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Luke 19:45-48

The Certain Gospel: Consumer Christianity

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I want to start out by **playing a little game**. I want to see if you can guess each answer. I'm going to ask you a "how many" question and you're going to see if you know the right answer.

- How many cars and trucks did Americans buy in 2017? Answer: **17.3 million**
- How much did we spend on movie tickets domestically in 2017? Answer: **\$11 billion**
- How much did Americans spend on donuts in 2014? Answer: **\$581 million**
- How many Cokes are consumed each day globally? Answer: **1.9 billion**

Do you like to buy stuff? I do. I like going to the movies and my favorite **Dunkin Donut** is **glazed blueberry**. It seems like just about everyone likes to buy something. You don't even have to go to the store now. You can use your **smartphone** to shop or you can buy a thing called a **dash button** from **Amazon** so whenever you run low on **toothpaste** with just the press of a button you can have toothpaste delivered.

How often do we **treat God** this way? How often do we come to **church** this way? God, I'm here to put money in the **offering bag** so that in return you will give me... **dot-dot-dot**, fill in the blank. Or maybe that's how you use your **prayers**. God, I'm praying, now would you do what I want? The **University of North Carolina** asked **teenagers** about their view of **God** and **religion** and they found this.

"They concluded that most American teens view God as a "combination divine butler and cosmic therapist," and teens were "primarily concerned with one's own happiness in contrast to focusing on glorifying God, learning obedience, or serving others." This was the religion of most teens, the researchers concluded, because it is also the form of religion practiced by their parents. Americans want a god who will serve our needs, fix our problems, and help us achieve our goals."¹

Even in the church we unintentionally teach each other to look to God as the great provider of our wants and needs. When we come to church we expect **excellent music**, a **funny yet thought-provoking sermon**, and maybe a **free mug** and a **t-shirt too**. You can blame me for at least 3/4 of those things. I really wanted to make my big idea for this sermon, "Out with the **merch**. In with the **church**." If God is something we **use** to get what we really want, **safety, security, happiness, wealth**, then we are consuming God and our religion is not Christianity, but **consumer Christianity**. Today, I want to ask this question...

What's wrong with consumer Christianity?

What's wrong with God helping us out? What's wrong with only going to God when we're in a tough spot? What's wrong with God fitting into **my life**? Today in our text Jesus addresses what's wrong and it's **not pretty**. He has finally come to **Jerusalem** for his **crucifixion**. He's just ridden in on a donkey and the **next big thing** he does is go to the temple. He **walks up the steps** into the courtyard and he **makes a scene**.²

Luke 19:45-46 When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling.
46 "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be a house of prayer'; but you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" (NIV®)

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

Jesus drives out the **merchants** in Luke. Both **Matthew** and **Mark** tells us he drives out those who were **buying** too. For some reason Luke leaves them out. But both Matthew and Mark say Jesus “overturned the tables of the **money changers** and the benches of those selling **doves**” (Matt 11:12; Mark 11:15).

The money changers exchanged currencies from around the middle-east for the one type of currency the temple used, **Tyrian Shekels**. It wasn't a **Roman** coin because they hated their Romans oppressors, but it did have “the **image** of the god **Melkart**.”³ When Jesus says they're robbers, they would have been doing this by charging an **unfair fee** on the **exchange rate**. They were taking advantage of **pilgrims** who had come from far and wide to Jerusalem for **passover week**. That's the **first thing** that's wrong with consumer Christianity.

1) It takes advantage of others.

When we approach Christianity and Christ as a way to get ahead or make some money we're not honoring God. I recently heard of a church member (not from our church) **borrowing thousands** of dollars from other church members and not giving it back. I don't really think about this sort of thing being a possibility, but it is. People can use **the faith** as an excuse to take advantage of **the flock** financially. There's a reason we have a **benevolence fund**. If someone in the church **personally** asks you for a loan, I recommend you send them to the benevolence fund so we can **assess** and meet their need as a **church body**.

In **Matthew** and **Mark** Jesus targets the **dove sellers**. The people that bought doves for sacrifices were the **poor**. The **rich** could afford **calves** and **sheep**. **Jesus' parents** offer “a pair of doves or two young pigeons” when they come to consecrate him as a baby at the temple (Luke 2:24). At one point in Jewish history dove prices were so **exorbitant** a rabbi ruled that you only needed to buy **one** instead of the **five** required.⁴ Some people, robber merchants, weren't afraid to even take advantage of the **poor**.

When Jesus says, “you have made [my house] ‘a den of **robbers**” he's **quoting Jeremiah 7:11**. Right before this verse the prophet Jeremiah **calls out** those who “**oppress the foreigner**, the **fatherless** or the **widow**” (v6) and those who “**steal and murder**, commit **adultery** and **perjury**, burn incense to **Baal** and follow **others gods**” (v9). What makes someone a **robber** is **oppressing** the most **at-risk** in our communities, taking **advantage** of others for our own means, and worshipping idols. By **cleansing** the temple of these **merchants** Jesus is cleansing the temple of **oppressors** and **idolaters**. They took advantage of the **poor** and used money with the **image** of a **false God** to run the temple.

How do we unintentionally **oppress** others and commit **idolatry**? As the **pastor** of this church I want people to **attend regularly** and **consistently** because I think the Bible commands it in **Hebrews 10:25**, but I also have an **inner voice** that tells me, “The **bigger** the **crowd** the **better** the **preacher**.” My good desire can turn into **oppression** and **idolatry**. Are there ways that you use your church experience to **satisfy** your wants and worship other things beside God? Maybe you get all your **gossip** here or **serve** to feel like you're a good person or just want a **worship experience** that fits you. Gossip may be bad but serving and worship are good things. But if we want those things more than **Christ himself** we've become consumers and **idolaters**.

Consumer Christianity takes advantage of others.

2) It prevents others from worshipping.

There's some debate among scholars whether or not Jesus drove out the merchants in the **court of the gentiles**, which was the **outer plaza** around the temple used by the **non-Jews** to worship and pray, or in the **Royal Stoa**, which was a hall lined with **pillars** and was the more common **commercial center**. Because of Jesus' **focus on prayer** I think it was the court of the Gentiles. The temple system **required** some buying and selling of animals but Jesus is angry with them taking over the court of the Gentiles because it **prevents Gentiles** (non-Jews) from coming to worship and pray to the **one true God**.

When Jesus cries out, “My house will be a house of prayer” he’s quoting from the **prophet Isaiah**. But he’s actually quoting **Isaiah 56**, which is a prophecy for when there is **no temple** in Jerusalem because it has been **destroyed** and the Israelites have been taken into **exile**. In Isaiah 56 God is telling the people how they are to treat **foreigners** when they the temple is rebuilt. I want to read you two verses

Isaiah 56:6-7

6 And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord
to minister to him,
to love the name of the Lord,
and to be his servants,
all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it
and who hold fast to my covenant—
7 these I will bring to my holy mountain
and give them joy in my house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house will be called
a house of prayer for all nations.” (NIV®)

God promises that it’s not just the Israelites who will have the **privilege** of worshipping on the **holy mountain**, that’s the **temple mount** in **Jerusalem**. He also intends to bring in **foreigners**, or Gentiles, to worship at his house. Luke **cuts** the phrase “for all the nations” but Mark’s account includes it (Mark 11:15-18). Somewhere along the line the Jewish people lost sight of God’s purpose to bring in all the nations (Gen 12:2-3). They became **self-focused** and lost site of God’s **missional plans**. **Worship** became about what was **convenient for them** and **met their needs**, not about God’s plans.

I’m going to share a quote with you from Thom S. Rainer. He contrasts the difference between an **entitled church member** and a **Biblical church member**. It’s **pretty stiff**, but I want it to **match Jesus’ tone** that he must have had when he **cast** out those **moneychangers**.

The entitled church member treats the church more like a country club than a church. They view their financial offerings as dues to get perks and privileges. They make pastors and other church leaders cringe when they say, “You do know we pay your salary.”

The entitled church member is the antithesis of the biblical church member described in 1 Corinthians 12. The apostle Paul describes that type of church member as giving, functioning, and sacrificing. He or she is a member of the body of Christ for the greater good of the church. Others come first.

An entitled church member expects his worship style. She expects her color of the rooms and temperature in the worship center. They expect their pastor to jump when they call. After all, they think, it’s our church. We should be able to get what we want.

The entitled church member resists change constantly. These church members do not want anything that upsets their way of doing church to be introduced to the congregation. Church is about their perks, their desires, and their comfort.

Biblical church members will gladly accept change to reach people with the gospel, and to bring glory to God. Entitled church members are in churches to get their needs met.⁵

I share what he wrote **not** as an **accusation** or **condemnation**, but as a **challenge**. May we **never become** entitled church members but rather **Biblical** church members. And **if we are** a little entitled, let’s **confess** that

sin and start anew. If there is **anything that we are doing** that *prevents others from worshipping* may we address it. I don't want to be a consumer Christian. But if I'm a selfish person naturally, what's the antidote?

What is the antidote to consumer Christianity? Prayer.

Within Jesus' condemnation of their lack of prayer is a **positive call** to pray. He says "my house *will be* a house of prayer." That's a future indicative. It's going to happen! It will happen. My house WILL BE a house of prayer. What does this prayer do?

1) Prayer teaches us to love God and others.

Notice what happens the rest of this week as Jesus teaches in the temple.

Luke 19:47-48 Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. 48 Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words. (NIV®)

The religious people try to kill Jesus but all the people love Jesus. It doesn't say for sure but I like how the text says "**all the people.**" I bet that means **Gentiles** who had come to the court of the Gentiles to pray were hanging on Jesus' words too. The word "hung" means to "**depend.**" The people were depending and hanging on every word of Jesus because he taught truth. They had encountered the **self-serving consumeristic religion** of the temple, but when they encountered Jesus they encountered life. The world takes. Jesus gives. It's through prayer that we come to **love Jesus** and it's Jesus who **satisfies us**

It's true that when we pray if you're like me you probably start by telling God all of **your needs and wants**. That may be true **for years** and years but **over time** if we keep at it prayer will become less and **less about my needs and wants** and more about **just being with God** and **lifting up others**.

Pray for God to give each of us and the whole church a **greater love for him** and for **each other**. When we pray we spend time **with** God and it's being in a relationship with him that we **become complete**. *Prayer teaches us to love God and others*. How else does prayer **counteract** consumer Christianity? If **consumer Christianity prevents** others from **worshipping** and prayer is the **antidote**, then...

2) Prayer is worship.

When we pray to the one true God we are **worshipping him**. We are admitting that **he is God and we are not** and that nothing we can consume will ever **satisfy us**. We are admitting that **only he** can satisfy us. One of the effects of Jesus driving out the buyers and sellers is that at least for that day people **couldn't buy animals** and **sacrifice** them. By driving out the merchants Jesus is doing away with the **sacrificial system**. In a similar occasion in **John 2** when Jesus drives out the moneychangers the Jews seem to understand the **deeper authority** Jesus is claiming. **After** Jesus drove out the moneychangers...

John 2:18-22 The Jews then responded to him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"

19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

20 They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" 21 But the temple he had spoken of was his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. (NIV®)

Jesus can **drive out** the **lambs** and the **sheep** and the **doves** because he the **one perfect lamb we need**. We can try to make the **religious experience** we think we need or want but **all we really need is Jesus**. Jesus is our **perfect substitute**. He takes our **idolatry** and **selfishness** and he gives us the perfect **love of God** and perfect love of **others**. What in **religion** or in this **world** are you looking to **satisfy you**? Have you looked to the **cross**? Have you looked to the **lamb**?

The antidote to consumer Christianity is prayer.

I wonder what it would look like for us to **not consume** Christ or Christianity but to **go to prayer** and be filled with Christ. **If** all **55-ish** of us took time to pray once a day and be in a relationship with Christ Jesus this week that would be **385** moments of true Christianity (55x7 days). If we did this for the **whole month** that would be **1,705** moments of **anti-consumeristic true faith** (55x 31 days). If we did this every day, every month, for a whole year it would be **20,705** moments of talking to the father through prayer, of focusing on him instead of ourselves, of true worship (55x365 days).

There is an **antidote** to this consumeristic world that we live in. There is an antidote to the consumeristic religion we can so **easily** create. The antidote is **prayer**, prayer to our heavenly father through Christ Jesus. We don't need fast **cars**, big **trucks**, or to go to the **movies**. We don't need **donuts** or **Coke** or **Amazon dash buttons**. All we need is a **little lamb**, the perfect lamb, sacrificed for us. Let's **go to him** in prayer. *The antidote to consumer Christianity is prayer.*

*Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church.
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Jul 14, 2018

¹ Jethani, Skye. *What's Wrong with Religion?: 9 Things No One Told You about Faith* (Kindle Locations 319-323). Niddy Griddy Design, Inc.. Kindle Edition.

² Various accounts of Jesus driving out merchants: Luke 19:45-48; Matt 21:12-16; Mark 11:15-18; John 2:13-22

³ Wilkins, Michael J.. Matthew, Mark, *Luke: Volume One* (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Book 1) (Kindle Locations 8543-8548). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

⁴ Wilkins, Michael J.. (Kindle Locations 8552-8555).

⁵ Rainer, Thom S.. *Who Moved My Pulpit?: Leading Change in the Church* (Kindle Locations 276-287). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.