

House of Prayer? Den of Robbers? Luke 19:41-48

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In today's text, Jesus claims that they have made God's house a den of robbers. What does He mean?

You have heard it taught that those who were selling were making obscene profit by what they were doing. You may even have heard about how using God's house as a place to sell, is what the problem was.

Malachi, having recorded God's own speaking, proclaims how some rob God. "Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation *of you!* (Mal. 3:8-9)

Is Jesus talking about robbing God by not tithing? While that is indeed a way to rob God, that is also not what Jesus is speaking about.

We can speculate all we want, and all those things are indeed ways in which we can rob God, but does God's Word, Holy Scripture, help give meaning to our text? It is clear that Jesus is quoting the text from Jeremiah which functions as our Old Testament lesson. Is there something there that could help us understand what Jesus is driving at in our Gospel? Of course there is!

"Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are delivered!'—only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord. (Jere. 7:8-11)

Did you hear how God defines making His house a den of robbers? People would come into the temple and offer the sacrifices required for forgiveness, but while they were doing so they had other thoughts in mind. Some were planning to go out and do the same sins again – they were actually impenitent. Some did it because the sacrifices were required – but they did not really believe what they did was all that bad. Others came in and offered the sacrifices, but they were going through it as an empty ritual – no thoughts at all about what they were doing.

When people come into God's house, confess their sins, and hear those sins forgiven, even as they are planning how to continue in those same sins again after leaving God's house – they are robbing God!

When people come into God's house and do not believe that what God's Word clearly calls sins, is a sin, in their impenitence they are robbing God.

When people come into God's house, go through the motions, but do so without faith, it is just

an act that they do not believe really does anything – they are robbing God.

Jesus had wept over Jerusalem because they did not know the things that make for true peace, a peace that passes all understanding. They had the Scriptures, but did not understand that it was all about God's Christ who has to come into the world and be the ransom for sin. They did not see Jesus as that Christ. And Jesus, knowing what He would endure, and that so many Jews would not see, hear, and believe, He wept over Jerusalem. They did not understand the truth and the depth of forgiveness that Jesus came to purchase by being God's Christ – although it had been foretold from the time of Adam.

When we think our sins are not sins...

When we confess our sins, even as we are intending to go out and continue doing them...

When we take forgiveness for granted, figuring, "since I can come and get forgiveness whenever I want, so I can do whatever I want"...

When we think that what we do, our own good works (if there is truly such a thing) make a difference in our getting into heaven...

When we do any of these sorts of things, we are robbing God! When these are the things we do and think, we are stealing from Christ, making a mockery of what God's own Son did when He gave His life unto death upon the cross.

If what we have done is not a sin, then why did God give His own Son to die for us? If I am good enough, if my sins do not eternally damn, then why did Jesus take upon Himself my flesh, and suffer the humiliation and pain of the scourge and the cross?

If I come into God's house, begging Him to forgive me, even though I have every intention of doing the same sins again – is that not the epitome of stealing?

If I believe that I have to do something, even some little anything, to assist in my gaining of eternal salvation, what does that say about Christ's proclamation from the cross, "It is finished – accomplished"? If I must do something, then I am robbing Christ's work on the cross and emptying it of all power! Such attitude and belief robs Christ's work of atonement, and claims that I have done what He accomplished for me.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem because they did not know what made for their peace. He proclaimed that they had made the temple a den of robbers.

This place is God's house, the place He has designated to deliver what Christ accomplished upon the cross – this is the place where He accomplishes His purposes to save sinners. This is God's house where He delivers to you the forgiveness His Christ accomplished!

When we come into God's house, His Spirit gathers us and moves us to repentance. We boldly confess that we have robbed God, for we have sat in these pews, heard the words of forgiveness from Christ, even as we knew that we were going to walk out these doors and boldly back into the same sinful situation.

We confess that we have robbed God by not believing we were sinners.

We confess that we have robbed God by thinking we had something to offer for our forgiveness.

Dearly beloved of God, there is no sin so great that it was not paid for in full when Christ gave His life unto death upon the cross. That was the promise given through the generations from Adam, Abraham, and down to the time God was enfleshed in Mary's womb. On the cross, as His lifeblood dripped from His torn flesh, Christ proclaimed that promised work completed when He proclaimed, "Tetelestai – It is finished!"

That is why you gather here, to have delivered to you what He accomplished. There is no sin so great that it is not covered completely when you hear His word state – Your sins are forgiven!

There is no sin so great that it is not completely forgiven when you eat and drink at the table Christ sets before you of His own body and blood, for it is His meal, give to you, for the forgiveness of sin.

This is a house of prayer – a house where we come and prayerfully beg God for forgiveness. And He answers that prayer in the affirmative – Your sins are forgiven! Go in peace. Amen.