

Christ Cleanses the Temple, Part 2

Luke 19:45-48

Verse 46 Jesus said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you," you, "have made it into a den of robbers." He cites two scriptures here, Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11, and by citing scripture he uses that formulaic "It is written" statement to introduce it. And though he is the Messiah, though he bears the weight of divine authority, and therefore all of his words and all of his actions reveal the will that has a divine sanction.

Jesus cites Scripture in order to show that he is acting in perfect continuity with the revealed will of God. He wants everybody to see, this is what is written. What I'm doing is in complete accord with what is written. This is God's intention all along. Go read the text for yourself.

First part of the quotation comes from Isaiah 56 verse 7 says, "My house shall be called," you can turn there if you like

Isaiah 56, "my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." That's the point of the temple. The temple is a place to come and repent of sin. To come before the all seeing, all knowing God, unburden the guilty conscience to the honest humble confession of sin.

The temple is the place for seeking God's forgiveness, for looking to the atoning work of God through this shedding of innocent animal blood, all pointing to the innocent Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. For without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins. Then the Lord cites that portion of Isaiah 56:7. But as per usual, he is alluding to the entire prophetic message of Isaiah 56.

He doesn't want them, just a spot check, a reference, fact check him. He wants them to go and read the context. I'm not going to read the whole thing, but just listen to these verses from Isaiah 56 versus 6 and 7. "The foreigners who join themselves to the Lord to minister to Him, to love the name of the Lord to be His servants. Everyone who keeps the sabbath does not profane it and holds fast my covenant. These I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings, their sacrifices will be accepted on," on, "my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."

That's pointing to a future day, that's pointing to a millennial temple that you can read about in Ezekiel 40 to 48. That's a time coming when not only the Jews in the temple, the restored temple, but Gentiles as well will come from all their different nations to come and worship and offer sacrifice there before the Lord. Looking back to the once for all sacrifice for sins, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what the temple is for, to see the atonement provided. To offer up prayers of humble confession, to offer up prayers of gratitude and joy. That's not what the priests have been using it for. They're like those whom Isaiah identifies later on in that chapter. Whom the Lord indicts, in verses 9 to 12 of Isaiah 56, the priests are devouring beasts. Verse 9, they're blind watchmen without any knowledge. Verse 10, they're dumb dogs, unable to speak, to bark. They're mute. They're dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber. They're lazy. The shepherds are false, verse 11, without understanding, each one

pursuing his own gain. They say in verse 12, "Come, let's get wine, let's get something to drink. Let's fill ourselves with strong drink. Tomorrow will be like this day, only great beyond measure."

I've seen some pastors like that back in the emergent church movement all throwing up their steins of beer on their websites and showing that they're drinkers. Preaching sermons about drinking strong drink and beers and all that. That is not what Christians are to be known for. Just like they did in that day. So they do in our day. People don't change.

Luke portrays Jesus in his Messianic role, coming suddenly into his temple. He finds corruption in the place of absolution. He finds avarice in the place of forgiveness. He finds covetous idolatry in the place of humble worship. The people are, they're ignorant, they're unconverted, they're lost in their sins. Therefore they remain under the judgment of God, the condemnation of his holy wrath.

The temple is not to be a house of commerce. It's, it's not to be the bazaar of Annas to enrich a corrupt priesthood, to fund the extravagant, lazy lifestyles of theological liberals who refused to fear God, who refused to submit to His word and humble obedience. That's not, that's what the Lord found as he goes there, exactly this. Jesus tells the money changers, the merchants, buyers, sellers, people and priests alike. They've turned the God given, God ordained, house of prayer into something else entirely. They've turned it into a den of robbers.

Robbers. That's the word *lestes*. *lestes*, the word for a violent criminal who engages in the forceful illicit seizure of property, often ambushing people in dark alleys, or on dark parts of a road, a bend in a road where they're hidden. Same word, by the way that Jesus used in the parable of the Good Samaritan about that poor traveler who was going from Jericho to Jerusalem. He fell among these *lestes*, the *lestes*, robbers. They stripped him, ruthlessly beat him, left him for dead.

So these are the kinds of thieves that are not just merely like fraudsters and con men, online scammers, you know, stealing

by trickery and deceit, these are violent abusers, they've got no regard for human life. They're malicious criminals. They're merciless, pitiless, and brutal. Reference "den of robbers" comes from the prophecy of Jeremiah, so you can turn over to Jeremiah chapter 7, Jeremiah chapter 7.

The partial quotation comes from Jeremiah 7:11, but again, that short quotation is meant to allude to the whole prophecy from verses 1 to 15. Again, Jesus isn't just saying hey, go check your Bibles, check this little short reference and make sure I'm telling the truth. He's saying I want you to read the entire context and get the point.

Look at Jeremiah 7:1 to 4 that the word came to Jeremiah from the Lord. "Stand in the gate of the Lord's house. Proclaim there this word and say, 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'll let you dwell in this place. Don't trust in these deceptive words. This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord."

What's that remind you of, pagan Ephesians, right, in the city of Ephesus, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians, great is Artemis of the Ephesians." Working themselves up into a riotous spirit of anger and beating them and sending them out. Same spirit is here at work in the Jews about Yahweh's temple. They turn the temple itself into a chant, a mantra, to express this ignorant religious zeal. Same thing here.

Keep reading. Look at verse 5, "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 don't go after other gods to your own harm, then I'll let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave you of old and 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, go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first and see what I did to it, because of the," of the, "evil of my people, Israel.

"And now because you've done all these things, declares the Lord. And when I spoke to you persistently and you didn't listen, when I called you and you didn't answer, therefore I will do to this house, that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. I will cast you out of my sight as I cast out all your kinsman, all the offspring of Ephraim."

When he indicts them here in Jeremiah. Same thing that Jesus does in Luke 19. You can turn back there, by the way, but when he indicts them for turning his house into a den of robbers, he is not merely accusing them of corruption, greed, violent intent to rob people. I mean, it's at least that that's at least what he's saying. He's actually accusing them of something, something else.



What is a den of robbers? What's a den? The word actually is the word cave. So think robbers back then use caves to hide out in. So this is how robbers hide out. Robbers' den. It's the place to which robbers retreat after they've committed their crime. They go and ambush out on the road or in some dark place in the city, and then they retreat to a den, to a cave, to a place of what? Refuge.

They go there to escape the law, to elude justice. In the same way the religious leaders of the Jews, they've turned the temple into their own refuge in order to avoid true justice. Rather than the temple being a place of open, humble, submissive prayer before God, these religious leaders, they've abandoned the entire point of the temple, starting with themselves.

They were not open. They were not humble. They were not submissive men of godly piety. They were crooks, criminals, robbers. And just as robbers use a cave as a hideout to run and hide, to duck accountability, to escape justice, to count the loot. Priests or religious leaders, Sadducees, Pharisees, backed

up by the scribes that they hired to provide scholarly cover and academic respectability for all their views and opinions. They were using the temple complex to enrich themselves, and using titles and positions and wealth to erect barriers against scrutiny.

To create a bastion, a stronghold, a lair where they're shielded from all accountability. Where they could keep the people at a distance, temple had become their den. The place they could use to intimidate, and bully, and coerce, shakedown people, steal. Our Lord put his finger on the heart of the problem right here. He did something about it, and they hated him for it. No wonder at the end of the week, he's going to be dead.

Now, why did the Lord do this? Is he just trying to like, stir it up because he's so prophetic? Is he trying to poke the religious leaders in the eye and just make him kind of mad? Is he trying to mix it up, stir it up? Provoke. Agitate? Is he an agitator? Provocateur.

No, the Lord is just being the Lord. He's just simply being himself. He's doing what's right. He's doing what's on his heart to do, and he leaves the results to God. What's on his heart to do? Love God, love people. He just does that according to his own role, according to what he's been assigned to do, called to do, chosen by God to do, gifted and equipped and sent by God to do, commissioned to do. He does that, and then he leaves the results to God. That brings us, when he loves God, loves his people, that brings us to the Lord's second concern here. I promise you, this one will be shorter.

That Christ not only prepares the temple, secondly, Christ prepares the people. Christ prepares the people. Cleansing the temple is just the beginning. It just sets the necessary foundation for ministry, for teaching, helping the people know who God is, what he's like, what he actually requires. The people need truth, and perhaps that's why Luke has been very abbreviated in his identifying the action of Jesus at the temple to drive out those who bought, sold, and all the rest.

He's just trying to get past that, lest we get caught up as, as we just did, quite frankly, my fault, I'll take ownership

and responsibility for that. He's trying to, Luke is trying to speed us along. Because the point, that's just the beginning. Clearing the temple, cleansing the temple, preparing the temple, that's just sets the stage for everything else that's coming in chapter 20, 21, 22, as he teaches, teaches, teaches.

Truth is the important thing. Truth is a crucial, critical, vital thing because when people know what God is like, when they know, as Isaiah did, that he is the thrice holy God who's majestic, and powerful, and frankly, for a sinner, frightening. You know, the God with whom you have to do, and you see yourself in stark contrast, that you're a sinner in thought, word, and deed. You haven't done everything that God's required you to do, and you've done a lot of things that he tells you not to do. Your conscience is troubled. You're overcome with the sense of your own sinfulness before God, and what does that do? Just, is that just to make you feel bad? No. It's to drive you to the one and only Savior, Jesus Christ. It's what He wants.

As people become aware of the depth of their failure before God, as they recognize their poverty of spirit, they come to mourn over their sins. They start to hunger and thirst for

righteousness that they lack. They long to know, "how can I be reconciled to this holy God." Jesus, very pleased to tell them.

Beginning at verse 47, we read he was teaching daily in the temple and then look down a couple verses later, chapter 20, verse 1, we read Jesus was teaching in the temple, the people in the temple, and preaching the gospel. He's evangelizing them. He declared the truth of God to them. He explained what it meant. He told him who God is, what he's like, what he requires of them. They are convicted to their conscience, to the core of their being, and they, looking out for help, understand the implications of all the truth that they're hearing, looking out for help, Jesus visits them, Luke 20 verse 1, with the gospel.

We could say it this way, just kind of sum this all up, that he's pastoring these people. He loves to shepherd people. He's a shepherd at heart. He is the Good Shepherd. In fact, we come, you can flip over a page or two and see the end of the section, Luke 21:37 to 38, we get, Luke gives us a summary there. "Every day," it says, "he was teaching at the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mountain called Olivet.

But early in the morning all the people came to him in the temple to hear him."

They keep thronging and coming, flocking together like sheep without a shepherd. He comes to teach them. He's acting as a Good Shepherd. He's telling them how they can lie down in green pastures. He's telling them where they could feed on good, strengthening food. He's leading them besides still water, so they can drink deeply, be refreshed. He wants to heal their wounds, clean them of all their filth and their idolatry. He wants to restore their souls so they can be converted by divine grace. Experience God's mercy, compassion, rest in God's Fatherly sovereign care.

Jesus is not here interested in reforming institutions. He's not interested in voting the right people into positions of political influence. He is the political influence. The government's on his shoulders. And as head of state, as chief politician, he comes in and deals with the heart problem, the sin issue. He's not interested in winning ground in the public square, winning friends and influencing people. He's not interested in turning the tide of public opinion and making

society more religious, more amenable to God talk and religious talk.

Jesus is interested in heart and seeing people converted, set free from their sin, reconciled to God living in the freedom and power of holiness. And by the way, beloved, Grace Church, this is the same mission that he has given to us. Telling us, the Church, and the Great Commission, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit, and then teaching them to observe, to obey, to follow all that I've commanded you, and behold, I'm with you always to the end of the age.

So verse 47 he's teaching daily in the temple until his arrest, until the spurious trials that condemned him, until his public execution on a cross. An outcome that is clearly foreshadowed in the rest of the verse because it says the chief priest, the scribes, the principal men of the people, were seeking to destroy him.

Who are the chief priests? High priestly family that includes the residing high priest at the time named Caiaphas. His father-in-law is Annas. Not only the individuals but also the priestly power that this whole family represents. The wide reaching influence of the charge over the entire priesthood at the temple. This family corrupted all religion.

The ruling priest, chief priest presided actually over the Sanhedrin, the, the council of seventy elders over Israel, ruling body of Jews in Jerusalem. Since the chief priest in this case, Caiaphas, since he, he belonged to the Sadducee party, he was a theological liberal. Anti-supernatural, didn't fear God, didn't believe in the resurrection. He ruled by pragmatism and by graft and greed.

Chief priests, scribes, who are they? As I mentioned, they're the academically trained scholars of the law of Moses. This made them, in that society, legal experts like lawyers, skilled at debate, rhetoric. Think of them again, like lawyers as prosecutors and defenders of religious things and civil things, civil matters, ceremonial matters. And they're always loyal here, as they're attached directly to the Pharisees or the



scribes. They are, they are loyal to the religious establishment. That's who signed their paycheck.

Scribes, they use training in the law, not like the pious scribe Ezra, who had set his heart to study the law, Lord to do it, and then to teach his statutes and rules in Israel. They use their knowledge, their skill in the law, to lay heavy burdens on the people. They were accomplices in a broad conspiracy of shepherding, a shepherding conspiracy to fleece the flock.

They're there to provide academic cover, scholarly cover, to justify the policies of the religious establishment, to uphold, strengthen the bureaucracy, make sure no one penetrated their legal defenses. Six times in Matthew 23, Jesus condemned the scribes. "Whoa to you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites." Why? Because they preach and don't practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, lay them on people's shoulders. They themselves, though, aren't willing to lift a single one of them with their little finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by men.

That's the scribes. And what made these people so reprehensible, perhaps even worse than the Pharisees, worse than Sadducees, because they had studied the scripture. They had intellectual gifts, they had educational advantages, they knew the Word of God. And their deep, prolonged exposure in their academic training, to use that then to twist the Scripture. To weaponize the Word of God in service of political and economic greed. Woe to them indeed.

Luke also tells us about this other group, the principal men of the people. They too are seeking to destroy Jesus. The principal men are laymen, but they are socially important laymen. They're from the upper-class caste of society, the proximity of their relationships to the religious establishment, their business interests in the temple merchant money changing operations. That put them in league with the chief priests. That made them connected people in town.

They knew all the right people, went to all the right parties, all the right homes, offered hospitality to their friends and ingratiated themselves. They were there to protect their investments and their financial interests. And that meant

Jesus in his, this temple cleansing, prophetic zealotry, he's a threat that's got to be eliminated.

So there they are, chief priest, scribes, principal men of the people, the most respected men in their society. And by the way, they're not irreligious people. These are not people who are wanting to abandon the temple. These are very religious people. They're churchgoing people. But they are the religious establishment.

They are the power brokers of Jerusalem. They are united in murderous intent, seeking to destroy him. Any doubt about the Lord's indictment of the religious leaders as robbers, as if maybe robbers, violent criminals, is too strong of a word. It's removed right here, isn't it? They're seeking to destroy him. *Apollymi*, it's a word that means to kill, to destroy, to ruin. One translation renders this, they're planning to assassinate him. They're agents, remember Revelation 9, agents of *Apollyon*. *Apollyon* is a word that comes from this verb, it means destroyer.

False shepherds, they're thieves that have come in only to steal and to kill and destroy. They think they own these sheep and they intend to keep them so they can continue fleecing the flock. Making money off the wool, making money off the slaughter. And they'll destroy anyone who gets in their way.

So what's stopping them? Ironically, it's the very people they're taking advantage of, that's who's stopping them. Says, "The chief priests, scribes, principal men and people seeking to destroy him. But they didn't find anything they could do for all the people are hanging on his words." They're hanging on his words. It's the only use of this verb in the New Testament; hanging on, portrays someone who's listening earnestly, almost, almost paralyzed, arrested, held in suspense because the speaker to whom they're listening; so captivating they're held spellbound. Can you blame them?

Think of all your favorite preachers, all your favorite teachers, politician, Ronald Reagan, very good at speaking. All the speechwriters, all the people who speak, all the people, who. Take all those compelling public speakers and roll them all up into one. The most dynamic, captivating of communicators, can

you imagine you'd want to listen to that guy rolled up into one, rather than Jesus? I'd rather spend two minutes to hear the Lord Jesus Christ than all the speakers of the world, with all the eloquence of angels and men. The expression though, it does not equate to conversion. These people are not truly converted. Well, maybe some of them are, maybe some of them are coming to Christ in faith.

But we know throughout the Gospels, many strong expressions like this, it'd indicate a strong admiration of Jesus' teaching, and yet they fall short of true conversion. His most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew, wraps that up by saying when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching for he's teaching them as one who had authority and not as their scribes. There's no one more compelling than Jesus Christ.

That's why we've been at this study since 2015. Still, don't mistake admiration for conversion. Won't be long before these same people who cried Hosanna will soon be shouting "crucify him, crucify him." Jesus knows that, as he sees the people before him, he knows what they're of, what they're about,

what they're like, and what does he do? Does he turn and walk away? No. He draws near, keeps on teaching them, keeps on loving them, keeps on ministering to their needs.

Luke focuses us on his teaching ministry in verse 47, his gospel proclamation in chapter 20 verse 1. Matthew adds though that the blind and the lame came to him in the temple and he healed them. He continues to preach the gospel and to heal, to use the power and the authority that he has to help hurting people, casting out their demons, dealing with their diseases, but also telling them the truth that will penetrate into their souls and ultimately and finally save them.

So in spite of the shallowness of the crowd, in spite of their fickleness, in spite of knowing that they will soon turn on him, Jesus, he loves them and he loves them by teaching them and by proclaiming the gospel. He stays put there in the temple, considers the best investment of his time in this final week is to teach the truth. If you were told that you have one week to live, how would you use it? Grab a good meal, you know, go dust off the will. Make sure that's sent around. Those are good things.

Jesus wanted to make sure that he preaches, teaches, tells the truth. That's what he's done on this occasion, as he comes to Jerusalem, as he comes suddenly into his temple, Malachi 3:1. So much to observe here and to admire and to praise in the zeal and the love of our Savior. He loves God. He wants his name to be honored, his temple to be holy, and his intent to glorify himself. The Father glorifying himself and reconciling sinners. That intention of God, that clear purpose of God, need to be protected, shielded, advocated for, proclaimed.

Christ loves sinners. He wants sinners to draw near and set aside all worldly concerns and common and mundane matters in order that as they come into the house of the Lord they can clear away all distraction. So they learn an undiluted preaching and teaching from Christ on God's Word. So we can pray to God in faith, humble repentance, find forgiveness in the work of God's atoning grace. And that's the take away for us, isn't it?

Again, if you had one week to live, how would you use the days? This is the one to whom I will look, Isaiah 66:2 says. And

again he says this, in Isaiah 66, "to those who have the spirit of 'this is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.'" We're protected in the institution. We are the people of God because we come here and offer sacrifices.

God says those sacrifices don't matter to me. This is the one to whom I'll look. It's he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and who trembles at my Word. For ourselves beloved, for others, we have to put the priority on the Word of God. We have to know the Word of God, study it, saturate our minds with it. We have to memorize it, reflect on it, meditate on it day and night. So we're like trees planted by streams of water, yielding our fruit in our season. We need our minds renewed by the Word of God, our lives transformed by its power because of the power of the Word of God, transform our lives, puts the power of that message on display. If teaching and preaching the truth was foremost in the heart of our Lord in His last week, it ought to be our chief concern as well. Amen?

Our Father we are so grateful for this clear teaching instruction from the Lord Jesus Christ and seeing his heart on display, his love for you, his love for people. We thank you



that you have sent him to love us. In fact, you have loved us, Father, from before the foundation of the world. And you've awakened us, each in our own time according to your own will and good pleasure, that we might be born again to this living hope.

We pray that we would have the heart and the concern, the priority of our Lord Jesus Christ. Teach the truth of your word to people so the people's consciences can be informed, so they can be convicted of their sins, convicted of sin and righteousness and coming judgment, and so they can desire salvation, be awakened to their need before you, a holy God, so they can look to Christ and be saved. Please use us in that way, Father, for your glory. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.