

Home Group notes for the week following Sunday 8th March 2015

LENT 111 : SHRIVEN. SIN, SELFISHNESS, SAVED

As We Gather

Throughout His life and death, Jesus fulfilled the Law, and in His ministry was passionate about social justice and the hypocritical attitude of those in positions of authority and power.

Reading Scripture JOHN 2 : 13 - 22

Passover was one of the greatest of the Jewish feasts [Mark 14:12-15]. Jews within a 20 mile radius of Jerusalem attended annually and others from all over the world travelled to celebrate at least one Passover in Jerusalem in their life-time.

Many non-Jewish foreigners also came to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem at this time.

The Temple authorities had established a lucrative business in the court of the Gentiles. Originally intended as a service to out of town visitors and foreigners, money changers would change foreign coinage for Galilean or Temple coins, and traders would sell oxen, sheep and doves for thanksgiving sacrifices. Pilgrims were being fleeced and God's house desecrated in the name of religion [see John 2:15-16 Luke 19:46]

Imagine pilgrims coming to worship, pushing through jostling crowds, seeing the size of the Temple (possibly for the first time), experiencing the noise, the filth, the smells, the haggling, the heat.

How do you think you would feel in such a situation? Discuss

Why did Jesus act the way He did? Discuss

[see also Malachi 3:1 Psalm 69:9 Mark 11:17]

The condition of the Temple reflected the spiritual condition of the nation – the glory had departed from the Temple and worship was without reverence.

Do you / is it possible to always worship with reverence? Discuss

[see also Hosea 5:4 Psalm 50:5 Psalm 19:7-14]

With the coming of Christ, animal sacrifices became irrelevant. The prophets had for years told the nation that heart attitude was more important than burned / blood offerings, but the people were spiritually blind [Isaiah 1:11 + 16-17 Jeremiah 7:22-24].

Today we still bring gifts to the Lord as we beautify our churches and spend money on furnishings and congregational ministries, often focusing on things and actions and losing sight of the purpose behind what we are doing.

What kinds of gifts please God most? Discuss

[see also Psalm 50:16-20 Psalm 51:1-4 + 12]

Because of the presence of money changers and traders in the court of the Gentiles, this place was no longer suitable for prayer and worship. Jesus did (does) not want anyone shut out of the presence of God [Mark 11:17].

Is there anything in our church life that keeps the seeking stranger out? Discuss

Jesus' action of cleansing the Temple shocked the religious leaders (and others present), who immediately questioned His right /authority for doing what He had done (John 2:18). His reply baffled them as they tried to interpret spiritual truth in material / physical terms (John 2:19-21). They forgot that God's ways are not our ways.

Do we do this too? Discuss
[see also 1Corinthians 1:18-25]

In Closing

The Temple authorities could not / would not accept that Jesus was a threat to the Temple style of worship and ritual, and would replace these with spiritual worship, thus opening the way for direct access to God through the Holy Spirit in our inner temple.

Our society worships power, influence and wealth, but the good news preaches truth, peace, and life through repentance and victory over sin.

PRAYER

God of passion and power, your Son drove the money changers out of the Temple.
Cleanse us of our arrogance and recreate in us a dwelling for your holiness, through
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen