

Clean Up Your Act – Luke 19:45-48; Mark 11:12-21

Looking at an event in the life of Christ, the day after his triumphant entry into Jerusalem
Find this event in Lk 19, but it's Mark's account, with the most details, that we're going to focus on
Forewarn you – hard teaching

If we were interested in growing a church just for the sake of numbers – never preach it
Because though some of you will search your heart, and take it to heart . . .
And make whatever changes are necessary in your life
Others will harden your heart, and take your ball and bat and never come back . . .
Because the truth hurts and you don't want to hear it, let alone admit it
I trust and have prayed that you will be soft of heart this morning

Turn to **Mark 11:12-21**

In this text we get a full blast of Jesus' passion for purity in worship
Strong message that when we come together there are certain actions/attitudes that are a barrier to genuine, authentic worship
Read Mk 11:12-21

Stop there – Jesus goes on to make a second point about prayer using the fig tree
But it's the first point that I want you to see
God has little patience for hollow worship – so _____ the _____ (v12-14, 20-21)
Worship with no heart behind it
No passion for who he is; No real desire to draw near to him or exalt him
No fervor; No nothing – just a façade on the outside with nothing on the inside
That's hollow worship
It's his cursing of the fig tree that clues us in to his *lack of patience* for it

At first glance you might think that Jesus has lost it because he couldn't satisfy his hunger cravings on the spot
First clue that something different is in the works is found in the phrase – *it was not the season for figs* (13b)
Jesus and everybody else at that time knew that fig trees don't bear fruit until June or July, several months after the time of this incident in early April
Just to make sure we get it, Mark includes this phrase

Here's the deal – Jesus loved to use parables to make his points
But in this case, instead of *telling* a story to make his point, he uses an *object* lesson to illustrate it
In this case, the object lesson was a fig tree that looked good on the outside, but had nothing of any value on the inside; no fruit

It was a perfect picture of the temple worshippers who looked good on the outside, but were hollow on inside – they were all show and no substance
To make sure we see the connection, the temple clearing is sandwiched between the cursing of the fig tree, and its withering

Let me connect the dots – the lack of patience Christ had for the empty fig tree . . .
Foreshadowed his lack of patience for the empty worship in the temple . . .
Illustrates God's lack of patience for hollow, empty worship in church

It's a solemn warning to us, that God will not tolerate pretense in worship
Which means there's only one solution – lose the façade
God has little patience for hollow worship – so lose the façade (v12-14, 20-21)
If you're walking in here week in and week out, faking it in worship – when are you going to take off your mask?
If you're all show and no substance – when are you going to lose the façade?

The solution is not to throw a baby fit and stop coming
“If the pastor doesn't like my worship, I'll just stop coming”
Ya, that'll do a lot of good
Hello! It doesn't matter what I think – it matters what God *sees*
If he sees hollow worship, you need to know that he has little patience for it

Nor is the solution staying away until your façade is thick enough to endure another convicting message from God's Word
That's why some of you are on the twice a month plan
You're scared to death that God might break through to your soul

If you're guilty of hollow worship, the solution is to lose the façade
To open yourself up and worship him with whatever you have, instead of acting like you have it all and you're giving it in worship
It's far better in God's eyes to be a struggling sinner who longs to worship, than a pious saint with a hollow heart

If you're all show and no substance, admit it – it's the first step toward genuine worship
There's no better place to take that step and lose your façade, than right here in grace of God's house

God has little patience for hollow worship
From v15-16 (doesn't get any easier) . . .
God has little patience for distractions in worship – so _____ it _____ (v15-16)
In order to understand what's going on – understand the participants in the temple

4 main groups mentioned

1. *Those who sold* (15; includes *those who sold pigeons* – 15b)
Certain designated vendors, with the blessing of the high priest, would sell sacrifices – lambs, goats, bulls, pigeons, doves, rams, flour, and oil – for the convenience of . . .
2. *Those who bought* (15)
They were the pilgrims who traveled miles and miles
It was easier to buy “certified” animals in the temple, than to travel with them, feed them, protect them only to have them flunk their “blemish certification” when arrived
3. *The tables of the moneychangers* (15)
A temple tax had to be paid each year by Jewish males in the currency of the temple as an offering to the Lord. (Ex 30:13-16)
When the pilgrims arrived, they had to exchange their Roman currency for Tyrian currency, which was the closest thing at that time to the Hebrew shekel of old
4. *Those carrying goods through the temple* (read 16)

Temple was convenient shortcut btw Jerus. & main road that led E. toward Mt. of Olives
It was the shortest distance between two points
A simple roadway for those who had a casual, cavalier attitude toward worship

- Problem was – it was all a *huge* distraction to the ongoing worship in the temple
- 17 – quotes Is 56:7 saying that God’s house is to be a *house of prayer*
A place where God’s people could gather for undistracted, unobstructed worship
Still holds true today – God’s house, our church, is to be a place where we can gather for undistracted, unobstructed worship

That doesn’t mean that bookstores or cafes are wrong in church
Just like the buying and selling of worship animals wasn’t wrong in and of itself – it was intended to support proper worship
Just like our bookstore/café are intended to support/encourage our various ministries

The problem comes when the buying and selling begins to overshadow and displace the worship it’s intended to support
That’s when it becomes a distraction that God has little patience for

In fact, anything you do to obscure God or divert attention from him, is a distraction to worship
While we don’t have money changers or profiteers or people hawking their wares, we do have plenty of potential distractions

Top 3 Distractions to Worship

1. Bad attitude

If you walk in here pouting about something, you’re a distraction
If you want people to notice your bad mood, you’re a distraction
If you have a chip on your shoulder, or mad about something, you’re a distraction
Whatever it is – either let it go before you walk in, deal with it as soon as you get here, or step out and take care of it

One Sunday morning, early in marriage, arguing about vacuuming
So bad, couldn’t go to church; Would have been a huge distraction
Skipped church, went to a restaurant, and talked it out – then went to the second service

2. Peddling your personal cause/agenda

“I’m gathering pledges for this thing that I’m a part of – can I put you down?”
“Dude, I’m part of Plumbers for Jesus . . . passing out flyers . . . want to help me?
That diverts people’s focus from God’s cause to your cause, in *his* place of worship
Our church is a house of prayer, not a networking opp for your latest business idea or org.

3. Inappropriate dress

How do you dress?
Talking mostly to women on this one, but it certainly applies to men as well
Do you wear things too low, too high, too tight, too revealing?
If so, you’re a distraction to worship

What’s your *motive* for how you dress? Do you dress to be *noticed*?
Do you hope other women will think you look *cute*?

Or that guys will think you look *good*?
If so, you’re a distraction to worship – diverting attention from God to yourself

House of prayer, not vanity fair – sport your buffed physique or sleek curves
House of prayer, not a meat market – where you check out who’s hot and who’s not
House of prayer, not a modeling contest – show off your latest fashion purchase
Secretly wanting people to compliment you or think you look really good
Inappropriate dress is a distraction to worship

Now, realizing that I’ve ruffled the feathers of every woman in here, let me clarify
Not saying you should dress in a burlap tent, or flannel jumpers
I have 3 daughters and beautiful wife; Love it when they dress sharp and “look cute”
I am saying – if your clothing, or lack thereof detracts from worship – you’re a distraction
If walk in with a bad attitude – you’re a distraction
If you peddle your agenda – you’re a distraction
If your coming/going, or behavior, speech, or anything else is a distraction to worship – You better **knock it off** . . . because God has little patience for it

God has little patience for hollow worship; Little patience for distractions in worship . . .
God has little patience for hypocrisy in worship – so _____ up your _____ (v17-19)
To see this, you have to go back to the OT and understand what Jesus was alluding to with his *den of robbers* comment (read 17)
Comes from **Jer. 7:8-11** (God is speaking) – scathing rebuke

Just like bank robbers do their dirty deeds and then retreat to their den or safe house to feel secure . . .
You do your dirty deeds 6 days a week, and then waltz in here on the 7th saying ‘We are delivered’(everything’s just fine)
You steal, hate, lust, lie
Put your time and money into things that don’t honor and glorify God
And think everything’s just fine because you go to church

If that’s you – everything’s *not* just fine
You’re using and abusing God’s place of worship to ease your guilt, keep up appearances, and make yourself feel better
God’s church, his community of believers, is not a safe haven for intentional, perpetual, unrepentant people who know better and purposefully live a lie

It’s not just fine – you’re on thin ice, and you better **clean up your act**
God has little patience for hypocrisy in worship – so clean up your act (v17-19)

If you’ve been around for any length of time, you well know that our church is a place of *much* grace for broken, struggling, hurting people who are desperate to worship with a pure heart
If that’s you, I so want you to find this to be a place of grace
Short of that (a desire to worship with a pure heart), you better clean up your act

Oh you could stay away from church all together and avoid the hypocrisy
But that would be like putting a Mickey Mouse band-aid on an internal hemorrhage

Because this passage is not the *end* of Christ coming to judge – it's the *beginning*
It's the initiation of Malachi's prophecy that Christ *will* come to judge

Mal 3:1-2 (God is speaking) – *The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?*

What we see in the gospel account of Christ clearing the temple is a drop in the bucket compared to the judgment and wrath he will bring when he returns
And just as surely as the fig tree withered as a result of his judgment, so too some of you will wither if you don't clean up your act
Clean up your act – worship God with a pure heart
No distractions; No facades