

CLEANSING THE TEMPLE

Early in Jesus' public ministry, He went to Jerusalem to observe Passover "and found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting" (John 2:14). The area of the temple here referred to is not the actual place of worship or sacrifice. It is most likely a "large area known as the Court of the Gentiles" (Wycliffe) which was the outermost court built by Herod when he rebuilt the temple to appease the Jewish hierarchy. In this area, those not in a covenant relationship with God could assemble and do business. Only Jews could go any further towards the area of the temple proper. These courts were not a part of God's pattern for the temple; their blue print originated in the minds of men. As Jesus arrives to worship and obey the Law of Moses, He discovers a common market place polluting the way. A veritable zoo-like atmosphere complete with every possible animal needed for Jewish sacrifice and "bankers" willing to cash and exchange any currencies (for a small fee no doubt) for the half-shekel required as an "offering of the LORD" (Exo. 30:13). The temple of the Lord was now no longer the focal point of the Passover. Men had turned the courts outside into a money-making place of trade. Rather than coming to Jerusalem prepared to offer the appropriate sacrifice, people were now trading and trafficking sacrificial animals at the very gates of entrance. One could only surmise that those profiting from the sale of these animals took great and deliberate care to ensure that these animals would be acceptable and authorized by God (cf. Exo. 12:5). Perhaps these animals came with a money-back guarantee – "100% acceptable to God or your money back." No doubt those selling animals, changing Roman currency into Jewish, and the Jewish leaders who permitted these acts to occur before the temple, were enjoying the earnings (or "filthy lucre", compare 1 Pet. 5:1-2) of this business venture. Therefore Jesus "made a scourge of small cords, He drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not My Father's house an house of merchandise" (John 2:15-16). It can be well understood here that these people were not trying to help and simply provide a service for those coming to worship. They were there to make money. It can also be understood that those coming to this market to buy were not preparing to worship God rather, they were simply trying to fulfill what had become nothing more than another annual task or chore. It is sad to note that about three years later, as Jesus' earthly ministry was coming to a close, He would have to purge the temple again. Jesus' rebuke – "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Mat. 21:13).

Many today regard Sundays and Wednesdays as just another task or chore that must be fulfilled during the week. They "go through the motions," but do not come close to God with what they claim to be worship and praise. Too many "television preachers" have made merchandise of the souls of many. They offer spiritual help and healings to those who send in their contributions, profiteering a perverted Gospel designed and intended to line pockets and save no one. Once-faithful works of the church have succumbed to the love of money, which "is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:10). In search of what is touted as much needed funds (but is actually a desire to spend above and beyond their means), preachers (and their pet projects) have pandered to liberals and have compromised their past convictions to the truth. We need only to look to our government to see how easy it is for people to spend money that is not theirs.

Let us prepare our hearts and minds to worship God “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Follow the example of Jesus and purge out sinful attitudes and desires that pollute the House of God. Let us train our minds on pleasing God and not self, set our “affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:2), and seek “first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness” (Mat. 6:33).

- *Brad Green*