

combined Sunday School classes: Sunday School Drama

Sunday School Drama

Play given by the combined Sunday School classes on 22 June, 1997.

CHARACTERS:

Jesus:

Tobin

Reporter:

April

Merchant #1:

Jennifer

Merchant #2:

Sally

Merchant #3:

Elizabeth

Money changer:

Jessica

Guard:

Andrew

Thief:

Daniel

Customer (little girl):

Samantha

Rich Man:

John

[Jesus stands above the action and observes all that happens throughout scene.]

[Thief follows reporter through scene stealing during distraction.]

Reporter:

This is your roving reporter, Judith of Jerusalem. We are now entering into the time of one of our holiest of holidays, the Passover, and crowds of people from all over the country are streaming into the city. The priests estimate about 500,000 people will visit the Temple this week. Right now I am standing in the Court of the Gentiles at the Temple. This is the only section of the Temple where non-Jews are allowed, and it is also the area where animals can be purchased for sacrifice and Roman money can be changed for Temple money. There has recently been some controversy over the marketplace atmosphere of the Court, and some people claim that they have been cheated by the merchants who are sanctioned by the Temple priests. With the intense crowds, the tension over the domination of the Roman Empire, and the so-called prophets of the new sects, this area is certainly the most volatile area of the city right now. I'm here to talk to some of the merchants and bystanders to get their views of the situation.

[Moves to Merchant #1 – seller of food and drink.]

I see you are a food vendor. I understand that some people claim you overcharge them for your goods. What do you say to that?

Merchant #1:

I provide a holy service. People come here from very far away and have to spend all day at the Temple. Some people can't bring food or drink. I am here to help them.

Reporter:

Why do you charge so much?

Merchant #1:

I have to make a living. People who don't want to spend the money don't have to buy from me. I only charge what the market will bear.

Reporter [to Merchant #2]:

What about you?

Merchant #2:

"Get your souvenirs right here! Take away something to remember forever. This is a once in a lifetime experience!"

[To reporter] Do you want to buy something?

Reporter:

No thanks. Do you really think that selling souvenirs is

appropriate for such a holy place?

Merchant #2:

Of course! Taking home one of replica Temples holds a sacred memory in your home forever. It's a religious experience! Take a look! Aren't they unique? Only 3 shekels!

Reporter:

Well, they are nice ... OK. [Digs out 3 coins.]

Merchant #2:

[Circles through crowd] Get your souvenirs right here!

Customer:

[Comes in with lamb. Goes over to moneychanger.] Excuse me, but the priest inside told my father we couldn't use our money here – that I had to come to you to exchange for some Temple money. I have two Roman coins – my friend says I can get 5 Temple coins for each.

Moneychanger:

[Changes the sign to higher rate] Sorry, that's the old rate. The rate today is 2 shekels each.

Customer:

But this is all we have, and we're going to need the money for food for my whole family! Please give me more!

Moneychanger:

Sorry, but business is business.

Reporter [to Moneychanger]:

Why did you change the rate? Isn't that dishonest?

Moneychanger:

Most certainly not! This rate is actually the holiday rate. The lower rate is what we used when crowds were thinner and competition more difficult.

Reporter:

But why does the Temple allow people to be charged so much? Since the Temple requires it, shouldn't the Temple provide the service for no fee and keep the rate low and constant?

Moneychanger:

People should be grateful that we are here. We keep the Temple holy by making sure it is not contaminated by outside money. It's also the customers' patriotic duty. By keeping the Roman money out we keep our religion and our country pure.

Reporter [to Customer]:

Why are you here?

Customer:

My family has come from far away for a pilgrimage to the Holy Temple. We brought our very best lamb, one we love very much, for our sacrifice, but the priests say that our lamb is no good because it is not a lamb blessed by the priests. They say that I must come here and trade for a lamb that is blessed. But I don't know why my beautiful lamb is not good enough – I raised it so we could give our best to God. [To Merchant #3] Will you please trade my lamb for one the priests will take?

Merchant #3:

How much money do you have? [Looks in the customer's hand and takes the coins.] I'll take this.

Customer:

But that was the money we were going to use to buy food for the family. If you won't take my lamb in trade, would you please buy her so we can have some money?

Merchant #3 [taking the lamb]:

You don't understand. I need the lamb and the coins. I can't just trade a blessed lamb for a bad lamb without some compensation too. [Customer leaves upset.]

Rich man:

I need your best, most blessed lamb – one good enough for my position. [Pays Merchant #3 – leaves with girl's "unblessed" lamb.]

Reporter:

Wait! You just sold that man an unblessed lamb! [Thief robs rich man.]

Guard:

Stop thief! [Confronts and arrests thief.]

Jesus:

[Very angry.] Is it not written "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations"? But you have made it a den of thieves! [Comes down whipping and knocking over tables, scattering coins, clothes, animals. Chaos in crowd. He exits through cloakroom. Guard runs after him, returns empty-handed. Meanwhile, thief reappears.]

[Crowd is divided between rich people yelling "Radical, Zealot, Blasphemer" and poorer people exclaiming "About time!

The Temple is used as an excuse to cheat us!"]

Reporter:

Who was that person? Why did he do this?

Guard:

He's a criminal!

Customer:

That was Jesus! He is a great prophet. Some people say he is the Messiah, the Son of God! He says that the poorest of us will be among the greatest. I know he would never cheat us. He is angry because the Temple is used for unrighteous acts. I know he believes in the rituals of the Temple, for he preaches here sometimes. He is no Zealot and no politician either. He is a true man of God. He thinks that the priests and merchants are taking advantage of the people, making the sacred area profane and insulting God.

Merchant #1:

He's crazy! Look at all the damage he's done. He should be punished and made to pay us for all our losses.

Merchant #2:

"Get your souvenirs here! Remember this momentous occasion and incredible excitement with this unique Temple replica! Only undamaged merchandise left in the Court of the Gentiles!"

[Guard seizes thief again, starts to march him away. Reporter stops them.]

Reporter:

Why were you doing this?

Thief:

It felt like the Temple was easy. Besides, I thought they were all crooks anyway. But Jesus was right, it was an insult to God. And I was wrong to be part of this "den of thieves." But they're worse than I am – they're pretending to be honest and holy!

Reporter:

What will happen to you?

Thief:

I understand the Romans crucify thieves as a warning. If

you have any pull, I sure would appreciate the help. [Exits with guard.]

Merchant #3:

I wouldn't bother trying. He deserves everything he gets. If we're lucky we'll see him hang with that radical. Jesus is dangerous! He's going to get us all in trouble with the Romans. Maybe he's a subversive sent to get the Temple into trouble and allow the Romans to take over here. We'll all be arrested. We need to get rid of him.

Reporter to congregation:

What do you think? [Works the adult audience.]

Reporter:

Well, this has been Judith of Jerusalem with an unexpected news-breaking eyewitness report live from the scene at the Temple. Listen for more details at 11.

[Seekers] [Write us] [Seekers Sermons] [[Fair Use](#)] [Families and Children]

Footnote by David Lloyd

Background on Trade in the Temple

The "trade" in the Temple occurred in the Court of the Gentiles. It was related to paying the Temple tax and to obtaining the items needed to make sacrifices required by the Torah.

Moneychanging was an occupation that developed due to the Roman Empire. Each formerly independent kingdom/principedom/empire minted its own coins. As people were able to travel more by road and sea, they developed the need to exchange currency (some things haven't changed). Moneychangers had tables in most major towns, probably including the Greek town near Nazareth (whose ruins have recently been excavated) that Jesus knew. They had a table and stool, little stacks of different coins, possibly a scale, and

possibly small sacks. It's not clear if they had little wooden or metal strongboxes. If they had a stall for their table it probably consisted of four forked poles holding up a plank or canvas roof. They charged a commission of 2 to 4 %, similar to that charged in international airports and banks today.

It seems to have been a socially acceptable occupation, but there were a few who became money lenders and charged interest, possibly at a usurious rate. Charging interest on loans violated the Torah, and such people were deemed sinners.

Moneychanging in the Temple seemed to be limited to exchanging various coins for the Tyre silver that was the only acceptable coin for paying the Temple tax. (There does not seem to have been any moneylending going on in the Temple grounds.) Like all devout Jews, Jesus knew about and understood the necessity for paying the Temple tax to support the priests and Levites, who had no ancestral territory in Palestine that could be used to raise cash crops. On at least one occasion, he instructed a person he had healed to pay the Temple tax. The episode of the Pharisees trying to trick him into saying whether Jews should pay the tax to the Romans illustrates the need for the moneychangers in the Temple: the Roman coin had a portrait of the emperor (Caesar) with the phrase "the divine Caesar." This was blasphemy in Judaism; one couldn't pay a tax to the Temple of God with a coin that indicated Caesar was a god. So pay the tax to the Romans with a Roman coin, but pay the tax to God with the coin required under the Torah. And what would a Pharisee, a person who claimed to zealously observe the Torah be doing with a blasphemous coin? Jesus neatly tricked the Pharisees back.

Also in the Court of the Gentiles were those who sold doves, and some who sold sheep, for the ritual sacrifices. (Joseph and Mary sacrificed a dove at Jesus' circumcision.) Again, they had a table, maybe in a stall, with stacks of different coins, a scale, and maybe small sacks, and cages for the birds. This occupation was in more disrepute, since the

birds/animals were supposed to be without blemish and no doubt some people felt cheated. In addition, they may have charged different prices depending on the buyer's ability to pay (still a common practice in the Third World). (Imagine poor country folk, such as Jesus and the disciples, being quoted a price that they thought outrageous.) Plus, sheep are noisy, smelly, and dirty, and pigeons/doves can be noisy and leave a mess. (Imagine an area of Temple grounds that had a cacophony of people talking, negotiating/arguing, cooing birds, bleating sheep, clinking coins – that was the Court of the Gentiles.) Some of the proceeds probably went to the priests and Levites.

Since the ones selling birds and sheep would want to exchange their various coins, they probably used the moneychangers outside the Temple. If the latter were into moneylending, the birds and animal sellers might appear to some to be in cahoots with each other to cheat the poor pilgrims coming to Jerusalem.

Jesus held the Temple in high regard and held the priests and Levites as responsible for everything that occurred on its grounds. At this time the system of selecting priests had become one of the perks of the Sadducee party, and it is likely that some priests received their position through bribery of the Roman authorities. This would have increased their need for proceeds from the moneychangers and dove/sheep sellers, so the squeeze was on the pilgrims. This probably outraged Jesus as much as the commerce, noise, smell, etc.

All this came from the Interpreter's Bible Dictionary and other sources. (The film, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, gives an audiovisual depiction.)