

Cleaning Up Your Act

Luke 19:45-48

A couple of weeks ago Robyn announced that this fall we would be undertaking a major cleaning of the house. I'm not at all sure what that will entail, but it sounds like a lot of work.

When we were growing up, Mom had two favorite games and they weren't Monopoly or Chinese checkers. It was a form of Sorry only it wasn't played on a game board. With her very busy schedule as camp cook, her favorite game was "pick a room". Not counting your bedroom you had to pick a room, straighten it up putting things where they belonged, vacuum, dust or, if you got stuck with the bathroom you had to clean the mirrors, sinks, shower, and commode.

Her second favorite game was pick a burner. Now we had popcorn almost every Sunday night. That was long before microwave popcorn. We made popcorn on the stove, in a pan, with cooking oil. What happens when cooking oil gets heated up and corn kernels start to pop? Oil splatters even with the lid on. No one wanted the popcorn burner. Incidentally, my brother Phil inherited the popcorn pan.

In Spring and Fall at Camp they have major cleaning days to scour the buildings top to bottom. They have long ropes with a cloth tied in the middle that is thrown up over the open rafters in the chapel to wipe the dust off. They use tooth brushes to clean around the base of toilets. Everything is thoroughly cleaned for the campers.

I saw on the internet one company with 50,000 cleaning products. Cleaning agents come in a variety of forms and for different purposes. From powders like Comet or Bar Keepers Friend to liquids like Dawn dish soap to creams and even sprays, there are a variety of cleansers that clean floors, counter tops, wood surfaces, carpets,

curtains, clothes, cars, glass, etc., etc., etc. These products boast the ability to remove odors, stains, grease, and grime. You name the item and there is some cleaning product for it.

If you own a cleaning franchise in New York City, you can expect to make an average of \$45,000 a year.

Our passage today is about some major cleaning that took place in Jerusalem and specifically in the Temple. We have been on a journey following Jesus throughout His ministry years. We have seen Him heal the lame, the deaf, the blind, the leper, and even raise the dead. He traveled throughout the region training His 12 disciples and teaching the multitudes about the kingdom of God and about the gospel. We read in Luke 19:10 that His purpose in coming was "to seek and to save the lost." A great processional brought Him into Jerusalem. They were singing Him praises, hailing Him as the Messiah, the rightful King to claim David's throne. The Passion Week has begun. It is now just days away from the Passover and His crucifixion. Jesus did not remain idle in those remaining days. There was still ministry to be done, important ministry to bring Israel back to a proper relationship with God. It begins with our passage today. Turn then in your Bibles to Luke 19:45-48. What He did then, He wants to do today, not in a literal way, but in a figurative manner. He wants to clean up our act.

I have but two points today. Hopefully they will be easy to remember.

Jesus and the Temple – Part I

Jesus and the Temple - Part II

I. JESUS AND THE TEMPLE – PART I –
vs. 45-48

We read first of all from verses 45-46 that Jesus cleansed the Temple.

A. Jesus Cleansed the Temple – vs. 45-46

Let me begin by saying that the Temple was of great significance to Israel. It was the center of Jewish worship, the place of God's presence. For many years until the Babylonian captivity it was the place that housed the Ark of the covenant in which was held the 10 Commandments.

The Temple rested on the highest point so that from anywhere in the city or the surrounding region you could see the Temple. Each portion of the Temple area was a smaller section. The Temple Herod built had a Royal porch that surrounding the whole area. Inside that was a large, open portion that was called the Court of the Gentiles. It was where God-fearing Gentiles could meet and worship. They could go no further into the Temple area. Signs were posted to warn them that if they went any further such an act would be met with death. Then there was the Court of Women, then the Court of Men, the inner court and then the holy of Holies.

Our text tells us that Jesus entered the Temple area and began to drive out those who were selling and buying. It is in the Court of the Gentiles where this purging takes place. Matthew and Mark add some additional detail to give us the scope of what was going on. Jesus was physically forcing out of the Temple merchants and consumers along with those who were exchanging money.

Keep in mind that this is the week of Passover. Turn to Exodus 12:3-6. Here is what was supposed to happen. On the 10th day of the first month, each family was supposed to select a lamb. They were to take care of that lamb. They would bring it into the house to live with them and become like a pet and then five days later on the 14th day they would slaughter the lamb, spreading its blood on the doorposts and then eat the roasted lamb. It was the Passover sacrifice symbolizing the sacrifice the Messiah would make for sin. We read about that in Isaiah 53. The lamb selected was to have no blemish of any kind, symbolizing the perfect nature of the Messiah.

I Peter 1:18-19

That is what was supposed to happen. But here's what actually happened. The Court of the Gentiles was turned into a market place selling animals that would be sacrificed. It was the duty of the priest to ensure that the animals being sacrificed met the standard of the law by being without blemish. You would bring your lamb to be sacrificed, the priest would inspect it and invariably find something wrong with it. You were then forced to purchase one of the lambs in the market. Hundreds of thousands of animals were sold. The priests profited handsomely from this venture.

And if you were a Jew who had traveled from another region of the world and you needed to buy an animal for the sacrifice, your money was no good. You had to first go to a vender who would exchange your currency for the right Jewish or Tyrian coinage, then you could go and purchase your sacrifice. Some records show that the exchange fee charged as high as 12.5%. The Court of the Gentiles became known as the Bazaar of Annas who was the high priest. He became very rich from this enterprise.

It was supposed to be a place of worshipping God and prayer, but instead it became a place of wanton greed and profit. The Court of the Gentiles was to be a place for devout Gentiles to come and seek the living God, instead the Jews had turned it into a place that disrupted its witness to the surrounding world.

Jesus entered the area and began to drive out all those who were selling and buying. He quotes from two Old Testament passages: Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. Notice that He uses the authority of Scripture in defense of His actions.

This is not the first occasion in which Jesus purged the Temple of its religious hypocrisy. In John 2:13-17 at the beginning of His ministry Jesus did the

same thing and in three years nothing had changed in the spiritual life of Israel nor the religious leaders who were supposed to lead them in worshipping God. A very personal God had become impersonal. Religious leaders were using the Temple as a cover up for their greed.

The sad truth is that it's been that way throughout history. Beginning with Adam and Eve attempting to approach God in their own power by coming to Him covered in leaves thinking that was acceptable to Cain offering grain. There is only one right way to come before God and it's His way. Throughout their history we see God's warning for improper worship, worship of idols or worshipping by the law but not with proper hearts.

Isaiah 1:1-20

Amos 5:21-24

The Messiah's role was to bring ceremonial cleansing to the nation and they didn't get it, and it is my opinion that the reason they didn't get it is because they didn't want it. They didn't want to change or maybe we should say that they had changed and their worship had changed to what they wanted it to become.

Pastor Paul Chappell writes that there as many as 350,000 churches in the US. If all these churches were actively preaching the gospel and their members were witnessing, it would not take long for our society to be transformed. That is not what is happening. Many of these churches are simply buildings where vaguely religious observances take place, rather than the kind of churches we see described in the pages of the Bible. Many of them have no interest in the commandments and precepts of God's Word and feel free to substitute their own opinions for the truth.

But even some churches that once held true to the faith now have changed. They may still have the same name on the sign, and they may still be in the same building, and appear to be alive, but inwardly

they are dead. There are a lot of problems in our world today – many serious moral and social ills that need to be addressed. God's plan for the change that we need so much is not for the world to change, but for the church to change the people of God into the image of the Son of God so that they will change the world. Churches must come to life first, then society."

He concludes: "The revival that our society desperately needs will not start in society, but rather in the church."

That, unfortunately, was also Israel. They were to be the catalyst for a spiritual awakening that would arouse the pagan world around them to seek God, but instead they were a stumbling block to God.

What would Jesus do if He came into any one of our churches today? Would He be rightfully appalled or rightfully adored? We sing the songs, we give our tithes and offerings, we use the right words, we even use the right book, but is our worship with the right motive?

Jesus wanted to restore rightful worship and He began by cleaning out the temple. After it was clean, we see that He communicated in the Temple.

B. Jesus Communicated in the Temple –
vs. 47-48

Jesus then spent time each day in the Temple teaching, communicating the truths of Scripture, enlightening them on worship and the coming Kingdom, ever and always seeking the lost to save them. There are and always will be only three responses to what the Bible has to say, to the truths that are written there to guide into right living. People will loathe it, love it, or be lukewarm to it. We see two responses in our text.

1. Some loathed it – v. 47

It says that the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people sought to kill Jesus. They hated Him for what He did by cleaning out their businesses. The cash cow had stopped flowing. The golden goose had stopped laying golden eggs. Their source of income had ceased, at least for the time being.

And they hated Him for what He taught. To them Jesus was circumventing the law, disrupting centuries of tradition. So they tried to kill Him. But there was just one problem. It was the people. While some loathed what He did and said, some loved it.

2. Some loved it – v. 48

For the time being the people foiled the plans of the religious leaders to murder Jesus because “they hung on every word.” They listened intently to everything He had to say. Too bad they didn’t do it. James exhorts us to be doers of the Word and not hearers only, so that we don’t deceive ourselves.

The proof is in the pudding, so the old saying goes. It may look good and smell good, but the real test is in how it tastes. A person may say all the right things and look the right way, but actions will sooner or later reveal what’s really in the heart.

They listened intently to what Jesus said. Just a day earlier they had welcomed Him into the city, believing He would set up His earthly kingdom.

Folks, when it comes down to it, when Jesus teaches, what Jesus teaches, there are only two options to obey or not obey. Obedience is the demonstration of our love for the Lord.

John 14:21

That takes into Part II of Jesus and the Temple.

II. JESUS AND THE TEMPLE – PART II

Jesus isn’t the only one who cleaned out the Temple. There were others in Israel’s history who did the same thing because the Temple and worship in the Temple had been neglected. Let’s look at just one example.

II Kings 22:1-13; 23:1-16

At the age of 26 Josiah began to bring Israel back in a right relationship with God. He ordered the priests to use money from the offerings to begin renovating the Temple. He was cleaning it out. In the process they found a scroll. It was the book of the Law. They came back and reported to the King that the cleaning of the Temple was progressing as scheduled and then they said they had found a book from which they began to read to the King. What he heard cut him to the core of his soul. He became visibly and physically fearful and tore his robes. He understood clearly that God’s wrath was going to be poured out on them because of their disobedience to the Law, their neglect or worshipping Him right. He sought to bring change in the way they worshipped God. He gathered all the people and read the Law in their hearing. He made a covenant that day that they would obey God. But it didn’t stop there. He instituted many other reforms throughout the land by ridding the Temple and all Israel of all the idols that were found in Israel.

When the Word of God is neglected, it is easy for the Temple to become neglected.

The problem is that after Josiah died the people returned to their old ways. Their reforms were not from the heart. To have a life changing response that is lasting, one that truly and wholeheartedly seeks God, Josiah shows us four attitudes that are essential, four attitudes that are good principles for us to follow.

There must be remorse for sin. Our sin should break our heart, not because we have been caught but because we are wrong and it separates us from God and breaks fellowship with Him.

There must be repentance, a genuine sorrow over it.

There must be a resolve to change. Scripture reminds us that we must flee from it, we must walk in the Spirit in order not to commit sin. That means we totally yield ourselves to follow Him, obey God.

There must be reform. We not only determine to change but we actually change.

If we follow those principles, we will begin to clean out the temple.

Josiah had a brokenness over sin, a humble spirit before God and a desire to change.

So what does that have to do with us today?
What does the passage of Jesus cleansing the Temple have to do with me today?

There is a direct correlation. I want to read several verses that should have a direct bearing and a significant impact on how we live each day. Listen carefully to what they say. Now, it may get a little warm in here. As Randy has sometimes said, “you’re going from preaching to meddling.” I Corinthians 3:16-17 “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple.”

Paul is speaking collectively of the local body of believers here, that we collectively as part of Fellowship Bible Church constitute the Temple of God. He then further issues a warning to anyone who would come in and try to destroy the church insinuating that it could be through false teaching or by leading others astray through sin, spreading discord or gossip or lies. That person would be destroyed by God.

Paul wrote to Corinth because there were a number of significant problems in existence in that church.

There was a great lack of unity. I follow Peter. I follow Apollos. I follow Paul. I follow Jesus. There was a problem with spiritual gifts where some were making others feel inferior. If you didn’t have the showy gifts you were made to feel like a spiritual failure.

There was a problem with their communion service. Some were getting drunk. Others were selfish and neglecting others in communion.

There was a problem with sexual sin being tolerated. Paul even said that what they were allowing to happen in the church wasn’t even heard of among the pagans. He went on to say that if they didn’t take care of it, when he arrived he would.

Are we as a church a fit temple of God or is there some cleaning that needs to be done?

Paul then moves from the local church as a whole being the body of Christ to the individual. I Corinthians 6:18-20 “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”

Not only is there a collective sense in which the local body of believers is the temple of God, Paul also states that we as individual believers are the body of Christ.

Here’s what one author wrote: “The Christian should value his body as a sacred place where God dwells and should realize that by the Spirit’s presence and power he can be helped against...sin.”

Are we taking care of God’s temple? It is His both physically and spiritually.

My dad was the mechanic at camp for 30 years. When we first moved there and he went down to the

garage it was a mess. Guys would come in and get a tool or some part or some equipment and when they were done they would find a spot on the floor and leave it. When dad went to the garage there was literally a path to walk through the garage. It needed serious cleaning. Ever afternoon we would go in and help haul out stuff so that it was a place where he could work.

We need to take a serious look at our lives and ask if it is a fit place for God to live as His temple, if it is a place where God can work. God's presence was no longer at the Temple in Jerusalem because the people and priests had let sinful practices continue unchecked, unconfessed.

In a conversation with a woman sitting by a well, Jesus got down to the business of worship. She believed that worship took place either in Jerusalem by the Jews or on Mt. Gerazim by the Samaritans. Jesus challenged that idea by stating that "true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth." (John 4:23b)

Some churches have a sign as you enter the sanctuary that reads "enter to worship" and then another sign above the doors as you leave that says "exit to serve" or something along those lines. I think the signs should read "enter to worship" and "exit to worship." As the temple of the living God anywhere we go God is present and we can worship. Does our Temple need cleaning before God can be worshipped, before God can work?

But here's the thing, are some of the places we go or some of the things we do or some of the things we say consistent with a place of worship? You, me, we are the temple of God if the Spirit of God is in you. Because that is true we may have some cleaning out of the Temple to do.

Psalms 51:1-10, 17

Psalms 139:1-12, 23-24

Quite a long time ago, I was not living for the Lord.

There was a time when I knew I needed to begin attending church again. For a couple years I felt good about that decision, but there were still some things that needed to be taken care of. On a Saturday morning in desperation I was reading through Psalm 51 and cried out to God and that began the process of cleaning the Temple.

If the physical temple was the center of Jewish worship and it needed cleansing, then our body as a believer is the center of our worship of God and it needs cleaning as well. And it requires constant attention. We may need a deep cleaning. Scripture tells us what to do. I want to give you three things that you can do today to begin the process of cleaning your temple.

A deep cleansing requires the Spirit's regeneration. Titus 3:5 "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

Without the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in you, you are not saved and if you are not saved then you do not have the Holy Spirit living in you and if you do not have the Holy Spirit living in you then you are not a child of God and if you are not a child of God then you are not the temple of God.

Allow the regenerating work of God's Spirit to bring about salvation in your life. When you do that you become a new creation and the old way of life is past and a new one has come.

A deep cleansing requires the Spirit's regeneration.

A deep cleansing requires the soul's repentance. We considered the examples of Josiah and David. Repentance is more than just sorrow for wrong doing. It is a turning away from it altogether. I John 1:9

A deep cleansing requires the sword's reach. Psalm 119:9, 11 "Wherewithall shall a young man cleanse his ways, by taking heed thereto according to Thy Word... Thy Word have I hid in my heart

that I might not sin against Thee.”

In His teaching about the vine and the branches Jesus states that “You are already clean because of the Word I have spoken to you.” (John 15:3)

Jesus weary from His 40 days of fasting faced the temptations of Satan. Jesus used the Word to remain strong.

God may right now be revealing to you things that need to be cleaned out of your temple, maybe physically and probably spiritually. You may think that your temple is pretty clean, after all you don't take God's name in vain, you haven't murdered anyone or committed adultery. You don't have any graven images or statues sitting around the house on the mantel or in your back yard or do you? An idol could be framed sitting on your mantel in the forms of kids or grandkids. It may be in the garage. It may be a hobby or your work. It may even be your retirement. Anything can become an idol, anything can take first place over God. What else needs to be cleaned out?

Galatians 5 and Colossians 3 have a pretty good list of sins that we are to put off. How about pride, unthankfulness, anxiety or worry, discontentment, jealousy, selfishness, impatience, anger, criticism, judgmentalism – I better stop.

God's Spirit may be revealing something in your life right now, something that He wants to remove from you, His Temple.

In a few moments we are going to conclude our service with communion. Today may be the day to clean out the temple. In writing to the Corinthians Paul exhorted them to do a thorough examination before taking communion so that they do not take it in an unworthy manner.

Today if the Lord is speaking to you, you may want to come to the altar and ask the Lord to help you

clean up His temple. You may need to do business with God. We cannot adequately or properly worship God if we allow sin to remain. It distances us from God and diminishes our witness to non-believers.

Do you need to clean out the Temple today? Let His Spirit help you.