

When Jesus Threw Tables

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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This morning, let me encourage you to open your Bibles to Luke 19. As you're turning to Luke 19, just a reminder to those of you that are guests and even those of you that are long-term members, that we're continuing to walk through the Scriptures typically a day at a time and today as we come to Luke 19, we find one of the most uncharacteristic passages of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ of anywhere in Scripture. In fact, if we were just to have a casual conversation and discussion of how we see Jesus act and interact with other people, I think it goes without saying that he not only was but he is the epitome, he is the embodiment of mercy and grace and love and compassion, and we could spend the entirety not just of this hour but of the day sharing stories from Scripture of those whom he expressed himself in like manner. When there was a heated debate on how one was saved and how one gained eternity, he gathered the little children that were in the area and he used them as an example, getting down on his knees and saying, "You need to be like these little children." When there was a woman who was caught in reckless behavior, he sent away those that would condemn her and said, "Go and sin no more." Individuals such as Zacchaeus just a couple of chapters earlier, condemned by the culture but yet Jesus was willing to enter his home and to share a meal. Whether it is calming the storm, multiplying food, or healing those that were physically and/or spiritual ill, he was the embodiment of mercy and grace, compassion and love, and yet today as we turn to Luke 19, beginning in verse 45, there is this account that just seems like an outlier, there is this incident that happens just days before his crucifixion and eventual resurrection that seems so out of character yet at the same time in a moment we're about to see that when we put it in context, it is completely apropos for the setting.

Verse 45 of Luke 19, it says,

45 And he went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought; 46 Saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves. 47 And he taught daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy him, 48 And could not find what they might do: for all the people were very attentive to hear him.

This is the famous story that we have in the Bible of Jesus throwing the tables, casting out the money-changers, making a spectacle, for lack of better terms, of things, and today I want to discuss why is it that Jesus responded the way he did? Why is it that he spoke what he spoke and he did what he did? And by the way, just for the sake of biblical clarity here, this is not the first time that it had taken place. In fact, you go into the gospel of John 2, Jesus performs his first miracle, he turns the water into wine and shortly thereafter what we just read occurs in John.

Now it's actually in John, the beginning of his earthly ministry, here in Luke it's at the end of his earthly ministry. The gospel of John lays out the chronology for us and so that we see not just once but twice Jesus goes into this holiest of places, overturns the table, casts out the money-changers and makes a very emphatic declaration. Why would Jesus perform such an act? Why would he say such words? It just seems so uncharacteristic when you look at the rest of his life and ministry. And I think one of the struggles that we have is we take three verses here, or a few verses there, and we isolate them from their context, we remove them from the setting, and that's what causes the questions.

So I want to go back to verse 28. I want to go back to earlier that day and I want us to see what initiated this response. What was it that took place mostly likely just hours before, maybe even moments, that caused Jesus to do and say what he did. Verse 28 says,

28 And when he had thus spoken, he went before, ascending up to Jerusalem. 29 And it came to pass, when he was come nigh to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount called the mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, 30 Saying, Go ye into the village over against you; in the which at your entering ye shall find a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat: loose him, and bring him hither. 31 And if any man ask you, Why do ye loose him? thus shall ye say unto him, Because the Lord hath need of him. 32 And they that were sent went their way, and found even as he had said unto them. 33 And as they were loosing the colt, the owners thereof said unto them, Why loose ye the colt? 34 And they said, The Lord hath need of him. 35 And they brought him to Jesus: and they cast their garments upon the colt, and they set Jesus thereon. 36 And as he went, they spread their clothes in the way. 37 And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; 38 Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. 39 And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. 40 And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.

I want you to think about what initiated what we just read a few moments earlier. This is what we know as the triumphal entry or what we commonly refer to as Palm Sunday. Can we just agree that this should have been the highlight of his earthly ministry? I mean, think about it for just a moment. Here he comes descending on the Mount of Olives,

approaching that famous Temple Mount, walking through the Eastern Gate and according to what we just read, thousands and thousands of people have gathered. In fact, this was Passover, probably the largest crowd that Jerusalem would see at any point in a given year, and when he descends and when he goes into the Temple Mount, not only is he fulfilling Zechariah 9 but they're laying down their garments, they're laying down palm branches, they're declaring that he is the King.

Here's the problem: we've got some serious division taking place. I think oftentimes we think we're the only people or the only culture who has ever walked through a polarized environment but notice what it says in verse 39, "And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke your disciples." You know, it's interesting on what we know as Palm Sunday, tens of thousands of people crown him king and declare him ruler of their lives. In just a few days, Jesus Christ will go to Mount Calvary, they will place nails in his hands and his feet, and according to John 9, there will not be tens of thousands of them declaring him king, there will only be five. That's it. The Bible says that the Romans were there mocking him, the Jewish Pharisees were there ridiculing him, but according to John 19, there were five individuals declaring him king. All but John of Zebedee as far as the disciples are concerned have gone their separate ways.

So it begs the question: what took place here? What occurred? I'm going to tell you what occurred is you had a large group of people who had seen Jesus walk on the water, heal the lame and the sick, multiply the food, but a group of people who were the power brokers of their culture said, "We don't need this." A group of those who possessed their mortgages, held their bonds and could alter their reputation forever said, "Oh, no, no, no. We will not continue as you are doing." I think sometimes we forget the power and the influence that people can have over us. One moment we're declaring Jesus king and the next moment we're worried about our bank account. One moment we declare Jesus is the Creator of the earth come to redeem me, and the next thing we're concerned about is if they say something I'll lose my job. I think sometimes we forget the power of the division that took place, in fact, it would be just hours later where a man by the name of Pilate would say, "Who do you choose, this Jesus or Barabbas?" Do you remember who led the cheers? These same folks. These same individuals said, "Let his blood be upon us and our children."

What's the declaration that Jesus made all the way back in Matthew 10? Jesus made it clear to us that he did not come to send peace but a sword, that he would set at variance or at odds family members against each other, communities against each other, friends against each other. You know, it's interesting we live in a world and a time where we seem divided on so many different issues but the only issue that's truly worth dividing on is the issue of who Jesus is. That's it. And Jesus made it very clear, he said, "I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life, nobody comes to the Father but by me." And yet thousands of people were so distracted with the temporal, the earthly, and the struggles of this life that they go all the way down to five by the time he reaches what we know as Mount Calvary.

So what initiated him throwing tables? It's the very fact that they allowed the issues of today get in the way of the issues of eternity. But then when you see what was his response, notice verse 41,

41 And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, 42 Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. 43 For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, 44 And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.

What was Jesus' response? Between seeing what he saw and what we know as Palm Sunday and turning over tables, he does something that is as rare as turning over tables. He weeps. In fact, the other only place that we truly have in Scripture that declares him weeping is in John 11. It's the famous story of when Lazarus eventually is raised from the dead and after much discussion with his sisters, his family, and the community, right on the cusp of calling Lazarus to come forth, the Bible says in John 11:35, "And Jesus wept." Now there's a lot of debates on why Jesus wept in John 11. There are those that saw the anguish in the family, the misery of the community, and he hurt for them and he had empathy with him about their loss of Lazarus. There's others that would say the reason he wept is actually found in Luke 16 when there's an individual who steps out of this life into what the Bible called Abraham's bosom enjoying what we might call the glories of the next life of which would soon be removed.

You know, when Lazarus came forth, they removed the grave clothes in chapter 11, do you know what happened in chapter 12? It says they sought his life because of his testimony. You see, when Jesus weeps, we need to pay attention and here he weeps. Why does he weep? Because they don't get it. He is weeping because they can't see what is happening. He is weeping because they're listening to the wrong voices. He is weeping because he knows how the story is going to end up.

What does he say? Destruction is coming. Now he told them that it would occur in time after time in the Bible. People questioned, "Oh, it took decades to build this great building and you're going to tear it down and every stone is going to be gone?" You know, it took an entirety of about 40 years for this to take place. We know that Jesus goes to the cross, he raises from the dead, he ascends up into heaven, then the early church begins to navigate a very hostile environment. There in Jerusalem these Pharisees, these individuals who talked people out of what they should have done, they continue to be obstinate. The year was approximately 70 AD when the Romans came in and did the same thing Nebuchadnezzar had done hundreds of years earlier. They not only took over the city, they tore down the temple, and for 1,900 years that statement, "His blood be on us and our children," came to fruition, did it not? They were completely dispersed.

So his response, this weeping was over the destruction that he knew was coming but, you see, Jesus had declared this all through his life and ministry. How many times do you read him say something to this effect, "In the day that you know not of"? Or, "When you say peace, be warned for destruction comes. Your redemption draweth nigh." There's all of these chronological statements that basically communicate to us, "Don't be getting out your calendar and going too far in advance because you have no idea when it will come upon you." Then finally there is this response, finally there is this time where he goes into the temple, as I mentioned, for the second time. It has been an entirety of three years and there are those that are making a profit off of the sacrifice, there are those that are making a mockery of the faith, there are those that are taking advantage of people, who are ridiculing people, and what does he do? He does something so out of character. He takes the tables that they're seated at, he overturns them. He takes the individuals and rather than drawing them to himself, he literally casts them out of the temple.

Why is it that Jesus would do what he did? Well, we have to look at the big picture. 1. Thousands of people who declared him king have been talked out of their declaration and are going to find themselves nowhere to be found at Mount Calvary. 2. He knows that because of their rejection of him the only thing that can occur is destruction. Oh, but this is a demonstration, people, he is demonstrating to them not only what God has done in days past but what he continues to do when we do not listen to him. When we listen to the other voices, when we listen to the crowd, when we listen to anything that is contrary to him, what does the Lord consistently do? He goes and he turns over the table of our life, does he not? Read the Old Testament. How many times did he go to the Israelites and say, "Do you not remember what happened a few years ago? If you do not repent of your sins, it's going to happen again." He even goes to the southern kingdom for hundreds of years and said, "Did you not see what happened to your brothers and sisters up north? It's going to happen to you as well." And time and time again what do we do? This is humanity's problem, "It won't happen to me." That's what Adam and Eve said, right? In the garden of Eden they said, "Oh, this is actually going to be good for us." When Abram went into Hagar he thought it was a good idea. When David was with Bathsheba, it makes a whole lot of sense. We can go through story after story of how many times we think, "Oh, it's not that big a deal. I've got this." He is demonstrating to them that the Lord will continue to turn over that which we've trusted in more than him until he has our attention.

Can I ask you a question? You had some tables turned over lately? By the way, lest you forget, how about the table of our health turned over? How about the table of our economic system turned over? How about the aspects of feeling secure turned over? Let me ask you a question: how many more tables is it going to take? Because he just keeps turning them over. Those individuals who were seated at those tables and those individuals who came and were at the table, they were trusting in the things of this world more than the Creator of this world. Their security, their resources, everything about their wherewithal was in the temporal and the here and in the now. And again, Jesus turns over the table and says, "Do I have your attention?"

We know the rest of the story, do we not? Five people at Mount Calvary. The tomb is empty three days later and even less than that arrive that day. What is Jesus' declaration? It's interesting what he says here in verse 26,

46 ... It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves.

I mentioned earlier there's a chronological difference here that in John 2 it's at the beginning of his ministry. There when he overturns the table, right between turning water into wine and the conversation with Nicodemus, he makes this statement, "You've made my Father's house a den of thieves." Here he makes it personal, "My house," because in just a few days he is going to be tried illegally, he's going to be mocked ruthlessly, he is going to be beaten, as we would say, within an inch of his life, he will be scourged, he will be falsely accused, and then he will breathe his last breath. In fact, here in the gospel of Luke he says, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Do you know what the Bible says happens? That veil, that item that separated humanity from the Holy of Holies, that which represented that God is for us and will bless us and take care of us, what happened? It tears, does it not? It tears from the top to the bottom, and in response to that it says that the earth quaked.

"You have turned my house into a den of thieves." You know, in 1 Corinthians 6, it says that when we come to faith in Christ Jesus, when we believe on him as our Lord and our Savior, that we become the temple of God. Let me put it in Luke 19 terms: we become his house. Can I ask you an honest question? What is the status of his house today? Not only to you as an individual but to us corporately and collectively? Can we stand guilty today of turning his house into a den of thieves? Are we acting more like those who were on that Temple Mount that day than the five that were at the foot of the cross? You know, this is an unusual story in the life and ministry of Jesus, trying to get our attention. What does he say will happen if you don't pay attention to this one? He says destruction cometh.

Before our time of response, I'm going to ask you one very important last question for each and every one of us: how many more tables is it going to take before you get your house right?