

Jesus and the Money Changers
Some Lessons for Temple-Keepers

Matthew 21:12 (the account of Jesus chasing the money changers from the temple in Jerusalem)

Introduction

1. Though not all of us are called by Christ to serve in the public ministry, to take “priestly” positions, Saint Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 3:16 that each believer is God’s temple and the God’s Spirit dwells within.
2. So in another sense each of us is called to be the high priest, or temple-keeper of our own temple, our self, and our life of faith.
3. With this in mind, there are a number of important lessons we can learn from those temple-keepers that Jesus so strongly encountered and challenged that day, one of the last days of his earthly life, so long ago in Jerusalem.

The Anger

Questions: Why did Jesus express such extreme anger at the changers of money? One possible answer is that he was shocked at such a practice and reacted accordingly. Though this answer seems obvious, let us look more fully.

- a.) Jesus had been to the temple many times during his ministry and must have often seen the practice of money changing. It had been a practice for years, like Friday night bingo at the local Catholic Church (omit if giving homily to a Catholic group!). Then why such anger this time?
- b.) I’d like to offer a reflection. The reason that Jesus had gone all of those times to the religious leaders of Jerusalem, to the temple (even at the tender age of twelve) was to share the good news of the Kingdom, to help them fulfill the very purpose of their temple, to help them realize the coming of the true temple, God’s Son.
- c.) But that one who came as the fulfillment of the Laws and the prophets was cast out of the temple, rejected time and time again, and considered a troublemaker by the temple-keepers. How sad, how frustrating!

d.) Now, before his departure, Jesus came to the temple to express the heart of heaven toward those whom he must have shed so many tears for, those who were trusted to know the real purpose of the temple, to receive the Lord of Glory. (What must have gone through Jesus' heart and mind as he sat on the steps weaving that simple whip! Much more than indignation at a few money changers.)

Truly, in the story of Jesus and the money changers, we see the headlong encounter between the religion that comes from the heart and that which has become "professional" in quite another sense. Here we have a rich opportunity to reflect on our own temple-keeping, next to that of those who kept the edifice in Jerusalem.

Our Temple

(Note to the evangelist. The points in this section are intended to hold implications for both the personal daily spiritual life of the individual believer and, as well, for the church as a whole. The material is intended to call forth, hopefully, some reflection from the listeners on both levels.)

1. Whether we speak of the entrance of Jesus two thousands years ago into that sun baked temple in Jerusalem, or the presence of God and Christ in our daily lives, or of the much expected return of the Lord, there is one thing above all to be mindful of: the final purpose of our profession of the faith and religious lives is to arrive at that face-to-face encounter with God and Christ that transcends all religious practice, all scriptural eloquence. (1 Corinthians 3:18 – "Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.")
2. Who sets the terms for the entrance of Christ into our temple?

Those who staffed the great temple of Jerusalem could not accept Jesus' terms. With all that they knew, they were no prepared for his entrance. He didn't meet their requirements for Messiahship. Surely we must realize, as we remember our own initial conversion experience, that God can only cleanse our temples as we accept His terms of entrance. If, indeed, God must accept my terms there can be no conversion.

The true religious life must daily open our minds, hearts, and wills to the ongoing terms of God and His Son in our lives. This kind of openness is no an easy achievement. Our faith is no a settling into a comfortable belief pattern or identity; it is the constant

challenge of a living, growing relationship with a living, growing God. (Evangelist: good place for an example or story.)

3. The Most Holy Place.

Looking at the attitudes of the temple elders toward Jesus, the blustering strength of their protest, we are led to examine and reflect on a weakness hidden behind the hedges of their wordy legalism. That weakness persists with us today: the failure of regular visitation, deep within the temple, to that Most Holy Place of communion with God. It has often been proven that as one grows in outward status or reputation the naked, inner relationship with God, all vestments removed, can become more distant.

Each of us has that Most Holy Place within us. How often do we lay aside temple-keeping business and go naked there to seek our Father? If this is not the center of our spiritual lives, then we had better not so easily condemn those who rejected our Lord. Are we not doing the same daily?

Conclusion

It is a simple thing to look back into the pages of the Bible and take the side of Christ in all circumstances. But it is quite another matter to take that side moment by moment in our own lives.

God challenges us Christians as a whole today as well: to reach beyond our temples to a world in desperate need, and to be ready for the approach again of His Son.