“The Cleansing of the Temple”

Isaiah 56:5-6; Jeremiah 7:9-11; Mark 11:15-19

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Introduction:

God has always intended His house to be a special, holy place where He and man can meet. And, from the time of Genesis, God has always had it in His mind that all men, from all over the globe, would be invited to come to Him and to worship. But, when something goes awry and that worship is hindered, God had to do something about it. He had to get things back in order, even if it meant overthrowing some stuff.

In today’s lesson we watch the progression of God’s invitation for all to worship in Isaiah to the fulfilling of it in Jesus’ day. We also see how God’s house; His worship was disrespected, causing Jesus to take out His spiritual broom and start “The Cleansing of the Temple.”

“What Isaiah Saw”

Isaiah 56:6-7 “Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.”
What Isaiah saw hundreds of years before its manifestation was a time when people from every race, ethnicity, creed and color would come together, collectively, to worship in the Lord’s house. In chapter 55 of Isaiah a call went out to “every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters,” (Isaiah 55:1). The call to salvation had gone out, and in our text today, Isaiah saw those who had answered that called before it came to pass.

“Also the sons of the stranger.” This phrase is a reference to the Gentiles (non-Jews); people who were not born of Jewish descent. This is the second time this phrase is used in this chapter. Previously, in verse 3 it said, “Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people . . .” God’s salvation was near and He wanted everyone, despite their ethnicity, to know that they had a place in His house.

Our God is not limited in whom He can love. If one was willing to “join themselves to the LORD,” then they were welcomed in His house. God doesn’t believe in cliques. He chose Israel as His special people, but those special people were to show the way to God for others. They were to demonstrate what a love relationship with God looks like drawing others of different backgrounds closer to Him. They were to be God’s billboard to display His grace and mercy alive that others might have a chance to be saved.

These have not only “joined themselves to the LORD” but they are committed to serve Him. They allow themselves to be used by God in whatever endeavors He has designed for their lives. They recognize they are but vessels for the Master’s use. They tie their life to Him and work day by day to please Him.

Also, they love His name. Proverbs 18:10 says, “The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into, and is safe.” It is a place of safety and refuge. Once, people who were not permitted to be included in this fashion, have now fallen in love with His name and find comfort there, for He has permitted entrance for all into His blessed place.

Jason Gray sings these words in his song: “More Like Falling in Love”: 
“. . . It’s gotta be
More like falling in love
Than something to believe in
More like losing my heart
Than giving my allegiance

Caught up, called
Come take a look at me now
It’s like I’m falling, oh
It’s like I’m falling in love,” (Azlyrics.com)

I can imagine those/us who have now been included as a partaker of His house; a partaker of His promise, falling in love with that name that saves; with the name that has thought about them, to include them in the gift of His eternal salvation. When someone loves you enough to do so much for you, you can’t help but to swoon at the mention of their name. That’s an incredible feeling deep on the inside.

“Every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant.” Because of their love for Him, they are also committed to His cause. They observe His covenants; His law, to live according to what is pleasing to Him. They show great respect and honor to His special day and keep themselves from “polluting it.” This is a strong contrast to the dishonor God and His temple receives in our next section dealing with Jeremiah.

In an elementary sense, the opposite of “polluting” is purity. When something is pure it is unblemished, unscarred and untainted by the detestable and the abominable. God welcomes all in the world to join up with Him, but He wants us to leave the trash behind. The pollution of our previous life no longer has a place in the royal heritage that He has in store for them that are His. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new,” (2 Cor. 5:17).

“Even them I will bring into my holy mountain.” Those who have joined themselves to Him and operate in loving Him and keeping His covenant, they will reside with His people in “my holy mountain.” This assurance goes all the way
back to the book of Genesis when God originally promised, “And in thy seed all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice,” (Gen. 22:18). Isaiah saw with his spiritual eyes God working out His original plan to have people from all nations know Him, enter a relationship with Him and be saved.

“And make them joyful in my house of prayer.” There is “joy” in God’s house! Doesn’t that just make you want to go off in a fit of praise? When one comes to His house it is a place of safety and refuge; it’s where one can find peace and nearness to God. It is also a great place of rejoicing. We are in the presence of God. Yes, God is omnipresent (meaning everywhere at once), but there’s something personal about entering His doors and sitting in a place ordained to for this occasion; an occasion to meet with God. This brings joy to the soul; a refreshing that can’t be found anywhere else. Oh, how blessed for the Gentiles that Isaiah foresaw partaking in His “house” and for us today.

“Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar.” God “accepts” their worship! Awesome! God responds favorably to their gifts of “sacrifices.” There is a genuine, heart-felt emotion that rises in one who offers someone something and it is received with gladness. It stirs the feeling of being wanted and approved on the inside. God is showing in various ways that He welcomes all to Him and that when they come to Him and join up with His guidelines, He “accepts” them.

“For my house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.” When you enter my house there are rules to follow. There are certain things that I want done in certain ways. What you do at your house is in your house but in my house this is the way it is going to be. God specially designed His house to be a welcoming edifice “for all people;” no exclusions. He made provisions for all to worship there in Jesus’ day though some degraded that space (later in the lesson), thereby, not following the rules of the house.

We are welcomed to be where He is! Can we just really grasp that concept really quick? God takes pleasure in those who want to be where He is! He’s not worried about those ridiculous things that man judge by; things that bring strife
and separation. When we get to Mark we will see that the Gentiles were worshipping in the temple in the outer courts with a separation still between them. But, after Jesus gave His life on the cross what Isaiah saw becomes an even greater manifestation of the power of His welcoming love. Paul taught the church in Ephesus:

“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby” (Ephesian 2:13-16).

No more division. No more separation. All will be welcomed!

“In Jeremiah’s Day”

Jeremiah 7:9-11 “Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD.”

Jeremiah is another major prophet just as Isaiah was, though they prophesied at two different times. God, in the above verses, really used Jeremiah to emphasize the desecration that was going on in His house; the hypocrisy of their worship through their actions.

In verse 2 of this same chapter God instructed Jeremiah to, “Stand in the gate of the LORD’s house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the
LORD, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the LORD.” God had a bone to pick with the people due to their worshipping practices. He was not pleased with what He saw going on in His house and in the hearts of the people. If anything, God should be pleased with our worship.

Why wasn’t God pleased with their worship? Take a look at the above verses and tell me how many of the Ten Commandments do you see? These were broken commandments! The people were deliberately sinning and coming to the temple to worship as if everything is okay; nothing can happen to them. They, during this time, even mixed their worship of the only true living God with false idols; which is another big No, No.

Listening to false prophets, they erroneously believed that nothing can happen to them because of the temple in their midst. Jeremiah 7:4 says, “Trust not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these.” They trusted more in the physical building of the temple to save them than the God who dwells in its midst. Their worship was as empty as the false prophets’ words.

God out and out told them through Jeremiah, “Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit,” (Jer. 7:8). If they keep progressing the way they are they are going to get nowhere! In the end, they were going to be the ones that would lose out on receiving God’s best for their life. God’s goal for sending Jeremiah was to get the people back on the right track, treat His house with the respect it deserves and worship like they were supposed to. He said, “For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings . . . Then, will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever,” (Jer. 7:5-7).

“Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD.” They can have their heads bowed in what appears to be true worship; they can have lips that utter prayers that may seem sincere to a hearer of it, but God sees what’s really going on on the inside. They treated His house any kind of way, just as they did their “worship,” but this didn’t fly too well with God. God always sees what’s really going on.
“In Jesus’ Day”

Mark 11:15-19 “And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves; And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple. And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves. And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine. And when even was come, he went out of the city.”

In Jesus’ day the temple of God, specifically the outer courts where the Gentiles worshiped (supposedly), was turned into a kind of marketplace. A meeting place of money and merchandise, rather than humble hearts looking for a graceful God.

Can we imagine trying to worship and pray to God, sincerely lifting our all up to Him to the ding of a cash register going off and people asking for price checks while others are bartering over cost and quality of product? Well, there may not have been the ding of a cash register in Jesus’ day, but the disruption to the meeting place of God was just as real. People who were seeking the Lord, in the place where they are told He may be found, were not able to connect with God as they should be able to because of all the business going on.

Now, we know that for traveling purposes, many had to wait until they arrived in Jerusalem to purchase the necessary items for sacrifices and such, but did that marketplace have to be in the temple? Would it not have been just as sufficient to have it in a vicinity close by?

Seeing all that transpired Jesus had had enough! It was time to get the house cleaned up! Unashamededly and without regard for roving eyes and the tsk tsk tsking of the people’s lips, He flips tables over and starts throwing people out to get His Father’s house back in order. “And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple” possibly means that the disrespect for God’s temple had gone so far as meaning nothing to some, that they simply use it
for a short-cut to walk through instead of walking around. This is where most of us in today’s slang would say SMH (Shaking My Head).

God’s temple was holy ground. Let your mind travel back a little to the time when Moses first met God through the burning bush. The first instruction was to respect the place where God is. Don’t bring anything that pollutes near where His presence is. He instructed Moses, “Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground,” (Ex. 3:5). Respect should be shown for the place where God decides to meet with man in all circumstances. They were not doing that and Jesus was about to tell them about themselves.

“And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves.” Jesus reeducated them on how they should view this holy place. Through the written word, He reminds them of what God’s house is supposed to look like; how it is supposed to function. It is supposed to be “called of all nations the house of prayer.”

This was supposed to be the place for everyone to draw near to God, fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy. The people of Jesus’ day have made this virtually impossible for one to really connect with God with the current environment, especially those who were Gentiles. He chastised the people and let them know that they are responsible for disrupting the worship there; they are not letting God’s house function as He fully intended. Rather, they have made it “a den of thieves;” a place for people to lie and cheat one another while hindering worship as well.

“And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine.” Watching His actions and hearing His words, the scribes and chief priests were determined something had to be done about Jesus. They’re main motive: “for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine.” That which is false always fears the truth when it is presented. The truth exposes things. The truth makes others begin to question. People were paying attention to Jesus. What He says made so much sense, even if people were too afraid to side with Him. This questioning would overthrow the authority
of the scribes and chief priests if something wasn’t done soon. So, they “sought how they might destroy him.”

“And when even was come, he went out of the city.” This would not be the last time they heard from Him. He cleansed the physical temple on this day, but soon He would cleanse the hearts and lives of men and women everywhere that trust in Him.

Conclusion: