

My House Shall Be a House of Prayer

Introduction

Text

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

⁴⁷ 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, ⁴⁸ but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words. (Luke 19:45–48)

God Wants a Relationship with You

- A. The essence of today’s message is simply this (I’m just going to give it to you right up front): God wants a relationship with you. I mean, He truly, deeply, passionately wants a relationship with you.
 - 1. Listen, it doesn’t matter who you are, it doesn’t matter where you’ve been, it doesn’t matter what you’ve done, I do believe that even right now God is coming after you—He loves you, I guess you could even say He misses you, He wants to be near you, He wants to know you, He wants to hear what’s on your heart, and He wants to share with you what’s on His. He wants a relationship with you.
- B. So I don’t know where you stand with Jesus right now . . .
 - 1. Maybe you’re boxing Him out—because you’re busy chasing after other stuff, or you have your doubts about Christianity, or you’ve been burned by the church, or something like that.
 - 2. Maybe you’re kind of half in—like you’ve got some toes in the water but you wouldn’t say you’re swimming. Kind of feeling it out. Trying to get a little Jesus and a little bit of the world. It’s not working too well, is it?
 - 3. Or maybe you’re all the way in and trying to do life in communion with Him. It’s certainly not easy, but you’re really chasing after Him. That’s awesome!
 - a. Listen, I may not know where you stand with Jesus right now, but I do know where He is on the matter: He’s right here. He’s inviting and calling and ready to welcome you, take you deeper into His heart. So if you’ve got ears to hear, come!
- C. Well, now that’s this sermon in a nutshell. This idea of the divine-human relationship will unfold more and more as we make our way along. I’m going to organize my thoughts under three headings: (1) That Jesus Is Angry; (2) Why Jesus Is Angry; and I’ll close with (3) A Couple Suggestions for Us.

(1) That Jesus Is Angry

Shattering Paradigms

- A. I wanted to at least pause for a moment at the beginning here and simply acknowledge the fact that Jesus seems a bit worked up. He seems not a little bit angry, right?
1. So here we have Him walking into the temple, the most sacred space in all of Jerusalem, in all of Israel really, and He sees a few things going on, and He just comes unhinged.
 - a. Our text mentions in particular that He begins driving people out, but we know from the other Gospel accounts that He's flipping over tables and chairs, perhaps making a whip and cracking it at folks and pouring out their money and things on the ground. He's furious!
- B. And I realize that this may shatter some paradigms for us.
1. I mentioned last week, when we looked at [Luke 19:41-44](#), how some of us likely think of God as too harsh and rigid and we struggle to believe that He could ever love sinners like us.
 - a. And people in such a place need to see Jesus weeping over Jerusalem as He is in those verses—not with concern for Himself, but with concern and love for others, even those who would rebel against and ultimately reject Him. He loves them. He's not washing His hands of them. He's longing to bring them near. As we quoted Dane Ortlund saying: *"The posture most natural to Jesus is not the pointed finger but open arms."*
 2. But, while this may be the case for some of us, I do think there are still others among us that may have a different view of God. We have that sort of soft, effeminate Jesus in our mind, who's always sitting with little children and stroking fluffy sheep. He would go out of His way to avoid stepping on an ant if He had to. He's just lowly and gentle.
 - a. And for these folks, the tendency is to forget that He is also holy and strong, majestic and mighty. We may read of this scene in the temple and think it an anomaly or a strange outburst, a break in character. We may have a hard time even accepting it, because it seems so contrary to the nice little Jesus we've come to know. But here is the Jesus we most need to see.

Righteous Anger?!

- A. We can be sure, this is no break in character, or lapse in judgment. It's not as if the stress of the moment has finally gotten to Him. Jesus isn't like you and I.
1. No, His anger here in the temple is in perfect harmony with the compassion and sorrow He expressed just verses prior out on the skirts of the city. Somehow, in the person of Christ both of these are held mysteriously together at once.
- B. Here, at last, we finally have an example of righteous anger. Here we see an anger wholly concerned with God's glory and good of others without any mixture or tainting of self-interest.

1. We like to think, in our own anger, that we arrive at such a thing, but I wager we rarely, if ever, do. I'm ashamed to say, though I certainly do have a personality type that runs hot (if you couldn't tell) and I have most assuredly had my fair share of flare-ups, I can't say honestly that I've ever been fully righteous in any of it.
 - a. In my experience at least, my anger, truth be told, like my weeping as I mentioned last week, is always shot through with self-concern. Let me put it this way: I don't think I've ever gotten angry and not felt the need to repent for something of it afterwards.
 - i. Now, in Eph 4:26, Paul says: "Be angry and do not sin," so I imagine it must somehow be possible.
 - ii. But James provides a more general rule, and one which certainly accords with my own experience, when he says: " ¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:19–20).
 - (1) The bottom line: We should think twice before we take Jesus' anger here as justification to go off on our own "holy rampages." The anger of man rarely if ever reaches the righteousness of God.

- C. But again, of course, Jesus who, as John tells us is both Lion and Lamb, does bring both together at once in Himself in a way we simply don't.
 1. Hence, we transition in Luke's gospel here from this scene where He's weeping over the city to now the scene currently under focus, where He is now cracking a whip in the temple. It seems a strange and bipolar thing to our eyes and ears, but it is in wonderful balance and simple harmony in the person of Christ.

(2) Why Jesus Is Angry

- A. Now that we've established the simple fact that Jesus is angry, and that it is no sin for Him to be so . . . we must ask the question: Why? What is it exactly that has Him so worked up?
- B. Well, we shall come to a clearer answer soon, but I think the best way to go about this (because it really aligns with the rationale Jesus provides even here in our text) is to do a bit of work to understand what the temple is actually all about in the first place.
 1. So under this second heading here there are really three things I want to push through: (1) God's Intention for the Temple; (2) Man's Distortion of the Temple; and (3) Jesus' Purification of the Temple.

(1) God's Intention for the Temple

- A. To understand God's intention for the temple, we actually have to go all the way back to the garden of Eden. You see, there is significant overlap in the way the Edenic paradise is described and the way the tabernacle and temple are spoken of later in Scripture.

- B. Eden, you recall, is where God dwelt with man. We're told in [Gen 3:8](#) even that He somehow walked with them "in the garden in the cool of the day." There was this fellowship, this access to God, this relationship, that man was created for—and it could be enjoyed without the barrier of sin, guilt, and shame.
1. But after the fall, that same quality of relationship could simply not be enjoyed in the same way any longer. Man is driven out from the garden and "at the east" ([Gen 3:24](#)), we're told, God placed cherubim and a flaming sword that would guard and seemingly prevent their re-entrance.
 - a. At first glance, it would seem as if the prospect of relationship with God is lost. It would seem as if God has hardened His heart against us and is not interested in engaging with us any longer.
 - i. But what I said at the outset of this sermon still holds true. You see, though God in His holiness, drives out man in his sin, yet still He does not sit idly by. For some reason He still does deeply desire relationship with us, though time and again we seem painfully disinterested on our own part.
- C. And so here we come to this idea of the tabernacle and, ultimately, temple.
1. [Lev 26:11-12](#) makes the connection between Eden and the tabernacle-temple quite plain. YHWH, after freeing His people from Egypt, says this to Moses: " ¹¹ I will make my dwelling [Heb. Mishkan = tabernacle] among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. ¹² And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people." "I'm not done with you. What we had begun there, I'm going to work to get it back on track."
- D. Other clear connections between Eden and the temple that many scholars have noted in times past (e.g. Alexander, From Eden to the New Jerusalem):
1. Both Eden and the temple were entered from the East and guarded by Cherubim. You noticed didn't you, in [Gen 3:24](#), it's on the East side of the garden that the cherubim were stationed and the flaming sword was set. Presumably that's because this was the entrance. And this is why the temple later, as you came towards the Holy and Most Holy Places, you could only enter them from the East. And as you did so, you come to face cherubim—images of them woven into the veil that separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place ([Ex 26:31](#)), and golden cherubim constructed and positioned on either side of the ark and mercy seat ([Exo 25:18-22](#); [1 Kings 6:23-29](#)).
 2. Garden like imagery—fruits, flowers, trees—abounded in the tabernacle and temple designs—likely intended to link the structures back to Eden as their prototype.
 3. Gold and onyx, referred to in [Gen 2:11-12](#), are used extensively to decorate the sanctuaries and priestly garments.
 4. Where, in Eden, Adam and Eve were told to "work" and "keep" the garden ([Gen 2:15](#)), so these same two Hebrew words are used in the Torah only to describe the duties of the priests and Levites in the sanctuary ([Num 3:7-8](#); [8:26](#); [18:5-6](#))—there again pointing to the

fact that God is in the tabernacle and temple looking to reestablish for humanity something of that relationship with Him that was lost in Eden.

5. And finally, I'll stop with this one, recalling the flaming sword, barring the entrance to the garden, indicating that the only way back would be to pass through it, under it, death. Well, so too, only the Day of Atonement, once a year, the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place, but only by way of sacrifice, raising the sword as it were over an innocent victim, a spotless lamb. In that context and in that context alone, he could enter.
- E. So there's this clear connection between Eden and the temple. There is obviously so much here, but the essence of it all is what I said back at the beginning: God wants relationship with us, He's not giving up on us, He's working towards it, preparing us for it, calling us to it.
1. That's the meaning and intention of the temple. It is the intersection of heaven and earth, the interface between God and man.
- F. Now, all of this Jesus is invoking when in v. 46 of our text, He gives rationale for His holy anger by quoting [Isa 56:7](#) where He says this: "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer . . .'"
1. There's supposed to be relationship going on here, the lines of communication open between God and man. And, yet, something's off, something's being distorted in all of this.

(2) Man's Distortion of the Temple

- A. Well, let's now make sure we see clearly what it is actually going on here. Jesus enters the temple, we are told, and it is thought that at this point He must be in the outermost court—what was referred to as the Court of the Gentiles. It is the furthest into the temple precincts that the Gentiles were permitted to go. They could come in here to worship, pray, meditate and things like this.
1. But instead of these sorts of activities taking place, Jesus enters and finds the religious leaders have set it up as a space for buying and selling.
- B. The fact is, Diaspora Jews from throughout the Roman empire, would come on feast days and things, and in order for them to participate in temple activities, they would need to be able to exchange their own currency for temple currency as well as purchase animals and other items for sacrifices.
1. The issue Jesus is taking here it would seem is not so much with the fact that such buying and selling was going on—in some senses this would be a necessity. But Jesus is taking issue here, it seems to me, with regard to two things: (1) with the location at which they're choosing to set up shop; and (2) with the state of their hearts that is being exposed in all of this.

(1) Taking Issue with the Location

- A. On the first, with regard to the location here, we have to understand the amount of commotion that such activity would create.

1. One scholar writes that the: “huge quantity [of animals], so great as to be almost unbelievable, gave the Temple cults its peculiar stamp. Day after day, masses of victims were slaughtered there and burnt, and in spite of the thousands of priests, when one of the great festivals came round the multitude of sacrifices was so great that they could hardly cope with them” (PNTC).
 2. Jewish historian, Josephus recorded that on Passover over 250,000 lambs were sacrificed (J.W. 6.422–27). That’s a lot of lambs! That’s a lot buying and selling.
- B. With this clamor, the noise of it all, taking place not outside the temple somewhere, but right here in the Court of the Gentiles, it would not be possible for any genuine worship or prayer to take place. It was an affront to the very intention and mission of God.
1. Israel and the temple—the point in it all was to bring blessing not just to the Jews, but to the nations.
 - a. Indeed, even the text Jesus quotes from in Isaiah, when you go back and read it in context, the full verse is as follows: “[M]y house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples [In the LXX, ethnos = “Gentiles”!].” The goal of the temple isn’t ultimately that Israel somehow be set apart from the Gentiles, but that they be attractive to the Gentiles, and so much so that they start flowing in! God is doing a bigger thing with the temple. God is on the move looking to restore humanity to relationship with Himself.
 - i. And they’re blocking His way, as it were. So Jesus is angry.

(2) Taking Issue with the State of Their Hearts

- A. With regard to the second idea that Jesus is quite troubled by the hearts of these people selling and causing quite a stir within the temple precincts, He gets at this most pointedly by what He goes on to say next in the latter part of v. 46: “It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of robbers.”
1. It’s an allusion to [Jer 7:11](#) and a serious indictment. For there the people of Israel were thinking that—regardless of their rampant idolatry, their exploitation and oppression of the poor and needy, their flagrant sin—so long as they run to the temple and do their little ritual things, they’d be good. “God doesn’t care about my heart, He just wants to make sure I do the stuff. I did it, I’m good.”
 - a. And Jeremiah, and now Jesus, are saying: “Not even close.”
- B. The temple, again stands at the intersection of heaven and earth, the interface between God and man. It was designed to encourage and facilitate and foster that deep and abiding relationship which God so longs to have with us.
1. And yet they’ve turned it into empty religion, an opportunity for profit and personal gain, taking vain confidence that so long as you do the external stuff, God doesn’t really care about what’s underneath it all.

- a. It's the same tragic move we were making in Eden. "I don't want relationship with God, I want to be God. I don't want God's presence, I want His stuff." That's the essence of the fall and it's played on repeat ever since, and here we see it once more.
- C. And we got to pull out for a moment here and recognize that we are prone to do the very same thing. We have this tendency to move away from deep and abiding relationship with God towards empty religion. I do, but only to get in some way—no longer covenant intimacy, but contractual agreement.
 - 1. It breaks God's heart. And when you, like these leaders here, start teaching and training and getting everyone else to do the same, it makes Him angry.
- D. This is why things like the prosperity gospel are such an abomination to God.
 - 1. I watched that compelling documentary American Gospel and it just uncovers the nonsense that has permeated so much of the American church and from our soil has spread beyond to the nations of the world, to our shame.
 - a. The essence of it all is you give to get, not more of God and relationship with Him, but His stuff. Oh sure, I'll sow my seed of tithe, or I'll go to church, or I'll do the religious thing, but only if it brings in that harvest I want—a healthy body, a better job, a fuller wallet. It's a contractual agreement not deep, abiding, covenantal relationship.
 - 2. Oh the difference between this and say the Psalmists' hearts in [Psa 84](#): "¹How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! ²My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. . . . ¹⁰For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere" (vv. 1-2, 10a).
 - a. That's what I want. That's what Jesus wants for us. Relationship.
- E. The irony is that His anger here isn't because He doesn't love us. Quite the contrary. It's because He does, and we're settling for something so much less.
 - 1. Yours and my anger more often than not is simply destructive. But Jesus' is profoundly constructive. Yes it may tear down the rusty scaffolding of empty religion, but it is only that we might find and enter the true house of deep intimacy with God.

(3) Jesus' Purification of the Temple

- A. Jesus wants to bring us back. The OT prophet Malachi spoke of a coming day when the Lord of the temple would come into the precincts there and purify it. And it may be that some insightful Jews understood that to be what Jesus is doing here by driving out the sellers and things.
 - 1. But I doubt any were aware just how far He was going to go with this—the length to which He would go to purify the temple and restore us to right relationship with God.

- B. You know, it would at first seem quite preposterous to the Jews, what Jesus is doing here—driving out those who were selling animals and things needed for sacrifice.
1. On one interpretation, it would seem as if Jesus is contradicting the OT law and all that’s required. “We need these lambs and things. You know that Rabbi. We can’t come into God’s presence without such a substitutionary offering. You would put an end to it?”
 2. While I don’t think Jesus is explicitly saying that here, it is certainly possible that He is hinting at it, is it not? “Oh dear friends, I hear your concern. But I’m not here contradicting the OT law and things, I’ve come to fulfill it.”
 - a. “¹¹[E]very priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹²But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins [namely, Himself], he sat down at the right hand of God [It is finished!]” (Heb 10:11–12).
 - i. “I’m not denying that You need a lamb . . . I am the Lamb! The flaming sword, guarding and preventing your re-entry into the full presence of God, it’s going to fall upon Me.”
- C. When He’s hanging there on the cross, it’s as if that sword is sunk into His own chest. He takes the hit so that you and I can pass through.
1. This is why, even while He’s hanging there, He leans over to that thief being crucified next to Him, who’s repented and asked for mercy, and He says: “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). With Me!!! Restored relationship, that’s the point!
 2. This is why the veil, you remember, that blocked man’s entrance into the Most Holy Place of the temple, where God’s presence was said to dwell—when Jesus finally released His last breath, that curtain we are told “was torn in two” (Luke 23:45).
 - a. You see Jesus’ acts of aggression there in the temple back in Luke 19 were really just preparation for the grand finale that was coming a few days later.
 - i. But the point isn’t the destruction of the temple, but rather the fulfillment of it.
 - ii. The point isn’t that the people have lost their chance at relationship with God, but rather that now access deep into the heart of God and His very presence is available, not just to the high priest once a year, but to anyone at any time who comes through Christ on the basis of His blood sacrifice for our sin.
 - iii. The point is that that relationship with God we’ve so long made a mess of is, at last, being restored in Jesus!

(3) A Couple Suggestions for Us

- A. And so here now we come to those two brief suggestions I said I had for us. I imagine may be asking: “Okay, so I want this relationship with God, I’ve come to Jesus and received what He’s done for me on the cross, but where do I go from there? What can I do to go deeper in?”
 - 1. Well, what I love about our text back in [Luke 19](#), is that we’re actually given some things we can do to grow in this relationship. All we have to look at what it is Jesus is trying to get reestablished straightaway in the temple there.
- B. We know ultimately He’s aiming for restoring this relationship with God, but what does this relationship entail? Well I see two things . . .

Suggestion #1: Devote Yourself to Prayer

- A. The first we’ve already made mention of in passing, and it’s this idea of prayer. The first thing Jesus says is this place has to be a “[house of prayer](#)” ([Luke 19:46](#))—which means, if we want to deeper in our relationship with God, then we’ve got to press towards Him in prayer.
- B. I was struggling this week, COVID stuff is hard, navigating a church through this is hard. I tend to think, analyze, figure it out, dig deep, instead of pray. I forget the relationship.
 - 1. So one evening I just went outside, get out of my office and my little world, and tried to go Psalmist on the matter. You know what I mean? When you read the Psalms, you get this sense that they just live before the face of God, always aware that He’s there, talking with Him. They’re not trying to figure it all out on their own. They’re just crying out. “Where are You? Why are You doing this? I don’t understand. I’m confused. I’m scared. How long?” That sort of thing.
 - a. So that’s what I did. And, I’m telling you, immediately it was as if I could feel the landscape of my heart reshaping.
- C. Jesus gave His life to open this line of communication between us and the Father, are we engaging, are we coming in boldly at all hours of the day? Are we praying?

Suggestion #2: Hang on His Words

- A. The second piece shows up in [Luke 19:47-48](#), which we haven’t looked at yet, but we’ll read it now: “⁴⁷And 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, ⁴⁸but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words.”
 - 1. Here we see Jesus’ aim wasn’t just to get prayer started up again, but to see the Word of God faithfully ministered and attended to.
- B. Here is the other side of a healthy relationship with God. It’s not just us talking to Him in prayer, it’s us listening to Him and reading His Word.

1. I love that last line there: “[A]ll the people were hanging on his words” (v. 48). Does that describe you? Are you hanging on God’s word? Are you reading it, studying it, meditating on it, storing it up in your heart, praying to God about it, banking your life on it?
- C. This is the way to a deep and abiding relationship with God. This is what Jesus died to make possible. Let’s press in!