

Sermon 11/1/09

W. J. Mencarow, Pastor, Reformation Church, Boerne, Texas

www.WorldUnderChrist.com

<http://reformation.sermonaudio.com>

John 2:13-17

13 And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, 14 And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: 15 And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; 16 And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. 17 And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.

A lot of people are perplexed by this. They wonder why meek and mild Jesus, who surely loves everybody, would do such a thing. Take a whip and drive out innocent animals and people who are only trying to make a living? Dump out their money on the floor and turn over their tables? How rude. How uncivilized. What's His problem? He's certainly not going to get disciples when he behaves violently like that, so why did he do it? And why didn't somebody stop Him? If you or I went to the county fair and started trashing the vendor's tables and releasing the animals we wouldn't get very far before somebody, probably a bunch of people, would jump us and we'd end up in the pokey. But nobody stopped him, even though there were temple guards that were supposed to keep order. What's this all about?

It's about the specific fulfillment of prophecy. The text itself says so: v. 17 17 And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up. And Mal 3:1 1] Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to this temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.

[2] But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap:

[3] And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.

By fulfilling these prophecies Jesus declared Himself as the Messiah, the savior of Israel, which being rightly interpreted means the savior of God's people, his church. He declared Himself the Son of God: "make not my Father's house an house of merchandise." He purified the sons of Levi (" he shall purify the sons of Levi" Mal. 3:3). Remember that the Levites were the "deacons" of the OT church. Their job was to take care of the administrative tasks, keep up the temple physically, and take care of the money. Christ purified them by showing them what they should have done all along, purging out the evil from the midst of the church.

But what is the wrong that the sellers of the animals and the money changers were doing? Is the lesson that capitalism is evil? Was Jesus trying to teach us that it should be replaced with a system where the government takes from some people to give to others? That of course is called socialism, and some claim the Bible teaches it, but there's no evidence for it in the Bible. In fact, the opposite is true — the origin of private property and by extension the system of capitalism, free markets, is the Bible. It is also the origin of freedom instead of enslavement to the whims of the civil government. No nation of the ancient world ever heard of or conceived of private property or personal freedom until God gave it to Israel in His Word. The civil government of the Bible is free markets and free men. All other systems are of Satan.

Jesus praised markets, capitalism, such as in the parable of the talents (Mt. 25) — the servants who invested the master's money wisely received great rewards, and even the lending of money at interest is commended. But the servant who did not invest the money was punished. Of course, the main point of that parable, as of all parables, is spiritual, not temporal, but think about it: Do you think Jesus would make a spiritual point by commending behavior he didn't approve of?

No, claiming the Bible teaches socialism which is forcibly taking from some people to have earned their money to give it to others who have not, is at best ignorance, or at worst an attempt to cram the Bible into someone's own agenda.

To understand why Jesus did what he did, we must know why the money changers and animal merchants were there. What business would they conduct in the temple?

Every year at the Passover all the people came from throughout Israel and converts came from foreign countries to the temple to bring their animal sacrifices and to pay their temple offering, temple tax, in the amount of half a shekel per man over the age of 20. Ex. 30 commanded that. A shekel was a coin denominating a fraction of silver. So some people got the idea to rent space from the priests in the outward court of the temple, called the court of the gentiles, to change money, at a small profit, for people not from Israel and for others who needed a half shekel to pay their offering. Other businessmen got the idea to rent space and sell animals for sacrifice.

Why would they do that? Because many people had to come a long way to Jerusalem and they could not bring an animal that long distance. Imagine walking 20, 50 or more miles with your family and trying to take an ox or sheep. You'd have to take plenty of food for the animal, plus make sure there was water available, the animal would slow you down — in short, a real difficulty. But that was never a problem, because the Lord knows the hardships of His people and provided in His Law for that, Deut. 14:23-25: “[23] And thou shalt eat before the LORD thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithes of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the LORD thy God always. [24] And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from thee, which the LORD thy God shall choose to set his name there, when the LORD thy God hath blessed thee: [25] Then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose:

Note that the Lord said that if the journey is too difficult, then sell the animal at home and take the money with you. The passage goes on with instructions. One you sell the animal at home and bring the money, you would expect that you are supposed to contribute the money to the temple, right? But the Lord is not a man, and He doesn't reason like we do. Unlike us, whose reason is fallen and corrupt, His reasoning is perfect, and that's why He often says things we don't expect or understand. The next verse in Deut. 14, v. 26, says, 26]

And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household,” (That verse may not be in Baptist Bibles.) Take the money that you sold the sacrificial animal for and spend it however you like — buy more farm animals, buy some wine, even buy liquor, spend it on whatever pleases you — the purpose is for you to remember the goodness of the Lord, thank Him and rejoice, you and your household. You know from the rest of Scripture that drunkenness is a sin — Phil 4:5 says “let your moderation be known to all men” — but Scripture praises wine — Ps. 104:15, “wine that maketh glad the heart of man” and the Lord Jesus turning the water into fine wine are two examples — and even permits stronger drink taken in moderation.

But the priests and Levites used the Scripture for their own profit — they rented out space to merchants right in the temple court and brought in oxen and sheep and even cheap doves for sale to the poor for sacrifice. Now, I’m speculating here, but if you know men, you know this is at least a good possibility — the buyers may not have had even to touch the animal — the seller may have told them he was full-service, he would take care of getting it to the altar. And think about it, perhaps the same animal was sold numerous times to unsuspecting customers. Possibly it was sold over and over again and then lead back to the merchant’s barn, to be re-sold again next year. After all, a perfectly unblemished animal was a relative rarity. Why kill it when you can get money for it again and again?

It was a profitable deal for the money-changers, the merchants — and the priests who made money from renting the space, from inspecting the animals to certify that they were free of blemishes, which was required by God’s Law, and possibly got a kick-back on the sales as well. All in all, a sweet little enterprise for everyone — until Jesus came and spoiled it.

Ps. 188:27 instructs, “bind the sacrifice with cords.” Jesus probably made the whip from tying together small pieces of cords, or rope, that the merchants had used to bring the animals into the temple and then tossed on the ground. Matthew Henry makes the point that “Sinners prepare the whips with which they themselves will be driven out from the temple of the Lord. He did not make a whip to chastise the offenders (His punishments are of another nature) but only to drive out the animals; he aimed no further than at reformation.” Christ was ordained to purge the church and with great zeal He began His office both of priest and prophet, as the Geneva Bible notes say.

He drove them out of the temple, not out of town. In other words, He showed us that ridding the church of evil is enough — we are not to persecute them once they are gone. Paul says much the same thing in 2 Cor. 10:8 speaking of his “authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction.

Jesus not only drove out the animals and the merchants and money-changers, he also poured out their money and overturned their tables, showing His contempt for those who make the church a mechanism for their own profit. He not only threw out the people, he shut down their businesses.

Interestingly, he did not drive out the doves, only the oxen and sheep. He simply told their owners to take the doves and get out of the temple. Why treat them differently than the owners of the large animals? Because the oxen and sheep could be driven out and they would stay with their owners. But the doves, if driven out, would fly away and their owners would suffer loss. Jesus obeyed the Law even in His anger. He had compassion on the sinful merchants doing business in the temple. He did not break the Law and take what belonged to them — if he was a socialist, he would have. He would have taken from those who had a lot of animals, the merchants, and given to those who had few or none. But He respected the private property rights of the merchants.

Jesus' actions were not in condemnation of business or capitalism, and even in the heat of his anger he did not persecute the merchants or take their property. Elsewhere, in various parables he praised sound business practices, so he was no enemy of business. What he condemned was those who polluted the church for their own worldly gain. But He also was teaching a deeper spiritual lesson — that God's forgiveness cannot be bought with money.

And that brings us to Dr. Martin Luther.

Yesterday was Reformation Day, the annual remembrance of the day, Oct. 31, 1517, when Martin Luther, a priest and theology professor, posted an announcement of a meeting and the agenda on a community bulletin board. The Lord used that act to change the world, and it closely parallels this act of Christ in the temple.

The bulletin board was the door of the Church of All Saints, Wittenberg, Germany, and Luther's actions were not out of the ordinary. The purpose of the meeting was to debate the sale of indulgences by the church of Rome, and in the announcement Luther listed 95 theses, or points of discussion. The 95 theses had to do with the sale of indulgences.

What are indulgences? The church of Rome says that if you give it money it will give you an indulgence, that is to say, a favor, which is essentially a spiritual coupon that can be redeemed to lessen the time you or a loved one spend suffering in purgatory. This is true to this day. In 1517 Rome was on a tear to sell indulgences in order to finish building St. Peter's Basilica. The Pope sent out many indulgence salesmen to prey on the people, promising the people that if they gave money they could buy forgiveness of sins. The more they gave they gave the less time they or grandma would spend in the fires of purgatory. Some Roman indulgence peddlers said if someone gave enough that when they die they could even get out of purgatory immediately, or spring their loved one out right now.. The most famous indulgence peddler was friar Johann Tetzel in Germany, whose sales pitch was, "'When the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory into heaven springs.'" It was Tetzel's absurd promises that salvation could be bought with money that spurred Luther into writing the 95 theses against indulgences.

And the spark that had been smoldering for centuries with the Waldenses, the Albigenses, John Hus, John Wycliffe and many others was fanned into white hot flames by Luther's 95 theses and called the Protestant Reformation.

We should ponder why, if the Pope has the power, does he not simply release all souls from purgatory?

In the Lord's providence, the writing of the 95 theses was done shortly after the invention of the printing press, and the theses were translated and widely published. Many people read them and refused to buy indulgences. Tetzel was losing commissions, so he attacked Luther, calling him a heretic who would be burning in hell within 3 weeks. The Pope, Leo X, interpreted the 95 Theses as an attack on the authority of the church. A prominent professor of the church called Luther a "fanatic Hussite, heretical, seditious, insolent and rash."

Despite what many people think, Luther had no intention of breaking with Rome, much less establishing a new church. In fact, he did not establish a new church, since there is only one church: the church of Jesus Christ, the fellowship of all believers no matter what congregation they may be part of. His intention in his own words, was to reform the Roman church. He naively thought that if he showed Rome their errors out of the Bible that it would change. Instead, Rome planned to silence him, peacefully if possible, violently if he persisted. The Pope ordered him to recant in 60 days or be excommunicated. This order was sent to him in a bull — the word for a document issued directly by the Pope — called *Exurge Domine*. In it the Pope also commanded that all the books of Luther's should be burned.

Luther took the bull along with books of the Roman church Canon Law and made a bonfire. He said later, "I have burned the books of the pope and the bull, at first with trembling and praying; but now I am more pleased with this than with any other action of my life, for they are worse than I had thought...if St. Peter himself were sitting in Rome today I would still deny that he is pope and supposed to rule over all other bishops by divine right. The papacy is a human invention of which God knows nothing. All (true) churches are equal, and their unity does not depend on the sovereignty of this one man, but as St. Paul

says in Eph. 4, their unity depends on one faith, one baptism, one Lord Jesus Christ, and these are all in common and equal possession of all the parishes in the world.”

The main difference between Rome and Martin Luther is the main difference between Rome and all Christians. It is the authority of the Bible. To quote the Pope’s spokesman, “Whoever does not accept the doctrine of the Roman Church and of the Roman Pontiff, as the infallible rule of faith, *from which the sacred Scripture derives strength and authority*, is a heretic.” Look at that again. The Scripture derives strength and authority from the doctrine of the Roman Church and of the Roman Pontiff. The Scripture itself pointedly rejects that: “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Heb. 4:12); “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be *perfect, thoroughly furnished* unto all good works.” (II Tim. 3:16-17)

Martin Luther and all Christians believe the infallible rule of faith is the Bible and the Bible alone, not the doctrine of any visible church. He wrote, “Necessity itself compels us to flee for refuge to the most solid rock of divine Scripture and not to believe rashly any, whoever they may be, who speak, decide, or act contrary to its authority.”

There are only two claimed methods of salvation: faith or works. The Bible says it is faith plus nothing, Rome claims it is faith plus works, which makes it works. Luther, by preaching faith alone, hit Rome head-on and shook her foundations.

When he discovered the Bible, which was in Latin and chained to a wall in his monastery written in a language (Latin) only scholars could read, and began studying it, the more he was convinced that there was a lot more wrong with Rome than indulgences. By the middle of 1520 he had concluded that the Papacy is the Antichrist and that it had nothing to do with the church of Christ. He wrote that the true church is that “inner, spiritual and invisible fellowship of the heart, by which one is incorporated by true faith, hope and love in the fellowship of Christ and of all the saints...”

Luther wrote, “The Devil beget darkness; darkness beget ignorance; ignorance beget error and his brethren; error beget free-will and presumption; free-will beget works; works beget forgetfulness of God; forgetfulness beget transgression; transgression beget superstition; superstition beget satisfaction; satisfaction beget the mass-offering; the mass-offering beget the priest; the priest beget unbelief; unbelief beget hypocrisy; hypocrisy beget traffic in offerings for gain; traffic in offerings for gain beget Purgatory; Purgatory beget the annual solemn vigils; the annual vigils beget church-livings; church-livings beget avarice; avarice beget swelling superfluity; swelling superfluity beget fulness; fulness beget rage; rage beget license; license beget empire and domination; domination beget pomp; pomp beget ambition; ambition beget simony; simony beget the pope and his brethren.”

Because of his unshakable belief in the authority and power of the Bible as God’s inerrant, infallible Word, Martin Luther was given the strength and courage to stand up to the devil himself and drive the merchants of indulgences from the church, those who used the poor to line their pockets by claiming salvation could be bought with money. Martin Luther was used by the Lord to purify his church as no man has been since Apostolic times.

And because we are honoring Luther’s memory, I close with a portion of a letter he wrote to a friend on April 8, 1516. It is one of the most powerful and encouraging explanations of the Gospel I have ever read:

“Now I should like to know whether your soul, tired of its own righteousness, is learning to be revived by and to trust in the righteousness of Christ. For in our age the temptation to presumption besets many, especially those who try with all their might to be just and good without knowing the righteousness of God, which is most bountifully and freely given us in Christ. They try to do good of themselves in order that they might stand before God clothed in their own virtues and merits. But this is impossible...Therefore my dear friar, learn Christ and Him crucified. Learn to praise Him, and despairing of yourself, say, “Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, just as I am your sin. You have taken upon yourself what is mine and have given to me what is yours. You have taken upon yourself what you were not and have given to me what I was not.”...For why was it necessary for Him to die if we can

obtain a good conscience by our own works and afflictions? Accordingly, you will find peace only in Him and only when you despair of yourself and your own works. Besides, you will learn from Him that just as He has received you, so He has made your sins His own and has made His righteousness yours.”