

# **First Serve**

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Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 11:15-19 & 27-33

Topic

Jesus overturns the tables of the money changers  
and the seats of those who sell doves.

Title

*"When Doves Fly"*

## Introduction

A key factor in your company's success may be the shape and size of its conference table.

According to an informal study by management consultant Ruth Haag, there is an apparent relationship between a firm's conference tables and productivity.

The best setup, she says, is a long, rectangular table. The table should be five-feet wide, and allow about a foot of space between individuals. While respecting personal space, the size promotes camaraderie while preventing co-workers from whispering snide comments about one another.

Table sizes and shapes are more important than we sometimes realize. I don't know how many of you are old enough to remember the Paris Peace Talks that were designed to bring about an end to the Vietnam War.

The beginning of the talks were stalled for months when the United States, the North Vietnamese, and the South Vietnamese leaders couldn't decide who should sit at the ends of a rectangular table.

They finally agreed on a round table flanked by two rectangular tables.

On a personal level, you may have experienced table trauma. Have you ever been to a wedding where they have assigned table seating, only to wonder why you are at the very last table, with the kids, or surrounded by weirdos?

Tables are prominent in our Bible text. Jesus goes in to the Temple and He "overturns the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves" (v15).

We will discuss this event in its context, but, as always, we want to discover its application for our relationship with Jesus. To do that, I'll ask two questions: #1 Are There Tables In Your Life That Deserve Overturning? And #2 Are There Tables In Your Life That Defy Overturning?

### #1 Are There Tables In Your Life That Deserve Overturning?

(v15-19)

The table is one of our favorite English idioms:

- We talk about "turning the tables" on someone when we get the upper hand.
- We talk about what someone "brings to the table," referring to their contributions.
- In negotiations, we reference things as either being "on the table" for discussion, or "off of the table," meaning they are non-negotiable.
- If you "table" something, that means you put it off for later.
- If everything is ready for something to happen, we call the preparation "setting the table."
- When we're being totally open and honest, we say we are "laying our cards on the table."
- When we are on some kind of streak, we refer to it as "running the table."
- Illegal or illicit activities are often labeled "under the table."

As Jesus entered the Temple, we could say that the tables were set for Him to overturn the tables.

Mar 11:15 So they 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.

When you compare all four Gospels, you find that Jesus overturned the tables of the money changers on two separate occasions - once at the very beginning of His ministry, and here again at the end of His ministry.

We should find it interesting that, of all the things that could have been the bookends for His ministry, Jesus chose the overturning of these tables. We immediately apply this to the commercialization of the church.

We certainly want to be careful to not make merchandise of the people of God. We don't want to see the church as an opportunity to make money.

When I was at Calvary Chapel of San Bernardino, there was a couple who was going from person to person, telling them that they were new to sales, and that they wanted to rehearse their sales pitch on them for experience.

Well, let me say, they were not new to sales; and they weren't there to practice, but to go for the kill. As soon as they exhausted the pool of clients at our church, they moved on to another church.

Having said all that, there was something going on in the Temple that was far worse than commercializing. We'll see it in a moment.

The "Temple" refers to the entire complex, not just the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies which comprised the actual Temple. A wide outer space around this entire area was called the court of the Gentiles, open to Gentiles and Jews alike. A low inner wall, with signs at its gates declaring that no Gentile was allowed to go beyond, enclosed three further courts: the court of the women, beyond which Jewish women might not go; the court of the Israelites, into which Jewish men might go, and often the place for Jewish gatherings; and the court of the priests, the innermost court into which only the priests might enter; it led directly into the Temple where sacrifices according to the Mosaic law could be offered.

Our action takes place in the court of the Gentiles which had been turned into a kind of Monday sale with vendors of various sorts.

Besides the money changers and the dove sellers, you could buy a lamb for your Passover sacrifice.

It was a lucrative business. Pilgrims by the tens of thousands would fill Jerusalem at Passover. They'd learned, probably the hard way, that if you brought your own lamb or dove, it would not pass inspection, but would be deemed unacceptable for sacrifice.

Ah, but right there, in the court of the Gentiles, you could buy a shiny, pre-approved animal. Of course, the cost was sky-high, but you were a captive consumer, with no options.

Mark limits his comments to doves to emphasize just how despicable a practice this was. A dove was the sacrifice offered by the poorest worshippers - those who had no lamb to bring, and could not afford to buy one. Nevertheless the merchants sold over-priced doves, burdening the poor.

As far as the money changers, every male Jew twenty years or over was required to pay yearly a half shekel toward the cost of the religious services in the Temple (Exodus 30:11-16). Foreign coins with their idolatrous images were refused for this purpose. The moneychangers were in the court of the Gentiles to change the Greek and Roman coins of the pilgrims into acceptable Temple currency.

But, again, the exchange rate they demanded was exorbitant.

**Mar 11:16** And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple.

This really was like a Monday sale, with lots of foot traffic and people buying and selling stuff.

Maybe they had those push carts that always appear out of nowhere at parades with year-old cotton candy.

Jesus put a stop to the traffic, probably by stationing His disciples at entry and exit points.

I said a moment ago that there was something worse about all this than the merchandising and the making of profit off of the Jewish pilgrims seeking to worship God. This activity completely shut out Gentiles who came seeking to worship God. We see that in the statement of Jesus in verse seventeen,

Mar 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 quoted Isaiah 56:7. Even though He was God, Jesus grounded Himself in the Word of God.

Every Jew should be incensed by what their leaders were allowing to take place in the court of the Gentiles. Instead of being the holy ground upon which non-Jews from all nations seeking the God of Israel could find Him, they were surrounded by a busy marketplace that prohibited worship.

Mar 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.

Hey scribes; hey chief priests. Look beyond your hatred of Jesus, and see Isaiah, and hear the Word of God. What Isaiah said is not hard to understand, and it is not subject to any private interpretation. It should have pierced their hearts.

Instead they wanted to kill Jesus; and they would have, had it not been for the people.

The people "were astonished at His teaching." They knew He was right. They were rallying around Jesus. It was not an appropriate time to defy Him.

**Mar 11:19** When evening had come, He went out of the city.

Jesus and the twelve spent the day in the Temple. All day, the court of the Gentiles was cleared of buying and selling and exchanging and merchandising. It wasn't used as a kind of short-cut to get from one part of the Temple to the other.

I wonder, *Did Gentiles come in, and worship God?* I think we can safely assume that they did. Word would have spread that the court was cleared for them.

Think of it:

- The King was there, teaching.
- His closest followers were there, serving Him.
- A mixed crowd of Jews and Gentiles from many nations was there to pray and worship.

It was a little foretaste, was it not, of the future Millennial Kingdom of God on the earth?

When we meet, as the church, there should be a foretaste of Heaven. One aspect of creating such an environment is to not block folks from coming by establishing nonbiblical or extra biblical traditions or rules.

You should feel welcome and comfortable. Your only discomfort ought to be spiritual as you come under the conviction of God the Holy Spirit, seeking to lead you to faith in Jesus Christ, or to let go of something or someone that is hindering your growth.

Let's carefully apply what we've seen to our own relationship with Jesus. We can ask, metaphorically, "Are there tables that deserve to be overturned in my life?"

*Of course there are.* I can confidently say there are, in all of our lives, because our walk with Jesus is an ongoing process.

I think it's enough to ask the question, and let each of us answer it for ourselves. For ourselves, that is, with the help of God the Holy Spirit.

Geno was relating to me a Q&A session he listened to online featuring Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse. He was a great pastor and commentator in the mid-twentieth century. Someone asked him a question relating to a Christian liberty, like "Can a Christian drink alcohol?," or "Can a Christian smoke?," or "Can a Christian go to the movies?," or some such thing.

Barnhouse said he never answered questions like those because what the asker is doing is making him the Holy Spirit in their lives.

I have my answers to all those questions, and others. You need to have yours. You find them by asking the Holy Spirit.

Think of everything in your life. Is there something you want to bring to the table, to show Jesus? Or is it likely He'd overturn it, since it is hindering, rather than helping, you in your relationship with Him?



You'll have time at the end of the study to spend with the Lord. All I will say is this: It's hard to believe that, since we are each far from perfect, there would be nothing that the Lord wants to overturn.

## #2 Are There Tables In Your Life That Defy Overturning?

(v27-33)

We are deliberately skipping verses twenty through twenty-six. We commented on them in our last study in Mark. Mark is giving us events in *chronological* order, and we are taking them in their *logical* order.

- Mark introduced us to the fruitless fig tree in verses twelve through fourteen, then Jesus visited the Temple. He finishes the story of the fig tree in verses twenty through twenty-six. Those verses go together logically with what we've just studied.
- In verses fifteen through nineteen, Mark shows us Jesus overturning the tables in the Temple. He finishes that story in verses twenty-seven through thirty-three. Those verses go together logically.

Mar 11:27 Then they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to Him.

These three groups were the parties that comprised the Jewish ruling council, called the Sanhedrin. This was an official delegation from the highest Jewish authority. They were gunning for Jesus. You know something is about to go down.

Mar 11:28 And they said to Him, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?"

It was, in fact, the job of the Sanhedrin to supervise the religious life of the Jews. Too bad they were corrupt, and needed someone to supervise them.

"By what authority" recognizes that Jesus either claimed to have authority, or that He taught in such a way that assumed authority.

In the recent film, *Concussion*, Will Smith portrays the doctor who discovers why so many NFL players were losing their minds after their careers ended. One of the early criticisms leveled against his findings was that he was a pathologist, and not an authority on the brain. It was a way of trying to discredit him so they could ignore the science.

This wasn't the first time Jesus had encountered the "by what authority" question. When Jesus encountered the paralytic who was let down through the roof of Peter's house by his four friends, He said,

Mat 9:2 ... "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you."

Mat 9:3 And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, "This Man blasphemes!"

Mat 9:4 But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts?"

Mat 9:5 For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk'?

Mat 9:6 But that you may know that the Son of Man has **power** [and the word is **authority**] on earth to forgive sins" - then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."

Mat 9:7 And he arose and departed to his house."

If you're a doctor or a nurse or a lawyer, and you move to another state, you need to become licensed or certified in that state. You need the state to validate you before you can legally doctor or nurse or lawyer anyone.

In Israel, the Sanhedrin validated you. The Sanhedrin did not recognize Jesus as having the proper credentials. They did not recognize Him as having *any* credentials.

You need not fear intelligent people. Sure, they try to make you seem ignorant. But if they don't know the truth of the Gospel, their arguments end up being foolish and absurd. Stay simple; stick to the truth.

I can only speculate how long these guys debated over what to ask Jesus that would trip Him up. I can only imagine how stupid they must have felt after Jesus answered them.

Mar 11:29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things:

Jesus was not being evasive. It was a common practice among the Jews to answer a question with a question. It served to further focus the intent of the original question.

I recommend you ask questions when you're asked a question about Jesus or the Bible. Get clarification about what the person is genuinely interested in.

In their deliberations, the delegation from the Sanhedrin must have contemplated potential questions Jesus might have asked.

I think they probably had a mock-debate among themselves, trying out various questions and counter-questions, until they thought their approach was bulletproof.

Jesus' question was a thing of beauty that they had not considered.

Mar 11:30 The baptism of John - was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me."

They were toast. Game, set, match. Turn out the lights.

The "baptism of John" is a summary for his entire ministry of preaching repentance and faith, and baptism on account of the remission of sins. His ministry also included being the forerunner and herald of the Messiah. He had, in fact, identified Jesus as the Messiah, calling Him "the lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world."

Obviously this was a brilliant question from Jesus, on several levels. For one thing it would expose their total inability to recognize those whose authority came from Heaven. They had evaluated John the Baptist, but refused to validate that he had been sent by God.

With thousands upon thousands of Jews going out into the wilderness to be baptized by John, it was the Sanhedrin's responsibility to give it a thumbs-up or a thumbs-down. To ignore it, as they did, was to show how spiritually bankrupt they were. It showed a total disregard for the spiritual well-being of those they ought to be shepherding.

These guys were terrible at their job. They were highly educated, deeply credentialed, recognized as the leaders.

They had no spiritual insight, no spiritual gifting at all, to be leaders, or to evaluate ministries. They were staring their Messiah right in the face, but could not recognize Him on account of their own pride and prejudice.

We sometimes make fun of seminaries, calling them "cemeteries." Sadly, a lot of young men do go into a seminary on fire and alive toward Jesus, only to graduate nearly brain-dead because of their indoctrination to a particular theology and tradition.

Sadly, too, a lot of Christians who reject formal education and claim only the anointing of God are not really gifted for the ministries they are performing. There are pastors that should not be pastoring, and missionaries that should not be missioning.

The ideal situation, I suppose, is for a church to recognize a believer's gifts and callings, then have that person get the most, best, additional training or education that he can.

When it's all said and done, I'll take the gifted layman over the educated clergyman who has no gifting. One of my favorite sayings in all the Bible along these lines is something that these same Jewish leaders would say about the apostles of Jesus after His resurrection from the dead and ascension into Heaven.

Act 4:13 (KJV) Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

Mar 11:31 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?'

Mar 11:32 But if we say, 'From men' " - they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed.

The indication here is that they would have said "from men," even though that was a lie, if it wasn't for their fear of the crowd.

The common people in the crowd were able to see and understand spiritual truth more clearly than those who had placed themselves over them as some kind of spiritual leaders.

Don't underestimate your ability to see and understand spiritual truth.

They were stumped. We're not told how long "they reasoned among themselves," but the truth is, they could *still* be reasoning among themselves and not have an answer that would exonerate them and accuse Jesus.

Mar 11:33 So they answered and said to Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus answered and said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Liars! They knew - they just wouldn't admit it. It would be too costly, from a worldly standpoint. To acknowledge John would be to acknowledge Jesus. They were not wanting to take up the Cross, lose their lives, and follow him.

The religious establishment was set on defying Jesus' authority. No matter what He said, or how He used Scripture, and no matter what He did, they defied Him.

All of us who are born-again would say in a heartbeat that Jesus, and His Word, are the ultimate and final authority in our lives.

We could summarize our theology of authority by quoting the old bumper sticker that says, "God said it; I believe it; That settles it!"

Nevertheless, I think it is healthy to ask ourselves the question, "Are there tables in our lives that defy overturning?"

Let's put it another way. "What am I doing that God does not want me doing?", and "What am I not doing that God wants me doing?"

If I can identify things in either category, then I am defying His authority in my life.

Again I would emphasize that there is no spiritual leader in your life who can answer those questions for you. No one but God the Holy Spirit can be the Holy Spirit for you (if that makes sense).

And again I would emphasize that since we are each a spiritual work in progress, there ARE things in our lives that defy God's authority. They may be glaring, or they may be subtle; but, either way, the Holy Spirit can identify them as we ask Him and wait.

The Bible calls us God's workmanship. Look around at creation. Even in its fallen condition, it is wondrous to behold, beautiful and mysterious, revealing the glory of God.

Creation is like a stage that God built just for you. It is expendable, and, in fact, it will be abandoned at the end of the current timeline. God will make a new earth, and new heavens, where we will live in perfect, glorified bodies in a beautiful city, the New Jerusalem.

You need not fear anything He desires to show you *on* or *under* your table; it's for your good, and his glory, if something needs overturning.

BTW - You may not be a believer in Jesus Christ. You may not be born-again.

I mentioned earlier that the Holy Spirit could convict you. It sounds negative, but it's not. He wants to show you that you are a sinner, in need of saving, because judgment is coming.

He wants to show you Jesus Christ, on the Cross, taking your place so that your sins could be forgiven.

He wants to show you Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, alive to give you power to live life as it was intended.

He is here to lead you to salvation.