

Jesus' cleansing of the Temple in Jerusalem is one of the most fascinating aspects of his life and personality. It is a story which grabs our attention, and makes us think that perhaps, on this one occasion, Jesus went a little too far. The story, in fact, has a much deeper dimension than whether Jesus got a little too angry. The story speaks to a more dramatic cleansing: the doom of the Temple and the whole Old Testament economy.

Mark's Gospel, often purported by some scholars to be less concerned with Jesus' Divinity, actually shows us three startling instances where Jesus exercised his Divine authority and Lordship. These are:

1. Jesus' Lordship Over the Sabbath (see Mark 3:28)
2. Jesus' Lordship Over Marriage and Divorce (see Mark 10: 6-12)
3. Jesus' Lordship Over the Temple (see Mark 11: 15-18 and 13: 1-37)

So what's going on with Jesus and the money-changers in the Temple? Is Jesus simply ticked off that there is commerce going on in the Temple? Or is there a far deeper concern on the mind of Jesus?

The Scriptures had foretold that one day God would gather Jew and Gentile to worship together at the Temple (see Isaiah 56: 7). Moreover, the Scriptures also foretold (at least typologically) of a day when the Messiah would make a "divine inspection" of the Temple (see Mal. 3: 1-4). When this day arrives for the inspection, Jesus says:

"Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" (Mark 11: 17)

The Temple's outer court, where the buying and selling took place, was supposed to be a place of prayer and worship for the Gentiles. This story isn't just about money; its about salvation. Turning the outer court of the Temple into a market place effectively impeded God's plan of salvation for the Gentiles. Thus we read the following in the commentary of the Ignatius Catholic Study Bible:

"Because Israel failed to repent, Solomon's Temple [the first Temple] was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Jesus similarly confronts Israelites who presume their covenant relationship with God will remain secure despite their sin.... Their impenitence will result in the Temple's second destruction in A.D. 70 [by Roman armies]. *** Here too the mountain of Jerusalem and its Temple must be pushed aside to make room for a new Temple: the true house of prayer built of Christian believers quarried from all nations...." (Gospel of Mark, Chapter 11 footnotes)

Jesus' cleansing of the Temple foretells its doom. "Jesus' dramatic demonstration of overturning tables foreshadows the Temple's violent destruction in A.D. 70." Jesus wasn't

just overturning tables in the Temple; he was overturning the whole Old Testament economy. New wine cannot be placed into old wine skins. Jesus himself will be the new, indestructible Temple. In Chapter 13 of Mark's Gospel Jesus will foretell with remarkable accuracy the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple which occurred less than four decades after His death and resurrection.

Augustine, in his sermons on John, makes a helpful observation about the sacrificial system then in place at the temple:

For you know, beloved, that sacrifices were given to that people, in consideration of the carnal mind and stony heart yet in them, to keep them from falling away to idols: and they offered there for sacrifices oxen, sheep, and doves: you know this, for you have read it. It was not a great sin, then, if they sold in the temple that which was bought for the purpose of offering in the temple: and yet He cast them out thence.

Why is this? Augustine hints at it, but does not explicitly say so. The key is so obvious it goes overlooked: note that it was not only the moneychangers that were driven out but the animals as well. Given that the animals were, in fact, necessary for the sacrifices of the temple their expulsion is a bit odd, as this scholar notes: was it not the commercial activity itself that was the real source of offense?

This detail points to the deeper meaning of this passage: is it not most fitting that this challenge to the old way of sacrifices preceded their replacement—which was Christ's one-time self-offering on the cross? The scholar concludes:

As we have already implied, the expulsion of the beasts symbolized the new order of worship whose temple will have no sacrificial rite. If we do not understand the expulsion as a symbolic act, we have no reason for it since the animals were necessary and were not in themselves an abuse of the temple's sanctity. Their removal was meant to symbolize the end of mediation toward God by sacrifice; the Mosaic system was not condemned but rather it was displaced as a result of its being superseded by the presence of Jesus.

Read in light of this interpretation, the text makes more sense. Just as Jesus was the new temple, who would be 'destroyed' and 'rebuilt' in three days, so also He was the new Lamb of God slain for our sins. The scourging itself then becomes another symbolic act that foreshadows the Passion of Jesus: to paraphrase Augustine, He who scourged the sheep Himself was scourged for us.