

Matthew 21:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves,

Analysis

And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple. This dramatic action demonstrates Christ's righteous zeal for God's house and His messianic authority. "Went into the temple" (eisēlthen eis to hieron, εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸ ἱερόν) specifies the temple courts, likely the Court of the Gentiles, the outer area accessible to non-Jews. This was where commercial activity had encroached on space intended for prayer and worship.

"Cast out" (exebalen, ἐξέβαλεν) uses strong language indicating forceful expulsion—the same word used for casting out demons. The merchants "sold and bought" (pōlountas kai agorazontas, πωλοῦντας καὶ ἀγοράζοντας) in the temple precincts, providing sacrificial animals and currency exchange for temple taxes. While these services had legitimate purposes, they had degenerated into exploitative commerce that defiled God's house.

Jesus "overthrew the tables of the moneychangers" and "the seats of them that sold doves," demonstrating that even religious activity conducted wrongly deserves judgment. The poor especially were exploited—doves were the sacrifices of the economically disadvantaged (Leviticus 5:7). This cleansing fulfilled Malachi 3:1-3, showing Messiah's role as both temple purifier and righteous judge. It challenges any use of religion for financial exploitation or any distraction from worship's true purpose.

Historical Context

This temple cleansing occurred during Jesus' final week (approximately AD 30), right after the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The second temple, rebuilt after the Babylonian exile and massively expanded by Herod the Great, was one of the ancient world's architectural marvels. The Court of the Gentiles, the largest outer court, was intended as a place where God-fearing Gentiles could pray and worship.

However, the high priestly family (particularly the sons of Annas) had established a lucrative monopoly on temple commerce. Pilgrims needed to purchase approved sacrificial animals and exchange foreign currency into temple coinage for the annual temple tax. While these services had originally been located on the Mount of Olives, authorities had moved them into the temple courts for convenience and profit. Prices were inflated, and the poor were exploited.

Jesus' action directly challenged the high priestly establishment's authority and revenue stream. This, combined with His growing popularity and messianic claims, sealed the religious leaders' determination to eliminate Him. The cleansing also fulfilled Zechariah 14:21, which prophesied a day when there would be no more merchants in the Lord's house. John's Gospel records an earlier temple cleansing at the beginning of Jesus' ministry (John 2:13-17), suggesting this was an ongoing corruption requiring repeated confrontation.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How has commercialization or exploitation crept into modern church practice?
2. What does Jesus' zeal for God's house teach about appropriate righteous anger versus sinful anger?

3. How can we ensure church ministry serves the poor rather than exploiting them?
4. What activities or attitudes in our churches might Jesus overturn if He visited today?
5. How do we balance appropriate financial stewardship with avoiding the corruption Jesus condemned?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	εἰσῆλθεν	ὁ	Ἰησοῦς	εἰς	τὸ	ἱερῶ	τοῦ	θεοῦ	καὶ
And	went		Jesus	into		the temple		of God	And
G2532	G1525	G3588	G2424	G1519	G3588	G2411	G3588	G2316	G2532
ἐξέβαλεν	πάντας	τοὺς	πωλούντων	καὶ	ἀγοράζοντας	ἐν			
cast out	all them		of them that sold	And	bought	in			
G1544	G3956	G3588	G4453	G2532	G59	G1722			
τῷ	ἱερῷ	καὶ	τὰς	τραπέζας	τῶν	κολλυβιστῶν			
the temple	And		the tables		of the moneychangers				
G3588	G2411	G2532	G3588	G5132	G3588	G2855			
κατέστρεψεν	καὶ	τὰς	καθέδρας	τῶν	πωλούντων	τὰς			
overthrew	And		the seats		of them that sold				
G2690	G2532	G3588	G2515	G3588	G4453	G3588			
περιστεράς									
doves									
G4058									

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 1:14 (Parallel theme): And if the burnt sacrifice for his offering to the LORD be of fowls, then he shall bring his offering of turtledoves, or of young pigeons.

Leviticus 5:7 (Parallel theme): And if he be not able to bring a lamb, then he shall bring for his trespass, which he hath committed, two turtledoves, or two young pigeons, unto the LORD; one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering.

Luke 2:24 (Parallel theme): And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

Leviticus 12:8 (Parallel theme): And if she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, and the other for a sin offering: and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean.

Exodus 30:13 (Temple): This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel is twenty gerahs:) an half shekel shall be the offering of the LORD.

Leviticus 14:22 (Parallel theme): And two turtledoves, or two young pigeons, such as he is able to get; and the one shall be a sin offering, and the other a burnt offering.

Mark 11:11 (Temple): And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve.

Leviticus 12:6 (Temple): And when the days of her purifying are fulfilled, for a son, or for a daughter, she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtledove, for a sin offering, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest:

Leviticus 14:30 (Parallel theme): And he shall offer the one of the turtledoves, or of the young pigeons, such as he can get;