

The Jesus we never knew x45. Sunday 05 November\_2017. **Jesus Challenges Corruption.**

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**Read: Mark 11: 15 – 19 (also John 2:13-22; Matt 21:12-17 and Luke 19: 45-48).**

**Jesus Challenges Corruption.** AIM for this year and this theme: for each of us individually and together to become better friends with JESUS. That is the real Jesus – not the Jesus of sentiment or others invention. Aim to know both the historical Jesus and to know Jesus experientially now. To do this we need to be able to spend time with him relating and especially reading the Gospels.

**Today we consider if Jesus did challenge corruption** and inevitably we ask why there seems to be so much corruption present in every part of the world. Why does there still seem to be corruption present in various parts of the church as well as in the world. (Corruption challenges integrity and decay leads to death)

**During August and the first week in September Geoff did a 5-week series on the Kingdom Parables** used by *Jesus in Matthew 13* and asked and sought to answer various questions about the coming of the Kingdom of God. If Jesus is bringing in God's Kingdom, then:

- Why does evil persist? (Taught the parable of the Wheat and the Weeds)
- Why is the Kingdom so insignificant? (Mustard seed)
- Why is the Kingdom so hidden? (Baker's yeast)
- Why do so few discover the treasure (Hidden in field and Pearl)

Those Parables which give us reason for hope and also show the need to be patient and wait for God's timing need also to be taken alongside this specific incident (and others) of Jesus taking direct action and publicly cleansing the Temple and challenging corruption with its elements of exploitation and injustice. Matthew, Mark and Luke's Gospels suggest that this was one of the specific incidents which pushed the Pharisees and others who controlled the Temple into choosing to seek to remove Jesus from the scene by having him killed.

Although John in his Gospel places this incident near the beginning of Jesus' public ministry I am sure that this is a tool to highlight right at the beginning that Jesus was bound to clash with the Jewish religious authorities as he threatened the way they were using their power to exploit and control. The worst forms of repression and control always have the abuse of political and religious power at the heart. There were at least 2 oppressive powers operative in Jesus' day in Palestine: the Romans and also the dominant Religious controllers of the Temple. The Romans made various deals with the religious authorities which complicated the true practice of worship in the Temple. Concerning the engineered death of Jesus, we see that the Sanhedrin as the highest Jewish Court carried out sham trials of Jesus and sought the Romans to impose the death penalty.

**Jesus found his visits to the Temple were a mixture of pleasure and shockingly disturbing.** He was concerned in the Court of the Gentiles where those of other nations should have witnessed the humble prayer of the Jews and a holy approach to God there was in practice a place and endemic ethos of corruption and exploitation. Priestly families were getting very rich through allowing certain people to trade and exchange money and taking a cut. On this **particular visit to the Temple** rather than teach parables which were in some cases thinly veiled attacks on the Pharisees and Sadducees he took **direct action (nonviolent?). It was pre-meditated and strategic: proportionate aggressive but not violent against people or animals? Mark 11: 11** tells us that Jesus looked at what was going on, when back overnight to Bethany and planned his action.

*(Some say that) Jesus used violence when he cleansed the temple. (And that we are therefore justified in using violence) But Jesus' stance on nonviolence is clear not only from how he responded to threatening enemies at the end of his life; it's also strongly emphasized his teachings. We need to understand what Jesus was up to in the Temple in order to reconcile his actions with the cross and his teachings on non-violence.*

*We need to realize that the temple system of selling sacrificial animals to worshipers had become extremely corrupted in Jesus' day. Among other abuses, priests were ripping people off by telling them the animal they bought to sacrifice didn't meet their purity standards. People were thus forced to purchase a "temple certified" animal. The priests would then confiscate the allegedly substandard animal, only to turn around and sell it to the next worshiper who was told the animal they had bought was substandard. It was a money-making scam.*

*The Gospels tell us that Jesus was so enraged by this corruption that he made a whip, turned over tables, and drove animals and people out of the temple. God's house was to be a house of prayer, he declared, not a den of thieves ([Mark 11:17](#)). On the precedent of this allegedly violent behavior, some have justified the use of violence "for righteous purposes" today.*

*I think this conclusion is completely unwarranted for three reasons.*

**First**, *we need to understand that Jesus wasn't throwing an uncontrolled tantrum. Most scholars agree that this was a calculated prophetic, symbolic act on Jesus' part. Based on Old Testament prophecy as well as the widespread knowledge of the corrupt priestly system, most Jews of Jesus' day believed the coming Messiah was going to restore the temple and make it God's house once again. By cleansing the temple, therefore, Jesus was demonstrating that he was the Messiah. He was also symbolically revealing Yahweh's displeasure with the religious establishment of his day and symbolically acting out Yahweh's reclaiming of his house.*

*It seems the masses understood the symbolism of Jesus' actions. While his behavior enraged the religious leaders, the people responded by flocking to him ([Mark 11:18](#)).*

**Second**, *and closely related to this, most scholars agree that Jesus engaged in this aggressive behavior to force the hand of religious and political authorities against him. After all, he had come to Jerusalem with the expressed intention of being executed.*

*Up to this point the Jewish authorities were concerned about Jesus, but they refrain from acting on their concern because of Jesus' popularity with the crowds. By exposing their corruption, Jesus was now explicitly threatening their authority. And this forced them to start plotting his arrest and execution.*

*So, we again see that Jesus' temple cleansing wasn't a spontaneous outburst of anger. It was a premeditated, strategic act.*

*Third, and most importantly, while Jesus' behavior was certainly aggressive, there's no indication whatsoever that it involved violence. True, Jesus turned tables over. But this was to put an immediate stop to the corrupt commerce that was taking place as well as perhaps to free the caged animals. There's no mention of any person or animal getting hurt in the process.*

**(Mennoners on Anabaptism synchro blog)**

**Also, the money changers were running a "right old racket" as currency exchangers often do.** The Roman coins couldn't be used in the Temple since they had the head or image of Caesar impressed upon them and needed to be traded in for the Temple currency and an unjust margin was being creamed off by the money changes and the 3 – 400,000 Passover Pilgrims had no choice but to be robbed.

It was these money changers whose tables Jesus turned over and those who were selling pigeons and other animals that Jesus drove from the Temple with a whip of platted cords. Jesus referred to the Temple as "**my Father's House**" and its having become a "**den of thieves**" (see *Jeremiah 7: 9-11*).

When Geoff looked at the parable of the **weeds and the wheat growing together (Matthew 13)** Jesus was explaining that the Kingdom of God and its work is like the field of the world. That which is good grows amongst that which is corrupt – often indistinguishable until the time for them to bear fruit and be harvested. (The weeds are the Darnel plant and their roots will inter mix with the roots of the wheat and cannot be removed without also pulling up and damaging the wheat. (Roman Law condemned the malicious sowing of Darnel in another's field as an act of sabotage which was punishable. The children of light and the children of darkness are described as polar opposites but in reality, we live together in varying in degrees of interrelatedness in the world. The lives of the righteous are often entangled with unrighteousness. We have already said today that it is almost impossible to make all our purchases righteously or totally pure because of the way that the world works. Virtually **every time we make a purchase of food or petrol or airline tickets we are part of systems which are tied into unfair trade, exploitation and things that are destroying a healthy planet** – we cannot be hypocritical about this.

As Geoff said, "**Society is not uprooted**" – the wheat and the weeds grow together – to at least some extent. And **even within ourselves we still struggle with the weeds growing** as well as the good wheat growing up in our lives. To tear up all the corruption in one go would greatly damage even those of us who think that we are free of corruption. We live in a very mixed society, but this **should not be an excuse not to change things in our lives which are corrupt, dishonest or exploitative e.g. the way we use and make money.** The co-existence of good and evil, wheat and weeds is a reality – but only for a time. A different day will come. As *Abiara* (Previously General

Evangelist of Christ Apostolic Church in Nigeria said, “**Corruption won’t end in Nigeria until Jesus comes**”. And we might say – that is true in the UK or anywhere in the world, but it doesn’t stop us calling and lobbying for reform and change of both systems and individuals. But the current situation of **sexual harassment being highlighted in both the entertainments business and even in our Parliament in Westminster** shows how utterly interwoven is the impurity and corruption within the establishment. And we know such **sexual immorality and harassing behaviour and even violent sexual abuse is not limited to the world but has been found in the Church too**. (*Paul in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century told the church at Corinth to remove the yeast of sin – the sexual immorality from within the church. 1 C 5:7 fol*). This presence of corruption in the world, the church and our own lives means that we often sit uncomfortably in the world – we need therefore to be seeking God as to what we should do about it.

**Did Jesus cleansing of the Temple mean it stayed clean for very long?** Not as far as I know. Because if people’s hearts and minds are not changed their actions will revert to bad and even corrupt practices.

**Did the Reformation of the Church 500 years ago** remove all of the corruption – not as far as I know. A new batch of dough was made but unless the church is constantly renewed through Christians believing in Jesus Christ and obeying his teachings it will become corrupted again.

**Why does Jesus allow corruption to persist?** Why does Jesus not finally judge and destroy all that is corrupt in human nature and the world. There can be only one answer – it is so that time is given to change – to seek God’s forgiveness and power to change corrupt lives and systems. BUT “We must not just go on sinning saying that God’s grace will be shown to us again and again” (*Romans 6: 1*). We who say we believe in and know God must not continue in sin – it makes a mockery out of God and what God values. It ignores that which angers God and what Jesus suffered so that we might be free of Sin’s power.

**The call of Jesus is to take action against wrong doing** but in this we need to be discerning of what Jesus is calling us to do and when and how. Christians have often done this and reformed hospital care, education and so on but not always. We need to continue in that moral discernment and act and seek to do the right thing locally, nationally and also globally. We need to learn how to be appropriately angry (not just irritated by people’s annoying habits) at times and strategically use that anger not to destroy people but to demonstrate and do things that liberate people. We need the help of others to make those decisions as to how to act against corruption and injustice. We need to identify with those challenges that Jesus would identify with. There will be times for some of us to protest and join with others in confronting institutional evil and to try to change social structures which perpetuate evil. There will be others of us that are called to strive for purity and obedience in the church amongst the followers of Jesus.

**Corruption is present in the world, but also the Church, and our own lives and hearts. There can be a lack of integrity and even decay.** This is not something to boast about or be content about but to grieve about. *But where sin abounds – God’s grace can also abound much more (Romans 5: 20)*. **We are called to repent – with God’s grace to change not just our minds and our hearts but also our actions.** We

need to learn and grow an understanding of what God considers good and what is evil about evil. We need one another's help in this and we need to be part of **conversations about how to respond to the corruptions and injustices of our day.**

**Discernment is about timing.** Is God calling me to do something about this injustice or corruption at this time? Paul preached that in *Christ there was no Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female* but did not in his day challenge the iniquity of slavery. But he did plant ideas (time bombs) in Scripture that other people took up in later generations. We need to judge what is the appropriate response. In Jesus mind he discerned that the "cleansing of the Temple" was the appropriate response for him on that day (presumably for the reasons suggested on pp2,3).

Let me give you an example of an **inappropriate response by Christians:** *"An example of such participation in evil is the way that a few pro-life activists have sought to advance their cause by assassinating abortionists. When the response to evil is out of proportion, as in that example it can become worse than the evil that occasioned it". (The Voice of Jesus, Gordon T. Smith p203.*

*"Jesus saw much that he chose, for the time being, to ignore or at least not denounce. Yet he had no patience with the abusive religious leaders of his day, and he lived with the consequences of his words and deeds. Infact he died because of them. (ibid)*

**We are not pure.** A streak of corruption can run through our own motives and actions like the veins in a blue cheese. Impurity and corruption can be in our own hearts and Christian communities and not just in others – "out there". **We must beware judgementalism and hypocrisy.** As we live in and engage with the world and those that do not claim to follow Jesus we need a **healthy dose of humility and reality to see** that there are logs in our own eyes before accusing others of have splinters in their eyes. (*Matthew 7: 3 - 5*). If then we take the logs out of our own eyes we will be able to see clearly to take the splinter out of others eyes.