

How Has the House of Prayer for All Nations Become a Den of Robbers?

Devotional #22, Mark 11:15-33

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.

²⁰ As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. ²¹ And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." ²² And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. ²³ Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. ²⁴ Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. ²⁵ And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

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."

- Mark 11:15-33, ESV

You've probably received one of those phishing scam e-mails from some African country promising to give you millions of dollars. What I hate most about some of these e-mails is that they begin with, "Greetings in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ!" This version of the phishing scam plays on feelings of Christian brotherhood to project an air of trustworthiness. They are using the name of Jesus Christ to scam people out of money.

But of course, they're not the only ones. In 1517, Martin Luther was outraged by the scamming of God's people to raise money for St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. This particular scam was the selling of indulgences by Johann Tetzel. For a sizable donation and some acts of penance, the Roman Catholic Church promised people relief from any temporal consequences for their sin.

Sadly, people in all parts of the world have used the name of God and the worship of God as a tool for personal gain. The religious leaders who ran the Temple had money-changers and animal-sellers in the Court of the Gentiles exchanging people's currency for Temple coins and then selling

them sacrificial animals for use in worship. The Temple was one of the wonders of the ancient world, and the Chief Priests enjoyed a wonderful income from this business.

Jesus made His own opinion on the issue of scamming religious worshipers very clear. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and drove the sellers of animals out of the Temple. Not only did these people make a nice profit, but their business crowded the Court of the Gentiles, which was the worship space set aside for non-Jews who wanted to come and pray to God and learn more about Him. No instruction and precious little prayer could happen in a place crowded with money-changers and animal-sellers.

Jesus also cursed the fig tree as a symbol of His judgment against the Jewish leadership.

So, it's easy to get outraged at African phishing scams and Roman Catholic indulgences and Jewish money-changers, but are we guilty of the same kinds of sins in our lives and our churches? Do we seek to grow large churches to advance our names and line our pockets? Do we provide hindrance for those who would come and learn more about Jesus by crowding Him out in exchange for lesser things? Any time we are self-serving in our church life or do anything to prevent people from seeing Jesus, we are in the wrong and we must repent. May the Lord give us the grace to examine our hearts and truly seek His honor and glory above all else.