

9. Is your temple clean?

October 31, 2010

The paintings and drawings of Jesus Christ you would see from the first century till now are pretty much depending on each artist's imagination. You may have seen some images of Jesus who looks like a skinny bean pole, scrawny, puny guy with very little muscle on His body. I disagree.

Being an artist myself, whenever I draw the images of Jesus as I receive an inspiration from the Lord, I try to portray Him as a rather muscular Hebrew male with a pair of dark eyes and dark hair, not like some paintings that portray Jesus who looks like a California surfer dude with blue eyes and blonde hair. Since Jesus' occupation was carpentry and they did not have the luxury of power tools, every sawing, chiseling, and cutting had to be done manually which means an average ancient Jewish carpenter would have relatively good strength and muscles.

Another thing, people – whether they are Christians or not – don't want to think is that Jesus had fierce anger from time to time. Oh yes, Jesus got angry for very good reasons. Just for your information, it is NOT a very wise thing to make God angry. It can be very hazardous for your health, you know? Since He was a 100% human and 100% God, He had the same emotion we have. In other words, He got angry at injustice and wrong.

This morning, we become a group of unseen visitors in the outer court of the Herod's Temple that was located in Jerusalem, Israel.

A. THE LOCATION SET-UP

John 2:12-13 After this He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples; and they did not stay there many days. 13 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Jesus, His family, and His disciples remained in Capernaum a few days before they headed out to Jerusalem for the Passover feast.

Passover – the greatest of all Jewish feasts. By Jewish law, every male within fifteen miles of Jerusalem was required to make the journey to the sacred city for the celebration. And since every Jew dreamed of celebrating at least one Passover in Jerusalem, many more pilgrims came from outside that radius, swelling the city with as many as 2.5 million visitors each year.

Though Jesus deliberately violated the man-made religious traditions of the Pharisees, our Lord obeyed the statutes of the Law and was faithful to uphold it. In His life and death, He fulfilled the Law so that, today, believers are not burdened by that yoke of bondage of requirements from the Law.

B. THE RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION

John 2:14-17 And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. 15 When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. 16 And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" 17 Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."

Opportunistic Jewish religious officials were hearing a 'Kaching' sound every time a worshiper walked through one of the gates of Jerusalem – for themselves, that is, not for the traveling worshipers. More people meant more dollars, in this case it would be shekels.

The temple priests had established a lucrative business of exchanging foreign money for temple currency, and also selling the animals needed for the sacrifices. No doubt, this "religious market" began as a convenience for the Jews who came long distances to worship in the temple. But pretty soon the "convenience" became a business, not a ministry.

The tragedy is that this business was carried on in the court of the Gentiles in the temple, the place where the Jews should have been meeting the Gentiles and telling them about the one true God. Any Gentile searching for truth would not likely find it among the religious merchants in the temple.

Let me explain this in a little more detail: The rest of the country of Israel are in the Roman currency. But if you are a worshiper who came from Capernaum, you can not use the Roman currency in the temple because they don't accept it. So you have to exchange yours to temple shekels at exorbitant rates.

You also have to bring animals for your sacrifices. But taking an animal for a ninety mile journey was not exactly easy. Even if you bring your own animal, a priest would find some flaws that they can't accept it. What can you do? You can't go back to your home to bring another animal. They probably will reject that one also. While you are in this dilemma, the priest says, "I am gonna make an offer that you cannot refuse." He says that they have pre-screened animals for your convenience. When you ask for a price of a lamb, you just about have a heart attack. It is ten times more than a fair market value of a lamb.

Without a whole lot of choice, you have to buy that lamb and pay exorbitant rates to exchange money. All of sudden your joyful heart of worship of God is crushed by these money-hungry, greedy temple priests who were nothing more than Mafia henchmen of Caiaphas, the high priest. It is a lot like going to movies. Costs you ten bucks to get in for the movie, but you need to get the second mortgage for popcorn and a water-down Coke.

It is no wonder why the Lord Jesus was angry enough to overturn the money exchangers' tables, drove them out with their animals of the temple.

You may say, "Ah, that was then. We don't have that kind of things in the churches of America." Are you kidding me? Watch some Christian TV programs. It seems that the majority of them are begging for money with their own gimmicks that they learned from each other. It is OK to let the viewers or congregation know about their financial situations. But it is a completely different story when their manipulations start.

Many of the Faith Movement teachers beg and cry for money from their viewers. They say, "If you become a partner in ministry with this much money, we will send you your own personal vial of anointing oil so that you can put it on the place where you hurt and you will be healed." If these so-called teachers have that much faith in God, why don't they just have faith in Him to provide instead of using this kind of con-artist' gimmicks?

I believe that as much as the Lord was angry at those greedy temple priests, He also is angry at these people who fleece the sheep for their financial gain. If you ask me, "What do you want me to do when they do this?" Here is the answer from the Lord:
1 Timothy 6:5 useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this study, people don't think about 'angry Jesus'. What they have in mind is 'Jesus with love, smile and forgiveness.' Yes, Jesus has all of that, but you can not ignore His wrath and anger against injustice, sins, and evil. You see, Jesus didn't have an anger issue. He doesn't need anger management classes. He was simply exercising His authority and holiness over His Father's house.

People tend to think that the OT shows the wrath of God and the NT shows the grace of God. If you think that the comment is 100% correct, you have to throw out the Book of Revelation. From chapter 1 to 3, you find God's strong rebukes to the churches that do not hold His precepts and principles of the Bible. From chapter 6, there is a series of the wrath of God pouring down from heaven to earth for those who reject Jesus as their Savior and Lord. For these people, there is no escape hatch to avoid them.

When it comes to religious hypocrisy, Jesus is not gentle at all. He called them on the carpet and named them: "Serpents, brood of vipers, whitewashed tombs." It is His righteous indignation. We also should be angry at the injustice and religious hypocrisy rather than supporting them.

Since I am talking about anger, I must mention this. You can be angry at wrong and injustice. But you cannot and should not sin.

Ephesians 4:26 Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath,

Some of you might have an outburst of anger issue. It is also known as rage. You might be calm and gentle normally, but if something ticks you off, nothing matters. You throw things around, use cuss words and display temper tantrum like a little child in front of people, especially unbelievers who know that you are a Christian. Guess what? You just trashed your Christian testimony. They no longer hear your witnessing about Jesus, but they now remember your rage and cuss words.

Ephesians 4:31-32 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

So what can you do now? Ask the Lord to forgive you and ask those unbelievers to forgive you for your unruly and un-Christian-like attitude. You start it over. Hopefully, you will not come up with another rage ever again.

Let's talk about your temple this time. Today God dwells in the temple of our physical bodies.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

After you became a born-against Christian, the Holy Spirit moved into your heart and resides in you, we should really take care of the temple. I am not talking about

doing exercise and eating right, even though they are important in taking care of our physical bodies.

What do you allow to enter into your 'temple'? Do you allow worldly stuff and demonic stuff to come into your heart? You may answer, "Never!" Don't be so sure. What do you watch and read? What do you use in the name of entertainment?

Do you think that watching movies like 'Twilight,' 'Eclipse,' and any horror movies is OK with God in light of Halloween today? Do you not know those movies are down playing the truth about demonic power as a romantic story? Come on, people. Wake up! Do you know how many Christians think that it is OK to watch that kind of movies? We are in a spiritual battle and if you watch those movies, it is like you are following the tune of the enemies.

When Jesus cleansed the temple, He "declared war" on the hypocritical religious leaders, and this ultimately led to His death. Indeed, His zeal for God's house did eat Him up.

C. THIS TEMPLE, NOT THAT ONE

John 2:18-22 So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?" 19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body. 22 Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

The Jews realized that Jesus was correct in what He said. Since they couldn't challenge Him in that, they sidestepped and demanded a sign. What they really needed was salvation. The issue was not what they wanted to see, rather it was what they needed to believe because they had a shallow faith which was nothing at all. Being spiritually blind, they could not understand the truth of Jesus' words.

The temple construction started from 19 B.C. and finished it A.D. 64. Then it was destroyed by the Roman soldiers with fire in A.D. 70.

To the Jews the symbol of God's presence was the temple. What Jesus is saying is "I am the presence of God among you in flesh. I am Immanuel – God with Us."

The disciples did not understand it at that moment, but they remembered and understood it after the resurrection of Jesus. But His enemies also remembered it and used it at His trial and killed Him.

D. JESUS KNEW WHAT WAS IN MAN

John 2:23-25 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. 24 But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, 25 and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

The words 'believed' in v23 and 'commit' in v24 are the same Greek word "pisteuo". These people believed in Jesus, but He did not believe in them. They were unsaved believers. It was one thing to respond to a miracle but quite something else to commit oneself to Jesus Christ and continue in His Word.

Seeing the signs and believing in them would be a great beginning. In fact, even the disciples started that way and had to grow in their faith. Throughout the Gospel of John, we see the Jewish people divided over the meaning of these miracles.

The same miracles that attracted Nicodemus to Jesus caused some of the other religious leaders to want to kill Him. They even asserted that His miracles were done in the power of Satan. Our Lord's miracles were evidences of His divinity. But they were also tests, exposing the hearts of the people.

While the majority of you will be closer to the Lord because of this morning study, some of you will harden your heart to go against the Lord by not believing in Him.

Do you want to know how much Jesus loves you? I tell you this: Even though He knows what we think deep in our hearts, He still loves us. Isn't our God great or what?

E. APPLICATIONS

1) After we come to the Lord Christ, we need to be cleansed by Him inside and outside. We need to stop allowing garbage coming into our hearts and minds and flush out all the bad things we've accumulated in the past with the Word of God and living by His way.

2) We need to control our emotions, especially anger, so that we may show self-control as a sign of maturity in Christ to others. This will bring honor and glory to God.

3) Let's not depend on human popularity, because it comes and goes quickly. But the Lord is an eternal, never-changing, gentle, merciful, and loving holy God.