

# **To Seek and to Save the Lost**

## **Jesus Cleanses the Temple**

*Luke 19:45-48*

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# Jesus Cleanses the Temple

## Scripture

The final section in *The Gospel of Luke* begins at Luke 19:28. Luke described Jesus' final week on earth, and began with his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (19:28-40). As Jesus drew near the city of Jerusalem he burst into tears and wept over the city because of the coming judgment on people who refused to repent of their sin and believe in him (19:41-44). *The Gospel of Mark* records that Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve (Mark 11:11). Most likely Jesus stayed in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

Jesus came to the city of Jerusalem for the Passover. The first Passover was the event in which God "passed over" the Israelite homes in Egypt during the Tenth Plague. A commemoration known as the Passover was established, and celebrations were recorded in both the Old Testament and New Testament.<sup>1</sup> In just a few days Jesus would be killed at exactly the same time as the "Passover Lamb."

John MacArthur notes in his commentary that lodging was a significant problem during Passover. Some calculate that as many as two million Jews were in and around Jerusalem during Passover. Housing was very difficult to find. So, it was good that Jesus and his disciples had friends in Bethany with a home large enough to accommodate them on that Sunday evening.<sup>2</sup>

On the following day, Monday, Jesus returned to the temple (cf. Mark 11:12). What Jesus had seen in the temple grounds the previous day set the stage for the dramatic confrontation that took place there.

Let's read about Jesus' cleansing of the temple in Luke 19:45-48:

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<sup>1</sup> Spencer A. Jones, "Passover," ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, John F (2014-10-01). Luke 18-24 MacArthur New Testament Commentary (MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series) (pp. 102-103). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

**<sup>45</sup> And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, <sup>46</sup> saying to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of robbers.”**

**<sup>47</sup> And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him, <sup>48</sup> but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words. (Luke 19:45-48)**

## Introduction

We live in a day in which there is massive confusion about how to worship God. Several years ago I visited a number of different church worship services, and it often felt more like attending a concert than attending a worship service. Of course there is great danger in a wrong understanding about how to worship God. John W. Everett once said, “Carnal men are content with the ‘act’ of worship; they have no desire for communion with God.”<sup>3</sup>

I have previously shared an illustration about an article in *The Wall Street Journal* that described one well-known church’s bid “to perk up attendance at Sunday evening services.” The church “staged a wrestling match, featuring church employees. To train for the event, 10 game employees got lessons from Tugboat Taylor, a former professional wrestler, in pulling hair, kicking shins and tossing bodies around without doing real harm.”<sup>4</sup> John MacArthur says, “No harm to the staff members, perhaps, but what is the effect of such an exhibition on the church’s message? Is not the gospel itself clouded and badly caricatured by such tomfoolery?”<sup>5</sup>

A. W. Tozer wrote a lot about the distortion of worship, which

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<sup>3</sup> John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold: A treasury of quotations for Christians* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2006), 687.

<sup>4</sup> R. Gustav Niebuhr, “Mighty Fortresses: Megachurches Strive to Be All Things to All Parishioners,” *The Wall Street Journal* (13 May 1991), A6.

<sup>5</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes like the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 69.

has degenerated into entertainment. He wrote these words in 1955, which are just as accurate in 2015:

For centuries the Church stood solidly against every form of worldly entertainment, recognizing it for what it was – a device for wasting time, a refuge from the disturbing voice of conscience, a scheme to divert attention from moral accountability. For this she got herself abused roundly by the sons of this world. But of late she has become tired of the abuse and has given over the struggle. She appears to have decided that if she cannot conquer the great god Entertainment she may as well join forces with him and make what use she can of his powers. So today we have the astonishing spectacle of millions of dollars being poured into the unholy job of providing earthly entertainment for the so-called sons of heaven. Religious entertainment is in many places rapidly crowding out the serious things of God. Many churches these days have become little more than poor theaters where fifth-rate “producers” peddle their shoddy wares with the full approval of evangelical leaders who can even quote a holy text in defense of their delinquency. And hardly a man dares raise his voice against it.<sup>6</sup>

Well, Jesus raised a voice against the distortion of worship he found at the temple in Jerusalem. He certainly did something about the unholy worship there.

### **Lesson**

Jesus’ cleansing of the temple in Luke 19:45-48 shows us his anger and prophetic denunciation of distorted worship.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. Jesus Was Zealous for the Pure Worship of God (19:45-46)
2. Jesus Was Passionate about the Clear Teaching of God’s Word (19:47-48)

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<sup>6</sup> A. W. Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1955), 32-33.

## I. Jesus Was Zealous for the Pure Worship of God (19:45-46)

First, Jesus was zealous for the pure worship of God.

Luke said in verse 45 that Jesus **entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold**. Most commentators believe that this was actually the second time that Jesus drove out the money-changers from the temple. The first time was at the beginning of his ministry, which is recorded in John 2:13-17:

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

So, almost three years later the money-changers and merchants were at it again. They engaged in business within the temple precinct, and this drove Jesus to action because he was zealous for the pure worship of God.

John MacArthur says that Jesus' entire ministry focused on spiritual matters. His concern was always that God be worshiped in the manner prescribed in his Word. He said to the Samaritan woman, "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24). Jesus understood that all was not as it should be socially, economically, politically, and in terms of justice and equity. But he also knew that the only way to remedy those injustices was to exchange hypocrisy and works-righteousness for a true relationship with God. Therefore, his ministry always focused on the kingdom of God and true worship of him.

The Greek word for **temple** (*hieros*) is the general term for the temple grounds as a whole, the vast complex that was able to accommodate thousands of worshipers. Within this area, surrounded by an outer wall, were several inner courts, progressively smaller, with the innermost being the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place, which were designated by a different word for temple (*naos*). The outer court was the Court of the Gentiles, so named because Gentiles were forbidden to go any further on pain of death. Inside the Court of the Gentiles was the Court of the Women, which was as far as women were permitted to go. That court was entered by a gate known as the Beautiful Gate, which was a popular place for beggars (Acts 3:10). Men could enter the next court, the Court of the Israelites, through Nicanor's Gate, made of Corinthian bronze and so massive that it took twenty men to open and close it. From the Court of the Israelites the assembled worshipers could look through the doorway into the next courtyard, the Court of the Priests. Although they could not enter, they could watch the priests offering incense and sacrificing animals. In the rear of the Court of the Priests was the temple (*naos*), or sanctuary, itself; that is, the Holy Place and then the Holy of Holies. The entire complex, including all the courts, comprised the **temple** (*hieros*) of God.

What was happening in the Court of the Gentiles made Jesus righteously angry. It had essentially been turned into a commercial center, where hundreds of thousands of animals and the other items needed for the sacrifices were sold. Theoretically, people could bring their own animals to be sacrificed. However, those animals first had to be approved by the priests. They had a vested interest in rejecting them, to boost the sales of animals from which the high priests Annas and Caiaphas profited. Money-changers had also set up shop there. They provided a needed service. The temple tax could only be paid using Jewish or Tyrian coins, so foreigners had to exchange their money for acceptable coinage. But because they had a monopoly, the money-changers charged exorbitant fees for their services (as high as 12.5% [F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 74]).

The merchandising in the Court of the Gentiles had become known as the Bazaar of Annas, after the greedy high priest before whom Jesus would be tried first after his arrest in Gethsemane in just a few days (John 18:13-23). Although he was no longer the actual high priest, Annas still retained the title and wielded tremendous power and influence behind the scenes. Along with his son-in-law Caiaphas, the current high priest, they ran the temple's business operations, becoming extremely wealthy in the process. They sold franchises to the merchants for exorbitant prices and then skimmed off a huge percentage of the profits that the shop owners made.

All of this had combined to turn the temple of God into a noisy, smelly stockyard. The worshipful atmosphere that was appropriate for the temple, the symbol of God's presence, was missing. Instead of being a place of sacred reverence and adoration, it had become a cacophony of abusive commerce and extortion. The sound of praise and prayers had been replaced by the bawling of oxen, the bleating of sheep, the cooing of doves, and the loud haggling of merchants and their customers.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus was repulsed by what he saw at the temple because he was zealous for the pure worship of God. And so he drove out the merchants and said to them, **"It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers"** (19:46).

There are actually two Old Testament quotations here. The first quotation – that the temple **shall be a house of prayer** – is from Isaiah 56:7 where God promises to bring foreigners to himself in salvation. According to Isaiah, God will not exclude from his people the foreigner "who has bound himself to the Lord" (Isaiah 56:3). According to God, "their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called *a house of prayer* for all peoples" (Isaiah 56:7). Clearly, as far as Jesus was concerned, based on his observations at the temple, the distortion of worship that had taken place in the Court of the Gentiles had effectively excluded the

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<sup>7</sup> MacArthur, John F (2014-10-01). Luke 18-24 (pp. 104-106). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

Gentiles from praying in God's temple. This was a clear violation of enabling foreigners to worship God.

The second quotation – that the temple was **a den of robbers** – is from Jeremiah 7:11. In the Old Testament, God called Jeremiah to stand at the gate of the Lord's house to proclaim a message to all the "men of Judah" (Jeremiah 7:2). Listen to what God said to them in Jeremiah 7:2-11:

Hear the word of the Lord, all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words: "This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord."

For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.

Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, "We are delivered!" – only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become *a den of robbers* in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord.

What is going on here? My friend, Peter Smuts, has identified the real problem in his commentary on this incident.<sup>8</sup> He says that it is apparent that God's people are guilty of all manner of sin, yet they believe that they are exempt from divine judgment because of the presence of God's temple in their midst. "We are safe," they say, "safe to do all these detestable things" (Jeremiah 7:10b, *NIV*). But they are "deceptive words to no avail" (7:8). It is against this background that God questions whether "this house, which is called by my name" has

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<sup>8</sup> This material is from P. W. Smuts, *Mark by the Book: A New Multidirectional Method for Understanding the Synoptic Gospels* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 156-158.

become a **den of robbers** to them (7:11).

Now here is the point, and it is important to catch its focus. It may appear that Jesus is targeting the commercial activity that is taking place in the temple, and denouncing the robbing of the worshipers there who are being charged exorbitant prices. Yet Jeremiah does not include trading in the temple in the catalogue of sins he lists. Rather, his message denounces religious people for their false sense of security in the temple and its sacrificial system. Commentator David E. Garland spells out the implications for understanding Jesus' use of Jeremiah's prophecy:

The robbers are not swindlers but bandits, and they do not do their robbing in their den. The den is the place where robbers retreat after having committed their crimes. It is their hideout, a place of security and refuge. Calling the temple a robbers' den is therefore not a cry of outrage against any dishonest business practices in the temple. Jesus indirectly attacks them for allowing the temple to degenerate into a safe hiding place where people think that they find forgiveness and fellowship with God no matter how they act on the outside. Jesus' prophetic action and words attack a false trust in the efficacy of the temple sacrificial system. . . . The sanctuary . . . has become a sanctuary for bandits who think that they are protected from God's judgment. They phrase "[I myself have seen it]" (Jeremiah 7:11) matches the description of Jesus' visit to the temple on the previous day, when he "looked around at everything" (Mark 1:11), turning that visit into an inspection. Jesus shares the purview of God. He has seen what the people are doing and pronounces God's judgment.<sup>9</sup>

Jesus is zealous for the pure worship of God, and he pronounces God's judgment on false worship.

How about you? Do you think that you are okay with God just because you attend worship services? Are you trusting your eternal destiny on the fact that you attend worship services? Do you think you are protected from God's judgment because you find yourself at

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<sup>9</sup> David E. Garland, *Mark*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 439.

the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church on Sunday mornings?

Do not put your trust in outward acts – even acts of worship – to save you. Only faith in Jesus and repentance from sin will save you.

## II. **Jesus Was Passionate about the Clear Teaching of God’s Word (19:47-48)**

And second, Jesus was passionate about the clear teaching of God’s Word.

Over the next few days Jesus taught daily in the temple. Luke said in verses 47-48, **“And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him, but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words.”**

The religious leaders wanted to destroy Jesus. But Jesus went on teaching God’s Word to the people. Right until the very end of his life, even while hanging on the cross in just a few days, Jesus was passionate about the clear teaching of God’s Word. He wanted people to know how to come into a right relationship with God, which was through faith in him and repentance of sin.

### **Conclusion**

Therefore, having analyzed Jesus’ cleansing of the temple in Luke 19:45-48, we should examine our own worship of God.

How we worship God is very important. It is easy to become content with the “act” of worship, and think that we are okay with God.

The Christian scholar Larry Taunton launched a nationwide campaign to interview college students who belong to atheistic campus groups. After receiving a flood of enquiries, Larry and his team heard one consistent theme from these young unbelievers: they often expected but didn’t find more spiritual depth from their Christian neighbors. Larry writes:

Some [of these young atheists] had gone to church hoping to find answers to [tough questions about faith]. Others hoped to find answers to questions of personal significance, purpose, and ethics. Serious-minded, they often concluded that church services were largely shallow, harmless, and ultimately irrelevant. As Ben, an engineering major at the University of Texas, so bluntly put it: “I really started to get bored with church.”

In contrast, these young atheists expressed their respect for those ministers who took the Bible seriously. Larry writes,

Without fail, our former church-attending students expressed [positive] feelings for those Christians who unashamedly embraced biblical teaching. Michael, a political science major at Dartmouth, told us, “I really can’t consider a Christian a good, moral person if he isn’t trying to convert me. . . . Christianity is something that if you *really* believed it, it would change your life and you would want to change [the lives] of others. I haven’t seen too much of that.”<sup>10</sup>

True worshipers do not seek entertainment. True worshipers do not want to worship God in their own way. No, true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

Jesus’ cleansing of the temple is really a warning to all of us. Each one of us should examine our own worship of God. Do we think that God will accept us and our worship simply because we go through the act of worship? That was the warning in Jeremiah. Going through the motions in a worship service will not bring us forgiveness and fellowship with God.

True worship flows out of a relationship with God. It is because we have faith in Jesus Christ and are repenting of our sins. May God help each one of us to worship him in spirit and in truth. Amen.

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<sup>10</sup> Larry Alex Taunton, “Listening to Young Atheists: Lessons for a Stronger Christianity,” *The Atlantic* (6-6-13).



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons)
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp)
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**PRAYER:**

Our Father, in today's lesson we learned about Jesus' cleansing of the temple. We saw his anger and his prophetic denunciation of distorted worship.

O God, if there is anyone here today who is self-deceived about his or her standing before you, will you open that person's eyes to the impending danger? Show each one of us whether or not we truly do worship you in spirit and in truth.

Will you enable any person who has not yet become a Christian to turn to Jesus in faith and repentance today? Will you help that person trust in Jesus as the way and the truth and the life, and the only one who can save? And will you help that person turn from sin and live a life of wholehearted obedience to you.

And for this I pray in your name. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!