

Mark 11:15-18

Aim of lesson

To show the reverence that Jesus felt for his Father's house, and to show Jesus as God's appointed judge over his people.

Background study

Isaiah 56:7; Jeremiah 7:1-20; Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:11-14; Luke 19:45-48. Study the practices of temple worship in Jesus' day.

Suggested outline of lesson

A walk around the temple

As a setting for this lesson, lead the class on an imaginary excursion through the temple to the very centre and heart of Jewish worship: through the great arched gateways leading to the Court of the Gentiles, with its columns and colonnades, to the marble screen separating this from the inner court, with its notice above the entrance steps "Let no foreigner enter within this screen and enclosure around the Holy Place"; and beyond that to the Court of the Women, and further still the court where only the men of Israel were allowed to go. In the centre stood the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place separated by the veil.

Passover activity

Jesus had been to the temple many times since his first visit at the age of twelve, and would no doubt have seen it at passover time on many occasions. Particularly at passover there would be great activity. Money changers were required because pilgrims came from many different countries and their coins needed to be changed into shekels. Foreign currency bore the heads of emperors or pagan gods and goddesses, and were unacceptable in the temple. Animals needed to be sold because those who had travelled long distances were unable to bring a sacrifice with them.

Chaos and corruption

It was evident, however, that excessive charges were made for money changing - sometimes as much as twenty per cent on each transaction. Traders selling animals and birds, because they had a monopoly, charged enormously inflated prices. One can imagine the constant confusion and noise - the shouting, haggling and grumbling, together with the bleating of sheep, the fluttering of birds in their cages, and the din of the clamorous crowd. This was the prelude to the act of worshipping God. No wonder Jesus' anger was aroused. In the very place where God should have been revered and worshipped - an act demanding humility and obedience to his commands - the basest human attitudes of greed, selfishness and irreverence were dominant. The House of God was being desecrated.

A house of prayer

Following his entry into Jerusalem Jesus had visited the temple and seen what was going on, then had left to spend the night in Bethany. No doubt he had spent time pondering what to do about this corruption of God's house. He could not allow this to continue unchecked. The words of Isaiah came into his mind: "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples"; and he must have shared his Father's displeasure at the people's failure to understand what it was he required of them. The next day, with complete authority, Jesus returned and interrupted their trading by driving out the merchants and scattering the coins on the floor. Quoting from the scriptures, which the people should have known, Jesus then declared that the temple was a holy place for the worship of God and must not be profaned. His quotation from Jeremiah should have reminded them that the glorious temple of Solomon had been destroyed because the people of Israel had angered God with their wicked deeds.

Jesus' anger provokes various reactions

There was an immediate reaction. The traders recoiled in fear and indignation, and the chief priests were furious, but powerless, because they knew that Jesus was right. They were offended by his challenge to their authority, within the temple precincts, and refused to accept that he had any right to intervene. They resented his condemnation of them and his popularity with the people, and they determined to have him put to death. The disciples had been stunned by Jesus' demonstration of righteous anger, and feared the hatred of the Pharisees. Now they were even more anxious for Jesus' safety, and very relieved when he took them out of the city before nightfall.

Worksheets

The code reads 'In this place is someone greater than the temple'

Prayer

Dear Lord God, we thank you that Jesus had the courage to stand up for what was right. Help us always to remember the reverence that is due to your name. Amen.

Memory verse

"The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him" (Habakkuk 2:20).

Relevance to the children's lives

In Sunday School we pray together. God invites us to talk to him and has promised to hear us. He is great and holy and all-powerful, and we must remember this. How can we show God that we respect his greatness, when we pray? How should we behave in Sunday School? What kind of attitude will please God most?