

Teaching Plan EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: May 5, 2019

Lesson Title: "Transformed"

Lesson Passage: Mark 11:15-19; 12:41-44

ABOUT THIS LESSON

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "You cannot serve both God and Mammon" (Mt. 6:24) (Mammon is wealth, elevated to the status of a god). This lesson is based on two episodes in which Jesus demonstrated this principle very forcefully. In the first instance, he broke up the money-making enterprises that were enriching the Sadducees who controlled the activities that went on within the temple gates. The second episode, also, took place in the temple area, where Jesus condemned the posturing of the elite and praised a poor widow who contributed to the temple treasury a mere pittance, because it was all she had.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Describe the abuses Jesus was seeking to correct in his "clean-sing of the temple." (2) Identify contemporary practices that exemplify the worship of money.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Ask: "Are you familiar with the term, 'prosperity gospel'?" Invite responses, then share this information: This belief teaches that wealth is a sign of God's blessing, the poor are poor because of a lack of faith, and God rewards acts of faith (especially giving generous contributions to "health and wealth" preachers) with greater amounts of wealth. In other words, the more holy you are, the richer you will be. Then relate this to today's Bible study by saying: "It would be very difficult to find support for the prosperity gospel in the teachings of Jesus, especially in the two episodes that are described in our lesson passage."

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Ask someone to read the account of "the cleansing of the temple" in Mark 11:15-19. Then comment on the passage: (1) During the lifetime of Jesus, the temple in Jerusalem was the only place where faithful Hebrews could offer the sacrifices prescribed in the Law of Moses. All the animals offered for sacrifice had to be approved by the priests or their aides. (Vendors of pigeons are mentioned specifically in Mk. 11:15, because pigeons were the only sacrificial animals poor people could afford. (2) Even the Greek and Roman money that they used in daily life had to be exchanged for Jewish coins, the only money that was acceptable within the temple precincts (note the reference to the "tables of money-changers in Mk. 11:15). (3) These rules gave the priests and their families (all Sadducees) absolute control over all the business transactions within the temple precincts. So, for them, the worship practices of pious Jews were a lucrative money-making opportunity. (4) So Jesus--offended by the bleating of sheep, the lowing of cattle and the clink of coins in the temple courtyard--drove out all these commercial interests, reminding them that the temple was first and foremost a sacred "house of prayer for all nations" (v. 17). NOTE: "He would not allow any one to carry anything through

the temple" (v. 16) means that he put a stop to the practice of taking a shortcut through the temple courtyard, especially carrying merchandise through it.

2. Add these explanations: (1) Jesus' "cleansing of the temple" was an unusually bold act that was possible because most of the worshipers there were sympathetic with him (*note v. 18*). (2) Jesus was not objecting to the temple as the center for the worship of God; but, rather, to its abuse by the blatant commercialism that had come to dominate its sacred precincts.

3. Ask class members to turn to Mark 12:41-44 in their Bibles:

Observe that, in this passage, Jesus is condemning the commercialization of worship from another angle: (1) The "treasury" mentioned in v. 41 was probably a reference to one of the 13 collection boxes, shaped like trumpets with narrow openings, that were placed in the Court of Women, where contributions could be deposited as worshipers entered the temple. (2) No doubt, many of the "rich people who put in large sums" (v. 41) were the scribes who loved to wear long robes and be honored by people who bowed before them in the market places and by being given the seats that were reserved for distinguished persons in the synagogues (vv. 38-39). (3) But arrogant pride was one of their lesser sins. These were greedy people who did not hesitate to steal the meager possessions of widows who, having no husbands, lived in poverty because they had no means of support (v. 40). And their hypocrisy was compounded by their habit of praying long, extensive prayers when in worship settings (v. 40). And, they made a great show of the offerings they put into the temple treasury (v. 41b).

4. On the other hand, the poor widow referred to in Mk. 12:42-43, contributed two copper coins (Gk., lepta), the smallest coins in circulation, worth less than a fraction of a penny in our coinage.

Comment: Eugene Nida, a Bible translator, suggests rendering Mark 12: 44, "they (the scribes) contributed leftover money," while the poor widow "committed her very livelihood in trust to God."

CLOSING THE LESSON

Conclude the lesson by asking various class members to read the following scriptures: Psalm 37:16; Jer. 9:23; Matt. 6:19-21; Matt 19:24; Luke 12:15; Luke 16:13; 1 Tim. 6:17.

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