring to him. Then encourage them to ask God for the courage to be willing to respond to Jesus' example and in so doing make an impact, cause a vibration, for his glory and his Kingdom.

