

The Heart of Worship

Luke 19:45–48

Theme: “God is zealous for the holiness of His worship, and He will not share His glory with idols.”

Big Idea: Jesus cleansed the temple not just to drive out corruption, but to restore its purpose: worship for all nations.

Introduction:

Review last week’s sermon

- Jesus entered Jerusalem on a colt; He was received by most, but not all.
 - Everyone missed the spiritual meaning of His visitation.
 - Jesus wept over the judgment that was coming to Jerusalem through the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.
 - The judgment was for sin and corruption within Judaism, and most importantly, the rejection of the Messiah.
2. Jesus now enters the temple and is emotionally disturbed by what He sees. The house of God’s worship had been turned into a den of robbers, filled with chaos and corruption. The Gentile courtyard looked more like a secular marketplace run by greedy scoundrels.
- What was designed to be a holy (otherworldly) place of worship for the One True God had become secular and corrupt and didn’t look any different from the fallen world around it.
3. Unfortunately, thousands of churches today don’t look any more holy than the temple did on this occasion.
- They look more like secular concert arenas and shopping malls than distinct places where Christians gather to worship God.

- You may say, “That's OK because the building doesn't matter—we, the people, are the house of God.” Amen! That's good theology, but that doesn't help the situation. It makes it worse. How much more secular and unholy is your bodily temple than the buildings people are gathering in?
- 4. This text will be a difficult challenge for us all, but for all in Christ, it ends with great news.

I. A House of Corruption (vv. 45–46)

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

Quick note about the parallel passages:

All four Gospels give an account of Jesus cleansing the temple, but John's is placed at the beginning of Jesus's ministry, and not at the end like Matthew, Mark, and Luke. There are two different schools of thought on this. One is that it is a completely separate event that did mark the beginning of His ministry, and the other is that it is the same event, but placed at the beginning of John's Gospel for literary reasons.

A. The Scene in the Temple

- Historical context: This occurred in the Court of the Gentiles — the only place where non-Jews could pray.
- Instead, it was turned into a marketplace filled with:
 - Money changers exchanging foreign coins for temple currency (Tyrian coinage) to pay the temple tax — often at corrupt rates.
 - Animal sellers charging high prices for sacrifices; outside animals were rejected.
- All of this was likely controlled by the high priestly families, especially the house of Annas. There was a title for what was going on here: “The Bazaar (market) of Annas.”

B. Why Jesus Was So Angry

- Jesus quotes Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11.
- Worship was obstructed for the nations.
- Isaiah 56:1–8 — The temple is to be a house of prayer for all peoples.

Philip Ryken says,

“This prophecy is about nothing less than the worldwide mission of the gospel. From the time that the temple was first built in Jerusalem, God had always intended that His house would be a house of prayer for the nations. This is why its outermost court was called the Court of the Gentiles. But who can pray in a supermarket? By buying and selling in the outer court, the money changers were effectively excluding Gentiles from the worship of God, and thus they were failing to fulfill their mission to the world. This is what made Jesus so angry. It was not simply what people were doing—the buying and selling; it was also what they were not doing: praying to God or reaching the lost.” (p. 345)

- The temple had become a machine for profit, not a meeting place for God.

Jeremiah 7:

Jeremiah 7 is known as the “Temple Sermon,” where the prophet stands at the gate of the temple and rebukes the people for their false religion, injustice, and idolatry. The people wrongly assumed that the mere presence of the temple would protect them from judgment, even though they were living in sin (see vv. 4–11).

C. Jesus’ Prophetic Demonstration

- Driving the sellers and buyers out (Mark 11:15), overturning money tables and seats, and even preventing people from carrying goods through the temple complex was not a temper tantrum; it was a prophetic demonstration.
- Just like Jeremiah warned of destruction in his day, Jesus is warning again.
- The temple was corrupt, and judgment was coming.

II. The Corrupt Elite (vv. 47–48)

“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.”

A. Religious Elitism

- Jesus was challenging not only their theology, but their economic system and authority.
- They had no heart for God or the nations—only for power and control.
- They were the “citizens” in the parable (Luke 19:14) who said, “We do not want this man to reign over us.”

B. Social Elitism

The principal men of the people — These men were likely part of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council made up of chief priests, scribes, and elders (see Luke 22:66). They were influential laypeople, possibly leaders of local synagogues, wealthy landowners, or elite community figures.

A WARNING TO CLERGY AND INFLUENCERS:

The power of spiritual blindness prohibited these men from seeing their true motives. They believed they were honoring God and doing good things. Look at Saul as an example in Acts 9. This should drive us to humble vigilance. As pastors, teachers, leaders, and influencers, we must not only examine our actions and positions but constantly challenge the motives of our hearts. Are we truly seeking God's glory—or our own? Are we honoring the Lord—or protecting comfort, reputation, or control?

Let this be a sobering reminder: spiritual blindness often masquerades as spiritual zeal.

C. Impotent Elitism

- These powerful men wanted desperately to destroy Jesus right then and there, but they faced a serious dilemma. At that moment, Jesus had favor with the crowds. The people were drawn to His teaching, hanging on every word, and the religious elite knew that to eliminate Him, they first had to win the crowd to their side.

- Otherwise, they risked igniting a riot—and that was something they could not afford. A public uprising in the temple courts would not only jeopardize their religious credibility, it would also threaten their political privileges under Roman oversight. The Romans tolerated local religious leadership as long as order was maintained, but they had no patience for insurrection.

Praise God that in His divine providence, He rendered the evil intentions of the elite powerless. Luke tells us, “They did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on His words.” Their influence was restrained by the sovereign hand of God, and the crowd was captivated not by power or position, but by the teaching of Christ.

We should also praise God that He often renders our own evil intentions impotent. How many times has the Spirit intervened to stop us from speaking, acting, or choosing according to the flesh?

Yet, in His wisdom, there are moments when God permits our flesh to prevail—not to destroy us, but to discipline and sanctify us. Even our failures can become means of grace when they lead us to repentance and renewed dependence on Him.

The good news is this: it doesn’t have to be that way. As believers, we are not slaves to the flesh. We have been given the Spirit, and God continually calls us to repentance and victory through Christ. That’s one of the glories of being a Christian—we are not left to ourselves.

III. A Corrupt Captivation (v. 48)

“But they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words.”

As I was doing my research for this sermon, I noticed many commentators spoke well of the crowds that were “hanging on” every word Jesus taught. And the phrase “hanging on His words” certainly tugs at the heartstrings from a sermonic perspective.

However, knowing that within a few days the majority of the same crowd will be calling for His crucifixion bothered me. I couldn't help but wonder why such a fickle and indecisive crowd would be so interested in what Jesus had to say at this moment.

Unfortunately, we do not get a transcript of the sermon He taught here. But we do get His thesis statement from the two prophets: He quoted Isaiah and Jeremiah. When we put those two prophecies together and plug them into Jesus's context in the temple at this moment, we can assume it was a stern condemnation of the church leaders and the corrupt elite.

That is a message that has always connected with the masses—and still does today.

Therefore, I do not believe the majority of this crowd is worthy of commendation for their attentiveness to Jesus's teachings. I believe they once again misunderstood the heart of His message.

Conclusion: The Heart of Worship is the Heart of the Worshiper

It never really was about the temple as a building. True worship has always been about communion with God. At that time, it just so happened that Herod's temple was the place to commune with God. But with the destruction of that temple in 70 AD and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, that has changed.

“Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?”
– 1 Corinthians 3:16

We are God's dwelling place on earth as His Spirit lives in us. We are little houses of prayer.

“You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” – 1 Peter 2:5

God wants to keep us free from corruption and distraction so that our communion with Him is pure and sweet and effective for reaching the nations.

God is not cleansing buildings—He's cleansing hearts. He purifies the church one heart at a time.

He will drive out whatever defiles His dwelling — in churches, in leadership, and in us.

Let us not be found resisting His cleansing work.

Application: The Cleansing

1. Do you want a pure and effective church here at HBC, as Isaiah preached about?
A church body is only as pure and effective as each member's heart is pure and effective.
2. Are we assuming God's favor without repentance?
Like in Jeremiah's day, do we say, "The temple of the Lord!" and trust in ritual without righteousness?
Do not presume, as the people of Jeremiah's day did, that the church is somehow going to magically stand in as your righteousness.
"I may be living like the devil all week long, but at least I go to Heritage on Sunday. Surely God is happy about that, right?"
Wrong!
3. The Good News
We are all guilty—except Jesus. Jesus succeeded in being the perfect temple of God the entire time He wore our flesh and breathed our air on this earth. And by His free grace, through repentance and faith, He offers His perfect record to us. And because His Spirit lives in us, we can have confidence that through continual repentance we will be that pure and effective temple of the living God.
Let Jesus cleanse your temple today.

Call to Action:

- Repent of anything in your life or ministry that obstructs true worship.
- Renew your commitment to making your heart the house of God — for yourself, your church, and the nations.

CG Discussion Questions

1. Why was Jesus so angry when He entered the temple?
What does this teach us about how seriously God takes worship?
2. What was the significance of Jesus quoting both Isaiah 56 and Jeremiah 7?
How did those Old Testament passages deepen the meaning of His actions?
3. What was wrong with turning the Court of the Gentiles into a marketplace?
How does this connect with God's heart for the nations?
4. In what ways can churches today resemble the temple that Jesus cleansed?
What forms of "corruption" or distraction might we be tolerating?
5. What are some modern-day equivalents to the money changers and merchants in the temple?
How do these things hinder true worship?
6. The sermon mentioned that thousands of churches today don't look any more holy than the temple did in Jesus' day.
What does it mean for a church to be holy?
7. How does spiritual blindness affect even religious leaders, according to the sermon?
What can we learn from the example of Saul in Acts 9?
8. Why is it dangerous to assume God's favor just because we go to church or have a religious background?
9. The sermon warned against spiritual elitism. How can we guard our own hearts from becoming proud, controlling, or self-righteous in ministry or influence?
10. If your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16), what might Jesus want to "drive out" or cleanse in your life?
11. How can we, as a church and as individuals, renew our commitment to being "houses of prayer"?
What practices help keep our worship pure, God-centered, and mission-focused?

Day 1 – Scripture: *Luke 19:45* – “And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold...”

Reflection:

Jesus entered the temple and saw corruption where there should have been communion. The temple was meant to be a sacred space for prayer and worship, but it had become a marketplace. This reveals God’s heart for **pure worship**—He is not indifferent to what happens in His house. We must remember: our churches are not platforms for performance or profit, but sanctuaries for reverent, joyful worship.

Application:

What parts of your life or worship have become more about convenience or consumption than communion with God?

Take time today to invite Jesus to “cleanse” your heart and restore the purpose of your worship.

Day 2 – Scripture: *Isaiah 56:7* – “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”

Reflection:

Jesus quotes this verse when cleansing the temple, highlighting that God’s vision was always global. The Court of the Gentiles was meant to be a place for the nations to pray, but it was crowded out by commerce. God’s desire is for His people to create space for others—especially outsiders—to meet Him in worship.

Application:

Does your life or church reflect a heart for the nations?

Are you helping to create space for others—especially the marginalized or unchurched—to encounter God?

Day 3 – Scripture: *John 2:17* – “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

Reflection:

Jesus’ cleansing of the temple wasn’t a loss of control—it was a prophetic act of holy zeal. His passion for the Father’s glory drove Him to confront compromise. We often associate anger with sin, but when rooted in holiness, zeal can be a sign of love. We need a righteous zeal that burns for God’s name to be honored and His worship to be holy.

Application:

What things stir your spiritual passion?

Does your zeal align with God’s heart for His glory and His people?

Day 4 – Scripture: *Jeremiah 7:4* – “Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the Lord...’”

Reflection:

In Jeremiah’s day—and in Jesus’—people assumed that religious buildings or rituals could protect them, even

while living in sin. But God doesn't bless **external worship without internal repentance**. His presence does not mean His approval. Going to church is not a substitute for obeying Christ.

Application:

Are you trusting in Christian habits (church attendance, serving, Bible knowledge) more than in a living, obedient relationship with Jesus?

Day 5 – Scripture: *1 Corinthians 3:16* – “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?”

Reflection:

With the destruction of the temple and the coming of the Spirit, worship shifted from a place to a people. **You are God’s temple** now. And He is just as zealous today to cleanse the hearts of His people as He was in Luke 19. The real question is not “what does your church look like?” but “what does your heart look like?”

Application:

Is your heart a place where God’s Spirit is welcome to dwell richly and fully?
What might God be asking to cleanse that may be affecting your worship?