

INTRODUCTION

- We are at the last stage of Jesus' earthly ministry, now in the midst of what is known as His "passion week." He has been teaching for approximately 3 years, focusing His ministry in the area of Galilee, and now entering Jerusalem for the last time before His crucifixion. Last week we considered His majestic entry into Jerusalem, and how in that event He was being identified as the greater Son of David, the King of Peace. We also considered how, though for the moment it seemed successful, He views the city and in a prophetic woe pronounces judgment on the city.
- We see in these events Jesus unleashing His fame and intensifying the conflict that is between Him and the leaders of Israel.

EXPOSITION

I. JESUS' CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE – vv.45-46

45 Then He went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in it, 46 saying to them, "It is written, 'My house is a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"

- The temple at the time of Jesus was the center of Jewish worship, and existed in the city of Jerusalem. It had its origin in King David's desire to make for the LORD a more permanent place of worship, and his son Solomon was used to actually build the magnificent building. Because of Israel's disobedience, that temple would eventually be destroyed. It would be replaced by Zerubbabel's temple when Israel was temporarily returned from exile into their land. That temple would be replaced piece by piece by King Herod "the great" in order to win favor with the Jewish people, and was still in process of being finished during the time of Jesus. This temple was very glorious.
- When we harmonize the various accounts of the Gospels, we find that though Luke compresses this event without time reference, this actually takes place the day following His triumphal entry. He apparently enters, weeps over the city, spends some time in Jerusalem, then departs. It appears that throughout this week He would go into the city and in the evening withdraw and stay in Bethany, probably at the home of Lazarus.
- What Luke records here Matthew and Mark also record at this time in His ministry, while John records an earlier cleaning at the beginning of His ministry.
- What is very interesting is to see how Jesus was displaying His three-fold ministry and office as Messiah. In the entry He is revealing Himself as King of Israel. In the "woe" of Jerusalem, He is revealing Himself as the great Prophet of Israel. In this account, He is revealing Himself as High Priest of Israel, exercising His authority in the temple of God.
- We remember that Jesus was not a Levite, and therefore did not have right according to the Law of Moses to go into the actual temple structure proper. When Luke writes that He went into the temple, He means a part of the entire structure which was called the temple. This included the holy of holies and holy place, the court of Israel, (Jewish men only) the court of the women (Jewish women), and the court of the Gentiles. This outer court was as close that a proselyte (i.e. non-Jewish convert to Judaism) could get to the inner court. It is was in this place, particularly the Southern end, that was more spacious that merchants had been set up for the provision of services that would assist the worshipper.
- The currency of the Roman empire was minted by Rome, and could not be used as offerings to pay the temple tax that was required. One would need to exchange that money for Jewish shekels, for a fee. Also, when one brought an animal sacrifice, it had to meet certain requirements or the priest would reject it. So there were those set up in this court that would sell animals pre-approved by the priests, for a fee. While these things seem at first helpful, it grew into such a racket that Jesus calls the place a "den of thieves." The temple had become a place likened to a hideout where crooks and swindlers would harbor. They were charging exorbitant fees, taking advantage of the rich, and especially poor. This was being done under the noses and with the approval of the leadership of the temple, who would receive kickbacks of the profit.
- Jesus, seeing the degraded moral condition, takes action. He physically overturns those tables with money on top, coins flying here and there. The chairs and benches in which sat those who sold doves were also tossed about with consuming zeal and vigor. Jesus did not take the corruption of His father's worship with a passive indifference.
- Then as some tried to pass through with the various wares to be sold, He physically stopped them and would not let them pass through. Many would think He was a madman, and it is amazing that none tried to restrain Him. But we see from the flow of events that, at least at this point, there are multitudes who are being persuaded that He is the King, a great Prophet, and has authority. Besides this, their consciences condemned them, and they knew what He said was true.
- Jesus alludes to two passages of Scripture here. The first is Isaiah 56:7, and is in the context of the great and glorious promise that God would bring salvation to the Gentiles. It speaks of the House of God as a house of prayer for all the nations. This means that both the temple was to be a place to pray for God's glory among the nations, and as God reaps a harvest from them that it was a place for the gathering of those people. This is significant in that this part of the temple was known as the court of the Gentiles. This was the place that the Gentiles were to gather for the worship of God. What had happened instead? It had been crowded out by people making merchandise of God's worship. A place where corruption abounded.
- The other passage Jesus alludes to is Jeremiah 7:11. This is one of Jeremiah's most scathing sermons against Israel. They were essentially living wickedly, and then trusting in the external ritual of the temple to keep them safe from God's wrath. This did not happen only in their day, but also happens in ours. There are those who live wickedly,

and then trust that because they have been baptized, are a member of a church, pay their tithe, volunteer, etc. that this will all be a covering to a life of wickedness. It is then that the House of God actually becomes a harbor for the wicked, instead of a place of gathering for those who love righteousness and love God.

II. JESUS' TEACHING IN THE TEMPLE – vv.47-48a

47 And He was teaching daily in the temple.

- We are told that for these several days, our Lord is teaching in the temple. This would have taken place in some of the side shelters or porticos that surrounded the temple. These were places with flat roofs upheld by large pillars under which people could sit and be sheltered from the sun. In these open spaces people would sit and listen to the various rabbis or teachers.
- What was He teaching them? (parallel accounts)

III. THE LEADERSHIP'S PLAN TO DESTROY THE TEMPLE – vv.47b-48

But the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him,

- The various groups named here are indicative of the representatives of the official Sanhedrin or court of religious leaders. While He was teaching, and they were watching from the sidelines, their precious authority and influence slipping through their fingers, they were boiling mad. They had had enough. Now they had but one goal. This man must be killed. Trying to outsmart Him, out teach Him, try to keep the people from being influenced by Him, all of these had failed. Now it is clear what they must do, and all their plotting will be directed toward that one goal.
- The reason for my using the phrasing of this heading is, I suppose, mainly to keep a kind of rhetorical continuity (i.e. temple). But this isn't mere rhetoric, because I'm taking my cue from the account of the earlier cleansing found in [John 2:19](#). Jesus prophesies that the time will come when they will not merely reject His authority, but will kill Him. This will come to play also in the parable found in [Luke 20:13-15](#). But there is presently a problem:

48 and were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear Him.

- His popularity for now is influential, and we are told that they were "very attentive" to hear Him. This is the translation of a word that means to "hang on." We could paraphrase this as "they were hanging onto His every Word." There was an excitement about His ministry, and they couldn't get enough of His preaching. As the people assembled in Jerusalem for the Passover there was an excitement to hear Him. But in the end it will be seen that this is mostly a "mob" mentality. There is something about the increase of crowds that itself stirs excitement. In the end they will not love Him nor His teaching so as to live it, but merely an excitement about being a part of the "in crowd", being at the place where things are "happening." Sadly, even Christians and churches can be swept away with such a mentality.
- The leaders realized that if they suddenly burst in and took Him, they could have a riot on their hands. They must be more delicate about the matter. So they begin a series of attempts to cause Jesus to slip up and get the people to turn from Him. They try this at every level. First, they question him about His authority (v.2). Then they question Him about His politics and taxes (v.22). They then try to trip Him up theologically, asking about the resurrection and family (v.33). These we will see in coming weeks (D.V.)

APPLICATION

Basic theological assumption: While the temple building was destroyed, we have the fulfillment of what that meant in the local church. [1Timothy3:15](#). Not the building itself, but the gathering of God's people for worship.

1.) Do we recognize the Lord Jesus, revealed as High Priest, with authority over the house of God?

- One question often not asked in regards to worship is "what does the Lord Jesus want?", then answered by the Word of God.

2.) Do we reflect our Savior in having zeal for the purity of God's house and worship?

- What are the sacrifices of God? What is acceptable worship?

3.) Do we consider this place as a house of prayer for all the nations?

- This is one of the reasons for our prayer meeting. We receive letters from all around the world, and pray for the nations. As your pastors we have a continual burden to see the prayer meeting better attended by those of you who can. For some, perhaps you simply can't. But is it just that, or is it difficult? Where are priorities?

4.) Do we use the ritual of God's house as a covering for a life of sin?

The church is no refuge for sinners who come there to be safe from their sin. - Lenski

5.) Are we truly attentive to the teaching of the Lord Jesus?

- Are our interests ongoing? Are they transforming? Are we good hearers of the Word? (seen in doing)
- Or are we merely excited that Calvinism or Reformed theology is growing in popularity?