

## **“JESUS CLEANS HIS FATHER’S HOUSE.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Scripture Texts: Mark 11:15-19**

### **Introduction.**

You can tell a lot about a nation or a religion by what they worship and where they worship. The Temple in Israel was the very heart and center of all Jewish worship and religion. It represented that place where God met with man.

The large outer court that surrounds the Temple was called the Court of the Gentiles. It covered nearly thirty five acres. It was the court where Gentiles were allowed to enter to pray and worship the one true God. The Gentiles who came to worship Israel’s God were sometimes called God-fearers, people like the Ethiopian Eunuch or the Roman Centurion whose servant Jesus healed. The temple was supposed to be a house of prayer for all nations.

This court had become filled with stockyards of bulls, sheep, goats, and birds, a veritable petting zoo of merchants buying and selling, banks exchanging money, the equivalent of ATMs. The volume of trade going on was staggering and this was Passover.

The Jewish historian Josephus recorded that in 65AD over a quarter of a million lambs were slaughter at the Temple. The amount of people and animals must have been deafening.

### **Mark 11:15-19.**

Jesus had of course entered the temple several times in the past three years. But twice, once at the beginning of His ministry and once at the end, it was different. Jesus saw clearly what everyone else seemed to neglect or ignore. God’s temple was an unholy disorder of merchants and buyers and sellers. In fact it had become a short cut for commerce.

He was getting their attention and warning the Jews that they had polluted their religion and that God was about to bring about a new order. This is the first revealing of the curse on Israel foreshadowed in the cursing of the fig tree down to the root.

Was He trying to purify the temple and restore right worship and right sacrifices? No, His action was a symbolic one. He was showing that God had given Him the role of forever changing the worship of God. Jesus was the new prophet, priest and king.

Jesus didn’t come to clean the temple, he came to destroyed it and replace it. He said, “tear down this temple and in three days I will raise it up again.” The new Church of Jesus Christ would be the true house of prayer as all nations streamed to it as the Gospel is proclaimed the whole world is called to faith.

A prophetic vision of this is given to Ezekiel:

**Ezekiel 47:1-9** Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The

water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. 2 Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and behold, the water was trickling out on the south side. 3 Going on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water, and it was ankle-deep. 4 Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was knee-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was waist-deep. 5 Again he measured a thousand, and it was a river that I could not pass through, for the water had risen. It was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through. 6 And he said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?" Then he led me back to the bank of the river. 7 As I went back, I saw on the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other. 8 And he said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, and enters the sea; when the water flows into the sea, the water will become fresh. 9 And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes.

It starts as a trickle down from the threshold of the temple and as it spreads it gets deeper and deeper and wherever it goes it gives fresh water teeming with life. A foreshadowing of Jesus.

### **Was Jesus angry?**

I hesitate to use the word anger, it's not used by any of the writers of the Gospels. For us anger is most often expressed as an emotion and Jesus was not being driven by run-away emotions.

Jonathan Edwards wrote a book called *Religions Affections*. By affections he meant "strong inclinations of the soul that are manifested in thinking, feeling and acting."

Emotions are generally equated with just feelings. Emotions are fickle, they come and go, they rise and fall, but the true affections of the heart are like heat seeking missiles.

Affections are more than feelings, they are strong inclinations or convictions or intense longings of the will that lead to action. Jesus was driven by what the Apostle John called zeal for His Father's house (John 2:17).

That this wasn't a fit of rage but zealous affection for His Father's house is seen in that in the midst of this cleansing Jesus was teaching. Jesus grounded what He was doing in Scripture, He quoted Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Oh that our lives were so grounded and tuned to the standard of God's Word so we could say that all we did was righteous and true and faithful.

Jesus applied the complaint of Jeremiah to His own day. The temple was still corrupt five centuries after Jeremiah. The temple was still an empty sham, a den of hypocrisy, outward actions with no inner connection, the form of godliness without the power.

God didn't care about the buildings or the ceremonies. What did God say through Samuel about King Saul's disobedience?

**I Samuel 15:22** And Samuel said, “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.”

God cares supremely about the heart. When Jesus says, “My Father’s house shall be a house of prayer” prayer stands for all that is worship, all that we do to lift up and honor and glorify God.

When the woman at the well questioned Jesus about the location of worship:

**John 4:21, 23-24** Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father... 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

They who would truly worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth. They must not only worship in outward actions or ceremonies, but with all their heart, soul, mind and strength.

### **Application and conclusion.**

There are so many applications of this text for us this morning.

*First*, we have to ask ourselves how does this sort of thing happen? How do the people of God allow such a thing? How does the only nation chosen and set apart and blessed by the one true God fall so far? How do a people who were once in bondage, who were delivered by so miraculous of means, who were lead through the Red Sea, who were fed by manna from heaven and water out of solid rock for forty years and given a Promised Land flowing with milk and honey forget where they have come from? How can a people who were given Abraham as their father and Moses as their leader and David as their king and Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah as their prophets wander so far from their history and heritage? How does this sort of thing happen?

When a people experience peace and prosperity they tend to neglect their religion, they find their faith to be an extra-curricular activity. When a people begin to neglect their God, they start finding other gods, more convenient gods, less demanding gods. They lose their fear of the Lord. They wander from His ways and begin to follow the ways of the world.

Weeds flourish when they aren’t pulled out. We wander from the right path when we don’t receive correction, rebuke and discipline. Young people get into trouble for lack of training and discipline. Churches and denominations allow unbiblical teaching and practices to take root when no one exercises discipline.

Where were the priests and rabbis, where were the teachers and elders, why was no one saying anything, why was no one objecting?

The famous Edmund Burke quote comes to mind, “The only thing necessary for evil to triumph/flourish is for good men to do nothing.”

The silence of the Jews in response to Jesus’ actions makes one wonder if in this matter they knew Jesus was absolute right and they were guilty as charged. The Jews who allowed this to happen were just as guilty as those who were doing it.

It's a terrible thing for a religion to become stained and polluted and corrupted. And it's a worse thing for it to go unnoticed by the people. God was being mocked and no one was speaking against it.

The Church of Jesus Christ always stands in need of reformation from the abuses that creep in often times unawares. We need special vision and discernment to see our own sins in this regard.

We must not remain silent whether it's false teaching within the church or immorality in the public square, in the court of the Gentiles; whether in God's house or in the world's house.

We must not lose our voice and give license to those even with good intentions but bad practices.

Calvin urges, "Those who have no public authority must fight with the freedom of their tongues what they cannot correct by force" (*Harmony, III*, p. 4).

Use the knowledge you have and the tongue God has given you in the place He has put you to defend what is true and right.

**Second**, there is a place for reverence and respect in our worship. We must not cheapen it in our words, actions or thoughts. We should train ourselves and our children that we are not just going to church, but we're coming to worship. That's an important shift in understanding and attitude.

When we gather on Sundays let's prepare our hearts and minds. Let's come having thought about what we are doing, why we are doing it, and in whose presence we will be.

And we should seek a certain reverence and awe in our worship, not a casualness, or informality. Not slouched or disinterested. Not seeking entertainment, but seeking an audience with the Lord of hosts, the Lord God Almighty. A joyful reverence with true and glad hearts.

Jesus notices how people behave in His house of worship, He knows our hearts and the attitude with which we worship. He knows our hypocrisy, our lack of interest, our lack of fear of the Lord, our lack of love for Him and for His people.

Are any of us here in body but far from here in mind and spirit? Where have our minds been just this morning? In the barn, at the office, at the movies, wherever you were last night, whatever you have going on this week, replaying that argument you had, thinking about what you looked at or read on the internet? Repent, confess and ask God to guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus. Ask the Spirit's help to deliver us from evil and evil thoughts and the evil one.

**Third**, we are temples of the Holy Spirit, let us cleanse our temple to be pure in heart.

**I Corinthians 6:19-20** Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?

**Psalm 24:3-4** Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?  
4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.

The GEMS girls challenged us last week to think on whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely commendable and excellent (Philippians 4:8).

Let us worship God in spirit and in truth, from hearts made pure by repentance and faith.

“To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God” (Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple, *Nature, Man and God*).

Keep yourselves from sexual immorality, from everything that defiles. Rid yourselves of the love of money, of sinful ambition and pride, and of laziness, slothfulness. Judge yourself before you stand before the judge. Examine your own heart and soul. Repent and confess and come clean. Seek and pray for holiness with tears, with zealous affection.

May we never resist Jesus as He continually comes to clean the temple of our hearts, to drive out greed and lust and pride and fear of man and self-centeredness. In fact far from resisting may we submit and cooperate with the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and welcome the Father’s loving discipline and chastisement.

We are all created with that place within us where we are confronted with God, and where we have the most intimate real relationship with God. What is the condition of your temple? What does Jesus find when He comes?

**Finally**, does our church have a reputation for being known as a house of prayer? Are we known to be a praying people? The Christians in South Korea actually have the reputation and for good reason. There are thousands of prayer gatherings before work every day of the week. There are countless prayer meetings in every city. The Presbyterian missionaries who started there over a hundred and sixty years ago laid a very good and solid foundation in the importance and power of prayer. As a result Christianity has flourish to the point that that tiny nation has passed us up as the most missionary sending nation in the world.

Does our prayer life show how much we believe in God and how much we depend on God?

May our zeal for God deepen as it’s fueled by prayer from a pure heart made clean by the presence of Jesus Christ and the sanctifying power of His Holy Spirit. May our zeal for God increase as we speak up for righteousness and truth in God’s House and in God’s world. May God be glorified as we follow the example of Jesus whether it’s to His House or to His cross.