

Cleaning House

Mark 11:15-17
Charlie Brackett

Jesus walked into Jerusalem and made His way to the temple. He had been there the previous day, but only looked around. This time, however, He took bold action that must have outraged the chief priests, shocked the worshippers, and surprised even His own disciples. Jesus strode into the temple and drove out those who bought and sold there.

On any typical day, many came to the temple to offer sacrifices for a variety of reasons. God had clearly specified certain sacrifices to be made on certain occasions. These were part of the law of Moses under which Jews in the time of Christ lived. When they came, it was not always convenient to bring with them what was needed to complete the sacrifice, whether some grain or oil, or a pair of pigeons or turtledoves. Especially those who had travelled some distance would have chosen not to carry with them such cumbersome or worrisome items. Better to purchase them after arrival.

Merchants in Jerusalem were quick to see and fill the need. They set up shop right in the temple. It must have looked like a modern European marketplace, or American flea market. Can't you see it? Over there are vendors with doves and pigeons for sale. Each one pleads with you to buy his. Each argues the superiority of his birds. Here you can buy flour, and there olive oil to mix with it for a grain offering. And look there! Some young lambs bleating as if to say, "I know why I'm here, and I don't like it a bit!" But, that's not all. Do you see those tables? They are the money changers'. Many who come here are Jews from foreign lands. They don't have local currency and require the services of a money changer to exchange their Greek coinage, which may have still been in circulation in the first century, or Roman silver denarii, the most common coin of the empire, into small bronze lepta and prutot, which were commonly used for business in Judea.

Jesus drove out the vendors and overturned the money changers' tables scattering coins all over the temple floors. Further, anyone who tried to take a shortcut through temple property carrying the wares of his business, Jesus stopped.

Talk about a teacher getting attention before he begins! Jesus had their attention. Following His unorthodox behavior, He taught them saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations?' But you made it a den of thieves."

Do you suppose some churches today ought to seriously reflect on how they are using the Lord's house of prayer?