

Father, may these spoken words be faithful to your written word and lead us to the living Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

As he approached Jerusalem, we see Jesus weeping as he stood on the outskirts of the city that had refused to repent and go the way of peace. This was not a picture of an angry God that was itching to destroy his wayward people. This was the picture of a God that had emptied himself and come to his own people as one of them, who longed to gather them together under his wings to protect them but now the house would be left desolate. Israel had run out of time, though some individuals had repented and chosen the way of God's peace, the nation as a whole had not. The opportunity had been lost and now the nation would never know the blessing of the return of their God, they would know only the curses that came for those who failed to live up to the covenant that they had made.

There are three separate incidents in this passage, there is;

- Jesus' lament over Jerusalem.
- The cleansing of the Temple.
- The incredibly audacious action of Jesus teaching in the Temple courts when there was a price on his head.

Jesus laments over Jerusalem. The shortest verse in the Bible consists of the two words 'Jesus wept', telling of his response to the death of Lazarus and the mourning of the bereaved family and friends. Later, he wept for the collective sorrow that would befall many people. Luke records this deep grief as being expressed on Palm Sunday, at the time of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. From the descent of the Mount of Olives there is a magnificent view of Jerusalem with the whole city fully displayed. As Jesus came to a turn in the road he stopped and wept over Jerusalem. He knew what was going to happen to the city. In AD 70 Jerusalem was besieged by the Romans, entered and destroyed, its people scattered. The tragedy was that if only they had abandoned their dreams of political power and taken the way of Christ it need never have happened.

Jesus' tears are the tears of God when he sees the needless pain and suffering in which men involve themselves through foolish rebelling against his will. Two thousand years later as we look around at our world, nothing much seems to have changed!

The cleansing of the Temple - The Temple, the centre of worship, was profaned by its commercial use, taking advantage of citizens and strangers who came to make their offerings. Jesus' sorrow turned to righteous anger and stern action.

Why did Jesus, who was the very incarnation of love, act with such violence to the money changers and the sellers of animals in the Temple courts?

Isaiah 56 is a passage that declares that the Temple was to be a place of justice for all who obeyed the Lord. It would be a house of prayer for all people from all over the world. Jeremiah 7 was a promise that God's wrath would be poured out on those who had oppressed others, acted unjustly, and engaged in idolatry. They were using God's house as a front for their own agenda and then justifying their practices. Jesus' point was to intentionally combine these two ideas. They were turning the Temple of God into a sham and using it for their own purposes.

Luke makes clear how they were doing this with a brilliant piece of word play. As New Testament readers we should be very careful when reading quotes from the Old Testament. The context of the original passage is often key for us understanding the intended meaning of the New Testament passage. In addition to that we need to pay special attention to any changes in the quotation.

In verse 46 Luke quotes from Isaiah 56:7 which says "for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people." But in verse 46 he has left off the "all people." The question must be "why?". Why would Luke leave off one of God's most important promises, that all nations would be blessed through the family of Abraham and that God's people would be a light for all people.

Luke's point is that Jesus was sending the clear message that the Temple was being misused to mark out "insiders" from "outsiders" rather than being a light to call the "outsiders" to join God's people. They were misusing the Temple for their own benefit rather than for its proper purpose. All the people were not being fed and the Temple was not being used as a house of prayer for all the nations. What they were not receiving rightly at the Temple, Jesus was providing. He was the place where all the people could connect truly with God's word. He had become the true house of prayer where all the people could go for God's will to be revealed to them and where they could pursue the justice and openness of God. Jesus was the true Temple.

The New Testament writers make clear that God's family, the body of Christ, is now the Temple of God, the place where the glory of the Lord dwells. The question that we must always ask ourselves is this: "Is our Temple truly a house

of prayer for all nations and all people?” Are we intentionally calling all nations to come to the light and find the revelation of God’s justice and mercy? These are questions that should always be on our hearts in everything we do. We still fail in reverence, personal and collective, towards our consecrated places of worship. We still sometimes value the material above the spiritual. We still pay lip-service to the holiness revealed in Jesus Christ but do not honour him in our lives and make the good news of his redemption known to others.

Teaching in the Temple Courts - in the short time left before his Passion, Jesus taught in the Temple. There is something almost incredibly audacious in the action of Jesus in teaching in the Temple courts when there was a price on his head. This was sheer defiance. At that moment the authorities could not arrest him, for the people hung upon his every word. But every time he spoke he took his life in his hands and he knew well that it was only a matter of time until the end would come. Our courage as Christians should match the courage of Jesus. Through all the years, his word continues for those who will hear it, his teaching remains true after many human calamities, sanctified and proved by his own sacrificial death on the cross. Jesus left us an example that we should never be ashamed to show whose we are and whom we serve. With dreadful suffering to come, he desired only that his people should know and obey the will of God. How will we continue his work here on earth? In Jesus’ name. Amen.