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Altar-ed Living: Jesus Alters the Temple – From a Marketplace to a House of Prayer

[Mark 11: 15-18](#)

When they arrived back in Jerusalem, Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out the people buying and selling animals for sacrifices. He knocked over the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves, <sup>16</sup> and he stopped everyone from using the Temple as a marketplace.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>17</sup> He said to them, “The Scriptures declare, ‘My Temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations,’ but you have turned it into a den of thieves.”<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>18</sup> When the leading priests and teachers of religious law heard what Jesus had done, they began planning how to kill him. But they were afraid of him because the people were so amazed at his teaching. Mark 11: 15-18

This scene of Jesus Clearing the Temple is recorded in all 4 Gospels. Matthew, Mark and Luke place it accurately during the final week of Jesus’s life. John takes some freedom by moving it towards the front of his Gospel. Dale Bruner believes it is because John’s audience needs to hear early that God must have a right place of honor.

Mark sandwiches this account between Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree. (unpack)

NT Wright explains, “by placing the Temple incident within the two halves of the fig tree story, we see Jesus’ actions as a dramatic acted parable of judgement. This was Jesus’ way of announcing God’s condemnation of the Temple itself and all that it had become in the national life of Israel.”

Bruner goes on to say that when Jesus approached the Temple and heard all the noise and saw the hustling and bustling of people, selling and trading needed sacrifices – “we should not be surprised that all this “business” hurt Jesus at a deep level.”

The Temple had become something it was never meant to be. The Place of God and the opportunity to encounter God had become a transaction.

Jesus entered Jerusalem just the day before, triumphantly on the back of a young donkey, hearing the praise of the people. What we as Christians now celebrate as Holy Week.

But for Jews this was Passover Week. One of 3 festivals that required traveling to Jerusalem. And during Passover week the city would swell in size - over 100,000+ Jews would come to the Holy City to celebrate Passover. And what were they celebrating...God’s deliverance from the oppressor Egypt. The freedom of God’s chosen people. You remember the movie, The 10 Commandments with Charlton Heston.

We are familiar with the story of Exodus...not the movie....Moses is commissioned by God to go back to Egypt and to tell Pharaoh to let his people go. Pharaoh refuses because they had created a system and a financial empire on the backs of the nation of Israel. A system, which although millions were oppressed, created for the people of Egypt and especially Pharaoh a structure that produced great wealth and power. The rulers of Egypt would use that power to keep the Jewish people in bondage for 400 years. Because of Pharaoh's refusal to let God's people go, God sent 10 plagues, warning signs if you will of God's ultimate authority and judgement. Pharaoh, in his pride would ignore the first nine.

The tenth and final plague, God would pass through the land of Egypt and strike down the firstborn of every household. But the Jews had been told by Moses, through God, to mark their doors with the blood of a lamb they've sacrificed — the Passover offering — and so God "passed over" their homes. This final killed Pharaoh's son and broke Pharaoh's back. He would relent and let God's people go. As part of his instructions regarding the plague, God also instructed the people of Israel in Exodus 12 that they would **celebrate this "Passover" each year, remembering God's deliverance from the hand of Egypt.**

This is why people would make a journey each year to Jerusalem. God had also instructed the Jewish people to bring an unblemished animal each year to the Temple and offer it to the High Priest as a sacrifice for their sins. Many would also bring a financial offering. However, the Temple currency was not to have any symbols of foreign rulers on it, so if you were to bring an offering you would need to exchange your money into the proper Temple currency.

Because this was part of the instructions God gave to Moses regarding the Passover it wasn't uncommon for people, especially those who would have traveled for days and weeks to need to purchase an animal to be sacrificed and for their currency to need to be exchanged.

So why was Jesus upset? Why did He get so angry, if this was customary? Dale Bruner writes, "This transaction didn't need to happen on Temple grounds. The system, which was created by the religious leaders, could have been set up anywhere in Jerusalem. It didn't need to be set up in the place where people would encounter God."

This shopping mall that Jesus walks into most likely was set up in the Courts of the Gentiles, the only place on the Temple grounds for non-Jews to come and worship God. What does this say about the disregard the religious authority had on the Gentile people? "Your only place to encounter God, we are going to set up a mall."

The tables Jesus overturned had become a barrier between the people and God. The structure that was in place had forced people to first do their business through the scam of the religious authority before they could do their business with God. Yes, the Temple was a place of sacrifice, God had instructed it to be, but the religious authority had created a way to take advantage of the people. Remember Jesus referred to the buyers and sellers and the money changers as a "den of thieves." They were short changing the people of their honest desire to worship God. They were ripping people off. Instead of helping and offering people what they

needed, they had created a scam. They made money on the exchange of currency. This was not an even exchange. 2 of your dollars for 1 of ours. They would buy your “unfit” animal for \$5 and sell you their perfect little sacrifice for \$10. They would then sell your “unfit” animal that had all of a sudden became fit for sacrifice for a profit.

And what if what you came with was not good enough based on the ones running the tables and you didn’t have enough money to buy what you needed.....you were turned away?

Perhaps Jesus was angry because this Temple, which was to be a symbol of God’s dwelling with Israel for the sake of the world, had become not a symbol of God’s welcome but rather of God’s exclusion.

He walks into the Temple and sees a Marketplace but what He longs for it to be is a House of Prayer for all nations. (Marketplace vs. House of Prayer)

You know, we spend most of our week living life in a marketplace. Think about it. Much of our week is made up of transactional dealings. You give something you have (time, money, effort, talent, etc.) and for your effort you expect a return. I have something and give it to you, in return you give something back to me. And the more you give, the greater the assumed return. A marketplace works off the system of transactions.

In and of themselves transactions are not bad, it is how much of life has been structured, but when our faith takes on a transactional form it creates a pattern and expectations that if I do all the “right things” then God will reward me with all the “right stuff”. We can manipulate our relationship with him by working for our expectant blessings. This often leaves our encounters with Him dry, stale, empty, and desiring more.

So if we spend much of our living in a marketplace, should the place where God dwells look and our attempts to encounter him look different? Should our relationship with Papa, our desired intimacy with Jesus, our faith look different than how we live out most our life in the marketplace? Jesus thought so and even expressed this desire. Let me share with you what I believe are the differences of a Marketplace and a House of Prayer.

(Marketplace vs. House of Prayer.....)

Marketplace

Fast & Hurried  
What do you have?  
Transaction  
Leave exhausted  
Excluded

HOP

Silent and Still  
Come as you are.  
Transformation  
Leave rested, renewed and reinstated  
All are Welcomed

TJ Dickerson, Regional Director at Young Life – First Presbyterian Church of Grand Junction, CO

In a marketplace we often experience a **fast and hurried** pace, with loud distracting noises. In a HOP we are encouraged to be **silent and still**. We learn about healthy rhythms and any noise we hear is the sound of our Father telling us how much he loves us and delights over us.

In a marketplace we're asked **"What do you have?"** In a HOP we hear **"Come as you are."**

In a marketplace you get what you put into it. **(Transaction)** In a HOP you get **transformed** by sitting in the presence of the "3". (Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.)

In a marketplace you often **leave exhausted** by all the dealings, negotiations and crammed schedules. In a HOP you **leave rested, renewed and reinstated**...you are his beloved kid.

In a marketplace you most likely will feel judged and **excluded**. Comparison is the currency of a marketplace. But In a HOP, all our valued and **all are welcome**. Every people, every nation.

Our faith should never be transactional. But for many of us, because we live much of our lives in the marketplace, the habits of transactions carry over in our experiences with God. We are so use to life in the marketplace that our faith and expectations from God takes on the same form.

Skye Jethani, Christian author and writer of *With God Daily* says, "We tend to see God as a machine, and therefore we engage worship or any encounter with Jesus as a program or formula (transaction)—as long as we provide the right inputs then we will get the right outputs. If I do my part in my faith journey there is an expected return that I get from God. I'll do what I need to do but I have an expectation that God will give me something in return.

And what are the right inputs? (sacrifices – a 30 minute devo, prayers – me speaking and listing my needs, rituals – going to church, on time, being a part of a small group, better yet hosting a small group). And what are the expectant outputs? (Forgiveness – right standing, blessings – all his stuff, and euphoria – wow do I feel happy).

How did the older son in the story of the Prodigal Son describe his life and his expectations? Remember he was refusing to come to the celebration of his younger brother returning home, so the Father (God) goes out and pleads with his son. Read this with me.

Luke 15: 28ff **"The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him, <sup>29</sup>but he replied, 'All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. <sup>30</sup>Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!**"

<sup>31</sup>**"His father said to him, 'Look, dear son, you have always been with me, and everything I have is yours.**"

The older son viewed his relationship with his father as very transactional.

TJ Dickerson, Regional Director at Young Life – First Presbyterian Church of Grand Junction, CO

In John 6:28 the people ask Jesus, “What must we do to do the work that God requires?” Jesus answered, “The work of God is this – to believe in the one he has sent.” Trust Jesus and the work he has done and continues to do for you.

Seeing God as a machine causes our pursuit of Him and what we get from Him to be a marketplace faith. And as I said earlier, this will leave our encounters with him feeling dry, empty, disappointed, and maybe even angry. “All these years I’ve slave for you....

You will leave desiring more.

Here is a little secret, God desires more too, but how we get more of Him and how He gets more of us is not through transactions. It comes rather through transformation. And we don’t bring a thing, only our real, raw and non-poising self. Everything he has is already ours.

Can I give you a different picture of prayer? One where you don’t do any of the talking. You know our true identity is found in Silence and Solitude. Not in the noise of the market place, but the silence and solitude of the HOP. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths....

{Donna Hatasaki’s picture of prayer}. The presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit reside at the center of our soul. Close your eyes and imagine them sitting at a table. You are invited to come and sit with them.....

Jesus was angry because the system of the Temple had altered the way of the worshipper. They had turned the place where people came to encounter God into a shopping center, a marketplace.

What would it look like to start altering your approach when coming to worship, creating space to be with the “3”, being still in order to have a real encounter with the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Let’s put down our transactional form of faith; bringing all the right “inputs”, doing the work in order to get something in return, and embrace what we know is true. **“You will always be with me and everything I have is yours.”**

## **Questions for Personal Reflection and Small Group Discussion**

1. TJ mentioned that the tables Jesus overturned had become a barrier between the people and God. What are other "barriers" that get in the way of your true worship?
2. TJ mentioned several differences between a Marketplace and a House of Prayer. Which characteristics of the Marketplace are most true for you and why? What distinctions of a HOP do you most desire and why?
3. TJ references the parable of the Prodigal Son, highlighting the older son's attitude and frustration that his Father had never given him what he expected. After all he had done all the right things. How does the Father's reply, "Son you have always been with me and everything I have is yours," speak to the missed opportunities and "altered" view the father wished his son would have received?
4. TJ invites us to a place of prayer where no words from us are expected. As you sit and hear the conversation the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are having about you, what do you hear them saying? And how does this real conversation, which happens all day, every day, "alters" your approach to connect and live out your faith?