

[mr. clean]

:: mark 11.15-18 ::

It's easter week. This is the week where we remember and commemorate Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, His death on a Roman cross, and most importantly His resurrection from the dead 3 days later.

This evening we're going to take a look at a familiar passage which shares with us an event that happened on the day after the Triumphal Entry, the Monday before the crucifixion, where Jesus entered the Temple and cleansed it of the merchants, the moneychangers and the moochers.

We will draw our application from this text in a couple of different ways.

First, we can parallel the principles we find here with our activity within the Church, within the gathering of Believers, much like how the Jews would gather together in the temple to worship the Lord, we are here meeting together as Believers in a special way.

Second, we can parallel the principles of our passage with our own lives as individuals, because as we see Jesus cleansing the temple, we remember what we read in 1 Corinthians 3.16 -

1 Corinthians 3.16 - Do you not know that YOU are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

So, knowing now which direction we're headed, it's time to get into our text, which is Mark, chapter 11, verses 15 through 18.

There we read this:

Mark 11.15-18 - So [Jesus and His disciples] came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.' "
And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching.

This is a passage that most of us have heard a number of times before. But tonight, I hope that we see something new, that we find some new insight and application from the Lord so that we leave this place having been brought nearer to Him and more transformed by His amazing power.

That's what easter is all about. The power of God not only for salvation, but for our transformation as people who are living out our lives here on the earth, that we might glorify God and direct people to Him.

So what are we seeing here?

The text opens and says this:

Mark 11.15a - So [Jesus and His disciples] came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple.

Jesus had come to the city the day before and had even gone into the temple.

In fact, we read this back in verse 11:

Mark 11.11 - And Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple. So when He had looked around at all things, as the hour was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Jesus had already gone into the temple, made an assessment, and then came back the next day and took care of business.

Our God is a God who evaluates.

He looks into my life and says, "Ok, here's what I want to do in there." He looks at your life and determines to change you from who you were to something remarkable and wonderful.

He looks at the earth and says, "Ok, I'm going to place my church throughout the world, and I'm going to lead My people to do My work in a way that will impact each community in a special way."

We find this characteristic all over the scriptures. Think of the parable of the talents, where the master comes and evaluates the work of the servants.

God evaluates. He evaluates so that He can guide, transform and empower and correct.

In this case, Jesus looked into the temple, saw what was happening and then returned the next day to correct that behavior.

Who did He correct?

Well first it says that He drove out those who bought and sold in the temple. We know these people as merchants who had set up shop in God's house and were extorting the people who came to worship and sacrifice. They would take advantage of those who had come to meet with God by saying that they had to first convert their money to the temple standard, charging them an unlawful fee. Or they would say that the lamb or offering that a person brought didn't qualify for sacrifice, but, *LUCKILY*, they could buy a *PRE-APPROVED* animal for worship right there at their table.

These were serious offenses and abuses happening in the temple of the Lord. But for us this evening, we can look at these different groups on the spiritual level and find application for ourselves, individually and corporately.

First, Jesus drove out those who **bought**.

Spiritually speaking we might liken this group to those who seek to simply 'buy' their righteousness from the Lord. As fallen human beings, it is possible for us to allow an attitude of penance to seep into our relationship with Christ. I mean that in the sense that we sometimes can allow our

relationship with God to cool to a point where it's more of a business transaction. "Lord, I know I'm not really loving You the way I used to, so if I go to church one extra time this week, we'll call it even." In a sense it's as though we are **buying** our salvation.

That doesn't work. That's not how our temple works.

Our salvation, our righteousness is a *gift* from God that we receive by grace through faith, not of works. An extra church service doesn't make you more righteous, because going through the motions of Christianity out of guilt or tradition does not please the Lord.

Isaiah 1.11 - To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me? Says the Lord. I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats.

In Isaiah's time the people had left their love for God but were going through the motions of sacrifice in an effort to purchase their salvation. To which God says, "Hey, this isn't about works. This isn't about tallying off a check list. You don't come to Me through legalism or tradition or works of penance, you come to Me through a relationship of love."

Those who bought, Jesus drove out.

Second, those who **sold** were given the boot.

These extortioners had quite a racket going.

"Oh, you want to get to God? You want to relate to Him? Well then you have to go through me!"

They took advantage of those who came through the doors of the Lord for their own profit.

Now, we obviously don't have quite the same arrangement as the Jews had back in the pre-cross times, but there are still those who seek to capitalize off of God's people. We certainly see this on a wide scale when we hear about a television evangelist who has taken millions of dollars and spent it on jets and palaces and all sorts of things.

But as we look inwardly, we find that this attitude can once again seep into our hearts or into the Church in a different way. If we start seeing other Christians as fodder for our profit. If we use the Church relationship to intimidate or coerce people into doing things that benefit us, then we've moved into this area of *selling* in God's house.

We live in the greatest country in the world, but as followers of Jesus Christ we **must** shake the materialism that we are inundated with in our culture. Life is not about wealth. Life is not about luxury. Life is not about amassing fortunes for ourselves. No, life is about much more than that. But in a country like America, we must actively and intentionally drive out the lure of materialism and greed from our hearts and from our churches.

Mark 11.15b - and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves.

Lot of the same ideas here, but let me pause on this idea of the money changers for a moment.

When Jewish men came to the temple, they had to pay a temple tribute tax as prescribed in the Law of Moses. These moneychangers were taking that commandment and charging a second fee for the conversion of the funds.

Not only was this unlawful, but it gives us another attitude that we should look out for.

As Christians, it is sometimes easy for us to take a person who wants to come to Jesus and say, "That's great. But if you want to come to Jesus, first you have to pay a toll!"

Then the burdens come out. And often times we forget that the transformation comes **after** the relationship with Jesus begins, not before. If we're not careful, we start thinking people need to *REFORM* so they can be *TRANSFORMED*. But the Lord is very clear in His word that the transformation is up to Him, not us. Jesus calls us, just as we are, to come to Him that **HE** might bring beauty from the ashes of our lives.

Our text continues and says:

Mark 11.16 - And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple.

This is an interesting verse. Different translations have a slight variation on what exactly people were carrying. Thus, commentators have a number of views.

Here are the 2 that seem most likely to us.

First view, as we read it, Jesus would not allow people to carry **wares** through the temple.

In this sense we understand that God's house is not designed for our amusement or entertainment.

With this interpretation, it's as if the peanut guy from the baseball game was in the temple, hocking his snacks.

You're sitting there, listening to a Psalm, and then you say, "HEY, 2 COTTON CANDIES OVER HERE!" The experience with God became more of a consumer outing than a time of worship and devotion. A time of self-service as opposed to a time of humble adoration.

This one hits home for me. Because in my flesh I have this idea that within the Church, if something is not to my liking or to my amusement, it must be because the Church has failed in some way. If things were going well, I'd always be pleased! I'd always be satiated! I'd always feel like a happy consumer! The customer is always right, right?

But our relationship with God and our gathering together as His Church is **not** about consumerism or having all of my wants and desires met. It's not about having my self served.

Much to the contrary, our lives and our gathering is about service and laboring **together** to glorify the Lord. Our congregation is about being a body that grows together and reaches out to demonstrate the love of our Savior, who came not to be served but to serve. Our gathering and our lives are not about self-satisfaction, but about God-glorification.

But there is a second interpretation of this verse. Some scholars indicate that people were using the temple as a shortcut on their walk home. They were carrying in all sorts of baskets and gear and household stuff and didn't want to have to walk *around* the temple.

Again, the application is very simple. God's house is not meant to be a shortcut for us. It's not a place we cruise through on our way to where we really *want* to go. It's the place where we meet with our Savior in a special way.

Your relationship with the Lord is meant to be something personal and wonderful. Not just a short stop on the way home, but a lasting love that impacts every decision you make. A place of abiding and delighting.

Jesus drove out those who carried wares.

Mark 11.17 - Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations' ? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.' "

Jesus called their attention to Isaiah and Jeremiah. In Isaiah, He pointed out the true purpose of the temple, in Jeremiah He points out how the Jews had often perverted the house of God through their history.

Mark 11.18 - And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching.

I love this, not because we see the hatred of the scribes, but because we see the heart of the Savior.

Our God is a God of action **AND** instruction.

As we receive His instruction it should cause us to take some action. His word and His power are not delivered to us so that we can simply catalog them in our intellect, but so that we can be filled and stirred and directed to do all that the Lord desires us to do.

What is it that God desires us to do?

Well, I think we find our answer by asking this question: Why did Jesus cleanse temple that Monday? Why did He do it?

In 4 days He would be crucified, the veil separating God and man would be torn in two, the entire system of sacrificial atonement would be forever changed.

So why did Jesus do this just 4 days before such a dynamic shift was going to happen?

Because He didn't want anything to hinder a person from coming to God. He didn't want anyone to burden them or take advantage of them or put a separation between them. He is a Savior who is faithful and powerful and personal. He had already cleansed this temple once in John chapter 2. Now, in His patience and His righteousness He was doing it again so that people could come unobstructed into His Presence to have a relationship with Him.

As we gather together the Lord is with us. This Church is the house of the Lord.

As individuals, we have the Holy Spirit living within us. We quite literally are the temples of the Lord.

As we spend some time this week thinking about easter: Christ's life, death and resurrection, let's commit to evaluating our hearts and our attitudes and our activities according to the heart of God, according to His word.

Let's purpose to take some time and say, "Lord, I know that you want me to have the kind of life that I read about in the Bible. I know you have looked at me and have prepared a life for me to live, a work for me to do, people to impact with your grace, and I don't want anything to hinder me or burden me or obstruct me from having the relationship that You want for us."

Jesus Christ came to earth and put on humanity, on your behalf. He died on a Roman cross so that He could take away my sin and your sin. And then, most importantly, He rose again so that He could give us victory in life and victory over death. He did all of this and all the while removed every thing that might separate us from Him. Guilt. Legalism. A Priesthood.

He has removed those things so that we can come to Him directly and His desire is to cleanse us so that our lives can be a center of prayer, a center of worship, a daring testimony to the nations that Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord, King Forever!

That's who you are in Jesus. Allow Him to do His cleansing work. Set aside any attitude or activity that would hinder your walk with the Lord and move forward as an astonishing example of God's power and love on the earth.