

Mark 11:15-19; 27-33

## THE GOSPEL OF MARK

### CLEANSING THE TEMPLE

Happy Father's Day

Have you ever been up really early in the morning? If so you have probably seen a televangelist promise you some type of blessing if you just send a financial gift.

Why? Because the Bible says that God wants to make everyone rich! You just have to send a check in within the 25 minutes and BAM! You are rich beyond measure!

Here are a couple of televangelist infomercials that you will not find in the bible:

## 2. Prayer Packages

The prayer package is one of the greatest scams ever. The product is simple. You pay someone and they pray for you.

- You will be healed
- You will receive an anointing from God
- You will have financial success

The problem with this is it implies that your prayer is less important than the person being paid to pray for you. Somehow, this guy has a direct phone to God and you don't.

## 1. Prayer Cloths

This is one of the oldest tricks in the book. This is yet another scam claiming to provide a "touch point to God" and someone else being the "point of contact,"

The unique thing about the prayer cloth scam is that they are sometimes sent out as FREE product, but you will be harassed VIA mail until you donate money to their ministry.

- The prayer cloth has been advertised to do anything from heal people to make them rich.
- It will cure all ailments

What is especially ridiculous is people have tried to make them unique by switching the color, so you can now coordinate with your "special prayer cloth".

### Dishonorable Mentions

- Miracle Spring Water
- Miracle Manna
- The Faith Seed

You give a televangelist your money and then you miraculously have more money.

You can often wonder why people still fall for these things. It can be for a lack of knowledge or simply when desperation gets intense—people will try anything—and there are people there to take advantage of this because they are no longer focused on worshipping God in Spirit and Truth, but using the gift of God for greedy gain.

In today's message we will see a form of this being played out in temple. But as we will see in the scriptures, Jesus wasn't having this.

Stand for the reading of God's word.

Mark 11:15-19; 27-33

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.

27 And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him,

28 and they said to him, "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?"

29 Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things.

30 Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me."

31 And they discussed it with one another, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?'

32 But shall we say, 'From man'?"—they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet.

33 So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

## PRAY

In our message last week we discussed Jesus cursing the fig tree as He made His way to Jerusalem. This was a physical act that had spiritual implications.

The story about the fig tree last week and the cleansing of the temple this week is Mark's use of a technique of "sandwiching" stories in a manner that allows one to serve as a compliment to the other. Both stories have a deeper meaning to the story of Jesus cleansing the Temple — and cursing the fig tree.

When Jesus cursed the fig tree, He was symbolically denouncing the practices of Israel as a nation. They had their leaves on the tree, figuratively speaking, or looked good on the outside, but was not producing any fruit.

Which leads to the significance of Jesus cleansing the temple.

Prior to the passage we are in today, Jesus entered Jerusalem triumphantly and then goes into the temple and the Bible tells us in v. 11 – “He had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.”

So Jesus scopes everything out, leaves the temple with His disciples and goes to Bethany to sleep.

He returned the next day and began wreck shop and deal with the issues that were going on in the Temple.

Before we answer the question **why did Jesus "cleanse" the temple**, let's get some context of the temple.

### **About the temple**

#### **GOD HAD A PLACE TO DWELL WITH HIS PEOPLE**

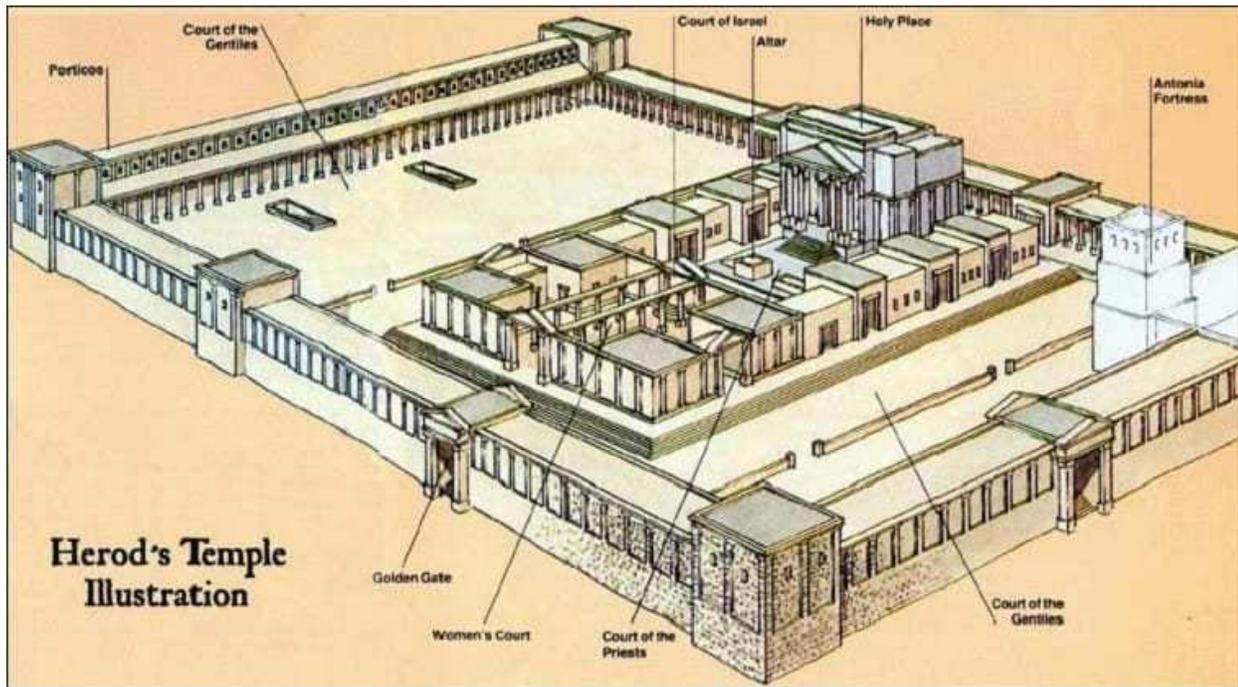
- God directed Moses to build a tabernacle in the wilderness He could meet the people in the process of worship. The tabernacle was a movable tent that wasn't very large.
- About three hundred years later David wanted to build a permanent Temple in Jerusalem to replace the portable tabernacle. David wasn't allowed to build the Temple because he was a man of War. So he helped raise the funds so that his son, Solomon, could build a house for God worth trillions.
- On the day the Temple was dedicated, Solomon prayed, “But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built...”

The Tabernacle/Temple was God's dwelling place among his people. Of course, God did not literally live there as people live in their houses. It signified the presence of God in Israel. It signified "I am with you" and were crucial to the Israelites.

However

- The Jews were rebellious and forgot God. So the first Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians.
- When the Jews returned from captivity about seventy years later, a second temple was built. But this was a plain.
- Then about 40 years before Jesus showed up in Bethlehem, Herod the Great renovated the Second Temple until it was a grand facility again.

SHOW SLIDE



This is the temple that was in Jerusalem where Jesus walked through and started cleaning house.

In our context we imagine Jesus going into a temple the size of a large church, but this area would have been much larger than the average reader would think.

The Temple being described would have had a large open area known as the court of the Gentiles.

The Court of the Gentiles was where the Gentiles (those who were not Jews) were allowed to worship. This is estimated to be at least 2.5 acres and up to 15 acres in size.

Instead of being a house of prayer, or place of worship the area was filled with people selling animals and changing money. It was like a huge flea market!

So Jesus comes in to:

Cleanses the Temple

Imagine—on this day—the city would have thousands of extra people traveling from all over the region because of Passover.

At this time, animal sacrifices were still being offered in Temple worship. Since many of the people would have traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover, there was a convenient way developed for them to get their sacrifices.

The sacrifices had to meet specific standards in order to be acceptable.

Those who traveled great distances would have a risk of their sacrifice being injured on the journey and declared unacceptable so they would just buy it at the temple.

They would also come to the temple to pay the temple tax.

Seizing an opportunity, pigeon-vendors and moneychanger set up shop.

Though not inherently evil, these practices became occasions for sin.

Travelers were exploited and paid exorbitant rates to change money, and sellers exploited those in poverty, overcharging for the poor man's offering of pigeons.

It might not have been too different from a sporting event today when hustlers outside the event trying to get you to buy tickets and other bootleg items—except at the temple these were sacrificial birds (Got those pigeons for you) and money changers that charged high rates.

To make things worse, these merchants set up shop in the Court of the Gentiles, making it useless as a place of prayer due to the hustle and bustle the buying and selling created.

This is where we see that Jesus drove 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. (v.15)

He didn't just nicely drive out. The appropriate description would be Jesus attacked the corruption.

But

### **Jesus' attacks make a point**

- Jesus looks for fruit on a fig tree but finding none curses it (11:12-14)
- Jesus enters Jerusalem and attacks the temple (11:15-19)
- The disciples see the fig tree withered from the root. (11:20-25)

The sandwiching of these stories indicates that the Jesus didn't approve of the practices of the Nation of Israel and the Jesus' attack on the temple and represented its subsequent destruction.

These merchants, and those in power and the priests who allowed their presence, cared nothing for true worship as long as they could make money and keep up the rituals.

Jesus hated this violation, which kept the nations from true worship of the living God.

As Jesus was driving everyone out of the temple, v.17 says, "**He was teaching** (Pause) 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."

The Temple was supposed to be set aside as a house of prayer. It was to be a place of worship and devotion to the Lord for all nations, but they had created an atmosphere of greed and self-promotion.

He accused them of literally robbing and taking advantage of the people.

What may have appeared harmless, and even helpful on the surface, was sinful and selfish beneath.

We then see in v. 18 another key to why Jesus cleansed the temple. It says that "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."

Jesus was poking a lion and led to them wanting to destroy Jesus and ultimately led to His crucifixion.

After attacking the temple Jesus left Jerusalem and when He came back the chief priests, the scribes and the elders came to him,

and began to question Him about the authority He has to do these things.

Jesus responded with to their question with a question and said if you and if you answer me I will tell you by what authority I do these things.

30 Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me."

They answered Him by saying

33 “We do not know.” And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

The temple—symbolic of God’s dwelling and authority—was a particularly good place for such a question to be raised, and the query itself was an attempt by the leaders to trap Jesus.

The leaders were looking to discredit Jesus by either saying He had no authority, or charge Him with blasphemy by saying God gave Him His authority.

Deep down, the priests, scribes, and elders knew the truth, but they were suppressing it in wickedness.

John Calvin wrote

“Christ did not make a direct reply to them . . . because they wickedly and shamelessly interrogated him about a matter which was well known.”

So Jesus answered them indirectly. The leaders’ reluctance to answer was to avoid being trapped by their words and deeds, shows that they did not really want to hear what Jesus had to say in the first place. So, Christ saw no need to answer them.

We would later find out that the only sign that would have any meaning to them was the sign of Jesus’ resurrection.

Transition

There are so many points we can pull out from this small portion of scripture. But we are only going to look at 2 points we can learn from the Cleansing the temple. One to focus on the church (gathering) and the other in our personal worship.

### **1. Jesus was set on purifying the church (gathering), not enlarging it**

Jesus did not like the fact that the temple became a den of thieves instead of being a house of prayer for all nations.

People were robbing from men—and in essence robbing the glory due to God.

When we make much of the activities of the church or church over people, we are in essence robbing the glory due to God.

Just as Jesus was Angry Because the Temple had become a Barrier to God’s Praise, we can allow our Sunday gathering to become a barrier to those in our communities—to those who need Jesus.

We have to remain mindful on not just doing church for the sake of having church.

We much assess how well does our worship, relational investments and our corporate gatherings reflect, even in a small way, the heart of a God who gathers the outcasts.

In our church culture we often see that membership size can equal church health and "Kingdom success," and we can get caught up in that. That is simply not true.

Jesus' idea of the temple was not about having a lot of people going there - it was about having people going there for the right reasons.

If Jesus were to come back now, would He step into our churches and find misfits, the socially marginalized, the outcasts, or would He find people coming to check off a box?

Jesus cared about what was being done in the temple. He quoted Isaiah 56:7 saying, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations".

He also referenced Jeremiah 7:11, which says, "Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?"

The temple was meant to be a house of prayer. If people go there for any other reason than pray and seek the Lord they defeated the purpose.

Our Redeemer cleansing the temple at the very least illustrates how concerned He is with the purity of worship. Our corporate gathering is something that is always in need of reformation.

It is easy to forget the heart for worshipping God and make much about things that do not matter to God.

The way the music is, or not having that good feeling is not the gauge we should use for success.

Let us always be mindful of not becoming a den of thieves.

And then on the personal side

## **2. Jesus' rebuke challenged the way they worshipped.**

The way they were going about worshipping God was off and Jesus came in called them on it. He disrupted the way things were being done.

Jesus is always going to challenge the way we are worshipping if the focus is on anything else but Him.

Let us not forget that in this passage Jesus knew what was to come.

After Jesus died on the cross there was no need for a temple. The moment He died, the curtain in the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom, signifying humanity no longer had to go through a ritualistic sacrifice to approach God.

God still has a temple, but it is no longer a building. He has a people for His temple.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

19 do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,

20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

In other words, it is not the location that makes an act of worship authentic. Worship is not merely an external act that you can accomplish by going to a place.

Jesus said in another place (Matthew 15:8-9): "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me,"

God makes His home in those who love and obey Him

In John 14:23 “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him”.

We are God's temple so worship is first and foremost an experience of our active adoration of God.

Prayer without worship of God is vain. Songs without seeking to glorify God are vain. Confession and creeds and liturgies and sermons that don't come from truly seeking God's Kingdom are empty and worthless in God's eyes.

We are to worship in spirit and not mere external ways.

We are to worship in truth and not based on an inadequate view of God.

When Spirit and truth guide us to a sense of real worship, it will be based on a true view of God that will overwhelm our heart and head.

Our worship will engage all of who we are.

John Piper says it this way:

The fuel of worship is the grand truth of a gracious and sovereign God; the fire that makes the fuel burn white hot is the quickening of the Holy Spirit; the furnace made alive and warm by the flame of truth is our renewed spirit; and the resulting heat of our affections is worship, pushing its way out in tears, confessions, prayers, praises, acclamations, lifting of hands, bowing low, and obedient lives.  
John Piper

When we gather together in the name of Jesus, He is here in our midst. This congregation, not this building is God's temple.

So how can we individually respond to cleansing God's temple, our body?

## **APPLICATION**

We are dealing with a God of reality, a God who cannot be fooled, a God who will always deal in loving forgiveness with anyone who does not defend his evil.

When we admit our sin, and ask to be cleansed, and freed, he never turns us away—he never deals with us harshly.

But when we come justifying our wrong actions, excusing them, fooling ourselves, we see this is dishonoring to His temple.

So this week and moving forward, Pray and Ask God to examine your heart throughout the week and reveal any areas we have that are barriers to God's praise. Begin to seek Him on how to remove those barriers.

## **Closing**

Throughout the Gospels we see plainly how anyone can come to Christ, no matter what his/her background, no matter how far they have gone wrong, no matter how evil he has been—murderers, prostitutes, swindlers, liars, perverts, drunkards, self-righteous, bitter, hard-hearted cynics, religious hypocrites, proud self-reliant snobs—anyone who realizes there is something wrong in their life, and wants to be free can come to Jesus.

"Come unto me all you that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest," Jesus said (Matthew 11:28). Anyone can come. But be assured that if you come, Jesus is not going to leave you the way you are.

We must understand that Jesus is longsuffering toward us, but by no means tolerant of our sin.