

THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE – Mark 11:15-19

“And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. [16] And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. [17] And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." [18] And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching. [19] And when evening came they went out of the city.”

This is as violent as we ever see Jesus in the gospels. For that reason this passage deserves some careful attention. It's significant that Jesus visits only one institution as He enters the city. It's what goes on in the **Temple** - what is happening with the **worship of God** - that is of primary importance to Him.

1) **THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM**

First, there is the **lack of concern for outsiders in the worship process**. The buying and selling is taking place in the "**court of the gentiles**," the outer court where foreigners who were not yet official proselytes could still come and worship God. The clamor of business would make it difficult for gentile people to engage their minds in prayer and worship. Because the Jews didn't care too much for the rights of the gentiles, there was a total disregard for any provision for their worship.

2) **THE CORRUPTION OF PURE WORSHIP BY HUMAN GREED**

This is the second form of corruption. Worshipers who had come from a distance found it difficult to bring their animals for sacrifice with them. Hence, they would bring **cash** instead and simply buy an animal for the required sacrifice right at the temple site.

Those who were selling **knew** these travelers would never go all the way home without offering some type of sacrifice, and would charge whatever they liked for their animals.

Also, only the temple currency would be acceptable. See **Exodus 30:13-16** - “**Each one who is numbered in the census shall give this: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), half a shekel as an offering to the Lord. [14] Everyone who is numbered in the census, from twenty years old and upward, shall give the Lord's offering. [15] The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than the half shekel, when you give the Lord's offering to make atonement for your lives. [16] You shall take the atonement money from the people of Israel and shall give it for the service of the tent of meeting, that it may bring the people of Israel to remembrance before the Lord, so as to make atonement for your lives.**”

People with foreign coinage would have to take their money to the "**money-changers**"(15). Exchange rates would frequently be set by the religious leaders to deliberately fleece the travelers.

3) **BOTH THE SELLERS AND THE BUYERS WERE OBJECTS OF JESUS' WRATH – MARK 11:15**

“And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons.”

This is a very striking point. It seems that Jesus was angry with those who were dealing crookedly and ***also with those who allowed themselves to be conned by crooked religion.*** He puts a responsibility on all of us to keep our hearts tuned in to the pure worship of God. So, ***it's wrong to conn others in the things of God and it's also wrong to allow yourself to be duped by others.*** And in this we learn to heed Jesus' warning, not only about ***dishonesty***, but ***carelessness.***

4) **JESUS FURTHER FULFILLED SCRIPTURAL PROPHECY ABOUT HIMSELF**

In cleansing the temple He points to the time predicted by **Zechariah (14:21)** - **“And every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holy to the Lord of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and take of them and boil the meat of the sacrifice in them. And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day.”**

Because Jesus makes it clear that He is fulfilling the Jewish Scriptures, He makes it very difficult for the leaders to speak out too harshly at what He is doing. Also, the people have one more chance to see the Scriptures fulfilled. There is both ***judgement*** and ***compassion*** in this act.

5) **JESUS CONDEMNS THE BOLDNESS OF THEIR MISTREATMENT OF THE WORSHIP OF GOD**

This comes out strongly in Jesus' words in **verse 17** - **“And he was teaching them and saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.”** This is a reference to the words of another prophet, **Jeremiah (7:11)** - **“Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord.”**

A) **THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF GOD'S HOUSE WAS SUMMED UP BY JESUS AS A PLACE OF PRAYER - INTERCESSORY PRAYER AT THAT**

It was to be marked by people making approach to God ***for the spiritual needs of others.*** God's house was a place where people reached out to their God.

This has to be taken up into our hearts afresh. Most of our churches have more committee meetings than prayer meetings. The kind of corruption Jesus overturned in the temple is closer to all of our hearts than we know. We bring our selfishness into our religion, and Jesus wants to kick this out of His church. Only prayer - ***intercessory prayer*** - keeps religion clean.

B) **THE "DEN OF THIEVES" WAS A PLACE WHERE HIGHWAY BANDITS WOULD REGROUP AFTER THEIR CRIMES.**

They would count their take and plan for their next robbery. What a classic picture of how people can live for themselves during the week - ***often showing outright disregard for the ways of God*** - and yet come together to perform their religious duties, all the while

planning their next crime on Monday morning! What a picture of how these criminals would take comfort and support from each other's fellowship. They would harden themselves into deeper sin by encouraging each other in their wickedness. ***That's what Jesus saw the people doing in God's Temple.***

It is doubly terrible when we not only fail to hear the voice of God as we worship, calling us to genuine compassion and moral purity, but actually ***use*** our worship of God as an excuse for ***persisting*** in the very unrighteousness from which Christ died to free us. When religion is used to ***fortify*** us in habits of carelessness and selfishness (and surely North American religion is right on the edge of this sin) Christ is not only grieved, but ***angered***. Perhaps we all need this picture of the blazing wrath of Jesus in the church.