

The Gospel According to  
**Luke**

**“God Hates Preying”**

Chapter 19:45 – 20:8

Introduction

Instead of **praying for** God’s people, they were **preying on** God’s people.

The Temple in Jesus' time consisted of numerous courtyards (courts) that were open to different groups of people for the purpose of *sightseeing*, *socializing*, and, most importantly, connecting with *spiritual* truth. Gentiles were allowed to visit an outer court. The events of our story take place in this outer Court of the Gentiles.

When Jesus said, **My house is a house of prayer**, He was quoting a verse in Isaiah. It reads in full like this:

Isaiah 56:7 Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices *will be* accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer **for all nations.**”

The Court of the Gentiles should have been a place to evangelize visitors. Instead, it was full of **tables** and **booths**:

1. The tables were where money-changers sat. Jewish men were required by the Old Testament law to come to the Temple annually and pay a Temple tax. When you got to the Temple you found out that your currency needed to be exchanged. It’s not unlike traveling today and having to exchange your dollars for the local currency. Money-changers were on hand to make the exchange easy for you. But they were allowed to charge outrageous fees. There was nothing you could do – because you had to exchange your money.
2. The booths were where you could purchase animals to present for your sacrifices. Instead of finding and transporting an acceptable lamb or a dove, you could buy one once you arrived. These

Temple animals were pre-certified by the Temple authorities to be sacrifice-ready! You were guaranteed that the priest would accept it. But you guessed it – they were exorbitantly priced. There was nothing you could do – because you had to have an approved animal to sacrifice.

The Court of the Gentiles was, in fact, **a den of thieves**. It was as if a defenseless sheep had walked into a den of wolves, to be destroyed and devoured. Instead of *praying for* God's people, they were *preying on* them.

**God hates that kind of preying!** Jesus didn't stand for it. He overturned the tables of the money-changers; He drove out the merchants; He restored the Court of the Gentiles to its true purpose.

To the religious leaders, it was a Temple-tantrum. They concocted a question about authority in order to expose Jesus as an imposter. Forgive the pun, but Jesus *turned-the-tables* on them!

We want to take a look at the question of authority as we move through the story. We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 You Have God's Authority To Announce His Revelation, and #2 You Have God's Authority To Denounce Human Reasonings.

#1 You Have God's Authority  
To Announce His Revelation  
(19:45-48)

Jesus twice drove out the merchants from the Temple – once at the beginning of His ministry (recorded by John in his Gospel), and again a few days before He was crucified. It puts us on notice that we should be very careful we don't prey upon God's people; that we don't see them as a source of revenue; that we don't manipulate them to extort money from them – even if it is for a good cause.

Instead, Jesus' actions focus our attention on what we ought to be doing when we gather together. Three specific activities are mentioned: *Praying, teaching, and preaching*.

Let's take a look at praying:

Luke 19:45 Then He went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in it,  
Luke 19:46 saying to them, "It is written, 'My house is a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"

The Court of the Gentiles was intended as a place where seekers from all the nations of the world could come and find God. The Temple was intended to be a kind of international house of prayer – IHOP for short!

I don't want to limit the kind of praying that might take place in the Court of the Gentiles; but, in the context of the quote from Isaiah, it seems that one of the key prayers that God had in mind was the prayer to receive Jesus as Savior. There was to be an evangelistic feel in the Court of the Gentiles – leading folks to pray a sinners prayer.

The **den of thieves** quote comes from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah. He used to stand outside the Temple and rebuke the Jews as they entered it. In his day, they were disobeying God, trusting in their heritage and the fact that they had the Temple in their midst. They didn't believe God would allow His people and His Temple to be conquered. They were wrong!

We can take notice of at least three things in Jesus' words:

1. First, everything we think and say and do needs to be totally influenced by the Bible. We need to discover God's mind and heart on every matter; and then proceed with God's wisdom.
2. Second, Jesus strung together passages from two sources, both dealing with the same subject. We ought to be careful students of God's Word and study the whole of it to gain a proper perspective.
3. Third, Jesus used those verses prophetically. Even though they were written hundreds of years earlier, He understood them to be contemporary. We ought to seek such words from the Bible to guide and direct us. In other words, we should believe God can speak prophetically from His Word.

One other thing I would like to suggest before leaving the thought that the Temple had become **a den of thieves**. If praying and teaching

and preaching are supposed to be going on... Whenever they are not going on, you are robbing people. We should be very careful about becoming so modern that we leave the Gospel behind.

Let's take a look at teaching:

Luke 19:47 And He was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him,

Luke 19:48 and were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear Him.

Jesus called the Temple **a house of prayer**, but that did not stop Him from teaching. In fact, teaching was His primary activity on those days leading up to His crucifixion. The comments about **the chief priests, scribes, and the leaders** are a segue into Chapter Twenty.

Teaching God's Word should always be the bread and butter of any ministry. I cannot think of any better way of doing it than going verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter, book-by-book, through the Bible.

Teaching God's Word is taking a lot of hits in the Church today. Other activities are being over-emphasized in order to attempt to engage people and hold their attention. We need to remain flexible and contemporary; but we cannot afford to minimize teaching God's Word. Otherwise our Church becomes **a den of thieves**, as we withhold the words of life.

I will only mention preaching. You see it in the first verse of Chapter Twenty; Jesus **preached the Gospel**. The phrase, **preached the gospel**, is from the Greek word we would translate *evangelize*. Let me suggest two things:

1. First, in the context of our verses, it means Jesus taught them by preaching. It was a lecture-type of teaching. There is nothing wrong with other types and styles of teaching. But God had ordained preaching of His Word.
2. Second, the word translated as evangelize means *bringing good news*. When you preach through teaching, you should remember that what you have to communicate should be presented as good news. It doesn't mean there is no talk of sin, or judgment, or

things like that. It does mean that your teaching must be full of grace and mercy and compassion.

The point I want to emphasize before we go on is that you have God's authority to pray, and to teach, and to preach. Every one of you – not just a missionary or a minister.

1. You have God's authority to pray. If you are a Christian, you are a child of God and have direct access to His throne. You can say to someone, "Let's pray," and you can know that you are taking them directly to God. You need no earthly credentials or certificates.
2. You have God's authority to teach. Yes, there is a gift of teaching; and God gives gifted men as teachers to His Church. But all of you who are believers can use God's Word to teach. Parents are charged with this as a responsibility. They teach by exposing their kids to God's Word morning, noon, and night. If you can teach your kids... You can teach others as well.
3. You are a preacher! You're the only one with good news to share – no matter how bad the situation.

Your authority is from Heaven. You are an ambassador on the earth – authorized to reveal God in and through your everyday life.

People don't always appreciate the announcement of God's revelation. They prefer their own reasonings – ignorant as they are. We see that as Jesus' authority to reveal God was directly challenged.

## #2 You Have God's Authority To Denounce Human Reasonings (20:1-8)

Jesus' activities in the Temple were a rebuke to the religious authorities. It was on their watch that the Temple was allowed to become **a den of thieves**. They determined to challenge the Lord's authority.

It's sad that they ignored His words and His works. No one ever spoke the way He did, as He applied the Word of God. His miracles, signs, and wonders testified that He was sent from God as their

Savior. But all they cared about was their own power and influence; so they challenged His earthly authority, refusing to acknowledge His heavenly authority.

By the way: Do you ever wonder why otherwise intelligent people say the dumbest things when it comes to Jesus? It's partly because they are trying to protect their earthly power and influence. Believing in Jesus seems too costly for them.

Luke 20:1 Now it happened on one of those days, as He taught the people in the temple and preached the gospel, *that* the chief priests and the scribes, together with the elders, confronted *Him*

Luke 20:2 and spoke to Him, saying, "Tell us, by what authority are You doing these things? Or who is he who gave You this authority?"

It is not unreasonable to question a person's authority. Even among Christians, it can be a good idea to question authority:

1. In an existing work, like a Church, you can properly question authority by finding-out who everyone is accountable to. Too many people assume too much authority, and begin to lord over the lives of God's people.
2. It's also important to determine if a person or a group really has God's authority to establish a work. Just because someone feels 'led' doesn't mean they are being led by God.

In the case at hand, it was unreasonable to question Jesus' authority. His words and works established an authority far greater than any His critics ever had.

Jesus' answer was superb, as usual:

Luke 20:3 But He answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one thing, and answer Me:

Luke 20:4 *The baptism of John - was it from heaven or from men?"*

The phrase, *the baptism of John*, was a summary of John's entire ministry. He was most known for baptizing; he was, after all, John the Baptist. Jesus was asking them whether or not John's ministry was from God.

While it's true that Jesus answered their question by asking a question, He was *not* being evasive. The answer to His question was His answer to their question. If John had God's authority for his ministry, then so did Jesus. John introduced Jesus; he declared that Jesus was the Lamb of God, sent by God; John told everyone to follow Jesus. So, if John was authorized, then so was Jesus.

The religious leaders were in a tight spot:

Luke 20:5 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?'

Luke 20:6 But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us, for they are persuaded that John was a prophet."

Luke 20:7 So they answered that they did not know where *it* was from.

This was the ultimate no-win situation for them. So they acted dumb!

Remember that these were the top guys; they were really, really smart. They would be the guys you'd see on the Discovery Channel; or the History Channel; or National Geographic. You know, when I watch those programs; and they talk about Jesus and the Bible; they sound just as ignorant. They read the Bible account of an event, and then they say, "Well, we just don't know what really happened."

A good example is the current debate over the teaching of Intelligent Design alongside evolution. Even though many top scientists have shown that evolution cannot possibly be true, the powers that be refuse to allow anything else to be taught. In fact, much of what kids are being taught isn't even true; it is knowingly false! It's the same type of ignorance we see in our story – because a truthful answer commits you to seriously considering your own eternal destiny.

Can't you just hear Jesus laughing out loud as He heard their answer, then said,

Luke 20:8 ...**"Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."**

He didn't need to answer because **their answer was His answer.**

Notice back in verse five, it says, **they reasoned among themselves**. There was Jesus, revealing God; and there they were, reasoning among themselves.

The greatest human reasonings are like the brain waves of a cockroach compared to the revelation of God. The simplest, youngest believer in Jesus can easily denounce the greatest of human reasonings. The key is to not get brought down to their level. I'm not saying that we shouldn't ever argue, or engage in debate. For example: I mentioned evolution. I love the work of men like Henry Morris and Ken Ham, who take head-on the secular scientists and show the truth of God's Word as opposed to the errors of evolution.

What I am saying to you and I is that you don't need to be an expert, with some worldly certificate of authority, to denounce human reasonings. People may mock you; they may try to embarrass you; they may question your authority. You know that you were once blind, but now you see; you know you were once dead, but are now alive. And so do they – but they won't admit it for fear of losing something.

How sad. You never lose when you believe God; you gain. You gain eternal life, and an abundant life now.