

Lasting Impressions from the Last Week of Jesus' Life
The Last Trip to the Temple: Is This Really a Church?
Matthew 21:12-16

March 13, 2011

Dr. Steve Horn

Text Introduction: Last time, we began this journey together looking at the last week of Jesus' earthly life. We are stopping to observe some of the last things that Jesus did, because I think there is a life lesson in these "lasts." Last time, we considered the last miracle. Today, we examine what Matthew records as the last (possibly next to last time trip to the Temple—see Matthew 21:23). Nevertheless, it is a story that has great instruction in this last week of Jesus' life.

Text: ¹² Jesus went into the temple complex and drove out all those buying and selling in the temple. He overturned the money changers' tables and the chairs of those selling doves. ¹³ And He said to them, "It is written, My house will be called a house of prayer. But you are making it a den of thieves! "

¹⁴ The blind and the lame came to Him in the temple complex, and He healed them. ¹⁵ When the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonders that He did and the children in the temple complex cheering, "*Hosanna* to the Son of David!" they were indignant ¹⁶ and said to Him, "Do You hear what these [children] are saying?"

"Yes," Jesus told them. "Have you never read: You have prepared praise from the mouths of children and nursing infants ?"

Introduction: Do you want to know what makes God mad? Really mad? He displayed His righteous anger when a place set up in His name did not honor His name? God is still angered at any place that has the Label of God on it, but not the Love of God in it.

I ran across an article this week that cited some research to indicate that 90% of those in the 20-29 year old age group "believe a person can have a relationship with God without having a relationship with the Church." Those of us who care deeply about both the LORD and His Church continue to have our work cut out for us to change the general view of the Church. Perhaps one of the reasons that so many have a problem with the church is that they have been disappointed with the Church. Searching for something real they have found something so much less than real. The naysayers of the Church have lots of evidence of those churches that have not been real.

For this reason, we ought to always be asking whether our church is really real! Jesus' trip to the Temple Complex in the last week of His earthly life gives us a good place to think about these things today.

6 Questions that Determine Whether My Church is Real:

1. Do we consider the church to be God's Possession?
"My House"

The Church belongs to Christ. Jesus is the Head of the Church. We must always consult the Head of the Church. Acknowledgement that the church really belongs to God changes everything.

2. Do we Prize people as God Prizes them?

I'm aware that many of you have strong feelings about selling anything in the church. You use this story as your Biblical proof that God is not pleased. At the risk of making you angry and probably not being able to convince you anyway, let me suggest that the selling of items is not really what made Jesus angry. You see, it was customary to sell items in the Temple. (Everyone had to make a sacrifice and had to pay a Temple tax in the local currency. The environment was perfect for those wanting to make a profit.) It was the hub of activity in the society. What made Jesus angry was the way that the items were being sold. People had come in this Passover Week from near and far seeking to make a worship offering. The crooks in the Temple Complex had exaggerated the prices because of the crowd. (Sort of like people hiking up the price of gas during a hurricane evacuation.)

When well meaning worshippers are taken advantage of, Jesus gets angry then and now. The Church that is real prizes people just as God prizes them.

3. Are we a church that relies on Prayer?
"will be called a house of prayer"

I have talked to you about this particular part of the passage before. Of all the things that Jesus could have said about the Church (Preaching, Service, music), He said that His house should be a place of prayer.

4. Do we experience the Power of God in our lives?
"The blind and the lame came. . . and He healed them."

There should be a link between prayer and power. What are we saying? Simply this, we should be seeing the power of God changing lives.

Changed Lives = Power of God

How many lives are being changed? That's the real question.

5. Are we a church of Praise?

“Hosanna to the Son of David”

The praise was no doubt a result of seeing the power of God on display. But, there was also the acknowledgement of God’s presence. The praise was spontaneous.

6. Is our church sometimes Un-Popular?

“When the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonders that He did. . .
they were indignant.”

If we are doing what we are supposed to be doing, there are going to be some who are not happy.

Conclusion: It is easy to deceive; it is easy to be deceived. Need an example. His church looked like the model congregation. The church built a pool for underprivileged kids. This was in addition to the horses for the kids to ride, housing for senior citizens an out-patient medical facility, and a drug rehabilitation program. A member of the President’s Cabinet called the pastor “an inspiration to us all.” His message seemed orthodox. He even claimed to perform miracles like heal and cast out demons.

Where is the congregation today? The church died—literally! After getting the congregation to move to a communal farm in Guyana, Pastor Jim Jones got most of the members of the Peoples Temple Christian Church to drink poison-laced Kool-Aid.

That could never happen again. I bet that’s what the members of the People’s Temple thought in 1978. What are you saying pastor? We must in all things be the real deal.