

The Cleansing of the Temple

Isa 56:6-7; Jer 7:9-11; Mark 11:15-19
SS Lesson for 04/06/2014

Devotional Scripture: Eze 36:22-33

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Discipline that keeps us from the folly of life (Prov 22:15)

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson reviews how and why Jesus had to perform **The Cleansing of the Temple**. The **study's aim** is to demonstrate that God disapproves of those who keep others from coming to Him. The **study's application** is to show that God wants to give believing Christians access to Himself.

Key Verse: Jer 7:11

11 Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," says the Lord.

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

God summoned Jeremiah to stand at the entrance to the temple and announce His message to those coming there to worship. The message was similar to that just recorded: the people had to reform their ways (cf. 3:12; 26:13) if they wanted to continue living there. Jeremiah answered the objection voiced by the people to his message. They believed judgment would not come because in Jerusalem was located the temple of the Lord (repeated three times to emphasize their belief in its protecting power). The people of Judah viewed the temple as a talisman or good luck charm that could ward off any attack. But God did not value buildings over obedience. God's protection would remain only if the people would change their ways (7:5; cf. v. 3). Jeremiah listed three examples to illustrate the change God wanted. The first two related to actions toward fellow Israelites, and the third related to actions toward God. (1) The people were not to oppress the helpless in society—people who could not easily protect themselves if wronged (cf. Deut. 14:29; 16:11; 24:19; Ps. 94:6). (2) They were not to shed innocent blood (cf. Deut. 19:10-13; 21:1-9). (3) And they were not to follow other gods. If these evidences of faithfulness to God's covenant were observed, God would allow the nation to live... in the land. But for the people to trust in the temple building rather than in obedience to the covenant for their protection was to put their faith in deceptive words that were worthless. Judah felt so secure because of the presence of God's temple that she believed it was safe to do all kinds of detestable things. Her vileness had actually turned the temple into a den of robbers (cf. Matt. 21:12-13). What she failed to realize was that God had been watching and was aware of her deeds. Jeremiah pointed to Israel's past to expose the fallacy of believing that the mere presence of God's temple would avert disaster. He asked the crowd to remember the place in Shiloh where the tabernacle of God had first dwelt (Josh. 18:1; Judges 18:31; 1 Sam. 1:3; 4:3-4). They were to observe what God did to it because of Israel's wickedness. The Bible is silent on the fate of Shiloh; but after the Philistines captured the ark of the covenant (1 Sam. 4:10-11) the priests evidently fled to Nob (1 Sam. 22:11) and Shiloh was abandoned as Israel's central worship center (cf. Ps. 78:56-61). Archeological studies also indicate that the village of Shiloh was destroyed about 1050 B.C., probably by the Philistines. The point of Jeremiah's message was that what God did to Shiloh He would also do to the... temple. If Judah did not change her ways God would thrust her from His presence just as He had done with the Northern Kingdom (Ephraim) in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:5-20, esp. v. 20). The temple bore God's name (Jer. 7:10, 12, 14; cf. v. 30) in the sense that it was a symbol of God's presence (His "name" refers to His revealed attributes).

Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson

The outline of the lesson came from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator and from the points revealed by the study of the Scriptural text.

Verse	Phrase	Commentary
Isa 56:7	Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My	The House of Prayer Provided

Verse	Phrase	Commentary
	house of prayer	
Jer 7:11	Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes	The House of Prayer Polluted
Mark 11:15	Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves	The House of Prayer Purged

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

In today's lesson, Jesus and the prophets will help us understand cleanliness from God's perspective. This is not a lesson about washing cars or personal hygiene. It is about spiritual purpose. It is about scrubbing clean the house of God. The thoughts of the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah that are included in this week's lesson come from books that are right next to each other in our Bibles. Because of this proximity, we may think that their authors were colleagues, but they were not. Their ministries were separated by many years and addressed different historical situations. Isaiah began his lengthy prophetic ministry in about 740 BC (see Isaiah 6:1). Today's text from Isaiah comes from the part commonly known as the Book of Consolation, namely Isaiah 40-66. Some prophecies in this section address the time when God's chosen servant (Jesus) will come to restore justice and bear the sins of the people (see Isaiah 42:1; 53:11). Jeremiah's lengthy prophetic ministry began about 626 BC, or some 55 years after the end of Isaiah's ministry. The Assyrian menace of Isaiah's day was gone, only to be replaced by threats from Babylon. Jeremiah's relentless warnings always seemed to fall on deaf ears. Persecuted by his own people, Jeremiah lived to see the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC (Jeremiah 52). The text from Jeremiah in today's lesson comes from his message at the gate of the temple, where he warned that the mere presence of that grand, 400-year-old edifice was no guarantee of blessing or protection by the Lord. Jesus' action of cleansing the temple occurred some 600 years after the time of Jeremiah. The temple of Jesus' day was the second such structure of the Israelites, completed by Zerubbabel in 515 BC (Ezra 6:15) and expanded by King Herod and his successors just before and during the time of Jesus (John 2:20). Herod's version of the temple was an architectural wonder, having huge courtyards and beautiful stonework. Yet beneath the temple's splendid exterior was a crass commercialism that profited at the expense of those on pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover observance. This problem needed to be addressed.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

The House of Prayer Provided (Isa 56:6-7)

6 "Also the sons of the foreigner Who join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, And to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants-- Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And holds fast My covenant--
7 Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices Will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations."

For whom is it provided (6)

Those who commit themselves to God (Heb 10:23-25)

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Those who serve God (Deut 10:12)

12 And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul,

Those who love God (Deut 6:5)

5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Those who are obedient to God (Romans 8:12-14)

12 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation--but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

For what is it provided (7)

For prayer (Heb 4:16)

16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

For worship (Psalms 100:2)

2 Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

For offerings (Psalms 96:8)

8 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.

The House of Prayer Polluted (Jer 7:9-11)

9 Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know,

10 and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations'?

11 Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," says the Lord.

Polluted by sin (9)

Insincere worship is not accepted by God (Isa 29:13)

13 The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men

Ineffective worship because sin hinders worship (Isa 1:15-17)

15 When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; 16 wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, 17 learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

False worship is when there is no listening to God (Eccles. 5:1)

5 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.

Polluted by hypocrisy (10)

Hypocrisy through legalism (Gal 6:13)

13 Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh.

Hypocrisy through appealing to human lusts (2 Peter 2:18)

18 For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error.

Hypocrisy shuts the kingdom of heaven from others (Matthew 23:13)

13 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

Hypocrisy is manifested by actions not agreeing with words (Titus 1:15-16)

15 To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. 16 They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

Polluted by defilement (11)

Defilement comes from planning iniquity (Mic 2:1)

2 Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it.

If the heart is defiled, it cannot be hidden for long (Matt 12:33-37)

33 "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. 35 The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. 36 But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

Defilement can come from our own evil desires (James 1:13-15)

13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Sometimes we are both clean and defiled, and this should not be (James 3:9-10)

9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

All defilement starts with some desire from within (James 4:1-3)

4 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

The House of Prayer Purged (Mark 11:15-19)

15 So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves.

16 And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple.

17 Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.' "

18 And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching.

19 When evening had come, He went out of the city.

Purged by discipline (15-16)

Discipline that produces perseverance, character; and hope (Rom 5:3-5)

3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Discipline that achieves an eternal glory (2 Cor 4:17)

17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

Discipline that keeps us from going too far astray (Ps 119:67)

67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.

Discipline that keeps us from the folly of life (Prov 22:15)

15 Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.

Discipline that is part of God's pruning so that we will be more fruitful (John 15:2)

2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

Discipline that aids in refining our faith and proves it is genuine (1 Peter 1:6-7)

6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Purged by teaching (17-18)

By ensuring the teaching of sound doctrine (1 Tim 6:3-5)

3 If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, 4 he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions 5 and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

Teaching with godly wisdom helps present people to God perfect in Jesus (Col 1:28)

28 We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

One of the functions of the Church is to provide teaching (Eph 4:10-13)

10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) 11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Godly teaching aids in the freedom from being a slave of sin (Rom 6:17-18)

17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Purged by separation (19)

Separate by purifying self from everything that contaminates (2 Cor 7:1)

7 Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Separate by putting off the old self (Eph 4:21-24)

21 Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Separate by not allowing even a hint of sin in life (Eph 5:3)

3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.

Separate by putting to death ungodliness (Col 3:5-6)

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

Separate by not conforming to evil desires (1 Peter 1:14-16)

14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts From Bob Deffinbaugh

From the series: Highlights in the Life and Ministry of Jesus Christ

Mark alone informs us that Jesus' attack upon the religious system was not spontaneous, but highly calculated, just as His triumphal entry. In verse 11 we are told that upon His arrival in Jerusalem, Jesus went immediately to the temple. There He looked about and, since the hour was already late, He returned to Bethany with the twelve. While an attack upon the money changers was possible on this occasion, it would not have the impact that it would have on the following day during peak 'business hours.' Returning the next day, He went into the temple and single-handedly⁷¹ purged it, just as at the outset of His ministry. There is little doubt that Jesus is attacking the highest religious authorities in the most sensitive spot—their pocketbooks. Annas and Caiaphas certainly were at the bottom of this corrupt operation.

As I understand this decisive attack of the Savior, it was against three evils. First, it was an attack against a den of thieves (verse 17). Here our Lord reveals divine displeasure at the way men were making religion a front for money-making. It was necessary, of course, for the pilgrims and sojourners who had traveled from afar to Jerusalem to purchase sacrificial animals and to exchange foreign currency into coinage for the temple tax. It was not necessary to do this in the temple precincts and surely not at prices which were exorbitant.

Edersheim informs us that on the Mount of Olives there were four shops, especially for the sale of sacrificial animals and related needs. But if one bought an animal there he would have to pay a fee at the temple to have his animal inspected. In addition it is likely that there was collusion between the owners of the temple bazaar and the inspectors so that many of the animals purchased outside of the temple were rejected as unfit. When all was said and done, it was easier, if not cheaper, to purchase animals at the temple bazaar which were assured to have been already inspected and found acceptable for sacrificial offerings. It would appear that these animals were sold at an inflated price, the profits being divided between its high priestly owners and the market proprietors.

Also there was the need to exchange foreign currency into Tyrian coinage in order to pay the annual temple tax (Exodus 30:13-16). The Tyrian shekel was the closest available equivalent to the old Hebrew shekel. Duly certified places of currency exchange were provided throughout the provinces and regulated by Law. A certain margin of profit was allowed. But as the Passover drew near, these provincial places of exchange were closed down, perhaps two weeks prior to Passover. After this, the only convenient place of exchange was at the temple bazaar in the temple precincts. Jesus' objection to this practice was that it was a profiteering enterprise often at the expense of those least able to afford it. Religious activity was a pretext for profit-making. This was not the justice and mercy which God desired of His people.

The second objection was to the desecration of the holy place. The sight, sound and smell of sheep and cattle filled the air. Such was not the atmosphere for worship. The bickering and bartering which could be heard was a far cry from the praises and adoration in which God delighted. This desecration was not only the fault of the religious leaders, but of the masses. The rebuke of Jesus was fully in accord with existing Jewish regulations which restricted the use of this part of the temple. Specifically, people were forbidden to pass this way, using it as a shortcut. No doubt, this is why Jesus forbade people to carry goods through the temple (Mark 11:16). The Lord was acting fully in accord with the Old Testament revelation as well (cf. Zechariah 14:21; Hosea 9:15).

The third objection (and one clearly pointed out only by Mark) was that the temple bazaar denied the worship of the Gentiles: "And He began to teach and say to them, 'Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations? But you have made it a robber's den'" (Mark 11:17). This quotation is taken from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. The context of Isaiah's words specifically refers to the worship of the Gentiles which will occur in the future (Isaiah 56:6-8). And yet the place in the temple precincts where the bazaar was set up was the only place where the Gentiles were permitted. How could the nations worship God in this circus?

What was the meaning of this temple cleansing?

(1) It revealed that God was more angered by the religion of Israel, His people, than the political damnation of Rome. He did not attack the Roman garrison, but the religious abomination in the temple. By this He revealed the true purpose of His first coming. It was not to throw off the shackles of Rome, but to restore true religion to the nation Israel. To put it in other terms, it was not to bring about political and social reform, but spiritual renewal and restoration. Our Lord's actions in cleansing the temple were intended to reveal to all Israel that the real enemy was within and not without. The implications of the triumphal entry are further pressed upon the multitudes within Israel. His Kingdom is not the kind which they supposed. He has come, not to deal with the oppressors of Rome, but the opponents of true religion.

(2) It was designed to further precipitate the final conflict and crises between Himself and the religious system of His day. The scribes and Pharisees were white hot with anger and were ready to attempt any plan that might rid the nation of this 'menace' (Mark 11:18). It is only Matthew who contrasts the sham of superficial religiosity in the bazaar with the realization of God's purpose for the temple (Matthew 21:14-17). Here we see, in part, what true religion should be like. In place of the sound of bartering voices there was the chorus of children's voices singing praises to God in the person of Jesus Christ (verse 15). Instead of profiteering there is the physical ministry of healing at the hands of the Savior (verse 14). Rather than the sound of sheep and cattle, there is the voice of the Savior teaching men truths about God (Luke 19:47-48).

From URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/triumphal-tragedy-mark-111-25>

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Having served on the ministry staffs of several congregations, I know how easy it is for a church to get off target. Sometimes the diversions that present themselves seem like the right thing to do. Establish a day care center? Let's do it! Maintain a cemetery for the membership? Yes! Sponsor a softball team? It's what the people want! Well-intentioned projects and programs may be worthy of consideration, but not at the expense of the core ministries of the church. These core ministries have been expressed in various ways, but a simplified (some would say oversimplified) categorization is that the core ministries can be grouped in terms of outreach (Matthew 28:19, 20), upreach (John 4:23, 24), and inreach (Ephesians 4:11-13). Sometimes a church needs to clear the clutter and clarify its priorities. As hard as it may be to do, sometimes we need to purge our programs in order to get back on target. But be forewarned: as Jesus' cleansing of the temple met with opposition, a reevaluation of church programs and activities may cause turmoil and congregational strife. Even so, a failure to clear the clutter may indicate that a church has lost its first love, with the resulting danger of losing its light (Revelation 2:4, 5). The personal life of a Christian believer may be a smaller version of the cluttered church. Many of us struggle to get (or stay) on target with God's will. We are easily distracted by seemingly worthy things, so we forget to pray. We may even get to the point of neglecting to meet with other believers for worship (Hebrews 10:25). A lack of focus is sometimes clarified by a traumatic event that puts things in perspective—we end up realizing that busyness does not equal godliness, that overcommitment leads to commitment breakdown, etc. Is there a cluttered area of your life that hinders you from serving your Lord fully? Paul's question in 1 Corinthians 6:19 can help us evaluate our lives: "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you?"

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. God freely and fully accepts everyone who trusts in Him (Isa. 56:6-7)
2. Only the arrogant expect God to overlook their unconfessed sins (Jer. 7:9-11)
3. We should never hesitate to firmly assert our faith (Mark 11:15-16)
4. Focusing on God through worshipping Him helps us realize and appreciate all He does for us (vs. 17)
5. Those who oppose Christ's truth do not accept Him as their Lord (vs. 18)
6. When we serve God, it requires constant attention—even when we think we are not observed (vs. 19)

