

## PURIFIES

Mark 11:15-19, 12:41-44

In our study of Mark's Gospel we find ourselves in the Last Week in the life of Jesus leading up to the Crucifixion and Burial. The time had come to increase the intensity of the message of the identity of Jesus. Many things Jesus previously did and said implied (sometimes very strongly) that He was indeed the Messiah. The first day of this week was what we now call Palm Sunday. This was the time of The Triumphal Entry.

With this one act He would declare to the Jews Who He was. Entering the city riding on a donkey had been done by previous leaders of their nation. The Romans would miss the point and would not be stirred to take any action. However, the Jewish leaders would not be able to let this move go unchallenged. They were already disturbed by the reports that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. What Jesus did in entering Jerusalem this way fulfilled prophecy recorded in Zechariah 9:9.

*Application to our lives:* In our interactions with people, we build rapport and develop relationships. However, there comes a time in which we must openly declare "who we are" in relationship to the Son of God. Such a declaration may cause a commotion when we do that.

On the second day of that week (Monday), Jesus returned to Jerusalem and along the way, we find the account of the encounter with the fig tree. This tree was a picture of Judaism or the religious situation of physical Israel – all leaves and no fruit. It had the right appearance but provided no beneficial impact. It was all ritual and imagery, but it was corrupted by the ways of the world. Immediately following Jesus' pronouncement of what would happen to that fig tree we find Jesus making a statement about evidence of the corruption that had become a part of the Jewish religious system. That brings us to the temple which was the center of religious activity.

### Cleansed – 11:15-17

<sup>15</sup> Then they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; <sup>16</sup> and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. <sup>17</sup> And He began to teach and say 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 ROBBERS' DEN." Mark 11:15–17 (NASB95)

Confrontations with the "establishment" and the status quo of life are inevitable if real changes for the better are ever to be made. Situations left to themselves only get worse and more confused. Restoring them to their proper place requires work and sacrifice. The conditions in the Temple at the time Jesus took action were indications of how far from "God's ideal" that things had deteriorated.

There are spiritual lessons to be learned in these accounts that would relate to us as the church and also to us as individuals who are described as the "Temple of God."

The first thing that we can note is that the place where the misalignments of everyday activities with the revealed fundamental, foundational principles found in the Scripture was so evident was in the "court of the Gentiles." This was the only place where non-Israelites were allowed. The picture that such a person would get of what Jehovah God was all about when viewing the "center of religious activity" was thoroughly distorted. Things people would see were buying and selling, hustle and bustle, a din of noise, exchanging money, and a convenient bypass or shortcut for anyone and everyone passing through that area. It was not a whole lot different from what they might experience in the downtown market areas. It would be difficult for us to think that a non-Jew would be drawn to seek to know more about the God of the Jews

from what he or she could observe associated with the “temple of God.” For the typical Jew, they really weren’t all that concerned about sharing “God” with Gentiles.

So what is the picture that we in the church present to the world today in the way we do things? Sometimes the only interaction an unbeliever has with “the church” is being asked to buy a ticket to a pancake breakfast that is for the purpose of raising money to fund a project. Other opportunities might be being invited to come get free food or free candy at a function that is in competition with a worldly pagan celebration. Another popular interaction is to come to a free concert where the performers are selling records or CDs of their entertainment. Sometimes there is a lot of hustle and bustle and there is certainly a din of noise with some of the newer music venues. All this doesn’t sound much like a “house of prayer.” While we want to make the point that there is so much more that is “good” that is going on, it is not what the “nations” (outsiders) are witnessing.

Notice the quote from Isaiah that Jesus spoke regarding what was happening. The words “for all the nations” were specifically targeted to the Gentiles or the nonbeliever and it was in that venue specifically designated for them that the corruptions which had developed over the decades or maybe even the centuries were being carried out. What do we (the modern day church) present to the world? Is it a place of worship and prayer or is it just like any other secular organization that is involved in making presentations, providing entertainment, doing some good service projects, and providing fellowship with others who have similar interests?

#### Feared – 11:18-19

<sup>18</sup> The chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching. <sup>19</sup> When evening came, they would go out of the city. Mark 11:18–19 (NASB95)

When our arguments are so illogical and all the evidence points toward the fact that our opponent is right and many people are supporting the opposition; the logic of the world would tell us to just kill the opposition. This was the situation in which the Jewish leaders found themselves when Jesus literally turned the tables (over) on them and confronted them with the truths they had been ignoring for the past three and a half years.

There were large crowds of Passover pilgrims from various parts of the world and they were blown away and amazed by the teaching they heard being proclaimed by Jesus. This popularity kept the authorities from boldly arresting Him when He was in public places such as the Temple area.

These “authorities” were the elders which were influential lay leaders, the chief priests who at that time were Sadducees, and the teachers of the Law or scribes which were mostly Pharisees. These “authorities” were well represented in the Sanhedrin which was the Jewish high court. It is somewhat paradoxical that these “powerful” people feared Jesus whom they claimed was just a poor itinerant preacher from Galilee who was causing trouble for them. They had become obsessed with the idea that He had to be eliminated.

Their fear was likely related to the situation getting out of control and the very thing the Zealots were hoping would happen would come to pass. The Zealots were thinking in terms of an uprising of the people that would lead to the overthrow of the Roman occupiers and the return to the glory of the days of David and Solomon. The Jewish leaders were thinking in terms of an uprising of the people that would lead to harsh persecution by the Roman occupiers and a replacement (by the Romans) of those “authorities” (elders, high priests, and scribes) that would cause them to lose their positions.

The fear of losing their powerful positions that might come about by an uprising of the

people if Jesus was arrested caused them to attempt to damage Jesus' popularity or to find ways to eliminate Him without the danger of a popular uprising. We are familiar with the accounts of them sending experts in the law to try to entrap Jesus into saying something that would damage his support by the common people or would bring down the wrath of the Roman government on Him on charges of colluding to overthrow or rebel against Rome. They tried such tactics as challenging Him as to His authority or His credentials to do what he had done the previous day in cleansing the Temple. Part of the effort to discredit Jesus was trying to entrap Him with questions regarding paying taxes, what was the most important commandment, and similar "theological" questions that were debated by the religious people of that day. None of that worked and these so-called leaders found that everything they tried backfired on them and put them in a worse position.

Those Jewish religious leaders thought they had no choices left to them and so they essentially decided (before any trial was held) that Jesus must be killed. The next step was to determine how to arrest (seize) Him in a nonpublic way. Their initial plan was to wait until the big crowds that came for Passover had gone away. However, an unexpected offer from Judas Iscariot caused them to change their plans.

We are familiar with the eventual outcome. The result was that the arrest was made in a remote area and under the cover of darkness when the crowds of supporters were not around. They even held the trial in the middle of the night to hide what they were doing.

One of the lessons we should learn from all this is that when we implement change, then opposition comes from the resulting confrontation. Just as the religious leaders and the lawyers were not going to let what Jesus did go unchallenged, when we in the church attempt to change the way things are done we will find resistance and opposition and persecution.

The opposition we encounter is many times related to a specific issue such as abortion or same-gender marriage; however, the real concern and push back comes from a deeper sense of the answer to the question of what kind of nation will we have – is it going to be a nation that honors God or will we have a totally secular society. In the same way, the Jewish leaders seemed to be more upset by the chants of the children proclaiming Jesus to be "Son of David" than they were regarding the wrecking of the outer court of the Temple. The Messianic implication of the children's chant was not lost on the leaders nor on Jesus. By His refusal to rebuke them, He gave tacit testimony to the truth of His person. He simply referred them to appropriate Scripture and left them to wrestle with it. Arguing with people who are spiritually insensitive (who are righteous in their own estimation) is totally useless. Jesus did not engage in it and neither should we.

#### Observed – 12:41-42

<sup>41</sup> And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. <sup>42</sup> A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. Mark 12:41-42 (NASB95)

After the religious leaders and their surrogates had exhausted all their "politically correct" questions that were popular during that time, they left without accomplishing anything with regard to the people's opinion of Jesus and His teachings. Jesus then had an opportunity to check out the "religious" activity that was happening in another part of the Temple. This time He observed what was happening in the court of the women. It was in this place that people could publically give their offerings and since there were many Passover pilgrims in the area, people were taking the opportunity to give. Some were giving generously and others were giving their annual voluntary payment for the support of the temple.

There were thirteen giving stations where specific collections for such things as daily offerings, wood for the burnt offering, frankincense for the incense offering, money to purchase turtle doves, and similar designations. These separate collection points provided those who gave a sense that they had some “control” over that for which their offering would be used.

There are several possible things we can learn from Mark’s account of this situation. One thing is that while there were many controversial things happening that captured the attention of the people and caused division among the people, the ongoing work of the Temple was still in operation and it needed to be supported. Many of the priest who carried out the daily duties of making sacrifices and offerings for themselves and the people were not really seriously concerned about the theological questions that were consuming their leaders.

Another thing that we can learn is that “why we give” and the “extent of our giving” is critically influenced by “who we are” and our “relationship to God.” Our motives for giving can range from pride, guilt, obligation, care for others, to devotion and love for God. Jesus touched upon this issue when He had issued a warning regarding those who did things for show and to be seen of others because they wanted to be praised by other people. That sort of motivation could have been fueled by the public giving format in the temple. Many times pride and recognition (fame) will lead people to give generously.

There is nothing in the observed behavior that would tell us whether those who gave large sums of money were giving from a motive of pride, guilt, obligation, care, or love. In the same way we cannot know the heart of the widow regarding her motivation for giving. There is nothing that would prevent a “poor” (limited means) person from giving pridefully. In the same way there is nothing that would prevent a “rich” (abundant means) person from giving based on his or her love for the Lord.

#### Commended – 12:43-44

<sup>43</sup> Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, “Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; <sup>44</sup> for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on.” Mark 12:43–44 (NASB95)

While people’s motivation for giving is certainly important it is not usually observable to us, but God knows what is the basis for all giving. We could also argue that our own giving motivation is difficult for even us to know since the “thoughts and intents of the heart” are intertwined in a complex way for most of us.

The thing that Jesus observed and that on which He commented was related to the sacrificial aspect of giving. Some (probably most) gave from their surplus and this widow gave sacrificially. In the first case, those giving from their surplus were giving from “what they had” and in the second case the widow was giving from “who she was.” This contrast may have been a commentary on the different approaches of the wealthy and the poor, the powerful and the powerless, or the leaders and the common people. It could also have been a commentary on the difference between the approach to God by Judaism compared to what Jesus had been teaching for forty-two months about the expectation of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus was less than a week away from demonstrating what “giving all” was all about. This is the message shouted “loudly and clearly” from the cross. The cross is the penultimate example of giving all.