

## Cleansing the Temple

Mark 11: 15-19

In our last study we discussed Jesus cursing the fig tree as He made His way to Jerusalem. While this was a physical act, it had spiritual implications. Jesus cursed the fig tree as He and the disciples were headed to the Temple on what most agree was Monday morning of Passion Week.

Jesus had entered Jerusalem triumphantly on Sunday. Apparently, He noticed some activity within the Temple that needed to be addressed. [Mark 11:11 – And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve.](#) Jesus returned on Monday morning to deal with the issues that were going on in the Temple.

In our modern day, many desire the Lord to “show up” in our services. While I understand that every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, I also know it is a blessing to experience the presence of the Lord when we gather for worship. On this faithful morning, Jesus had not gone to the Temple to offer His blessing; He had gone to deal with those who deserved judgment. He went to Jerusalem to set His Father’s house in order. This should stand as a challenge to every local congregation throughout the world. We have come together in the Lord’s house, to worship Him. We must ensure that everything is done in accordance to His Word and pleasing to Him. As we examine the [activities](#) that transpired that day, I want to consider: [Cleansing the Temple](#).

**I. The Authority of Jesus** (15-17) – These verses reveal Jesus’ arrival at the Temple in Jerusalem and the way He dealt with the activities that were taking place there. Consider:

**A. The Position** (15a) – [And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple.](#) While most imagine Jesus going into the area of the Temple where the priests ministered, that was actually not the case. The word translated *temple* in the text actually speaks of the outer court, the entire Temple enclosure, not just the Sanctuary itself. Some scholars estimate this area would have been between fourteen and twenty acres in size. No doubt this area is much larger than the average reader would imagine. It appears to me that there was almost a carnival feel to this area – more like a downtown market than an area within the Temple court.

**B. The Confrontation** (15) – [And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves.](#) As Jesus entered the Temple court, He immediately confronted those who used the area for personal and financial gain. This is a clear contradiction to the weak

and timid Jesus some men like to preach. While He was a Lord of compassion and grace, He was also a God of holiness and righteous indignation.

- At this time, sacrifices were still being offered in Temple worship. Since many of the Jews would have traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover, the high priest had developed a convenient way for them to acquire their sacrifices. The sacrifices had to meet specific standards in order to be accepted. Those who traveled great distances had a risk of their sacrifice being injured on the journey and declared unacceptable. The merchants were set up within the outer court, selling “acceptable” sacrifices to the people. This included the selling of doves – an acceptable sacrifice for those who were too poor to offer sheep, goats, or bulls.
- Jesus also confronted the moneychangers within the Temple court. The Jewish males were required to pay a one-half shekel Temple tax. This practice was instituted when Nehemiah restored the city, and remained an annual tax, about one-half of an ounce of silver. The Temple tax had to be paid in Jewish currency. The moneychangers were there to exchange whatever currency the travelers had into Jewish shekels.

**C. The Restriction** (16) – *And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple.* We must keep in mind that the Temple grounds covered a large area. Rather than walking around the outer court of the Temple, people frequently cut through the outer court to shorten the distance they had to travel. The Temple grounds had become a short-cut for many who did business in and around Jerusalem. Jesus refused to allow anyone to cut through this area, if they were not there to visit the Temple and worship.

➤ Clearly these practices were acceptable to the high priest and those who attended the Temple. They thought nothing of the activities going on within the Temple court. Based on what we have discussed thus far, you may see nothing wrong with what was going on in that day. Jesus addressed the issue with a stinging rebuke. Notice lastly:

**D. The Proclamation** (17) – *And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves.* Jesus knew the Temple had been set aside as a house of prayer. It was to be a place of worship and devotion to the Lord, but they had created an atmosphere of greed and self-promotion. The Lord’s house had been reduced to a place of commerce, where the rich took advantage of the poor and needy. It had become a den of thieves. Jesus being angry, forced out those who traded goods within the outer court; He turned over the tables belonging to the moneychangers; and He refused to allow this sacred place to be used as a shortcut for material gain. Jesus demanded the house of God be treated with respect and reverence.

- He accused them of being a den of thieves, literally robbing and taking advantage of the people. What may have appeared harmless, and even helpful on the surface, was sinful and selfish beneath. Those who sold the sacrifices charged grossly inflated prices for the animals. The moneychangers charged at least a ten percent exchange rate. The outer court had been reduced to a market place that brought wealth to the merchants, at the expense of those who came to worship. Rather than the Temple being a house of prayer, it had become a house of corruption and greed!
- While these verses have caused some to take an extreme approach to the church, teetering on the verge of legalism, I am convinced they teach a demand for reverence and respect at the house of God. I agree that this is just a building of brick and wood, but it has been set aside to worship the Lord. This is a special place and should be treated with the utmost reverence and respect. We gather here to worship and serve our Lord.

**II. The Animosity toward Jesus (18-19)** – Here we see the reaction of the chief priests and scribes, and their animosity toward Jesus. Notice:

**A. Their Focus (18a)** – *And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him.* The hatred of the Jewish leadership within the Temple that day is evident. Hearing the words of Jesus, they desired to destroy Him. This reveals their desire for Jesus to be put to death. Although they weren't the ones He drove out because of their commercialism, His actions were directed at them as well. They were in charge of the activities within the Temple and must have approved of what was going on at that time.

- The Spirit is contrary to the flesh. Many continue to despise the Lord and the working of the Spirit because they are convicted of their sin. People get angry when the Word of God confronts the lifestyle they have chosen. Much like those in Jesus' day, people really get upset when their source of income is altered in any way. Unfortunately, most today are more concerned with the life they currently live, pursuing their desires, than living a life that honors the Lord.

**B. Their Fear (18b)** – *And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine.* The chief priests and scribes feared Jesus. He did not tow the line of accepted practices. He challenged their actions and their motives. He refused to accept tradition and complacency when it contradicted the Word of God. He refused to allow such corruption within the Temple and stood boldly against those who defiled it. His boldness in the face of the leadership, and the wisdom with which He spoke, astonished the people. The leadership became afraid that Jesus would bring about change.

- Fear is a strong motivator, taking on many forms. We see this within the modern church today. Many choose tradition over biblical doctrine. They are determined to continue certain practices and traditions simply because that's the way it has always been done. Even when confronted with the truth of the Word, some remain hesitant because they fear change. Some have attained positions of power within the church and will do anything necessary to maintain their control. Biblical knowledge and obedience has caused fear within the hearts of the "establishment" for centuries.

**C. Their Fate (19)** – *And when even was come, he went out of the city.* This is the second time we find Jesus departing from Jerusalem, returning to Bethany, in as many days. This seems quite ironic when we consider who He is and where He was. This is the Son of the living God, standing within the Temple built to worship God. One would expect Jesus to have felt at home within the Temple, but the opposite was true. Jesus felt their animosity and knew He was not wanted or welcome in Jerusalem. Thus, He departed back to Bethany, to dwell among those who loved Him and desired to be in His presence. The Jews could not see it because of the hardness of their hearts, but this was a sign of things to come. They will deny Jesus as the Christ and consent to His death upon the cross. Eventually the Gospel would be taken primarily to the Gentiles and the nation of Israel would be dispersed throughout the world. It is a serious matter to deny and reject Christ.

- This truth remains today. Jesus is the sole means of salvation. There is no other way of forgiveness of sin and acceptance to God. If one desires to inherit eternal life, Jesus is the only way! Those who deny and reject Him will not enjoy His presence, and they will eventually be forced to deal with the consequences of their decision. All will stand before the Lord one day in judgment. The only thing that will matter at that moment is whether there is a relationship with Jesus Christ. Apart from Him, judgment will be sure and eternal.

**Conclusion:** This has been a compelling passage. I wonder what our Lord thinks as He surveys this local body of believers? Is He pleased with what He sees and knows? Are we here to serve the Lord and promote the Gospel, or are we here to preserve our traditions and defend personal agendas?

I trust all know Christ as their Savior, but there may be someone here today that has never submitted to Him in salvation. If that be the case, I urge you to come in repentance and faith unto salvation. There is no other way!