

House Of Prayer
 Mark 11:12-19
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¹² On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. ¹³ And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴ And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.

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. 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.

When you look at our world today, I wonder how many places are out there where sanctity, sacredness, solemnity, simplicity, modesty, dignity and reverence for God are still upheld, honored and promoted?

Because everywhere you turn and hear, you see wickedness in low and high places. Profanity has become the new normal in the public square. Public entities and institutions have become promoters of sin. Some have abandoned every form of morality in the name of equality and inclusion and others want to try and regulate morality. None of these things can bring about repentance or change your heart. Only Jesus transforms the sinner's heart. That is why the Gospel is the only message that contains the power of God to change lives.

So, your home and your local church better be the place where prayer begins and godliness is maintained. Because, if the church, particularly, is the place that minimizes or compromises the Gospel, then we are in big trouble.

Jesus may do what He did to the temple in his day. The Apostle Peter wrote to churches in his day that judgment begins with us. (1 Peter 4:17).

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that *"if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world"* 1 Corinthians 11:31-32

Here in this passage, Jesus is intensely zealous for the sanctity of the temple of God. We'll come back to the fig tree passage next Sunday Lord willing but last week we saw

that Jesus entered Jerusalem on a colt.

And there was a huge celebration. People praised him shouting Hosanna. And it was late by the time the celebration ended. Jesus inspected the temple and went to Bethany for the night.

Now Jesus is back in Jerusalem. Why is Jesus there and what does he do?

Cleansing and judgement.

Verses 15 and 16.

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. ¹⁶ And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.

Historical Context:

Before we expound this passage, its implications and application for us, let's describe what a first century Temple looked like.

This temple is the second temple (the first was destroyed by the Babylonians). Herod built this temple in Jerusalem. The temple complex had on the outer most side, an open area, which was known as the Court of the Gentiles. This, obviously was meant for the Gentiles - not Jewish. There was a sign placed for the Gentiles not to enter the temple area. The sign said "*no man of another nation is to enter within the barrier and enclosure around the temple. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his death, which follows.*"

Towards the inside of the temple, there was the Court of Women, the Court of Israel for men, and the Court of Priests.

Where was Jesus when he entered the temple and began the cleansing?

In the Court of Gentiles. Because that is the only place where buying and selling would be allowed.

Sources of revenue for the priests came from sacrificial animals, first-fruits of grain and fruit harvest, and tithes. Every male Jew over twenty had to pay half a shekel tax to the temple.

It is said that in the first century that the wealth of the temple reached its greatest amount. Which would explain why Jesus took such radical action.

We see three things that Jesus did.

1. Jesus *drove out* those selling and buying in the temple premises. This is forceful action by Jesus. "Drove out" is the same word used when casting out demons. Jesus *expels* and *casts out* those who sold and bought.

2. Jesus *overturned* or *flipped* the tables of the money-changers and seats of those sold pigeons.
3. Jesus *did not permit* or *prohibited* anything that would be allowed to be sold in the temple.

Why?

Verse 17.

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.”*

Notice what Jesus teaches about God’s Temple. Jesus draws attention to what was written about the temple. Jesus quotes from Isaiah 56:7. God’s Temple in Isaiah’s time was the first Temple built from Solomon. It wasn’t destroyed by the Babylonians yet God spoke to the people of Israel through the Prophet these words *“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.”*¹² *“When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts?”* Isaiah 1:11-12. It would be later destroyed because of Israel’s sin.

After God rescued the Hebrews from Egypt, God himself descended on Mount Sinai.

There, it was God’s purpose to make a house, a temple, a sanctuary, a tabernacle.

Why? So that God’s presence would be with them. So that Israel would be a light to the surrounding nations.

“And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst” Exodus 25:8

Moses built the tabernacle and sanctuary to worship God. And after many years of tabernacle worship, king David purposes to build a temple structure. God does not allow him. Solomon, David’s son, builds the temple. Hear what Solomon says at the Temple dedication.

“But will God indeed dwell with man on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built!”

2 Chronicles 6:18

It is an incredible thing that God chose and actually dwelt with the people of Israel. No other people group on the face of this earth has had such a privilege.

And yet they had squandered their privilege. Their idolatry and disobedience led to the destruction of the first temple.

The first Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians. Israel went into exile. And there was some rebuilding. The Romans take over. And Herod, the Jewish client king for the

Romans took up rebuilding the Temple.

So, the temple grounds that Jesus was standing on was the second temple built by Herod.

Jesus was standing there not just as a Prophet or a messenger of God but as God himself in human form. The Lord Jesus Christ was standing in this second temple complex as the God's Son – the rightful heir to purify and judge.

“Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son.” Hebrews 3:5-6

So, Jesus drives out those who sell and buy merchandise. He overturned tables and the seats of pigeon sellers. And lastly Jesus prohibits those unholy things in the temple. This is all symbolic of coming judgment and also pointing to the death and resurrection of Christ.

In John's Gospel, the temple cleansing narrative is at the beginning. The other three Gospels have it at the end. Regardless of the placement in John's Gospel, John the Gospel writer tells us more about Jesus' actions in cleansing the temple. This is from John 2.

¹⁶ And he told those who sold the pigeons, *“Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade.”* ¹⁸ So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, *“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”* ²⁰ The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. John 2:16-21

You see Jesus came not just to purify and cleanse the temple but to inaugurate a new way of worship for both Jew and Gentile. Jesus becomes the object of our worship. He is the temple.

Remember when Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman? This woman said to Jesus that the Samaritans had their own temple for worship not in Jerusalem but in Gerizim. In John 4, “Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” ²¹ Jesus said to her, *“Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.”* ²² *You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.* ²³ *But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.* ²⁴ *God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”* John 4:20-24

Who then belongs in the household of God?

Both Jews and Gentiles who have faith in God's Son Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth that you are the temple of God. Those who have the Holy Spirit residing in them.

Jesus called out the leaders to tell them what Isaiah and Jeremiah said to the leaders of Israel in their own time. God's house shall be called a place of prayer for all nations but they have made it a den of thieves.

The Temple was supposed to be a channel of blessing and prayer for all nations. For the outsiders and for eunuchs. But these leaders had made it a place of merchandise, a place of greed, a place where the leaders were getting rich using God's name.

Jesus quotes from Jeremiah 7:11 in the second part of verse 17. Here is what verse 11 in Jeremiah 7 says, "*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.*"

Imagine the implication of this verse. Last Sunday, we saw in verse 11 of Mark 11, Jesus "looked around at everything" in the temple. The Lord Jesus himself had to come to correct his house. This is a severe indictment against the leaders.

Instead of a place of prayer, sanctity, worship, the temple had become a place of selling and buying merchandise.

Today, churches can be very busy promoting their brand, selling their merchandise like hats, cups, t-shirts etc and I wonder how disproportionate is our time praying?

Here in one *implication* from this passage: Jesus' cleansing of the temple is indicative of cleansing ourselves and the church of unrepentant sin. This is why church discipline is necessary.

- When unrepentant sexual sin was reported in the church of Corinth, Paul said, "*Purge the evil person from among you*" 1 Corinthians 5:13
- The author of Hebrews writes that "*Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous*" Hebrews 13:4
- One way to compromise the Gospel is to not practice church discipline. We have to obey God and not fear offending someone. Because reconciliation and restoration happens through loving correction.

Another *implication* to consider: Churches can be known for many good things. But they cannot be known for prayerlessness. Because prayerlessness will eventually lead to fruitlessness, ineffectiveness and uselessness of the church to the community and to the

world.

We must pray with vigor!

Spurgeon said that the “*cream of the Christian Church will be found among those who most commonly assemble for prayer*”.

Some sadly have convinced themselves that prayer is *optional*.

Paul Miller, in his book *A Praying Church* says that “*The American church is functionally prayerless when it comes to corporate prayer. In hundreds of seminars, we have found out that only 15 percent of Christians in a typical church have a rich prayer life*”. So, when someone says, ‘I’ll keep you in my prayers,’ 85 percent of the time it is just words”.

When prayer meetings have become infrequent but small talk has become plentiful, then we ought to take notice of Jesus’ actions.

We need to ask ourselves - what do we need to throw out, what do we need to flip and do we need to prohibit?

Lastly, look at verses 18 and 10.

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.

Jesus does one act of cleansing the temple. And the leaders are angry to the point that want to kill him. But they can’t because Jesus was feared. His teaching was met with astonishment. Who is this Jesus who speaks with such authority? No one ever spoke like Jesus. But soon the leaders will find a way to throw him out.

In conclusion, Jesus illustrates so masterfully in the parable of the vineyard (Luke 20) how he was treated. There was a vineyard. The vineyard represented Israel. The owner of that vineyard is God. And the owner leased the vineyard to some tenants. The tenants represent the leaders of Israel. The owner sent servants (representing the prophets) to the tenants to collect fruit. And what did the tenants do? They beat the servants and sent them away. So, the owner finally sends his own Son. And what do the tenants with the Son? The tenants cast the son out and killed him. That Son is Jesus Christ.

Jesus was cast out so that you and I can come into his presence and be accepted.

Paul writes to the Ephesians in 2:13.

“*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*” Ephesians 2:13

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: House Of Prayer. Mark 11:12-19

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What does this passage reveal to us about Jesus' authority over God's house?
2. HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.
 - Why does Jesus say "my house shall be called a house of prayer?" What do the actions of Jesus signify? Do you believe prayer is optional or necessary?
 - What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

3. HEART For personal reflection: What will you need to cleanse in your life so that Christ is honored and prayer is upheld?