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## ARE YOU A TINKERER?

*SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE*

Good Morning! Up here today I have some Tinker Toys. I grew up with these, and my kids now have some laying around. Tinker Toys were actually created way back in 1914 by a couple of guys in Evanston, Illinois. One of these men had seen some children playing with sticks and some empty spools of thread and this is why Tinker Toys look the way they do.

Now these things are great for tinkerers. You typically don't create things of substance with them, but you can create some complex stuff. For instance, Ferris wheels and windmills are common creations. One of my buddies actually created an engine differential just to see if he could. But overall you really don't really make anything of substance—they are simply for tinkering.

I think this is a good analogy for our lives. We do tinkering very well I think. We tinker around with all kinds of things. For instance, food and diets. We go on diets; we go off of diets. We try one here; we try one there. Or how about exercise? We're good at tinkering with exercise programs. If you go to a YMCA after New Year's, you can bet there will not be any room for you. But if you go in February, there is a lot of room. And, of course, gadgets are the new tinker toy. We add an app here. We delete an app there. We add a song here, delete a song there. They are great for tinkering. We can waste a lot of time tinkering on our gadgets these days.

This summer, I was disgusted with myself because I realized I was a tinkerer at crosswords. My grandfather instilled in me the virtue that you never look at the answers until you are done (and even then I think he just filled in every space whether it was right or not). But, I was on a plane over the summer, filling out the crossword in the seat back magazine. I didn't even get through five or six clues, and I found myself turning to the answers! I was absolutely horrified with myself! I was tinkering!

We can laugh at those examples, but the danger of this mindset is that it makes its way into our faith. We tinker with our faith. We take it lightly. We dabble here and dabble there, never taking any of it very seriously. We tinker with churches. We try one here, then try one there. We tinker with Sunday mornings. We go to one or two here, then one or two there, but never make it a priority. We tinker with disciplines. We try a little dab of this then a little dab of that because "a little dab'll do ya." But there's no substance to it, no depth to it and no lasting power in it. In the end, we simply go through the motions.

The same could be said of the people of God in the first century. They were simply tinkering around with their faith, going through the motions, and Christ had some strong words for them; but first He had some strong actions, as we will see today.

### Action in Jerusalem

After a week off we are back in the book of Luke. Two weeks ago we saw Jesus approach Jerusalem on a donkey's colt. Today Jesus

finally makes it into the city and goes straight into the Temple. Here we have what is probably the shortest text of our entire study of Luke:

**And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, saying to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers."**

**And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him, but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words. (Luke 19:45–48 ESV)**

### View of God?

To help us better understand this text this morning, let me ask you this: what is your view of God? This is an important question for us, because our view of God, in many ways, affects our behavior, including how we express our faith.

Let me share a couple common views of God and see what you think:

**The iGod:** A God who is very distant from us. He is out there somewhere in space listening to his iPod in his own world. This is a God who has abandoned His creation in order to listen to his favorite tunes. This view of God might lead to a joyless and dry life, and joyless and dry worship.

**The Genie God:** This God is the God we call on when we need Him. We keep him in our bottle until we really need Him, then we rub our bottle and bring Him out. We try to manipulate this God into doing whatever we want. You know the prayers to this God. They usually sound something like this: God, help me pass this test. OR God, help me nail this interview. OR God, help the Niners win today.

**And, lastly, the Mush God:** This is the God of play-doh. We mold Him and shape Him into whatever image we want. Typically, we shape Him into whatever fits into our world of tinker toys. We shave off those things we don't really like about Him because then, well, we don't have to change our lives.

In 1978, Nicholas Von Hoffman wrote an editorial for the Washington Post called "The Mush God". He said this:

The Mush God has been known to appear to millionaires on golf courses. He appears to politicians at ribbon-cutting ceremonies and to clergymen speaking the invocation on national TV at either Democratic or Republican conventions.

The Mush God has no theology to speak of, being a Cream of Wheat divinity. The Mush God has no particular credo, no tenets of faith, nothing that would make it difficult for believer and nonbeliever alike to lower one's head when the temporary chairman tells us that Mr. So-and-So will lead us in an innocuous,

harmless prayer, for this god of public occasions is not a jealous god.

The Mush God is a serviceable god whose laws are chiseled not on tablets but written on sand, open to amendment, qualification and erasure. This is a god that will compromise with you. People just love this Mush God because he is so very easy to get along with. What a convenient god!<sup>1</sup>

None of these views is anything like what we find in Scripture. There is no iGod or genie God. There is no mush God. What we find is a Majestic God.

A God who is HOLY. A God who is so holy that if you get too close, you may burn up. Get too close and you may die. God is other, and He's a little bit dangerous. He can be approached, but only with utmost reverence and awe. That's the God of the Bible.

On the lips of the seraphim in Isaiah is "Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of hosts." (6:3) The word 'holy' is repeated three times to convey the superlative. This God is not just holy, He is the most holy. And this holiness is experienced in a number of ways in the OT. In Exodus, the presence of God is experienced in sheer force, such as fire, earthquake, thunder and lightning. At the burning bush, Moses is told to remove his sandals, "for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." (Exod 3:5). In Nahum, "the mountains quake before Him" (1:5).

But, then there are the New Testament experiences—Jesus being God incarnate. In Revelation, John sees a vision of the glorified Christ on the island of Patmos. When he describes the vision, John says that he fell down as though dead (Rev 1:17). Or Peter in Luke chapter 5: after putting the net on the other side and catching loads of fish, Peter fell to the ground saying, "depart from me for I am a sinful man." (5:8). Or, after Jesus calms the storm, the disciples are frozen in reverence and awe. The Message says it this way, "They were in absolute awe, staggered, saying, 'Who is this, anyway?'" (Mark 4:41)

Indeed the God of the Bible is no Mush God. He is not a God to tinker around with. He is a God who takes your breath away, or as one person says, he is "too hot to handle."<sup>2</sup> This is the majestic God that accords all reverence, all worship, and all devotion.

## The Lamb & Lion

The context of our scripture today requires a few extra words because we have just seen Jesus approach Jerusalem, humble and gentle on a donkey's colt. It doesn't conjure up an image of majesty. He wept uncontrollably over the city out of a heart full of love and compassion. In fact, Jesus describes Himself as gentle and humble in heart, and it's through Him that we find rest for our souls. He gently loves us all, even though we are sinful and broken. But, with this love comes a hatred. It's a hatred of those things which cause us to be broken. As Kent Hughes says about this text we are in today, "Christ was displaying a great underlying truth: Love presupposes hatred. A love for the downtrodden, the poor and the oppressed also brings about a hatred for the conditions that caused their suffering."<sup>3</sup> In that sense, we see the majesty and ferocity of a lion. Our scene today displays the Lion of Judah.

CS Lewis captures this well with a scene from the Voyage of the Dawn Treader of the Narnia series. At the end of the book, Lucy, Edmund and Eustace are treated to a meal with a sparkling white

lamb. When this lamb is asked by Edmund if there is a way to Aslan's country from this world, the lamb responds,

'There is a way into my country from all the worlds,' but as he spoke, his sparkling white turned into gold as he grew and grew, and turned into Aslan himself, towering above them and scattering light from his mane.<sup>4</sup>

The lamb became a lion, and today, we see Jesus as the Lion of Judah in all of his majesty. He is still the lamb of God, and we have to balance both of these images.

## The Scene

Now, with that as a foundation, let's dig into our text today. Let me try to explain the scene a little bit. Luke doesn't give a lot of details but we can gather details from the other Gospels. Jesus comes into the Temple, expecting to see people praying and worshipping God. And, what does He find? He finds a lot of people, but they're not praying. It's a mad house.

## The Temple

Where are all of these people within the Temple? They are in the Court of the Gentiles, the largest section of the Temple. You may know that the Temple was made up of essentially four sections, moving from the least holy to the most holy: the Court of the Gentiles, where all Gentiles could go; the Court of the Women, which was accessible only to Jews; the Court of the Men, which was for all Jewish men; and finally the big building contained the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies which the High Priest would enter one day a year on the Day of Atonement. This scene though takes place in the Court of the Gentiles.

## The Pilgrims

Who all is there? First you have the pilgrims. It's Passover time so there are thousands and thousands of pilgrims in the city. Imagine Time Square on New Year's Eve. That's kind of how it might have felt. People everywhere, camping everywhere, crowds everywhere. There are a lot of people in the city, and the Temple would have been bustling.

According to Old Testament law, each pilgrim would need to obtain an unblemished animal for sacrifice in the Temple (cf. Lev 1:3). The animals used for sacrifice were pigeons/doves, sheep and cattle/oxen. It would be hard for a pilgrim to travel with an animal any distance, plus any animal they brought would probably get rejected by the High Priest. So, they needed to obtain one while in Jerusalem. And, it turns out that they could get one at the Temple.

## The Money-changers

They would first visit the money-changers. They are the banks. A pilgrim would arrive in Jerusalem with foreign money and they would need to exchange their coinage for Tyrian coinage, the only coinage allowed in the Temple. It is known through other sources that moneychangers were allowed to charge 12.5% for their services.

## The Merchants

Then they would go to the merchants to purchase the animal. The merchants would regularly charge 10% more for their animals, compared to what it would cost outside the city. So, now imagine this picture: Time Square with thousands and thousands of people all crowded together, each with a sheep or cow or a pigeon!

Can you imagine the stench? It would be awful. Records exist of transactions in which 3,000 livestock are brought to the Temple and sold for offerings at one time.<sup>5</sup>

So, as you can tell, this whole Temple enterprise had become very profitable. To the point that even Ananias, the high priest at the time, is called “the great procurer of money.”<sup>6</sup>

So, what you have here is not a Temple, it’s the first installment of Costco! Everything you need and more under one roof. What convenience! What help it must have been for the weary, tired travelers. They could simply stop in to Costco, I mean the Temple, exchange some money, grab their animal, go sacrifice it and be done with their duties just like that. Easy, efficient and convenient.

And, consider this: the Court of the Gentiles was the place for all peoples—all nations—to come and meet Israel’s God, Yahweh. And the place to pray and worship this Majestic God. And, what they find during Passover week is the first installment of Costco! Now, what do you think their view of God might be after seeing this Temple scene?

### The Lion of Judah

Well, Jesus walks in and shuts it down. In doing so, He quotes from Isaiah 56:7 saying, “My house shall be a house of prayer.” The context of Isaiah 56 is the welcoming of all foreigners to God’s Holy Mountain to meet Him. This is what the Temple was always supposed to be, a light to the nations.

The last part of his quote comes from Jeremiah 7:11, “but you have made it a den of robbers,” indicating that the Temple had been defiled. This quote comes directly from Jeremiah’s famous Temple sermon where Jeremiah warned the people of Israel who had embraced wickedness as a way of life but thought that just being Israelites and just being in the Temple would keep them safe.

And Jesus, the Lion of Judah, shuts it down.

It’s a shocking episode and it should shock us. But, what does it mean?

### The Truth

Jesus needs to remove the merchants and the moneychangers because they have defiled the Temple, and we’ll come back to that in a moment. But, there is a larger truth here. Jesus is also rejecting the entire sacrificial system, and in doing so, replacing the entire Temple with Himself. He does not just reform the Temple, He comes to replace it. In the book of John, Jesus says, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” (John 2:19) He, of course, is talking of the Temple of His body. In other words, He is saying, “I am the new Temple. I am the place where you meet God. I am the majestic God that accords all reverence, all worship and all devotion.” That is the truth in this passage.

Today, we live on the other side of the cross, the resurrection, the ascension and Pentecost, the four great events of history. The Spirit, the presence of this majestic God, has been poured out on all nations. So the temple, the presence of God, is now the place where the Holy Spirit resides, and that is within you and me. The house of God is now you and me. We are the house of God. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:16, “we are the temple of the living God.” And, therefore, our bodies—our very lives—are called to be houses of prayer. Is that how you would characterize your life? A house of prayer? A life of reverence and awe? If not, then what tables in your house need to be overturned to transform it into a house of prayer? In other words, how might we move out of a tinkering faith into a true, reverent, authentic faith?

I’m going to end this morning with a few suggestions.

### It’s Too Noisy!

Is your life too busy? Is your life too noisy? Let me ask you this, does this sound familiar?

On the go, on the road, on our last legs. Another day in the fast lane, always tuned in, plugged in, checking in. Computers. Tablets. Smartphones. Getting groceries, getting in shape, getting to bed. Eating. Working. Sleeping. REPEAT.

Reed Jolley shares a story of a pastor at a pastor’s conference speaking about how they were trying to get the men of their church to spend some time in solitude every day, and this pastor said what they were working on was 10 minutes a day. Only 10 minutes a day, and they were finding it nearly impossible!<sup>7</sup>

It’s not unlike our church staff meetings, where we regularly ask questions about how we can better serve you as a pastoral staff. Much of our laments fall on our own inadequacies, but it also falls on the busyness we sense in many of you. I’m just being honest with all of you; many times we don’t know what to do about it. We don’t know how to plan things for our church that fit into all of our schedules. But, maybe that’s the point. Maybe we shouldn’t be trying to fit the living, majestic God into our schedules. Shouldn’t it be the other way around? And I’m just as guilty as anyone.

Are our lives too noisy? Let me suggest this: If the outer courts of our lives are filled to capacity with noise, I would suggest that our inner court is also a mess, full of noise. So what can we do with the outer courts of our House of Prayer? I think we can look at this two ways. We can subtract things from our lives that are distracting us from Him, that are obstacles. And in doing so, we can add things to our lives that draw us closer to Him. I’m going to call these two movements de-noising and devoting.

### De-Noising:

De-noise: It’s a word that comes out of the audio world or the photography world. In photography images can be noisy, meaning they have dots or specks where there should be none. In other words, the images are degraded, dirty or grainy. When you de-noise a photo, you remove all those imperfections, those things that are not supposed to be there, resulting in a truer, more beautiful photo.

Where might we need to de-noise our lives? Here are a few thoughts:

You can probably guess where I’m going to go first: screens. Is our life too noisy with screens— ipods, iphones, ipads, laptops, desktops, TVs? Are we so preoccupied with screens that we never have space to meet with God? And sometimes I wonder if bringing them into church is more of a distraction than a help?

Is our life too noisy with the love of money that we don’t make space for God? In our text today, the merchants and moneychangers made time for money, but not for God.

Is our life too noisy with protected sin? There is something in our life that we know shouldn’t be there, and we are fighting to protect it with all of our energy. In that sense, we are tinkering with our faith.

Maybe the noise in our life is simply the noise of disinterest? We simply don’t care. We’re happy worshiping the Mush God and tinkering with our faith. We’re content just coming to church on Sundays, but beyond that, we don’t really think too much about our faith. If that’s the case, pray that God would remove your apathy and give you a desire for him.

**Devoting:**

Here are just a few thoughts:

**Devote time for a daily reorientation to Jesus:** Eugene Peterson says this:

It is necessary if we are going to truly live a Christian life, and not just use the word Christian to disguise our narcissistic attempts at spirituality without worshipping God ... it is necessary to return to square one, and adore God and listen to God... Daily reorientation to Jesus and His truths is required.<sup>8</sup>

How can we add space to our lives to do that, to daily reorient our lives to Him?

**Devote time for Sundays:** What is our view of Sunday mornings? Do we actually see it for what it is—an encounter with the living, majestic God? I know some of you do and that's awesome. What if we added a time to prepare ourselves for Sunday morning, as I know some of you do as well? Or what if we began doing what Psalm 95, our call worship, says. It paints a picture of people who are making their way to the Temple. As they ascend the steps into the sanctuary they exhort one another to rise to the occasion and get ready for meeting God in corporate worship. As Derek Kidner puts it, "Instead of complaining about parking or whatever else we complain about, what if we helped each other not drift into the service preoccupied or apathetic."<sup>9</sup>

**Devote time for family and community:** I was at a conference last week where Chap Clark, a popular youth worker, spoke to the needs of our youth. He used this picture of a polar bear on an iceberg. Why this picture? Because this is how our kids are growing up, as islands. The way he said it was that our children are growing up with a "lack of social capital".<sup>10</sup> In other words, kids are struggling to connect with each other because there aren't enough adults showing them how to live life. And, more importantly, they are struggling with their faith because they don't have enough adults showing them how to live life with God. And, this is for all of you singles as well. We need you to get involved with our young people. We need you to speak into our children's lives. What if we created margin in our lives to not only be with our families and but with our church community as well?

**Devote time for service:** In the book *Radical* by David Platt, he suggests that every single Christian should devote 2% of their time a year to service, whether that be within the church or outside the church. That works out to be about a week a year. I think there is wisdom there. I have found that the power in mission trips is that there is no noise, no distractions. You simply do what you were created to do: love God and love people, and it can be a powerful help in moving out of a tinkering faith.

Well, those are just a few thoughts. I need to close.

After Jesus shuts down the Temple, there are two dramatically different reactions. There are those who want to destroy Him, and there are those who are hanging on every word. May we fall on the side of those who hang on every word, such that we move out of tinkering and into true and authentic followers of this majestic God! Amen

1. Nicholas von Hoffman, *'Mush God' Is Happy To Oblige You* The Evening Independent, March 6, 1978, 8.

2. Reed Jolley. "Jesus in the Temple" n.p. Online: <http://www.sbcommunity.org/sermons/index/o/o/13/72/#recordings>

3. Kent Hughes. *John: That You May Believe* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 68

4. CS Lewis. *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1952), 245-6.

5. Kent Hughes. *Luke: That You May Know The Truth*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 246.

6. Ibid.

7. Reed Jolley. "Jesus in the Temple". @ 24:15

8. Iain Provan. "God and The Gods" at 1:01:20, Regent College Audio, October 15, 2003. Online: [www.regentaudio.com/products/god-and-the-gods](http://www.regentaudio.com/products/god-and-the-gods).

9. Derek Kidner. *Psalms 73-150* (Tyndale Commentaries). (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973), 344.

10. Chap Clarke. 2014. "A Biblical Theology of Intergenerational Ministry" presented at the Fuller Youth Institute Sticky Faith Summit Seminar, Pasadena, CA. October 8.