

The Gospel Unashamed

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."

A Controversial Newsletter "The Printed Voice of Summit Theological Seminary"

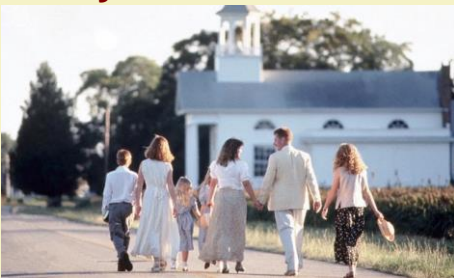
~ All articles are written by Terry Carter unless otherwise stated ~

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Terry Carter, Editor

Why Go to Church?



In the past year and a half, a lot of people have been considering whether to come to church or not. The pandemic caused most congregations to suspend in-person meetings for some period of time.

Most places have returned to normal services, or close to it, for the most part. Still there are places that have not resumed in-person services yet.

During this time, most congregations have offered some kind of online alternative. Even after opening the buildings back up, many continue to have online services. There are good reasons to do this, and I am not going to criticize them. However, many people have continued to "attend services" online rather than in person. For some it is a health decision. For others it is a matter of convenience or even habit.

Nevertheless, we have all had to wrestle, in one way or the other, with the question, "Why go to Church?" in the past year. For many of us, we have dealt with this as never before. Lots of us were simply raised to go to church on Sunday. For those people, it has become a lifelong habit that we may have never even questioned.

The truth is that people actually come to church for lots of different reasons. Some of those reasons are good and some are bad. Some are better than others and some are worse than others. But *why* you come to church can be just as important as *whether* you come to church.

There is an incident in the last week of Jesus' life that illustrates well what I am talking about. It happened shortly after what we call "The Triumphal Entry". It was during the Passover week. It is the incident where Jesus drove the money changers from the temple. It is recorded in three of the four Gospels for us. Each of these accounts is rather brief. However, each one gives important details that are not included in the others.

The temple was not just **a** place of worship, it was **the** place of worship for the Jews. This is where all the males were required to be during the Passover week. Consequently, there were Jews there from all over the world. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record this event. In those records, we only see a number of groups who came to the temple ostensibly to worship.

However, as we look at what they said and did, we can see why they really came. These attitudes towards coming to a place of worship are still with us today. As we look at them, ask yourself which one describes you.

"12 Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who

bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. 13 And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" 14 Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant." **Matthew 21:12-15 (NKJV)**

"15 So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. 16 And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. 17 Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" 18 And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching. 19 When evening had come, He went out of the city." **Mark 11:15-19 (NKJV)**

"45 Then He went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in it, 46 saying to them, "It is written, 'My house is a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" 47 And He was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief

priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him, 48 and were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear Him." **Luke 19:45-48 (NKJV)**

First, there were those who were there to make money, namely the money changers. It should be obvious from what happened and what Jesus said, that these men were there to make money.

This was not the first time that Jesus had cleared the temple. He had begun His ministry by cleansing the temple at Passover.

"13 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 And **He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. 15 When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. 16 And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away!** Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" 17 Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.""
John 2:13-17 (NKJV)

Then He had told them not to make the Father's house a house of merchandise. The Jews were not happy about this, but they had gone back to the way things were before.

Now He cleanses the temple again at the end of His ministry. This time he says they have made the temple a den of thieves. This is a much harsher statement, not just merchandisers, but thieves. Changing money was a very profitable business. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of dollars were made by the money changers each year. It likely began as a matter of convenience. They exchanged people's money into the Jewish currency used at the temple for the temple tax.

"11 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 12 **"When you take the census of the children of Israel for their number, then every man shall give a ransom for himself to the LORD,** when you number them, that there may be no plague among them when you number them. 13 **"This is what everyone among those who are numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (a shekel is twenty gerahs). The half-shekel shall be an offering to the LORD.** 14 "Everyone included among those who are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering to the LORD. 15 "The rich shall not give more and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when you give an offering to the LORD, to make atonement for yourselves. 16 "And you shall take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shall appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of meeting, that it may be a memorial for the children of Israel before the LORD, to make atonement for yourselves.""
Exodus 30:11-16 (NKJV)

They changed the money at unfair exchange rates. It was like buying a soda or even water at an amusement park today. Prices were ridiculous because the people there had little other choice.

There were those who sold animals for sacrifice, so you didn't have to bring your own on the trip. These people exploited the worshippers for their own profit. They also took advantage of the poor.

It is obvious that these people were not there to worship. They were there to make money in any way they could. There are those among us today who only view Christian worship and worshippers as a means of making money. That is not to say that nobody should ever get paid for goods and services they provide for the Church. It is to say that viewing the Church as nothing more than a marketplace, especially one to be exploited, is wicked.

Money motivates many to come to church today in a number of ways. Some come to participate in, or run, fundraisers for all sorts of causes. Some come to make business deals and connections. Some only serve because they get paid to do so. For these people, coming to church is "strictly business".

Second, there were those who were there to protect. More than one group was there to protect something that was important to them.

Protecting something may sound, at first, like a good reason to come to church. That all depends on what you are trying to protect. Some were there to protect their own interests. Others were there to protect God's interests. Let's look at who was there protecting what on that day.

The scribes and chief priests were interested in protecting their power. They were also protecting those who were abusing the building, namely the money changers. Others were only interested in protecting the building itself.

"Then the Jews said, "It has taken **forty-six years to build this temple,** and will You raise it up in three days?"
John 2:20 (NKJV)

Jesus quoted from **Jeremiah Chapter 7** when casting out the money changers here.

"**"Has this house,** which is called by My name, **become a den of thieves in your eyes?** Behold, I, even I, have seen it," says the LORD."
Jeremiah 7:11 (NKJV)

In that time the people of Judah were certain that as long as the temple was in Jerusalem, the city would never fall. They were trusting in lying words.

"4 **"Do not trust in these lying words,** saying, **'The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.'** ... 8 **"Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit."**
Jeremiah 7:4, 8 (NKJV)

As a result they went about their sinful ways feeling completely secure. God reminded them that He didn't spare Shiloh because the tabernacle was there.

"But **go now to My place which was in Shiloh**, where I set My name at the first, **and see what I did to it** because of the wickedness of My people Israel." **Jeremiah 7:12 (NKJV)**

It was so bad that God told Jeremiah not to pray for them.

"**Therefore do not pray for this people**, nor lift up a cry or prayer for them, nor make intercession to Me; for I will not hear you." **Jeremiah 7:16 (NKJV)**

Protecting the building is actually the least of your worries. Furthermore, that in itself is a hopeless cause. When the people reject God, He will destroy the building. He did it before and He can do it again.

"23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! 38 "See! **Your house is left to you desolate**; 39 "for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'" 24:1 Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and **His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple**. 2 And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, **not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.**" **Matthew 23:37-24:2 (NKJV)**

Unlike those who wanted to protect their power, the money changers, or the building itself. Jesus was there to protect the intended purpose of the building. That purpose was prayer and worship. Jesus quotes from **Isaiah 56:7** to indicate the purpose.

"Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in

My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices Will be accepted on My altar; For **My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.**" **Isaiah 56:7 (NKJV)**

God's house was intended to be a house of prayer for all nations. That is what needed to be protected the most. Yet it seems like nobody but Jesus was interested in protecting this. They were only protecting their self-interests.

When you come to church, are you here to protect something? Are you protecting your own self-interests? Or are you protecting the intended purpose of the Church?

Third, some had come to be healed. Matthew records the fact that the blind and lame came to Jesus in the temple, and He healed them.

We may not think that the temple was built to be a center for healing. However, for many diseases the Jews had to go show themselves to the priest. When they were healed, there were sacrifices to make. Of course, the temple and its sacrifices were for the healing of the worst disease of all – sin. The fact that Jesus healed those who came to Him in the temple should teach us that it was one of the purposes of the temple.

This is certainly true spiritually. While we do not possess the power to heal miraculously today, there are many who need healing that only God can provide.

They need healing from the results of sin in their lives. Whether it is their own sin or the sin of others, they are broken spiritually and need healing. They may be lame in their souls as a result of this sinful and fallen world. They are unable to see the truth that is in front of them because they have been living in darkness and the god of this world has blinded their minds.

"**Whose minds the god of this age has blinded**, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God,

should shine on them." **II Corinthians 4:4 (NKJV)**

Some come to church today because they are blind and lame spiritually and they need the healing that only Jesus can offer. That is a good and proper reason to come to church. The truth is that we are all here because we need spiritual healing. The church is not a place for those who are whole. It is a hospital for the sick spiritually.

"When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "**Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.**" **Mark 2:17 (NKJV)**

Fourth, some came to be taught. In Mark's account, we see that the people were astonished at the teaching of Jesus. Luke doesn't mention it in his account, but he ends the chapter by saying that Jesus taught in the temple daily and the people were very attentive to Him.

Jesus doesn't state that as a purpose for the temple, but His actions show that it was a purpose for it. It is obvious that many people were there to be taught and were glad to be taught by Jesus. Remember that the priests were to teach the people under the Law of Moses.

"10 "that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, 11 "and **that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken** to them by the hand of Moses." **Leviticus 10:10-11 (NKJV)**

"21 "No **priest** shall drink wine when he enters the inner court. 22 "They shall not take as wife a widow or a divorced woman, but take virgins of the descendants of the house of Israel, or widows of priests. 23 "And **they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.**" **Ezekiel 44:21-23 (NKJV)**

"Her heads judge for a bribe, **Her priests teach for pay**, And her

prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD, and say, "Is not the LORD among us? No harm can come upon us." **Micah 3:11 (NKJV)**

Note: The priests were supposed to teach but they were not supposed to do it for pay. They were already supported by the tithes of the people and their portion of the sacrifices the people brought. The priests in Micah's day were charging extra to do what they were already being supported to do. However, this does illustrate that the priests were to teach.

It was a bad thing when the priests were not teaching.

"For a long time Israel has been without the true God, **without a teaching priest**, and without law;" **II Chronicles 15:3 (NKJV)**

Many come to church today to be taught. This is a good and right reason to come to church. However, it is not the only good and right reason for coming.

Fifth, some came to pray.

Jesus makes it plain, by quoting from **Isaiah 56:7** that this was the intended purpose for the temple. While we don't see a particular group of people who were there specifically to pray, I believe it is implied that some were there for that reason. That is why Peter and John were going to the temple at the ninth hour when they saw the lame man.

"1 Now Peter **and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.** 2 And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; 3 who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms." **Acts 3:1-3 (NKJV)**

This group came with pure hearts to pray and worship God. That ought to be one of the main reasons why we

come to church today. Is that why you go to church today?

Sixth, Jesus came to heal and teach.

None of us are Jesus. We all need to be taught and to be healed spiritually. However, we are called to teach others.

"18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and **make disciples of all the nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 "**teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you**; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen." **Matthew 28:18-20 (NKJV)**

"For though **by this time you ought to be teachers**, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food." **Hebrews 5:12 (NKJV)**

We are all called to help heal the hurting and offer them comfort.

"3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our tribulation, **that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.**" **II Corinthians 1:3-4 (NKJV)**

You may come to church to be taught and to be healed. Jesus can do both of those things for you. But you also have a responsibility to do that for others to whatever extent you are able.

Too often distractions get in the way of our worship. The money changers got in the way of worship for the Jews. They were a big distraction. Sometimes those distractions began as helpful things but have taken over and crowded out our worship. Sometimes we just need to drive out the distractions so that real heartfelt worship can happen.

There is a popular song called *The Heart of Worship* by Matt Redman. It was written in the late 1990's when his home church got rid of their sound system and band for a while. They felt that they had lost sight of what worship was really about. So, they decided to get rid of anything that might distract them from true worship. You can see that in the lyrics of the song.

What distractions to our worship might we need to "drive out"? When Jesus drove out the money changers, several things happened. Some were angry and wanted Jesus gone. Some were taught. Some were healed. All were able to worship and pray. All could receive blessings from God.

When distractions to worship are removed today, some good things can and will happen. Some will get angry and want you gone. Some will be taught. Some will be healed spiritually. All can worship and pray. All can receive blessings from God.

Why do you go to church? Are you even going to church?

Poem – Going to Church

People go to Church
for many different reasons
Some because of guilt or fear
Some because of special seasons.

A few may go to church
because of pain or depression,
Some are trying to find a mate and
others to make an impression.

These are not good reasons,
nor should they ever be
God has the answer in His Word
So let's take a look and see.

For in the book of Genesis with the
making of Adam and Eve,
God created a family bond
But on HIM we must strongly cleave.

On the first of the week we assemble
to partake of the fruit of the vine,
According to John Chapter 15
we go to STAY JOINED to the vine.

God wants His people to gather,
in the assembly each and all
To keep our weekly commitment
so we don't turn from Him or fall.