

Mark 11:15-19 The Rampage of Jesus Falls Ch. PM 4/30/2023

The acted-out parable of the cursing of the fig tree now has its fulfillment and reality in our Lord's actions to condemn false religion.

Our anger tells us what is important to us. The anger of Jesus tells us that what is important to Jesus is worship of God and spiritual fruitfulness.

How can we emphasize sufficiently the importance of the Temple in ancient Jerusalem? The temple and everything having to do with the Temple is central and huge in significance.

Consider the splendor of the Temple. The huge crowds of visitors from many foreign countries that would come, especially at the time of Passover to the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. Historians tell us that one Springtime 255,000 lambs were sacrificed in the temple in Jerusalem.

Consider also the attention given to the temple. The gatherings. The huge feasts that would take place there. The interest, the activities, the following. You think people are fans or fanatics about the Packers, Brewers, Bucks or Badgers, or Taylor Swift? You should see the attention that people gave the ancient Temple!

Nearby there was a hill or mount called the Mount of Olives. There were 4 open markets, like our state fairs, where visitors could buy doves or lambs or other offerings to worship God in the temple.

The question is, why were they recently starting to sell animals inside the temple itself? What right-thinking leaders of the temple would allow that? That brings us to our main point for this sermon.

Jesus did more than cleanse the temple – He replaced it with Himself!

1. Rampage against false worship. (v.15-16)

Jesus is well-known to have expressed His deep anger. I am using the word rampage, and by that I mean, a holy and sinless rampage. A series of actions that were violent in nature, and yet were fully justified as the holy and correct reaction for our Savior to have against the flagrant violation of the purpose for the temple. The purpose of the temple was true worship of God. The temple was for seeking God through prayer and teaching of His Word. Nothing else.

In order to understand the rampage of Jesus, first, let me transport you from where we are right now - in your imagination - back in time to the ancient temple scene of this incident with Jesus.

It is worth it for you to join me on this imaginary journey, because all 4 Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John report to us how Jesus disrupted the tables in the temple. I believe the one in the Gospel of John happened earlier, and the one in Matthew/Mark/Luke happened later. So, I believe there were two times that Jesus disrupted the temple.

First, realize that Jesus did not hurt anyone. Jesus did not take advantage of the moment to take or steal any money or any other property or animals. Jesus did

not damage, or burn anything. For example, if there were financial accounting records of who legitimately owed money to whom, Jesus did not destroy any of those records. Jesus did not start any larger movement of any growing group of people taking action as a crowd to now similarly turn tables in other places and in other cities. No. Nor was this the start of a military revolution. In fact, the temple authorities did not see it necessary to arrest Jesus, or take any other immediate counter-action against Jesus. A little while after these actions, Jesus was free to leave the temple, and other people were free to set the tables back up again; we can presume that operations returned to normal the next day. So, what did Jesus accomplish? More than anyone present that day could have imagined!

Verse 15 tells us that Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, and furthermore, that Jesus entered the temple. So, everything that next happens in our passage is happening inside of the temple building. We have to start with an understanding of that scene. Their temples, and what they did there, are different from our church building, and what we do here.

In the modern New Testament age, when we think of church, we think of entering, and find Bibles, hymnbooks, baptism fonts, Lord's Supper tables, pulpits chairs, and musical instruments. We come here to sing and pray hear God's Word read and preached, hear announcements of God's blessing, to give, and to fellowship. It is all very clean, and can be done in a suit or a dress, without soiling your clothes.

In the ancient temple, it was different. The temple building was a place for the sacrifice of animals, who just prior to sacrifice, were live animals that need to be butchered. So, we are talking about cattle! Where do we find cattle in our county and in our state? In a barn! Cattle belong in the barn, right! So, already, we must understand the scene of the temple, and how it is different from our conception of a church building, and the scene in here.

Visiting worshippers may not be able to travel from long distances while bringing their animal. So, when they arrive in Jerusalem, they were hoping to buy an animal that had passed the needed criteria in order for that animal to be sacrificed. There was a need for farmers to have animals to sell. There were worshippers who needed to buy animals. Buying and selling would be a normal and needed and godly thing to do. Somewhere.

The issue is where? Where should the animals be displayed? Where should the transactions take place – the required part of a potential buyer seeing the animal he intends to purchase, followed by the next step of buyers and sellers talking about a price, and the progression of the negotiation reaching a point of both buyer and seller agreeing on that price, and the final step of buyers and sellers actually exchanging of the money to go in one direction, while the animal goes in the other direction. The question is where shall all of this be conducted?

Having moneychangers with tables or stalls is not exceptional or unusual. What is questioned, and the only thing questioned, is whether the location chosen for that activity is properly to be provided within the temple or not! In or out? Shall the transactions take place within the temple precincts, or somewhere outside of the temple building?

For example, what if animals were sold nearby on a hill called the Mount of Olives? A small mountain that had olive trees on it. What if animals were kept over there, and the farmers could welcome travelers, and all the trading and banking would take place over there? Well, that is what used to happen. It was only within the few years prior to this incident with Jesus, that the animals, their farmers, and the traders were allowed to move the location of their transactions into the very temple itself, into the large open entryway area called the Court of the Gentiles.

This strong objection of Jesus was not to the trade itself. Jesus was not against the need for animals to be brought to town, to be sold, to be bought, to be sacrificed in worship to God. Jesus was not even objecting to any exploitation by the traders. If that were the case, Jesus could just throw out the sellers, and not those poor travelers seeking to buy a lamb in order to worship. But Jesus threw out both sellers and buyers. There was something that the buyers were doing wrong, not just the price gouging of the sellers. Jesus is mounting a bigger objection than just a rip off or a scam. Jesus was concerned about something deeper than just fair pricing.

It was not the wrong price. It was the wrong place.

It was the wrong place, because this is the temple.

This activity of buying and selling is fine, when it happens elsewhere.

The problem is that it ought never to happen in the temple, because buying and selling is not the reason that God called for the building of the temple!

The temple courts were not for buying and selling.

In Matthew and Luke, this incident is reported, but only Mark has added these words in verse 16, “*And [Jesus] would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.*” Do you see how verse 16 confirms the emphasis of this passage? That Jesus was not against buying and selling, but rather the proper use compared to the improper use of the temple courts. Jesus was not allowing the temple court to be used as a shortcut or thoroughfare for people carrying heavy loads. There is no mention of buying and selling in verse 16. Only the using of the area. The issue is not what they were doing but where they were doing it. They can carry items elsewhere, but just not “*through the temple!*” The temple court is not a short bypath. It is not a shortcut!

2. Teaching about the true temple. (v.17)

Now Jesus spoke about His actions. Jesus explained why the location is different and must be treated correctly.

Verse 17 is the teaching of Jesus to spell out why His actions were appropriate to stop the misuse of the temple. In verse 17, Jesus used two OT quotations.

First is a quotation from Isaiah 56:7, in which Isaiah prophesied of a future time when, in the coming age of the Messiah, outsiders and foreigners would enjoy full rights with God's own nation in the worship of God in Jerusalem. Please note that this was quoted by Jesus while Jesus was standing in the court of the Gentiles! And here in Mark, the phrase "for all the nations" is included, while it is missing in Matthew and Luke. It simply means that Mark was making a point of applying this story to a theme in Mark's gospel. The theme is that the gospel is for the gentiles too.

The Court of the Gentiles was as far into the temple that non-Jewish people were allowed to go. So, if a non-Jewish worshipper came in, how could that person find a quiet area away from the animals, away from the negotiations of the trading, and away from the people making a shortcut through there? Mark is highlighting this, because Mark's intended audience was Gentiles! This was a temple court. And this part of the temple was the only area designed for people from all nations to seek the one true and living God.

Other activities could take place there. Such as, Jesus could teach there, which he is doing in verse 17. But other activities could not take place there - such as carrying objects through there, or setting up tables, chairs, and selling booths in there. Above all else, that area must remain available for what? What was the primary purpose of that area of the temple?

Listen carefully to the teaching of Jesus in verse 17, "*and [Jesus] 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.'*"

So, what was the primary purpose of that area of the temple? Prayer! A house of prayer! That area of the temple must remain available for Gentiles to seek God in prayer! Prayer by people from all nations. If anyone from any nation of the world wanted to seek the God of this temple, the God of Israel, and had traveled to actually enter that temple court where the visitors from any nation were allowed to enter, what was Jesus passionate about those visitors being able to do? To pray to God!

In verse 17, Jesus in His teaching also quoted from a second OT passage. The second passage had a negative message. The phrase was "den of robbers." What was going on in the temple was not just a distraction from true worship, but also had the added aspect of turning the temple court away from a house of prayer into a den of robbers. It is quite possible that the prices were shamefully high, and

that scams were common. However, that is still not the concern of Jesus in this passage. The word robber here does not mean scammer. Rather, it means robber or bandit or revolutionary. It is a person who would revolt against the whole overseeing authority. It is the idea that those who go out and do wrong, then return to the temple as a place of safety, like a cave of revolutionaries. The team of those doing wrong would have a criminal hideout in the temple court! It is not supposed to be a meeting place for people rebelling against God and God's authority, rather it is supposed to be a place where people come in to pray alone to God or pray in small groups to God. In prayer, the people were to seek to submit to God's authority, and seek His will for themselves! They are not to use God's own temple to rebel against God, but rather to be saved by God!

3. Two opposite reactions to the new temple. (v.18-19)

In verse 18, we read, “...*the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy [Jesus], for they feared [Jesus], because all the crowd was astonished at [Jesus'] teaching. (v.19) And when evening came [Jesus] went out of the city.*”

Now for the first time since Jesus had arrived in Jerusalem, did we hear about the leaders, these chief priests and scribes, now determining to destroy Jesus. It does not surprise us here, because all the way back in Mark 3:6, we remember that the Pharisees met “...*with the Herodians against [Jesus], how to destroy Jesus.*”

Here stood Jesus, in the temple that these chief priests understood to be under their authority. Here Jesus had disrupted tables, and Jesus had taught out loud in public that the temple was not being operated and conducted as God required for the temple to be operated and conducted. These actions and words of Jesus were a clear challenge to the authority of the chief priests.

What Mark our author wanted us to notice here in verse 18 is the two opposite reactions to Jesus. The authorities were against Jesus, but the crowds were for Jesus. The religious leaders feared Jesus, but the crowd was drawn to Jesus. The chief priests and scribes were seeking a way to destroy Jesus, while the people in the crowd reacted with astonishment that Jesus would and could say such things publicly about the temple. Perhaps they were equally astonished at the fact that Jesus seemed to get away with it, as much as they were astonished at the content of the teaching of Jesus. Prayer!? They had not heard much about people coming from around the world to seek God in the temple by means of prayer. Wow.

The temple being a place to seek God and find Him! Wow, astonishing. Wow, that was new. The crowd's reaction was positive and they were very interested. The leaders of the temple had the opposite reaction – negative, and very disinterested. The crowd seemed to smell life in the words of Jesus. The leaders seemed to want Jesus dead so bad that they could taste it.

So, the crowd in Jerusalem seems to be on the side of Jesus! Right after Jesus had a rampage throwing tables around, then Jesus explained His actions, and won the crowd over! It made perfect sense to the crowd.

Or at least, the crowd had heard enough already that they marked Jesus as a man with a distinctive message. Jesus was saying something new and different. The crowds were not repelled. The crowds were attracted. Jesus was a radical. Jesus was disrupting things. Jesus was changing everything, but they seemed to immediately see His point and agree enough to be hungry for more of His teaching. Whatever minimal amount of teaching that Jesus was already able to give in the aftermath of his temple protest, was enough to have the interest of the spectators in the temple court, the interest of the crowds in the temple precincts, and seemingly the attention of the whole city. Thus the need for Jesus, in verse 19, “*when evening came,*” to go “*...out of the city.*”

This statement of the end of the day, and the departure of Jesus from the city, allows our author Mark to emphasize this. Mark drew a line under this, and circled it and highlighted it, and put a checkmark in the margin. All of this was so that Mark could return to tell the rest of the story about the fig tree in verses 20-25. Mark was telling us that the curse of the fig tree is tied to the clearing of the temple.

In verses 27-33, the leaders in the temple will approach Jesus with the official challenge to his actions and words. They will ask Jesus by what authority could He overturn tables, and give out public indictments of temple practices? But before we get there, Mark has us looking again at the fig tree. The fig tree is the illustration. The fig tree helps us to not miss the general lesson. Have we learned the lesson of the fig tree? The fig tree is the key to understanding what Jesus has done in the temple!

Let’s review the lesson of the fig tree.

The fig tree promised figs, but did not deliver, and so cursed by Christ.

The temple promised worship, but did not deliver, so cursed by Christ.

Notice that in verses 24-25, Jesus taught about prayer still further!

Since the fig tree stood withered, so too the temple would wither.

No more fruit again from that fig tree.

No more worship again from that temple.

Jesus had come not to prune the fig tree to make it bear figs. Jesus came to destroy it.

Jesus had come not to fix the temple to make it have true worship. Jesus came to destroy the temple and replace it with Himself!

Between the cursing of the fig tree in verses 12-14 and the withering of the fig tree in verses 20-25, stands the event of Jesus clearing out the temple. The story of the fig tree is interrupted to tell the story of Jesus clearing out the temple.

Jesus was not cleansing the temple. Jesus was shutting it down and replacing it! Temple worship had failed. It had lost its focus. Christ must do more than purify the temple and overturn some tables. He must replace the temple with Himself. To hear proof of this, we read from just two chapters later, in Mark 13:2, where Jesus said, *“Do you see these great [temple] buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be trampled down.”* The temple had been making a promise that the temple could not fulfill – the temple was promising to bring people to God in worship. But instead, the temple was misleading people and not leading them to God. Jesus cursed the fig tree and Jesus turned the tables, because Jesus was announcing that He was about to close down the temple! Jesus Himself would become the temple and He would lead the people to God. Jesus gave a planned demonstration, intentionally done during prime time for maximum exposure. Turning over the tables would be a demonstration calculated to interrupt business as usual and bring the immediacy of Christ’s reign abruptly and forcefully to the attention of all. Sadly, after Jesus turned the tables, we can well assume that the tables were back in place the next day. Jesus would need to take more severe action than turning over tables. Jesus would need to become the temple, and mount the cross and die in order to cleanse the people of their sins, and bring us to God.

Conclusion:

1. Rejoice in our salvation through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

How do we enter the presence of God in worship? It is not by the sacrifice of animals. All the sacrifices point to the one true Sacrifice.

Hebrews 9:12, Jesus *“...entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.”*

The Apostle John wrote in Revelation of being told to look for a Lion, but he saw a lamb! Revelation 5:5-6, *“And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.” And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth...”*

We look at the Man in the temple overturning tables, and we think of a Lion, and actually He is the Lamb who was slain for us!

Revelation 21:22, *“And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.”*

Our salvation is granted to us only by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, and so we rejoice in our salvation.

2. Be astonished at the passion of Jesus for His worshippers.

When Jesus came, a lot of people in that area believe that when the Messiah came, He would purge the temple of Gentiles. Instead, Jesus came and purged the temple FOR Gentiles! The religious show in the temple was glitz and glamor and an empty embarrassment. Instead of bringing people to God, they obscured the way to God until no one could find God in God's own temple. Jesus came and said, "Enough!"

Paul spoke to the philosophers of his day speaking with the same passion about worship in Acts 17:26, that God "...made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him." Paul understood that God is inviting all nations to feel their way toward God and find God, be saved, and enter into true worship of God.

3. Keep in mind that we are the temple of God, even as we worship God together by His Word and Spirit.

1 Corinthians 3:16, "*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?*"

Those who believe in Jesus are the temple. The church is the temple.

Over and over, Jesus has shown in our study of the Gospel of Mark that the people of God will no longer be defined in an ethnic way. The new people that Christ is calling into existence are not defined by race, ethnicity, or political ties, but rather by the fruit of the kingdom and the worship of God. We are a new global family of worshippers made up of believers in Christ from every ethnic group on the planet.

The church is the house of prayer for all nations.

We welcome anyone who calls on the name of God to join us as we seek God by His Word and Spirit, and worship Him truly, from our hearts.

This is what the rampage of Jesus was passionate to protect.

Jesus said in Joh 4:24, "*God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.*" There is nothing more important than the worship of God.

Revelation 4:11, "*Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.*"