

In Matthew 21:12, we see Jesus entering the temple and driving out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.

He said, “It is written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of robbers.” (Matthew 21:13, NIV).

The Temple and the Significance of the Money Changers

The temple in Jerusalem was the center of Jewish worship. It was not merely a building but the sacred place where God’s presence was believed to dwell (Psalm 132:13-14). God had instructed the Israelites to bring their sacrifices and offerings there as acts of worship and atonement (Leviticus 1:1-17).

As part of this system, the half-shekel tax (Exodus 30:13) was used to support the temple and its functions. This was a mandatory offering for all Israelites who were 20 years and older. The money collected was used for the upkeep of the temple, to fund the work of the priests, and to provide for the sacrificial system. This tax was also an acknowledgment of God’s provision and sovereignty.

However, when people came to Jerusalem from distant lands to observe

the Passover, they would often bring foreign currency. The money changers, therefore, were necessary to convert these foreign coins into the Jewish shekel. But over time, the practice became corrupt.

Corruption and Greed in the Temple Courts

Instead of offering a legitimate service by exchanging money at a fair rate, the money changers became part of a system that exploited the people. The “den of robbers” (Matthew 21:13) Jesus referred to was not only a symbol of spiritual corruption, but it also highlighted the greed and exploitation of the religious leaders. These money changers would often charge inflated rates, taking advantage of worshippers’ need to exchange money for the temple offerings.

In John 2:13-16, we find a parallel account of Jesus driving out the money changers, and He even makes a whip of cords to drive out those selling animals for sacrifice. In this passage, Jesus declares, “Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!” (John 2:16, NIV).

Jesus’ actions in the temple were a profound declaration about the sanctity of God’s house. His anger was not merely about the inconvenience or dishonesty; it was about the disrespect for God’s holiness. The temple, the place where people should have been drawing

near to God in worship, had become a place of exploitation and distraction.

The Deeper Theological Meaning: The Cleansing of the Temple

Jesus' cleansing of the temple was symbolic of a deeper spiritual truth. Just as He cleared the physical temple of corruption, He was also making a statement about the spiritual temple—the hearts of individuals. In the New Testament, Christians are referred to as the temple of God (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.” (NIV). Jesus’ actions in the physical temple foreshadow the work He desires to do in the lives of believers today. He came to purify our hearts from the corruption of sin, selfishness, and greed.

Why Jesus Was Angry

Jesus’ anger at the money changers was not simply about business practices; it was about the misuse of the sacred. The temple was meant

to be a place of prayer, worship, and reconciliation. By turning it into a marketplace, the religious leaders not only exploited people but obscured the true purpose of the temple. The heart of worship was lost amidst the noise of commerce.

Jesus had said in Mark 11:17, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’” (NIV). He was quoting from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11, pointing to God’s original intention for the temple: a place where people from all nations could come and pray. Instead, the temple had become a place of exploitation.

The Continuing Corruption in Modern Day Worship

Sadly, the same spirit of greed and exploitation that Jesus confronted in the temple is still present today in many places of worship. Many use spiritual matters for personal gain, whether through selling religious items at inflated prices, charging fees for spiritual services, or turning faith into a commercialized enterprise.

1 Timothy 6:5 warns of those who, “...think that godliness is a means to financial gain.” (NIV). This mindset is a distortion of the Gospel. The message of Christ, which was meant to be freely shared with all, has

been turned into a business, with people charging for what is supposed to be offered freely by God's grace.

The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 2:17, "Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God." (NIV). The true ministers of the Gospel are not supposed to profit from their ministry but to serve others selflessly.

Jesus is the Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever

Jesus' cleansing of the temple is not just a historical event; it is a reflection of His ongoing desire to cleanse His people and His church from corruption and greed. Jesus remains the same, yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). Just as He overturned the tables in the temple, He continues to call for purity and holiness in His church.

Jesus is still in the business of purifying hearts and calling His people back to the true purpose of worship: relationship with God. The temple, in the New Covenant, is no longer a physical building; it is the body of believers—the Church. We are called to live in such a way that our lives reflect the purity and holiness of God's presence.

In Matthew 21:43, Jesus warns the religious leaders: “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.” (NIV). The true worship of God, without greed or exploitation, will be found in those who honor Him with their lives, not their profit.

Conclusion: A Call to Integrity in Worship

Jesus’ actions in the temple serve as a stern warning to us today: God’s house must be kept pure. We are not to use spiritual things for personal gain but to offer our lives in true worship and service to God. This includes protecting the sanctity of our hearts as the temple of God and being mindful of how we interact with the things of God.

As 1 Peter 2:5 says, “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (NIV). Let our lives be pleasing to God, and may we always honor Him in spirit and truth, just as He deserves.

Who Were the Money Changers in the Bible? (Matthew 21:12)

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