

THE NEED FOR CLEANSING

SERIES: JESUS, SAVIOR OF THE LOST

by Ron Ritchie

On Thursday, May 28, my wife, Anne Marie, and I were in Paris to visit our dear missionary couple Dudley and Janet Weiner. We had the morning free, so we met with Carl Gallivan, who was there on business, and invited him to visit the famous Gothic cathedral Notre Dame de Paris with us. Carl had received an early morning phone call from a friend in the states who was going through a divorce, so he was interested not so much in seeing the cathedral as in finding a quiet place, perhaps a side chapel, where we could pray for the man and his wife.

So off we went toward the heart of the old city of Paris, which is located on a small island. As we crossed the bridge we were overwhelmed by the beauty and size of "Our Lady," which has welcomed pilgrims since 1163 A.D. We were hoping to find a place to pray, but as we approached the great doors of the church we quickly became aware of another reality: commercialism. The plaza was filled with people from around the world who were hoping to get inside the church, but before any of us could reach those doors we had to press past booksellers, portable T-shirt stands, tour guides, their groups and buses, street musicians, a blind beggar, and street artists. Commercialism had taken over the plaza. Moreover, once we got inside we realized that many of those visitors came to see the beauty of the church, with its stained glass windows, its famous clock, and its Gothic style of architecture, but it appeared that few came to pray. On this particular day we were blessed to be able to get into an Ascension Mass just as the doors were closing. But as soon as that mass was over the doors were opened, and the next group of pilgrims and tourists flowed into the cathedral.

That experience reminded me of what Jesus, the Prince of Peace, may have seen when he walked into the court of the Gentiles within the temple area after his triumphal entrance on that first Palm Sunday. After his rejection by the Jewish leaders, he saw the need to cleanse the temple because of the corruption in worship that blinded the people from seeing their Messiah. Jesus had cleansed the temple at the beginning of his ministry (see John 2:13-16), and here he was cleansing it again at the end of his ministry. As we study this passage, I hope many of us will see the need for our Lord to come and cleanse our "temples." There is so much clutter in our lives that we can't find the time or a place to pray.

The need to cleanse our lifestyle

**And He entered the temple and began to cast out those who were selling, saying to them, "It is written, 'And My House shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it a robbers' den."
(Luke 19:45, 46)**

On the first Palm Sunday, just before our Lord's last Passover, he entered Jerusalem as King of the Jews (19:29-44). According to my harmony of the gospels, a couple of other events occurred before we pick up our story in Luke 19:45- 20:26. First, Jesus entered the temple area and began to heal the blind and the lame. He was fulfilling the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 35:5-6. So the common people cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David," causing the chief priests and scribes to become indignant (Mark 11:15-18). Second, leaving the temple, Jesus spent that Sunday night in Bethany, and on Monday morning as he and his disciples returned to Jerusalem, he cursed a fig tree that had no fruit. The fig tree was a symbol of the nation of Israel, signifying that it had become barren; it had lost its ability to produce spiritual blessings for either its own people or the surrounding nations (Matthew 21:18-19). Then he performed this second cleansing of the temple.

Let's talk about the temple for a moment. The temple is critical in the life of Israel, and it is critical as well in the life of the Christian. When God led his people out of Egypt and into the wilderness in 1441 B.C., he presented to Moses the plans for the tabernacle (or tent), "...a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). It was designed to be a place where man could meet God, where he would come and dwell so that the people

could experience his presence and the forgiveness of sin and could spend time in prayer and worship (Exodus 25-28). It was designed by God to remind man of body, soul, and spirit; the two outer courts represented the body and soul, and the holy of holies represented the spirit.

Then in 960 B.C., God asked Solomon to build him a permanent temple that would symbolize the hearing ear of God; that is, a place where man and God would meet and he would hear their prayers (1 Kings 8); a place of mercy, salvation and the forgiveness of sins; the refuge of the stranger; and the house of prayer and worship for all the peoples (Isaiah 56:7), to the end that all nations of the earth should fear God. Solomon's temple was destroyed by the Babylonians and the Chaldeans in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25).

After the Babylonian captivity Zerubbabel built the second temple in 520 B.C. In 20 B.C., Herod the Great began rebuilding the second temple after it had fallen into disrepair. It was this temple that our Lord had already cleansed once and prophesied that it would be destroyed by Israel's enemies. Rome did destroy this temple in 70 A.D.

A third temple, yet to be built, will be destroyed in the tribulation.

In the New Testament, the human hearts of the Christian community replaced the building of stone as the temple, or God's dwelling place, on the Day of Pentecost. Paul told the Corinthians and the Ephesians, "You are...God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9). "...you [are] built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:20-22; see also 1 Corinthians 3:16). "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

With that in mind, let's see how the need for cleansing of the temple became apparent in Luke 19:45-46. When Jesus entered the temple area in the court of the Gentiles, he saw that at the times of the various religious feasts, the plaza that was designed to be a place for people to prepare their hearts for prayer and worship turned into something like a Kmart or Price Club. Behind all this buying and selling of sacrificial animals used in the worship services was a corrupt system designed by the high priest and religious leaders to rob the common people and the pilgrims by forcing them to purchase unblemished animals from them within the temple area. To make matters even worse, the priests had designed a temple tax to be paid by the pilgrims. But the tax could not be paid in their home country currency; that had to be exchanged for temple shekels for a fee. (Imagine that every time you came here to worship God, you knew you were getting ripped off--suppose when it was time for the offering, you had to exchange your American money at ten cents on the dollar for currency with PBC printed on it!)

The temple activity was the symbol of Israel's heart, and our Lord knew that the problem was their corruption in worship. This lack of true devotion to God was what kept his triumphal entry from being triumphal in a permanent sense (Luke 19:35-40). So the King returned to the temple and began to cleanse it for the second time.

Jesus looked around the court of the Gentiles and cried out using the encouraging words of his heavenly Father quoted by Isaiah, in which the Lord declared to all the people that his temple was an outward symbol of his loving heart and that all peoples--Jews, Gentiles, eunuchs, and foreigners--could gather in the same place and worship him:

**"...those I will bring to My holy mountain,
And make them joyful in My house of prayer.
The burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar;
For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples." (Isaiah 56:7)**

Jesus told those who were selling, however, that they had made the temple a robbers' den! The Lord had accused Israel of this same problem some six hundred years earlier through the prophet Jeremiah. But each new generation faced the same temptation, and in this present one they gave into greed one more time. The priests had commercialized the temple services and had become middlemen in the sale of animals used for worship and

bankers in the money exchange business. They were in essence robbing God's people for a profit instead of leading them into a deeper relationship with him and worship of him.

God has designed the collective invisible body of Christ and our individual physical bodies to be the temple of the Holy Spirit, the place where he dwells. This temple is where he wants to communicate with us and wants us to communicate with him and worship him. He wants our lives to be so in tune with him that when others see us they think of God. However, in my own personal experience and perhaps in yours, many of us have allowed the world system to so fill up our courtyard with the business of this world that we can't find the time to pray or to even stand still long enough for others to see Christ in us. We as a Christian community are so busy promoting our personal careers and our financial security that when we come to church to worship God we find ourselves looking for business contacts! Recently one local pastor was forced to ask his people on a given Sunday morning to refrain from coming to church to exchange business cards. Other Christians use the Christian Yellow Pages to drum up business among the members of the church.

I believe that we as a Christian family need to come to Jesus and ask him to cleanse us of those activities in our lifestyles that hinder us and others from communicating with the Father and that blind others from seeing in us the eternal hope that is offered in Jesus Christ.

The need to cleanse our minds

And He was teaching daily in the temple; but the chief priests and the scribes and the leading men among the people were trying to destroy Him, and they could not find anything that they might do, for all the people were hanging upon His words.

And it came about on one of the days while He was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, that the chief priests and the scribes with the elders confronted Him, and they spoke, saying to Him, "Tell us by what authority You are doing these things, or who is the one who gave You this authority?" And He answered and said to them, "I shall also ask you a question, and you tell Me: Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?" And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet." And they answered that they did not know where it came from. And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things." (Luke 19:47-20:8)

There is a battle for the minds of the people going on in verses 47-48. The religious community motivated by Satan was moving in with more daring attacks, seeking to destroy God's anointed, their Messiah-King and Lord. The chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees had become very threatened by Jesus' presence, power, authority, and teachings because he was challenging their very spiritual foundations and finding them wanting. This challenge caused them to become defensive, which in turn hardened their hearts and closed their minds to all the evidence that he was their Messiah based on the witness of the fulfilled prophecies and miracles among the people, even his recent raising of Lazarus from the grave and healing of the blind and lame in the temple.

They raised a question about Jesus' authority in 20:1-2. The Lord had gone back to Bethany for the night, and then on Tuesday morning he returned to the temple area for his last day of public teaching (which is covered by 20:1-22:6). Once Jesus arrived, the various members of Israel's supreme court showed up to question Jesus about his actions among the merchants on Monday, since they considered themselves to be in charge of the temple and its activities. They walked angrily into the temple crowd where Jesus was preaching and teaching, and rather than take the time to really listen to the truth of his message, they demanded that he produce his license for temple cleansing: "Tell us by what authority You are doing these things, or who is the one who gave You this authority [to interrupt our business, disrupt our customs, and cut into the flow of our income]?" They were hoping that he would say that he did it on his own authority. If he admitted he had cleansed the temple on his own authority, then they could accuse him of playing God, arrest him on the spot, and discredit him before the people who were

beginning to believe he was the Messiah.

But Jesus answered their question with a question of his own: "Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?" In other words, what was the source of authority John called upon in order to call the whole nation of Israel to repentance? Where did he get the power and the courage? And how come all the people listened to him and were baptized? The obvious answer was God. David Gooding wrote in his commentary *According to Luke*:

John had proclaimed on the authority of Isaiah that for the nation to be prepared to recognize and receive Messiah would require radical and thorough-going repentance on the part of every member of the nation; and John had demanded that repentance be signified by baptism. It was in fact the tremendous moral and spiritual power of John's preaching of this baptism of repentance that had convinced the people that John was a God-sent prophet.

The leaders understood that if they said John's baptism was from God, then Jesus would say, "Then why did you not believe him and submit to his baptism of repentance--you of all people should have been first in line!" On the other hand, if they answered that John was a self-proclaimed prophet, the people would rise up against them and stone them. So they suddenly became agnostic. Then Jesus, seeing that they were more concerned about their position of power than about spiritual truth, said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I have cleansed my Father's house." Jesus was saying, "If you can't tell divine authority in action, no amount of argument will convince you of its presence." His disciples knew, however, that his source of authority on earth was from God the Father.

Ever since Jesus first came to this earth as the incarnate Son of God, many people have struggled with his person, power, and authority over their lives. In his humanity he demonstrated for all of us that he had come to this world to do the will of his heavenly Father on earth, even to the point of dying for our sins. He taught the disciples that every word he spoke, every place he went, and everything he did on this earth was by the will of his loving heavenly Father and was to his glory. He submitted to the lordship of his Father. And because of his death, resurrection, and Ascension he is now declared by his Father to be not only God but Lord of lords. His desire for all believers is that we submit to his authority and lordship over every area of our lives, remembering that our life is no longer our own; it has been "bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20).

I believe that as a Christian community many of us struggle with allowing Jesus to be Lord of our lives. As a young person I probably accepted Jesus nine times as Savior. Why? Because I wanted him to save me from my sins so I could "live like hell without going to hell." Does this sound familiar? Then one day I read the verse, "...if you confess with your mouth Jesus as *Lord*, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved..." We are suffering tragic physical, emotional, and spiritual consequences because we don't want Jesus to be Lord of our whole life, just sections of it. But that was not the offer he made to us. In reality he said, "You must give up your life so I can live my life through you. Then you need to check with me about everything you do, everything you say, and everywhere you go. Your whole reason for living on this earth is to please me and do my will--to bring life where there is death, joy where there is sorrow, salt where there is corruption, and light where there is darkness." Lordship is Jesus' position in our lives and saving us is his activity. The process of allowing him to be Lord in every area of our lives is designed by God so that we will be conformed to the image of his Son. Our daily prayer should be based on Psalm 143:10: "Teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God...."

According to Luke 20 we need to have God cleanse not only our current lifestyles, but our minds, so that once again we can understand the need for Jesus to be our final authority, Lord over all the areas of our lives.

The need to cleanse our hearts

And He began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard and rented it out to vine-growers, and went on a journey for a long time. And at the harvest time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order that they might give him some of the produce of the vineyard; but the vine-growers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. And he proceeded to send

another slave; and they beat him also and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. And he proceeded to send a third; and this one also they wounded and cast out. And the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' But when the vine-growers saw him, they reasoned with one another, saying, 'This is the heir; let us kill him that the inheritance may be ours.' And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What, therefore, will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy these vine-growers and will give the vineyard to others." And when they heard it, they said, "May it never be!" But He looked at them and said, "What then is this that is written,

**'The stone which the builders rejected,
This became the chief corner stone'?**

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust." (Luke 20:9-18)

Our Lord told a parable using some symbols out of Isaiah 5 that were familiar to the Jewish people. In this story we see a sweeping picture of God's wonderful plan of redemption over some fifteen hundred years of Israel's history and how many times the false spiritual leaders sought to try to stop the fruit of redemption from going back into the owner's hands. The vineyard owner is God the Father; the vineyard is Israel; the vine-growers are the spiritual leaders; the harvest is righteousness and justice; the owner's servants are the prophets (for example, see Jeremiah 19:14-20:2 and 37:15; see also Luke 11:45-51); and the beloved son, heir and co-owner of the vineyard is Jesus. Jesus told the people in front of their leaders a prophetic story about the source of his authority as the heir and co-owner of the vineyard. At the same time he warned the people that their leaders had no respect for him as the "beloved son," and were about to put their known Messiah to death and to try to take the vineyard away from their rightful owner.

The physical and spiritual consequences of their actions would be that the vineyard owner, God himself, would respond to the murder of his son by destroying the vine-growers and giving the vineyard to others outside of Israel. We now know that the others are his church, the Christian community, which is made up of both Jews and Gentiles. When the spiritual leaders said, "May it never be," Jesus quoted Psalm 118 to show them that prophecy had already predicted that they would reject their Messiah, the chief corner stone of the nation. And to reject or rebel against the Stone and try to build one's life or nation on some other foundation would be to suffer the consequences of brokenness and utter ruin.

There have been so many religious groups since that day who have had no respect for who God's beloved Son was, either in his humanity or as our risen and living Lord and Savior. Since his resurrection, these religious groups have sought to kill him anew in a variety of ways and then, using his name, to claim the vineyard for themselves. The apostle John warned us when he wrote at the end of the first century, "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh [his incarnation--God becoming man] is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist..." (1 John 4:2-3). In our own country many religious groups have redefined the person of Jesus. Mormonism says that Jesus is the "son of God" become man, but that every other man is also the "son of God." So in Mormonism Jesus becomes pragmatically unnecessary in the work of salvation. Jehovah's Witnesses say Jesus is "a god" but not God. The New Age movement says Jesus is replaced by the California god in that he is a kind of orange grove, where you can pick as and when you want, particularly since he is an orange grove within.

How many friends do you have who are (as perhaps even you yourself are) tempted to change the truth about Jesus the beloved Son of God, and in a spiritual and emotional sense "kill" him in order to have control over their own lives and the lives of others within a religious community? The new spirit of this age wants the religious community to keep watering down the character and the words of Jesus and in this way eventually "kill" him so that he has no final authority in people's lives. Paul warned the Corinthians, "But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit

which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully" (2 Corinthians 11:3-4). If what we believe in is not the Christ who has revealed himself, the Spirit who is now in us, the good news that has been preached from the beginning by Jesus, then we are not giving the "respect" that is due God's beloved Son Jesus. We have to be very sensitive and discerning in these days, and the best way is to study the word of God and then depend on the Spirit of God to point out to us what is true and what is false.

In this Christian community we need cleansing of our lifestyles so we can come to God in prayer, cleansing of our minds so we can accept Jesus as our Lord and allow him to have full authority over our lives, and cleansing of our hearts so we respect Jesus as the beloved Son of God and willingly serve with him in God's plan of redemption.

The need to cleanse our hands

And the scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them. And they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so as to deliver Him up to the rule and the authority of the governor. And they questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You speak and teach correctly, and You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" But He detected their trickery and said to them, "Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" And they said, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were unable to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people; and marveling at His answer, they became silent. (Luke 20:19-26)

The spiritual leaders continued to reject Jesus as their Messiah. Once they realized that his parable about the vine-growers was about them, their hatred of him and their desire to have him killed intensified. Finally they sent some spies to him disguised as righteous men to catch him in some blaspheming statement. These spies came up with a trick question: "Is it lawful [that is, in accordance with the Law of God] for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" For if a Jew were to pay taxes to Rome, then he would be acknowledging its right to rule over Israel instead of Jehovah. So the question was loaded politically and religiously. The general agreement among the Jews at the time was that it was morally wrong to pay taxes to the hated Roman Empire. So if Jesus said it was right to pay taxes to Rome, he would alienate himself from Israel politically and religiously. If he said it was wrong, though, then he was inciting rebellion against Rome.

Jesus detected their trickery, asked for a coin, and said, "Whose head and inscription does it have?" They said, "Caesar's." And he replied, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." The lesson was, the money belongs to Caesar but you belong to God. Let the world have its coins, but let God have your life. As believers we are to "seek first [God's] kingdom and His righteousness..." (Matthew 6:33). Honor Caesar with your money but not as if he were a god; honor the only living God and his beloved Son with your lives, your worship, your time, and your work. It was a great answer, and even our Lord's enemies marveled at his logic.

In this society we as a Christian community find ourselves struggling with the tension between honoring Caesar (the world system) and honoring God. Both want our time our time, our energy, and our money to God and the things of his kingdom. We need cleansing, especially in the work of our hands. We need to come back to the words of Moses in Psalm 90 when he prayed:

**Lord...teach us to number our days,
That we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom...
And let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us;
And do confirm for us the work of our hands;
Yes, confirm the work of our hands.**

As Anne Marie, Carl, and I walked away from Notre Dame de Paris and the commercialism that surrounded that great ghost of a spiritual center where men and women used to meet with God in prayer, I could not help but think

of all the commercialism that surrounds my life and the lives of many in our Christian community. Our only hope for spiritual health in a very sick society is to pray that (1) the Lord will come into our temple and cleanse our lifestyles so that we can once again become people of prayer, (2) he will cleanse our minds so that he once again is given full authority over our lives, (3) he will cleanse our hearts so that we will respect Jesus as the incarnate Son of God and our risen and reigning Lord, and (4) he will cleanse our hands so that our work will be done to his honor and glory.

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