

The Temple Cleansed

Matthew 21:12-16

Introduction

It's Monday morning in our text (see Mark 11:11). The previous Sunday Jesus has ridden into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey. Now he will drive out corrupt merchants in what has been called the Cleansing of the Temple. But this is not the first time Jesus has cleansed the Temple. When Jesus began His ministry there was an earlier episode of driving out the money changers

In John's Gospel chapter 2 we read about this first purification where Jesus finds people selling oxen and sheep and doves and drives them out of the temple and overturns the money tables (John 2:15). In that episode Jesus said to those who sold doves—"Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" It was at that time the disciples remembered the Scripture; "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up" (Psalm 69:9)—and at that time the religious leaders demanded an explanation for his actions. They said "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). The Jews reminded Jesus that it took 46 years to build the Temple and that raising it up in three days sounded rather impossible. Jesus was of course speaking of the temple of His body (John 2:21).

The first cleansing marked the beginning of Jesus' ministry. This second cleansing will mark the closing of Christ's ministry.

Does Jesus have the right to cleanse the temple? When Jesus calls the Temple His Father's House and says "My house shall be called a house of prayer" He in fact lays claim to its possession (v.12). He further reserves the right to how His Temple will be used and asserts the right to purge of it of all corruptions. The Lord Jesus does this based on the Scripture.

The Temple was the place where God was praised, worshipped and exalted. The Temple was not the place where **God was to be misrepresented** and **God's people exploited**.

In this act Jesus claims to be the Lord of the Temple. Jesus is the Lord of the Church and its rightful head.

The Temple: A Place Absent Exploitation (v.12)

Matthew 21:12 (NKJV)¹²Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves.

We need to know some things about the temple layout. The temple proper would have covered some 30 acres—with the temple building (*naos*) and the temple courtyards or precincts (*hieron*).

The Temple Cleansed

Matthew 21:12-16

There were four courtyards—the courtyard of the priests—closest to the temple building—the courtyard of the men—and then the courtyard of the women—and last of all the courtyard of the Gentiles.

This courtyard of the Gentiles covered a massive area—that included what was called the Stoa—but this courtyard surrounded and encompassed the other courtyards. It was the place where foreigners and Gentiles could come—who wanted to convert to Judaism.

This courtyard was the greatest distance from the center of worship—the Holy of Holies. There was a high wall of separation from this court to the court of the women. There were in fact tablets posted on this wall—warning Gentiles—that any Gentile who dared to go beyond this wall would be punished by death!

Within the court of the Gentiles—much merchandise took place. How in the world did this happen? There is a simple answer—and a more nuanced answer. The simple answer might be greed. The more nuanced answer might include the over-all sentiment that the court of the Gentiles was not really holy—after all—and the Gentiles were simply a group of people tolerated by the observant Jews.

Worshippers needed animals—sacrifices—oxen—sheep doves—meal, wine, oil, salt and other items set aside for sacrifice.

The temple was the **only place** where sacrifice could be made. And in our day Jesus is the only sacrifice that is acceptable to God the Father.

The religious leaders would not accept foreign money with pagan images and so money must be exchanged to reflect the right purity and weight of silver. The drachma and Tetrachma of Tyre was of the acceptable weight and purity of silver—these were also called the half-shekel and shekel. Of course if the Gentile—and even Jewish worshipper brought a sacrifice of insufficient purity it was rejected.

We are not sure—but at some point the priests cornered the market on these transactions and it became big business. At some point the religious leaders made the decision—to lease space within the courtyard of the Gentiles to outside retailers for a cut of their profits! The whole atmosphere became one of crass commercial —commotion—not worship—not prayer.

This temple and this place was supposed to be the place where an honest inquiry could be made concerning the God of Israel. The temple was the place where people supposed to reveal God and know God. This is the place where true worship was supposed to take place. But that was impossible in the court of the Gentiles.

Jesus wasn't simply angry and upset over the greed and crass commercialism. He was angry that the Jewish people were misrepresenting God to the Gentiles (the rest of the world).

The Temple Cleansed **Matthew 21:12-16**

Where can I go to meet God and know God? Where can I go to get an honest understanding of the God of the Bible?

And so Jesus will drive them out with the fury and cleansing judgment!

Jesus does three things:

1. He drove out all who were buying and selling (making merchandise).
2. He flipped over the tables of the money-changers.
3. He threw over the chairs of the those who sold doves!

What's going on? They were selling things that were essential to worship. Buying and selling things essential to worship—are not bad—in and of themselves—what was bad was doing it in the place of worship!

The temple and the church are not the place for commercialism.

Was Jesus angry? The answer is yes—Jesus is angry with those who who abuse God's temple; who misrepresent God who exploit others and make it impossible to worship the Lord in Spirit and in truth. And what happens to those who abuse God's temple and exploit others? They are cast out.

The Temple: A Place Where Prayer Is Present (v.13)

¹³And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"

Where is this written? In Isaiah 56:7 we read; "Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer"—and who are 'them'? In verse 6 in says "Also the sons of the foreigner Who join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, And to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants—Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast My covenant—(v.6).

The temple was not simply the place where sacrifice took place—it was also to be the place where foreigners—Gentiles—would know and discover the God of the Bible. In Jeremiah 7:11—The prophet says "Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold I, even I, have seen it," says the Lord.

The house of the went from a place of merchandise (John 2:16 and Matthew 21:12) to a den of thieves!

The temple was to be a place where God was accurately represented and a place of worship and prayer! We are at once rebuked and convicted.

The Temple Cleansed **Matthew 21:12-16**

The temple wasn't the only place to pray—but it was to be a central activity. Is it possible to over-emphasize prayer or exaggerate prayer? I think it might be possible if some see prayer as some kind of ecstatic state or excuse not to work! Perhaps a very few people might cross the threshold of excessive prayer—but it would appear that the great sin of the church is our lack of prayer.

And the lack of prayer is a sin. 1 Samuel 12:23; “Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and right way.” Samuel is not content to simply pray but also to exercise responsible leadership and discipleship to the people of Israel. The next sentence (v.24) reads; “Only fear the Lord and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you.”

We pray because it is right to pray (see Luke 18:1) “Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart”. The Bible teaches the lack of prayer is a reproach to God (Rom. 14:23) and that it is pure unbelief not to pray (see Hebrews 11:6).

My hope is not that you will be overwhelmed by guilt for the lack of prayer. But rather to provide some small word of exhortation to begin—and then continue to pray.

Andrew Murray wrote; “Each time, before you intercede, be quiet first, and worship God in His glory. Think of what He can do, and how He delights to hear the prayers of His redeemed people. Think of your place and privilege in Christ, and expect great things!

My wife shared such a list with me. We praise our heavenly Father in Christ because we are the object of His love (Rom.5:6-8; John 3:16). We are born again (John 1:12,13); We are children, heirs, chosen, forgiven, justified, redeemed, holy, near to God, friend of God, saved from wrath, reconciled to God, peace with God, a new creation, freed from sin, no longer condemned, alive, sealed by the Holy Spirit!

And James (5:15) says “And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” What is the prayer of faith? Whatever it is—it rises not from a condemning heart—but an uncondemning heart (see 1 John 3:2-22). It

Recognizes the Will of God (1 John 5:14)
Rests on the Promise of Christ (John 14:14)
Relies on the Purpose of God (Acts 4: 25-31)
Reckons on the Power of God (Acts 1:14)
Responds to the Spirit of God (Eph. 6:18)
Rejoices in the Answer from God (Luke 1:13).

Lets use the acrostic prayer

The Temple Cleansed

Matthew 21:12-16

- P Pleads the name of Jesus (John 14:13-14)
- R Regards the word of Jesus (Hebrews 10:19-22)
- A Abides in the Person of Jesus (John 15:7)
- Y Yields to the Will of Jesus (1 John 5 14-15)
- E Expects a fulfillment of the promise of God in Christ (2 Cor.1:20)
- R Remembers that there are conditions attached to the fulfillment of the promises of our experiences—(2 Corinthians 7:1)

The Temple: A Place Where Ministry Takes Place (v.14)

¹⁴Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.

The Lord Jesus shows up in the temple and the blind and the lame come to Him—and He heals them! Matthew references these as “wonderful things that He did” (v.15).

The blind and the lame are not terrified—that Jesus has gone off the deep end! They come to Him in the temple! Some scholars have pointed out that the blind and the lame were usually excluded from worship. In 2 Samuel we have the cryptic saying “Whoever climbs up by way of the water shaft and defeats the Jebusites (the lame and the blind who are hated by David’s soul), he shall be chief and captain.” Therefore they say, ‘The blind and the lame shall not come into the house’. In other words—the fortress of Jebus (Jerusalem) even the blind and the lame could defend it.

Were the blind and the lame forbidden in the temple proper? Jesus welcomed them—and healed them for he was greater than the temple (Matthew 12:6) and this was expected in the messianic age (see Isaiah 35:5). These are only recorded healings—inside the temple walls—and according to some scholars an indication of “a new age when God would accept all people into his presence (the tearing of the curtain in the temple at Jesus’ death was another such indication, 27:51)(*Life Application Bible Commentary; Matthew pp. 413-414*).

When Jesus shows up in the temple there is power to heal. Jesus Christ crucified is the power of God to heal—to reconcile, to separate us from our sin and this world. Jesus exalts us to God’s throne and removes the claims of the Law against us and empowers and inspires obedience to God.

The Temple: A Place Where Christ Is Praised (vv.15-16)

¹⁵But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant ¹⁶and said to Him, “Do You hear what these are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes. Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise?’”

The Temple Cleansed

Matthew 21:12-16

It would appear that children were still singing hosannas in the temple! Why are the children singing? They see what Jesus has done with the blind and the lame.

The wonderful things Jesus did blessed those who were healed and vexed or troubled or annoyed the religious leaders (chief priests and scribes).

Why are the religious leaders indignant (*aganakteo*)? Why are they asking the children to refrain or silence the children from giving their testimony to the messianic character of Jesus?

The religious leaders are not happy that Jesus has challenged their authority or their ability to generate money. The religious leaders are not happy that the children continue to declare that Jesus is the Messiah. **The religious leaders are not at all happy that Jesus is healing the blind and lame.**

How does Jesus respond to their indignation?

He begins by saying; “*Have you never read*”—citing Psalms—to justify the children’s remarks about Himself; (Psalm 8:2); “Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, because of Your enemies, That you may silence the enemy and the avenger.”

They should have read their Bible. They should have known from their Scriptures. How is it possible that the religious leaders could read and study but not understand the meaning of the passage?

Jesus in effect claims that this Scripture is fulfilled in the religious leaders’ criticism and the children’s praise! It also is an acknowledgement that God in Heaven reserves the right to accept praise—even from small children—infants—and that God is pleased—God is glorified and magnified to receive praise from men who the religious leaders deem insignificant—helpless—the mouth of babes and nursing infants!

Think about what Jesus is saying. Jesus insists that the appropriate thing to do is to praise Him! **The church is the place where Jesus is to be praised.**

What does it mean to praise Jesus?

Conclusion

Jesus reserves the right to be Lord of our lives.

In our church life and personal life we must look to Jesus for His cleansing power to drive out the attractions and distractions and gimmicks that crowd out prayer and ministry and praise!

We can’t afford to misrepresent God, Jesus or the Gospel.

The Temple Cleansed
Matthew 21:12-16