

Purifying God's House

Luke 19:45-48

As some might recall, last April, a major men's conference organized by an influential church in Missouri opened with a shirtless acrobat climbing a pole in a performance more suited for a Las Vegas stage than a gathering for God's glory. Although the event coordinators defended their decision, the circus act sparked much criticism. Pastor Shane Idleman, for example, called it, as I do, a display of "carnality" that prioritizes drawing crowds over drawing God's presence. He wrote, "Silly gimmicks undermine the integrity of the Gospel, potentially leading to confusion and a diluted witness. ... Entertainment-focused events contribute to a 'Hollywood' church culture that detracts from God's glory by replacing humility and spiritual power with spectacle."

When churches trade the transformative power of the gospel for flashy entertainment, they risk losing the very presence they claim to seek. E.M. Bounds reminds us what's at stake: "Life-giving preaching costs the preacher much—death to self, crucifixion to the world, the travail of his own soul. Crucified preaching only can give life. Crucified preaching can come only from a crucified man." Unlike the spectacle of a stage show, true worship and proclamation demand sacrifice, humility, and a focus on God's glory, not human applause.

This modern scandal of turning what was advertised as a sacred space into a Las Vegas show echoes a similar scandal that Jesus radically addressed in His day. Imagine with me the loud noise and energetic activity in the Jerusalem temple during Passover season in the first century. Thousands of pilgrims have converged on this sacred site, God's house. But instead of finding reverence and prayer, they're met with merchants hawking overpriced animals, money changers engage in shady transactions, and the stench of livestock drowning out the incense of worship. It's more marketplace than a meeting place with God.

But into this scene Jesus, the Messiah, walks in with righteous fire in His eyes. He doesn't politely ask for change. Instead, He overturns tables, drives out the merchants, and declares with authority from

Scripture: *“My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers.”* This isn’t just justifiable anger; it’s a divine act of purification. And as we’ll see, it’s a divine truth that calls out to us today.

Often, sermons on this passage focus solely on prayer—and that’s vital. But there’s much more at stake. As Kent Hughes notes, “The scandal Jesus attacked and abolished by driving the corrupted clerics from the Court of the Gentiles and preaching, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer’ was the exclusion of Gentiles from the grace of God. The reverse would soon be fully accomplished by the shed blood of Christ.” So Jesus isn’t just flipping tables; He’s flipping the script on religious corruption that keeps people from God.

“Jesus threw over the tables and drove out the perpetrators says Hughes, “for two reasons: 1) the honor of his Father’s name, and 2) the salvation of sinners. This is a glimpse of the zeal he has for our eternal souls!” In our message today, we’ll see how Jesus purifies God’s house by **exposing** the scandal of corruption, **elevating** the sacred purpose of worship, and **expounding** the Scriptures that draw hearts to Him.

Main Idea: Jesus purifies His church by exposing consumerism and elevating prayer, the Word, and welcoming all.

As we unfold God’s word, I pray we will examine our church and hearts: Have we let consumerism and convenience crowd out the sacred? Let’s turn to the Word and let it purify us.

1. Exposing the Scandal

Let’s start by exposing the scandal in the temple—and in our time. In verse 45, we read: *“And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold.”* This aggressive act by Jesus wasn’t random; it targeted deep corruption. You see, the temple’s Court of the Gentiles was suppose to be consecrated for foreigners—non-Jews—to pray and seek God. In Isaiah 56:7 the prophet promised that God’s house would be “a house of prayer for all peoples.” The gospel records that

Jesus added, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations” (Mark 11:17). God’s heart and redeeming love goes out to all people. But the religious leaders in Jesus’s day turned the court of the Gentiles into a marketplace.

Pilgrims arriving in Jerusalem to observe the Passover needed animals and temple currency to offer before the Lord. Knowing this the priests took advantage by setting up shops in the court of the Gentiles, jacking up prices and turning worship into a scam for profit. This excluded the very people God wanted to include—the outsiders, the seekers, who were left out in the noise and clutter.

This was a scandal! They weren’t just exploiting their people for gain, but blocking seekers from God’s grace. These religious elites prioritized profit over souls. Therefore Jesus quotes Jeremiah 7:11, calling the temple court a “den of robbers”—a hideout for those who rob God of glory and sinners from knowing the salvation of the Lord.

Does this sound familiar? Like the temple merchants who turned a house of prayer into a marketplace, many churches and Christians have bought into the idea that bigger is better, so they resort to worldly means to attract larger crowds. Too often, they draw consumer-driven Christians who hop from one church to another, not the lost and broken Jesus came to save.

As Karl Vaters warns in *De-sizing the Church*, “The idea of a church constantly getting bigger began as an outlier. Then it became a goal. Now it is the standard by which the performance of all churches are measured. Our obsession with numerical success is overwhelming pastors, stifling churches, and ruining our witness.” J. Mack Stiles sharpens this critique, noting, “Jesus was engaging, but he never entertained; there is a huge difference, one that is lost on the modern church.”

Brothers and sisters, Jesus didn’t use gimmicks or laser lights to draw crowds; He engaged hearts with truth and love. Yet, we chase spectacles, like flashy lights, coffee bars, and entertainment-style services—to “draw a crowd,” confusing engagement with entertainment and diluting the power of the gospel.

When we prioritize comfort over conviction, we exclude those needing transformation. When we water down the message to avoid offense, we rob people of saving truth. Like the temple merchants, our consumerist methods and church growth strategies push out the broken, the questioning, those who Christ came to save. This also quenches the power of the Spirit who draws the lost by His Word.

So Jesus zealously exposes this scandal not because He was in a bad mood, but for the sake of His Father's name and for the souls of the lost. So, let's ask: What scandals need exposing in our church or in our individual lives? Are we more concerned with attendance or entertainment rather than authentic encounters with God? Let's set aside our superficiality and let Jesus drive out the consumerism that undermines our genuine worship.

2. Elevating the Sacred

Now, having exposed the scandal, Jesus then elevates the sacred by reaffirming the temple's purpose. In verse 46, He declares: *"It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers."*

Quoting Isaiah, Jesus reminds us that the temple was meant to be a house of prayer for all nations—not a bazaar or business, but a sacred space for communing with God. Prayer isn't just a private conversation for our own personal gain; it's the heart's cry for God's presence to be revealed in our hearts and community in a way that welcomes all—Gentiles included—into fellowship. Jesus' zeal for His house, as John 2:17 says, "consumed" Him, driving Him to the cross, where His blood tore down barriers so all could approach God.

Again, the cleansing of the temple wasn't random. It wasn't like road rage. Jesus acted for the honor of His Father and the salvation of sinners. By purifying the temple, He previews the ultimate purification through His sacrifice, making God's house, which is no longer a physical place, but His gathered church, a beacon of grace.

What does it mean to elevate the sacred by gathering to experience God's presence? It means seeking a transformative encounter with

the Holy Spirit—not through smoke machines, dramatic lighting, or manipulative entertainment that mimics the consumerism Jesus rejected. Instead, as the living temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16), we manifest His presence through our collective love, the exercising of spiritual gifts in service, Spirit led prayer and preaching, and radical hospitality. As Jim Cymbala says, “A church that’s not open to all people is not fully open to the Holy Spirit.” When we welcome outsiders—foreigners, skeptics, the hurting of all races—as Christ welcomed us (Romans 15:7), and open our homes, the Spirit moves, convicting and transforming lives. Jesus Words, “My House shall be called a House of prayer”, is not just about making space for worship based prayer, but making space for people.

Yet, we often pull back, keeping our distance from God and others out of fear—fear of being exposed, of our sins and shame being seen, of true intimacy.

This brings to mind the woman who suffered for twelve years with a bleeding condition in Mark chapter 5. She was shunned as “unclean” under Jewish law, isolated from community and worship. Yet her desperate faith drove her to push through a crowd to touch Jesus’ garment, risking exposure for healing (Mark 5:28-30). Beloved, like her, we often hide from God and others, fearing vulnerability, using polished social media facades or religious routines to keep our distance—much like the temple’s marketplace masked its corruption.

But Jesus calls us to draw near, creating space for His transforming love to heal us and flow through us to others, making us His hands and feet to touch the lost with His redeeming grace. Charles Spurgeon warns, “Nobody can do as much damage to the church of God as the man who is within its walls, but not within its life.” Unlike the religious elites who hid behind their corrupt practices, we must pursue authentic faith, opening our hearts to Jesus’ healing touch and extending it to others.

Consider Thomas Edison, as Lance Odegard shares. Edison, inventor of the phonograph and light bulb, was a terrible fisherman, never catching fish because he used no bait. When asked why, he said, “Because when you fish without bait, people don’t bother you, and

neither do fish. It provides me my best time to think.” What was he looking for by fishing without bait? Edison sought space—space to reflect, space to create, and innovate. And then it happened. One day, while fishing with a bamboo pole, he had the insight to try bamboo as the filament for the first ever electric light bulb.

I want to suggest to you that no space better fosters encountering God than engaging in scripture-fed, Spirit-led, worship-based prayer. But transformational prayer requires that we make space not wait to find it. If we don’t make space to hear His voice and seek His face, nothing else, not even good things will have the aroma of Christ upon it. Charles Spurgeon put it this way: “If the church of God does not make prayer her chief weapon, she has no other to depend upon. ... Prayer is the life-breath of the church; without it, she is a dead body, not a living temple. Let us give ourselves to prayer, and make room for God to work, for He will not dwell in a house that is not a house of prayer.”

That’s why I invite you to our three-day prayer summit which will take place in two weeks. It’s a time to create space—not for entertainment, but to seek God together through His Word and Spirit, opening our hearts to His transforming work and welcoming all to His grace.

Karl Vaters reminds us, “In the same way that a healthy elephant is bigger than a healthy rabbit, a church’s size has nothing to do with its relative health – or relative value. ... The issue, when considering the health of a church isn’t ‘how big is it?’ but ‘is it a healthy one?’” Let’s measure our church’s health by our prayer, our inclusivity, and our faithfulness—not our attendance. Make space to join us regularly for our monthly corporate prayer meeting so that we can be the dwelling place of God that Jesus shed His blood for us to be. And again, join us at the prayer summit to seek God’s presence to change us and our community from the inside out.

Beloved, let’s elevate the sacred by imitating Christ’s zeal, making our church a house of prayer where sinners find salvation and God receives glory.

3. Expounding the Scriptures

Finally, Jesus models His ongoing work, namely expounding the Scriptures. Luke continues in verses 47-48 say: *“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.”*

Notice the contrast: leaders plot destruction, but people hang on every word. Why? Because Jesus wasn't peddling products; He was proclaiming truth. His teaching, rooted in Scripture, was authoritative, life-giving, and transformative. He taught daily, making the temple a place of God's Word, exposing sin, elevating holiness and pointing the spiritually lost to salvation.

Why aren't Christians, hanging on to every word today, as they did then? Too often, distractions like social media or daily pressures harden our hearts to God's voice (Psalm 95:8). Additionally, consumerist church practices that prioritize entertainment over truth suppress our hunger for the word. Moreover, if the only time we feast on God's word is on Sunday mornings, we won't develop a strong appetite for His life giving truth.

And let me emphasize, having a fruitful daily quiet time in God's word is not about filling a quota. As Marshall Seagal suggests, we may approach God's Word as a duty to check off, not a delight to savor, like Psalm 1 demonstrates where the blessed man delights in God's law, meditating day and night. As I pointed out a few weeks ago, let's pray as Seagal suggests to move from neglect of God's word to delight in it, using the FEAST—acronym: Focus my mind, Enlighten my eyes, Address my sin, Satisfy my soul, Train my hands. Prepare your hearts daily and corporately to feast on Scripture's life-giving truth.

What's another reason Christians today aren't hungry for God's Word? Too often, preachers, as 2 Timothy 4 warns, tickle ears with messages aimed at felt needs, fearing offense, instead of feeding the flock with expository preaching.

What is expository preaching?" H.B. Charles Jr. helps us understand this: expository preaching is preaching where "the point of the

message is rooted in, aligns with, and flows from the primary meaning of the sermon text,” exhorting hearers to trust and obey God’s Word. It’s not a dry lecture, or a display of exegetical research, or selectively cherry-picking verses to fit our ideas. It’s faithfully proclaiming the truth of the text, as Jesus did, letting Scripture shape the message. When we do this, we avoid the consumer-driven trap of preaching what tickles ears and instead let God’s Word pierce hearts.

How many of you know, in our consumer-driven age, we’ve sidelined Scripture for self-help talks or motivational messages. But Jesus shows that expounding the Word is central to purifying God’s house. It combats scandal, elevates the sacred, and sustains worship. Pastors must preach the whole counsel of God faithfully. And again, Congregants must develop a longing for God’s word by not just feasting on Sunday, but also in personal quiet times. When Scripture is faithfully expounded, and daily consumed, again scandals are exposed, the sacred is elevated, and souls are saved.

I’m sure that some of us, like me have visited churches where the service felt like a concert followed by a TED Talk—entertaining, but yet you left without being touched by God. Contrast that with gatherings where the Word is opened, prayed over, expounded and applied in the Spirit—there, hearts are pierced, and lives are renewed. That’s the power Jesus demonstrated.

Conclusion

How did Jesus cleanse the temple of the Lord? Jesus purifies His Father’s house by exposing the scandal of consumerism and exclusion, elevating the sacred through prayer, inclusion, and encounters with the Holy Spirit’s transforming presence, and expounding the Scriptures that draw us to Him.

Church, this isn’t ancient history—it’s a call for us today. Have we made God’s house a den of robbers through consumerist ways? Let’s turn from the, “I want to be catered to” mentality and let Christ purify us. With zeal for His Father’s name and love for sinners, let’s make our church a house of prayer. In three weeks, our prayer summit is a

chance to do this—join us to seek God's presence, be transformed not only for our sake but to show others the welcome of Christ.

If you're here feeling excluded or burdened by sin, Jesus' blood welcomes you. Come to Him. For all of us, let's pray for spiritual renewal that not only satisfies the deepest needs of our hearts, but creates space for outsiders to know Christ's redeeming grace.