

GOSPEL MESSAGE - God's Love Is Not for Sale

Holy Spirit, open our hearts to receive your Word, reveal to us the good news, and enable us to trust in the promise of salvation in Jesus Christ. Amen.

It's a jarring image: A violent Jesus, physically casting away people abusing the Church He loves and protects.

Jesus grabbing a whip and throwing people out of the temple who were using it for profit is a powerful image because Jesus preached peace-making, not fighting. He preached patience and gentleness, not anger and violence. If He was getting *that* angry, it was clear that an extremely grave offense was being committed. The kind of behavior Jesus displayed in the temple that afternoon isn't forbidden, but it wasn't exactly a daily part of Jesus' life, either.

So it was a **bad** day at the Temple for those livestock sellers and money changers. Such activity was forbidden in the temple but the authorities who were present were clearly looking the other way! The high priest received a percentage of the profit from the money changers and merchants, so their removal from the Temple would have caused a financial loss to him. Because pilgrims were not familiar with Jerusalem, the Temple merchants sold sacrificial animals at a higher price than elsewhere in the city. The high priest overlooked their dishonesty, as long as he got his share.

So the scene we are looking at, is merchants and live animals, birds in cages, money exchanging hands, maybe merchants gouging innocent worshippers from out of town. It would have been noisy like any marketplace and very stinky from the animals, yet this marketplace on the entrance to the temple would have been the only place Gentiles could worship.

Bible scholars think this incident happened at Solomon's Porch, the outermost part on the east side of the Temple. Archaeologists

have found a Greek inscription dated to 20 B.C. from the Court of the Gentiles, which warns non-Jews not to go any further into the Temple, on fear of death.

The moneychangers were making it hard for common people to worship God. The outer court was full of bleating lambs and sellers hawking their wares and people exchanging money.

No one was focused on God.

Beside his anger at the money changers' greed, Jesus hated the noise and commotion in the court, which would have made it impossible for devout Gentiles to pray there.

We may not have shady characters collecting temple taxes outside our churches in modern times, but we do have them invading our homes through radio, television and the internet. I must get three phone calls a week, telling me that my taxes are in arrears and the police are coming to arrest me because there was illegal activity on my tax return. Please do not fall for these thieves.

We are best to respond as Jesus did to such selfish swindlers. With no apologies, he drove them out of His Father's house. When we identify a modern money changer, we should do the same, not to give them any power over our lives.

Jesus cleansed the Temple because sinful activities interfered with worship.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus Christ was ushering in a new covenant with humanity, in which animal sacrifice would end, replaced by the perfect sacrifice of his life on the cross, atoning for human sin once and for all.

"When Jesus said he could build the temple in three days, he was trying to get people to recognize the kingdom of God was within him and to believe in him,"

Jesus spoke of his body as the temple. The three days he mentioned referred to his resurrection on the third day. Jesus was the reality to which the temple pointed.

When Jesus was preparing his disciples for his departure, he assured them that when he ascended back to the Father that his followers would accomplish greater works than he was able to do. Jesus was able to say this because God is no longer confined to the temple or the church building. Jesus, the kingdom of God, has come and is moving through each and every one of us. We live each day expectantly. Just maybe we need to cleanse our hearts of attitude that are coming between us and God.

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Today, God doesn't dwell in buildings, but in the hearts of his people. When we come to worship God, we must put aside all distractions and agendas. Jesus wants his people to experience the joy and peace of undistracted devotion. Amen.