

The Messiah In His Temple

Luke 19:45-20:19

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We are entering into the last week in the life of our Lord on earth. The last time we were in Luke was the triumphal entry, which was the Sunday before His Crucifixion. It was when Jesus rode a donkey from the Mount of Olives down through the Kidron Valley and up into Jerusalem through the Eastern Gate.

The people waved palm branches, and they were singing and saying, “Hosanna!” which means “Save Now!” So it’s not a proclamation but a petition. They sang, “Hosanna to the Son of David” (Matthew 21:9). But in anger, the Pharisees, scribes and Sadducees said, “Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.” And Jesus said, “I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out” (Luke 19:39-40). So to the religious leaders, Jesus had ridden openly, triumphantly and defiantly into Jerusalem.

Now we come to our text where Jesus goes into the temple and cleanses it. Date-wise, He probably went into the temple on that Sunday—or it could be Monday—looked around Him and then went back to Bethany, where He spent the night at Mary, Martha and Lazarus’ home. So our text might occur on Tuesday, and Jesus will be teaching on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday in the temple, as it leads to His Crucifixion on Friday and His Resurrection on Sunday.

There are four sections to our text. The first section is Jesus cleansing the temple, verses 45-46. This is the second time He cleansed the temple. Luke has an abbreviated rendition of it. “Then He went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in it, saying to them, ‘It is written, “My house is a house of prayer,” but you have made it a “den of thieves.”’”

Some outline verses 45-48 as Jesus cleansing the temple. But technically the cleansing of the temple is in verses 45-46. Luke doesn’t mention this, but He actually overturned the money changer’s table. He made a whip and chased them out.

You might say, “Wait a minute! Didn’t Jesus already do that at the beginning of His public ministry?” The answer is, “Yes.” But the first time is only recorded in John’s Gospel, chapter 2. At the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus went into the temple, in John 2, and cleansed it. Then at the end of His public ministry, He went back into the temple and again cleansed it. So He “book-ended” His public ministry with these two cleansings of the temple. This second cleansing of the temple is also recorded in Matthew 21 and Mark 11.

by His action and by His words. First is by His action, in verse 45. “He went into the temple.” Malachi 3 said that the Messiah would come and that He would go into the temple. So He is fulfilling Scripture. We see He is on a divine mission.

“The temple” referred to here is the third temple. The first one was the temple of Solomon,

which was destroyed by Babylon. The second temple was the temple of Zerubbabel, and the third temple was Herod's temple, which was this temple, but it had been embellished, enlarged and beautified. This temple had an outer courtyard called "the court of the Gentiles." It also had "the court of the women," "the court of the Israelites," "the court of the priests" and also "the holy of holies."

So Jesus was in the outer courtyard, known as "the court of the Gentiles." And he began to cast out "those who bought and sold." This is all Luke tells us about this event. What is happening here is that Jewish men had come for the Passover. Jerusalem would swell by about 2 million people during this time. They had to give a sacrifice and pay a temple tax.

If you're journeying from afar, it's hard to bring a temple sacrifice with you to Passover. So you would buy one in the temple to sacrifice there. The temple tax would have to be a shekel, so you have to use just the right coinage. And they were changing the coins for the people and charging an exorbitant interest rate.

But if you brought a lamb, goat or turtledove from home or from outside the temple to sacrifice, the priest who examined it and would inevitably find a flaw or blemish in the animal. That meant you could not use it for a sacrifice. They then would be more than happy to redirect you to their preapproved animal table, where you'd pay four times more for the animal. It had the government-sanctioned stamp on it. So they were ripping off the people.

This story speaks of Jesus' righteous anger or indignation. Jesus was mad. This wasn't Jesus meek and mild; this was Jesus angry, with a whip in His hand literally chasing out of the temple all these authorities. These were the leaders of the Jewish nation. And this peasant carpenter from Galilee ran them out of town. How powerful!

So we see Jesus come with a divine mission to the temple. We see Him act with divine authority in cleansing the temple.

The second way He cleansed the temple was by His words, "saying to them, 'It is written, "My house is a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves."'" I like the fact that Jesus always quoted from the Scriptures for the activity that He performed. He gives a Biblical basis for what He is doing. He quoted Isaiah 56:7. It reads, "My house shall be called a house of prayer..." but He omitted "...for all nations" or "for the Gentiles." So this was to be a witness to the Gentiles, but they were being hindered from seeing the glory of God. Jesus was consumed with anger, and it was a righteous indignation. It was a zeal for the glory of God. Then Jesus quoted a second verse: "But you have made it a den of thieves," Which is Jeremiah 7:11.

So Isaiah 56:7 was a positive verse: "My house is a house of prayer." That doesn't mean that's the only thing you do there. They would sacrifice there, and there would be teaching in the courtyard. What it means is that the focus needs to be the worship of God.

Jeremiah 7:11 is the negative verse: "You have made it a den of thieves." In the context, Jeremiah was prophesying to the people of Judah that they had lived in sin and rebellion

against God but had put their trust and confidence in the physical temple, thinking they would be safe or spared. But Jeremiah said, "Don't say, 'The temple of the Lord,'" because their hearts weren't right with God. It was a prophetic proclamation.

So He comes fulfilling Isaiah 56:7 and was also prophesying Jeremiah 7:11.

The second section is Jesus commandeering the temple. He cleansed the temple, verses 45-46; He commandeers the temple, verses 47-48; and He "was teaching daily," verse 47. This phrase means literally "every day, all day" He taught in the temple.

When we first saw Jesus in the temple at age 12, He was teaching and dialoging. His mother and father found him there and said, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously!" Then Jesus said, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:48-49). So Jesus opened His ministry in His "Father's house" and closes it there. So when He said in Isaiah 56:7 "My house," that was true. It was His house; it was a divine authority He has.

So Jesus cleared out the bad guys and taught the Word of God in the temple daily. Another Scripture said that He was "preaching the Gospel as well."

Verse 47, "But the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him." These people represented the Sanhedrin, which was a group of 70, spiritual, national leaders or a high court of the Jewish people. They opposed Jesus and were upset with Him. He had come into Jerusalem on a donkey claiming to be the Messiah, and now He had cleansed the temple, commandeered the temple and was teaching in the temple.

Verse 48, they "were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear Him." This phrase "attentive to hear Him" in the Greek means they were "hanging on His every word," as we would say.

As far as application, we see Jesus' righteous indignation, His zeal for the glory of God, his devotion to the Scriptures and His relationship to the earthly temple.

Jesus became the temple of God. When He was there preaching, in John 2:19, 21. He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up....But He was speaking of the temple of His body." Everything that the temple prefigured and pointed to was fulfilled in the Person of Jesus Christ. He was Messiah, the Son of God, but their hearts were hardened, so they discredited Him and rejected Him.

Next we move to chapter 20, verses 1-2, our third section. Jesus' authority is questioned in the temple. "Now it happened on one of those days..." this was probably Tuesday or Wednesday "...as He taught the people in the temple..." in the court of the Gentiles "...and preached the gospel, that the chief priests and the scribes, together with the elders..." this is the Sanhedrin "...confronted Him and spoke to Him, saying, 'Tell us, by what authority are You doing these things? Or who is he who gave You this authority?'"

I have a hard time not preaching this section with imagination. If I were Jesus, I'd let them know who I was! I'd say, "I'm the Son of God! I was born of a virgin. I came from heaven. I lived a sinless life. I cleansed the leper and raised the dead. When I was baptized, My Father spoke from heaven saying, 'This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased'" (Matthew 3:17).

On the mount of transfiguration, when He was transfigured before Peter, James and John, Moses and Elijah showed up, and audibly the Father spoke and said, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Luke 9:35).

So if I were Jesus—and I'm not—I would have told them flat out who I am, and I would have told them who they're not and to bug off! Aren't you glad I'm not Jesus? But Jesus didn't do that; He's so gracious, wise and amazing.

So they basically asked Jesus, "Who do You think You are?!" Think about that. They're asking Jesus Christ, the Son of God the Father, the Second Person of the Godhead, the Creator of heaven and earth, "Who do You think You are?!" Excuse me?

Our third section is in verses 3-8. "But He answered and said to them, 'I also will ask you one thing, and answer Me. The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men?' And they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'If we say, "From heaven," He will say, "Why then did you not believe him?" But if we say, "From men," all the people will stone us...' they couldn't have that! '...for they are persuaded that John was a prophet.'" The people believed John was a true prophet from heaven. "So they answered that they did not know where it was from."

Literally it was that they would not tell; they knew the truth, but all they cared about was their power and position. They didn't say what was true; they said what was convenient or advantageous for them.

Verse 8, "And Jesus said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.'" If you go head-to-head with Jesus, you're going to lose; He is the Son of God. "No man ever spoke like this man" (John 7:46).

Jesus often answered their questions with questions. I heard of some rabbi who used to do that, and one of his students asked him, "Rabbi, why do you always answer our question with a question?" He answered, "Why shouldn't I?" I like that. Jesus wanted them to think, to realize the truth of who He was.

Go back to verse 4. "The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men?" They got into a little holy huddle. "What are we going to say?" They should have said the truth; that it was from God. "If we say, 'From heaven,' He'll say, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'"

John said about Jesus, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). When John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River, the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit as a dove came down and the voice of God the Father audibly said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (John 3:17). John said, speaking of Jesus, "It is He who, coming after

me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am no worthy to loose" (John 1:27). So John was a profit, but they wouldn't admit it.

So they answered Jesus that they couldn't tell. If they said, "He is of men," then the people would stone them. So they lied and said, "They did not know." Yet they did know. It's a sad day when your spiritual leaders lie about the truth to save their own necks, to save their own positions, to save their own power.

So Jesus Christ was the victor in this episode. He had conquered their questions in the temple about His authority. Jesus had all power and all authority given to Him (Matthew 28:18).

Now Jesus gives a parable, which is our fourth section, verses 9-19. This is one of the most theologically deep, interesting and fascinating parables Jesus ever gave, because it is also allegorical; each thing in the parable represents something. The word "parable" is the Greek word "parabole," which means "to lay alongside." It is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

Starting in verse 9, "Then He began to tell the people..." now He turns from the religious leaders in the temple to the people "...this parable: 'A certain man planted a vineyard, leased it to vinedressers, and went into a far country for a long time. Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that they might give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the vinedressers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent another servant; and they beat him also, treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. And again he sent a third; and they wounded him also and cast him out.'"

In this parable, Jesus gives the history of the nation of Israel—past, present and future. These verses show us the patience, the compassion, the mercy, the longsuffering of God toward the nation of Israel. The "certain man" who planted the vineyard is God the Father. The "vineyard" is clearly the nation of Israel. This is a picture of God the Father planting the nation of Israel like a vineyard in the land, giving them His covenant promises to them through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The "vinedressers" represent the spiritual leaders of Israel, which were the Pharisees and scribes. The "servants" represent the prophets. God sent the prophets to the nation of Israel over and over, but they were treated badly. I'm glad God is patient, merciful and kind, but there comes a time when God brings judgment.

If I were God—and I'm not—I would have cut them off a long time ago. The first time I sent a servant to collect the rent on the land and they despised him and treated him shamefully, I would say, "Okay; it's done!" But He sent them again and again.

If you read the sermon Stephen gave in Acts 7, specifically verses 51-52, he said, "Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?" What they did to Isaiah was they sawed him in two. They threw Jeremiah in a dungeon. All the prophets were despised and rejected. But God was patient and loving and longed for them to turn to Him. In their past, they had hard hearts and rejected God and rejected His messengers.

Verse 13, "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son.'"

This is a reference to Jesus Christ, the Messiah. “‘Probably they will respect him when they see him.’ But when the vinedressers saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.’ So they cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it they said, ‘Certainly not!’”

The owner of the vineyard, after sending many servants who were rejected, decided to send his “beloved son.” Remember that when the Father spoke from heaven, He said, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” So this parable is a picture of God sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to the nation of Israel to be the Savior of the world.

In the parable, it says that “They cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.” This is a reference to the Cross and to the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Jesus was giving this parable, in which He was actually predicting His future Crucifixion. Jesus came to die for the sins of the world. He knew what was going to happen. He was on a divine mission. So He was actually prophesying in the parable about His Cross that He would die on for the sins of the world.

Then the question was, “Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those vinedressers...” which is this Jewish nation and its leaders “...and give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it they said, ‘Certainly not!’”

What does he mean that he will “give the vineyard to others”? It means that God would shift the focus from Israel to His church. This is not replacement theology. God has a purpose, a plan and a future for the nation of Israel. But right now God is all about the church, His bride, the body of Christ; it’s the widening of God’s mercy and grace.

Romans 9 is Israel’s past election. God chose those people to be His channel of blessing to the world, to be a light to the world. Even at the dedication of the temple by Solomon, he said, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Isaiah 56:7), that the people of the world could come there and worship the God of the Bible.

Romans 10 is Israel’s present rejection. God broke off the natural olive branches and then grafted in the wild olive branches, which is the Gentiles. Then we became partakers of the covenant promises to Israel. He took the vineyard from them and gave it to another.

But the Jewish rejection is only partial and temporary. There are Jews in the church who believe in Jesus. We don’t see ourselves as Jew or Gentile, bond or free; we are all one in Christ. We are all members of the family of God. The temple now is a people; God inhabits His church, His bride. So this rejection is only partial; there are Jews who believe in Jesus and have been born again. Praise God! They are part of the church.

And this rejection is only for a time; it’s temporary. Paul says it will last “until the fullness of the

Gentiles has come in" (Romans 11:25). That's the church. That's why I believe that when the church is raptured, when the Antichrist will be revealed and makes a covenant with Israel for seven years, God will once again work with the nation of Israel. There will be 144,000 evangelists preaching the Gospel during the tribulation. God will bring the Jews to repentance; they're going to see Jesus come back in the Second Coming.

What we're reading right now contrasts with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. He's in the temple. He's the Lord of the temple. He's the Messiah. He's their Savior. But they stumble over that. Matthew 21:44 says, "Whoever falls on this stone..." referring to Jesus "...will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."

But there will be a national revival in Israel, and they will be restored. Romans 11 speaks of Israel's future restoration to their election and to their purpose and plan as it goes into the millennium or the kingdom age.

Jesus now looked eyeball to eyeball at the religious leaders, and in verses 17-18 He said, "Then He looked at them and said, 'What then is this that is written: "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone"? (quoting Psalm 118:22). Whoever falls on that stone will be broken...' which I believe refers to being saved by falling in broken repentance upon Jesus '...but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.'" This I believe is judgment.

Verse 19, "And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on Him..." to arrest Him "...but they feared the people—for they knew He had spoken this parable against them." You betcha He had! And they knew He was directing these words to them. They knew the "vineyard" represented the nation of Israel.

Now Jesus is likened to a stone, verses 17-19. This quote from Psalm 118:22 is a Hallel psalm that as pilgrims they would be singing on the way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover feast. Jesus is the stone, and you're either falling on Him in repentance and faith, being broken of pride and self-righteousness, being forgiven and saved; or one day the stone will grind you into powder, as in Daniel 2, when the stone smote the image of Nebuchadnezzar's vision. Jesus is coming back as a smiting stone. So either you fall on Him in salvation, or He falls on you in judgment and condemnation.

The religious leaders in Israel sinned against the Light. It's a very dangerous thing to do when you have light or revelation. Luke 12:48 says, "To whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more."

Today you received a lot of great information. What do you do with it? Are you believing in Jesus? Are you following Him? Are you broken in repentance before Him and are saved? Or are you hardening your heart, sinning against the Light and the stone will come in judgment, fall on you and grind you to powder?

The famous Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon, called "the prince of preachers," said about

Christ's rejection by Israel: "If you reject Him, He answers you with tears. If you wound Him, He bleeds out cleansing. If you kill Him, He dies to redeem. If you bury Him, He rises again to bring Resurrection. Jesus is love made manifest."