

But Some of the Pharisees...

The Hardness of Heart and Its Implications

Luke 19:39 And some of **the Pharisees** in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.”

40 He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very **stones** would cry out.”

41 And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it,

42 saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.

43 For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side

44 and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one **stone** upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

45 And he entered the **temple** and began to drive out those who sold,

46 saying to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of robbers.”

47 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,

48 but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words.

Luke 19:39-48

That Old Dilemma

One of my jobs is to help people think as good as they can about the whole council of God (**Acts 20:27**). Today’s text provides an excellent opportunity for me to do this by

raising the question of a very old dilemma. For ages, it seems, people have been arguing about one particular doctrine that gets more dander up, more voices raised, more blood pressure boiling than any other. It has caused splits in marriages, friendships, churches, and even denominations. It seems like many are not even capable of having a calm, rational discussion about it. It's an age-old philosophical question that reaches deep into virtually every book of the Bible. It goes back far earlier into history, but is probably exemplified most famously in a fight that erupted around 400 AD between a bishop from North Africa and a monk from Ireland. Of this fight someone has said, "There has never, perhaps, been another crisis of equal importance in Church history in which the opponents have expressed the principles at issue so clearly and abstractly. The Arian dispute before the Nicene Council can alone be compared with it...."¹

I'm talking, of course, about Augustine and Pelagius. According to Adolph Harnack, Pelagius was "roused to anger by an inert Christendom, that excused itself by pleading the frailty of the flesh and the impossibility of fulfilling the

¹ Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma*, part 2, book 2, trans. James Millar (1898; New York: Dover, 1961), 169. Cited in R.C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy over Free Will*, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 34–35.

grievous commandments of God.” An honorable thing to be upset about, for sure. However, Pelagius “preached that God commanded nothing impossible, that man possessed the power of doing the good if only he willed, and that the weakness of the flesh was merely a pretext.”² In his famous *Confessions*, Augustine had written a little prayer, “Give me grace to do as you command, and command me to do what you will” (*Confessions* 10.29). Of all the things Augustine wrote, this one infuriated Pelagius very much. As Augustine later wrote, “When these words of mine were quoted one day at Rome in Pelagius’ presence by a fellow bishop and brother of mine, Pelagius was not able to bear them and, attacking them with considerable emotion, came close to fighting with him who had quoted them” (*On the Grace of Perseverance* 20.53).³ Such it was, such it is, and such it seems it shall ever be.

One scholar writes that “Pelagius felt that Augustine was minimizing the human capacity to do what is good.”⁴ It

² Harnack, 174.

³ See Augustine of Hippo, *Four Anti-Pelagian Writings*, ed. Thomas P. Halton, trans. John A. Mourant and William J. Collinge, vol. 86, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 323.

⁴ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, trans. Vernon J. Bourke, vol. 21, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1953), 298 n. 87.

sounds very much like the Apostle Paul's invisible opponents in Romans who were accusing him of saying, "Let us sin so that grace may increase." This is what it seems is often in the minds of those zealously trying to guard freewill from those they perceive as destroying it. For this is what the battle is fought over, you see. The idea of "freewill."

In his discussion of this controversy, Sproul explains that Pelagius was not upset about the second part of the prayer, but the first part, "Give me the grace to do what you command." Pelagius was incensed that Augustine was asking God for some sort of divine assistance to help him obey. Sproul puts Pelagius' thinking this way, "Is the assistance of grace necessary for a human being to obey God's commands? Or can those commands be obeyed without such assistance? For Pelagius the command to obey implies the ability to obey. This would be true, not only of the moral law of God, but also of the commands inherent in the gospel. If God commands people to believe in Christ, then they must have the power to believe in Christ without the aid of grace. If God commands

sinners to repent, they must have the ability to incline themselves to obey that command. Obedience does not in any way need to be ‘granted.’”⁵

Now, we need to be careful here. I think it is often our lack of precision that sometimes becomes the earthquake that precipitates the volcano that was already just about to blow going all Mt. St. Helens on someone. We need to think about something. These days, when someone brings this controversy up to me, I ask them a simple question up front. What is the opposite of freewill? “Predestination,” they will almost always say. I will then ask, “What is the opposite of predestination?” “Freewill,” they will say.

But is this really true? Is it really that we either have a freewill or God predestines? When frame it like this, which is exactly what Pelagius did, then you pit God against himself. How so? Because God is the one who gave humans freewill. So, if God predestines something then this goes against the very point of the freewill that he gave. Therefore, God doesn’t predestine.⁶ But, it isn’t just Pelagians or

⁵ Sproul, 34.

⁶ Those who realize that of course predestination is in the Bible understand that he must in fact predestine. So they try to move the problem in a variety of ways. Sometimes it will be that God only predestines a few things—such as Herod and Pilate killing Jesus. But that destroys the whole thing they are trying to say is the most important thing, for this means that in this one moment, God destroyed their freewill. If he can do it here, why not elsewhere? Others want to

the later Semi-Pelagians and Arminians who reason like this. **So do some on the other side.** Because they also think these are opposites, but instead of making freewill more important, they make predestination more important, they will simply say that freewill doesn't exist, because you can't have the two there simultaneously. In my opinion, this is what causes a majority of the emotional reactions that so many people have. They have created **a false dilemma.**

So let me re-ask the question. What is the opposite of predestination? Wouldn't it be *postdestination*? Now, that really isn't a word, is it? And yet, that makes sense. So what would *postdestination* be? It would be a destination that is chosen after the fact. But does that even make sense? Does one choose to fly to Hawaii after one has already flown there? Assuming we had free elections, do we choose the president after he is in office? That's what postdestination or postelection would be. But sometimes people will say, **“But God looks down the corridors of time to see what we will choose. Therefore, that is postdestination in a way. We**

say that God doesn't predestine individuals, only groups, or something like this. But this doesn't get them out of the problem, because groups are made up of individuals. And if there is any certainty at all in whatever the group is being predestined for, then it is certain of individuals within those groups. And if it is individuals, then those individuals were predestined.

chose it, God saw what we would choose, then he destined it after the fact.”

Besides the fact that this is still actually *predestination*, since God is still determining it before we actually do it, for sake of argument let's assume it is right. So let's ask the other question now. What's the opposite of freewill? Wouldn't it be *the bondage of the will*? Is the bondage of the will “predestination”? No, because it still focuses on the *human* will, not God's will. *The human will is real*, it's just that it's *in bondage to sin*. If it is bondage, then for a good outcome to be possible, predestination and its accompanying graces in our lives must therefore be necessary. You see? *Predestination isn't the opposite of freewill, it is the logical consequence* of a good and loving God knowing that we are in bondage to our own wills, reaching down and doing something for us that we are unable to do because of our slavery.⁷ If God really did look down the corridors of time, all he would see is rebellion and running from him, because that's what our bondage of the will creates.

⁷ It is important to note here, and I say this as someone who very much believes that God's sovereignty is the first-cause of those who go to hell, predestination is never the term used of someone going to hell. Why not? Because he doesn't need to predestine anything, they are already slaves to sin and will never choose him unless he changes their hearts. He is sovereign over this in that he could change their hearts but chooses not to. But this is never called “predestination.” Rather, it is *preterition*—the action of passing over or disregarding a matter.

One more short word about freewill. I said a moment ago that **God gave us freewill**. And he did. But there's **more than one way to think about this**. We can think about the bondage of the will, as we just did, or we can think about people doing exactly what they want, even when they are in bondage. When you do what you want, this is freewill, even if it is in slavery, because you are doing it because you will to do it. I'll talk about this more a little later. For now, it is enough to say that we can define freewill in very different ways. One is *the ability to do what you don't want to do*—to choose between two options out of indifference. **I do not believe this kind of freewill exists**, even for God, because everything we do arises out of motives. Another is *to do what you want to do*. And I believe **all culpable beings have this kind of freewill**, whether the will is in bondage or has been freed from sin. For, as Jonathan Edwards argued, everything we do comes out of the greatest motive and desire that we have at the moment we choose to do it. There is no such thing as doing something you don't want to do, because the second

you choose it, you wanted to do it more than the alternative.⁸

Regarding the bondage of the will, elsewhere Augustine wrote, “It is entirely true that all men have this in their power if they will; but ‘*the will is made ready by God*’ [Prov 8:35 LXX] and is strengthened by the gift of charity to such a degree that they have it in their power.”⁹ We indeed have a will, and even a freewill, if we define freewill as simply the ability to make voluntary decisions free from external constraint or coercion, i.e. self-activity.¹⁰ But it is freewill that is evil and therefore we do not have the good will that is needed unless God intervenes.

And this makes sense. For sometimes *we will what we cannot do*. Like, I will to be a billionaire, but I can’t do it. And sometimes *we can do what we do not will*. Like, I can drive myself into the side of a mountain at 120 mph, but I don’t want

⁸ See Jonathan Edwards, *The Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey (Yale University Press, 1957). For a great summary of this difficult book see James Montgomery Boice, *Romans: Justification by Faith*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991–), 300–02.

⁹ Saint Augustine, *The Retractions*, trans. by Sister Mary Inez Bogan (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1968), 42. Alternative translation in Augustine, *Genesis* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 36. Available at: <http://books.google.com/books?id=-mQWfS0QUukC&lpg=PA1&pg=PA36#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

¹⁰ This is how Sproul says Augustine defined it. See Sproul, 62.

to.¹¹ I said that our passage today gives me a prime excuse to discuss this topic, and more, to help us see the consequences of it in action. So let's look at it.

Luke 19:38-48 in Context

We are in **Luke 19:38-48**. In the ESV, **vv. 38-39** are sectioned off as belonging to **the previous story** of the Triumphant Entry of Jesus. This is because there are Pharisees in the crowd and as the disciples are all shouting, “**Hosanna to King David**,” they are absolutely enraged at this. Jesus then takes the opportunity to talk about **the stones crying out**, a complex metaphor that is quite fascinating.

But don't let the headings keep you from reading it all together. For in the very next breath, as he is drawing near

¹¹ “Someone will ask whether the faith itself, in which seems to be the beginning either of salvation, or of that series leading to salvation which I have just mentioned, is placed in our power. We shall see more easily, if we first examine with some care what “our power” means. Since, then, there are *two things*,—*will* and *ability*; it follows that not every one that has the will has therefore the ability also, nor has every one that possesses the ability the will also; for as we sometimes will what we cannot do, so also *we sometimes can do what we do not will*. From the words themselves when sufficiently considered, we shall detect, in the very ring of the terms, the derivation of *volition* [*voluntas*—choice, will, volition] *from willingness* [*velle*—wish, desire], and of *ability* [*potestas*—power, ability] *from ableness* [*posse*—to be able].” **Augustine of Hippo**, *A Treatise on the Spirit and the Letter*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Peter Holmes, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series, Volume V: Saint Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 106. Latin italics original. English italics mine.

to the city, Jesus begins to weep over it. It is this weeping over Jerusalem that becomes the reason for what we've just discussed. Jesus says, "*Would that you...*" (Luke 19:42). In Matthew's parallel, "*... and you were not willing*" (Matt 23:37). But returning to Luke, "*But now they are hidden from your eyes.*" This is literally our controversy. Jesus brings up *the will* and he brings up *God's sovereignty* at the very same time.

Before getting into that, let's continue thinking about the context. Jesus is drawing near to Jerusalem on his donkey. But just here, we need to see *two things that Luke does* which the other Gospels do not. First, he has Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, which Matthew also has (albeit a little later on). However, the closer parallel to what Matthew has heard was actually given by Luke way back in *Luke 13:34-35*. In other words, *Luke has this event twice*. The first time was a kind of foreshadowing that was in the context of *the Pharisees acting like sly foxes* attempting to trap him. Because he is telling it twice, we really need to look at the previous passage together with this one. When we do this, we see that Matthew's "*you were not willing*" is found there in Luke,

thus making our controversy all the more important to discuss because it is actually in Luke's Gospel (I skipped it at that time knowing this moment would come).

Second, because Luke has already discussed this earlier, he does not spend the time repeating himself, but instead has another piece of foreshadowing which he introduces now about [the destruction of Jerusalem](#). Jesus will talk about this in much more detail in Luke 21. But I think he raises it here because he wants us to understand [the severe consequences of hardened hearts against God](#). And since so many fail at a fundamental to get the controversy right, they will likewise fail to see the consequences properly, and thus, our need to discuss both together.

The consequences of a hardened heart can be seen in what will happen to Jerusalem, in at least one of the complex purposes of the stones crying out, and also in the final thing we will look at, Jesus entering the temple and driving out the money changes. To put it another way, hardened hearts against Jesus have [effects on nature, on cities, and on religion](#), all of which, of course, circle back on the individual whose heart (and will) was the beginning of those very problems in the first place.

The Stones Will Cry Out (Luke 19:39-40)

Let's look at them in order. Many disciples have followed Jesus down from the Mt. of Olives as he makes his way over to the temple a half-mile west. These are the ones shouting hosannas to the King of kings. But we read, “And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, rebuke your disciples’” (Luke 19:39). Cyril of Alexandria (375-444) is fantastic here,

The Pharisees truly complained because Christ was praised. They came near and said, “Rebuke your disciples.” O Pharisee, what wrong action did they do? What charge do you bring against the disciples or how would you rebuke them? They have not sinned in any way but have rather done what is praiseworthy. They extol as King and Lord the One the law had before pointed out by many symbols and types. The ancient company of the holy prophets had preached of him. You despised him and grieved him by your great jealousy. Your duty was to join the rest in their praises. *Your duty was to withdraw far from your innate wickedness and to change your way for the better. Your duty was to follow the sacred Scriptures and to thirst after the knowledge of the truth. You did not do this, but*

transferring your words to the contrary, you wanted to rebuke the heralds of the truth [italics mine].

(Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Luke*, Homily 130)

Ephrem the Syrian (b. 306) interprets their comment to Jesus as, “If these praises do not please you, make them keep silent.”¹² I think this is correct. And why do they say this? Because Jesus is accepting their praise as the one who fulfills the Psalm. In not rebuking them, Jesus is admitting that he believes that he is the coming Messiah, the King of David. They would use this against him later that week.

But Jesus knows their wicked hearts. He is not oblivious. And instead of rebuking them he answers, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out” (Luke 19:40). I said this is a complex metaphor. What is Jesus doing? Some think he is alluding to Habakkuk 2:11, “For the stone will cry out from the wall.” The context is the brutal Chaldeans who had ripped apart Jerusalem when they sacked the city. The prophet is predicting their eventual destruction hereby calling on inanimate objects to witness the divine judgment. If this is true, then Jesus may be comparing the Pharisees to the evil Babylonians. Ouch!

¹² Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron* 118.2.

Others think that the metaphor is straightforward, and that Jesus is saying that **you can't keep the creation from praising him**. “**Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fill it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy**” (Ps 96:11-12; cf. Isa 55:12). As someone has said, “**This moment is of such importance that it must find a response—if not a human one, then another.**”¹³ Your hardness of heart can't stop the creation from praising me. I am it's God and I am coming into my city to do God's will. The whole world will sing my praises, even if you refuse.

Finally, he may also be leveling **a veiled threat** about the destruction of the Jerusalem, even as some of the later Rabbis would use Habakkuk 2:11. For the record, these are not logically mutually exclusive. But this one ties in well to the next section of our passage.

Weeping Over Jerusalem and the Prophecy (Luke 19:41-44)

¹³ Kinman [1995: 100], who points to Cicero, *Pis.* 52 [**“Rome, which received me in such a manner that not only all men and all women of all classes, and ages, and orders of society, of every fortune and every rank, but that even the walls and houses of the city and temples appeared to be exulting.”**]. Cited in **David W. Pao** and Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Luke,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 356.

“*Would That You*”

Moving into the next section it says, “**And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it**” (Luke 19:41). It is from Luke that we get the language of **Jesus weeping over Jerusalem**. Jesus knows what has been happening with the Pharisees. He knows what the city itself is about to do to him. He knows even about his own disciples. But **what is Jerusalem?**

Is he only talking about the chosen people, the elect? This is where the earlier story needs to come into focus. “**O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!**” (Luke 13:34). Jesus is weeping over all of them. Jerusalem stands for **everyone who has ever been associated with this city, but especially those who are wicked**. Do you see the heart of the Savior here? He weeps over those who murdered the prophets. He weeps over the Pharisees who are even this very moment plotting to murder him. God loves all the sons of Adam, all the children of Jacob, even those he has not chosen to save.

Some think this is a contradiction, but they fail to grasp that there is a general **love of benevolence** and a **special love for a bride**. One does not hate all women because one loves one specially. But one does not love them in the same way. In the same way, Jesus is weeping over these people because he loves them.

This tension is very similar to the one we raised earlier and to which we will now look at from the text. “**But you were not willing**” is parallel to “*would that you.*” **Both presuppose a will in those who are evil.** Humans have wills, of course they do. Their wills are even free—free to act according to their nature. The nature of the will of a lion is that it will never eat straw, only meat. It *could* eat straw, but *it hates straw and loves meat*. That’s why it chooses the one over the other every time.

The nature of the will of a sinner is that it loves sin. Because someone’s will is in bondage to sin and Satan, it does not destroy that their actions are still free. Slaves are still slaves even if they obey their masters and do what the master bids. And they obey, *even if part of them does not want to*, because the consequences of not compel their will do obey. They’ve acted out of their highest desire, even if part of

them hates it. Humans apart from Christ as slaves to sin. We are free because we could do other, *if we so willed*. Pelagius got that part right. However, apart from Christ, we have the power, but not the will. Or, we have the will, but not the power. Pelagius got this profoundly wrong. Either way, humans are always responsible for their rebellion. This is why Jesus grieves. They have ability, but they *would* not.

And yet, the wicked do not have both at the same time. This can have several causes but the one mentioned here is, “*But now they are hidden from your eyes.*” What is hidden? That Christ is the one who makes for peace! Peace between God and man. God has a right to prevent someone from seeing if that person does not deserve to see. But no one deserves to see it, because all have fallen short of the glory of God. This is the tension then. He weeps even as he hides.

Of course, *this goes back a long way into the past* and God never saw fit to save everyone. But that’s his prerogative. He is not obligated to save the wicked. For, they are wicked. But he is gracious, and some of the wicked he does save. And that is his right. *Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some vessels for noble purposes and*

some for common use? Many are they that fall upon the rock of their dilemma and are crushed.

Not One Stone Upon Another

But let us consider a different rock that is crushed. In fact, there's going to be more than one before we are finished with Luke's Gospel. Jesus said that *the stones will cry out*. Now, he says, "For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:43-44). The stone here refers to *the temple*.

The "time of your visitation" refers to Jesus incarnation (Luke 1:68, 78), to his earthly ministry (7:16), and especially to *this moment* when their King rides into Jerusalem. But since there are clearly many who are celebrating this, it means that the majority of the city was not there praising the Lord. We'll see later what they were likely doing.

“The days will come upon you” is talking about [the destruction of Jerusalem](#) a generation from then in 70 AD. Now, he will talk much more specifically about this in a couple of days when he returns to the Mt. of Olives, so we won’t get into much more of that today. All I’ll say is that he is [quite specific](#) even here. Enemies will come. They will set up barricades and hem the people in so that they cannot get out. This is precisely what happened when Rome sacked the city. They tore the people and their children to the ground. A million Jews lost their lives in one of the most brutal attacks in world history. They were crushed, figuratively speaking, by the temple’s stones.

Rome destroyed the temple, and that is no small feat. The stones of the temple are gigantic, but that did not stop the army from demolishing the entire building. [Only part of the western wall remained](#), and that is perhaps because those stones were so large that to this day people do not know how they were put in place. Are these the stones that would cry out? Perhaps partly. Luke is clearly playing on the word “stone” throughout this and the previous discussion with the Pharisees.

There's more **stone-play** that we will see throughout the rest of this Gospel. When he gets into the longer discourse about Jerusalem Jesus will say, “**The days will come when there will not be left here *one stone upon another* that will not be thrown down**” (21:6). We just discussed this. In 20:6, when confronting the Pharisees again they say, “... **But if we say, ‘from man,’ all the people will *stone us* to death.**” A few verses later Jesus will say, “***The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone***” (17).¹⁴ At the resurrection, ***the stone of the tomb*** will be rolled away (24:2).

The stone is like the their heart and it would all be bad news, just like Jerusalem being destroyed, except that the **Stone itself becomes the gospel** and the gospel is the power of God that removes that stoney-heart. For if you hear that Jesus is the cornerstone and was rejected, if you know that he dies and is thrown into a tomb which is sealed by a stone, and if you see that the stone is rolled away by his own power and resurrection, through this miracle of the gospel, your hard heart towards God will be removed.

Don't sit there are wonder if you are elect and or if God has given you a will to believe. The Gospel is the power of

¹⁴ Ephrem, using Matthew, says the stones were crying out at the time of Jesus' crucifixion (Matt 27:51-52).

God, not your sitting there trying to figure out election. If you desire Christ, then God has given you this desire. **So believe!**

People like to make excuses that if God hardens hearts that nothing will matter, that the will is pointless. This was Pelagius' problem. But it isn't. And this is precisely why God gives us good news. It pleases God to use the good news of Jesus to remove the heart of stone and give a heart of flesh. Indeed, this is the very promise of **the new covenant** in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. **"I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh"** (**Ezek 11:19**; cf. **36:26**; **Jer 31:33**). You must have confidence that through the power of the Gospel, God loves to change wicked people into justified people, sinners into saints. Frankly, the very same thing that makes so many upset—predestination and God's sovereignty, is the very thing that makes it possible for anyone to be saved. For if God was not like this, if God did not predestine, who could be saved? Who *would* be saved? The Pharisees and the city of Jerusalem are Exhibits A and B. Later, even the followers of Christ, his

own disciples, demonstrate the truth as Exhibit C. The answer is, **no one**. But let's look at the last part of our passage today to see just how deep this problem goes.

A House of Prayer | A Den of Robbers (Luke 19:45-48)

Luke 19:45-48 focus our attention upon the very **temple** that Jesus has just predicted will be destroyed. This is where Jesus will now spend the next couple of chapters, as **vs. 47** begins, “**And he was teaching daily in the temple.**” In Luke's Gospel, it is the first time Jesus has been here since he was a child and was left by his parents who didn't realize he wasn't among the entourage heading back north.¹⁵

Of course, **it wasn't the first time** he's been here since then. John's Gospel gives us several trips. In perhaps the earliest, Jesus is teaching about destroying the temple and rebuilding it in three days. This will take place as a sign, he says, to prove his authority for taking out a **whip of cords and driving out the money-changers** in the temple (**John 2:13-25**).

¹⁵ Technically, he was here in that vision at the temptation (Luke 4:9-10). Of course, we know from John's Gospel that Jesus came to the temple every year, more than once, for the feasts. But Luke's design is to have Jesus only seen here at the end of the Gospel.

Something very similar now happens in Luke (and the Synoptics). “And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold” (Luke 19:45). The thing about John’s story is that it takes place at the beginning of John’s Gospel, not the end. This begs the question, one that skeptics who hate the Gospels love to raise. Was this the same event and John just completely blew it? Or was it two different events that were nearly the same thing?

A good argument can be made that they are separate events. It is highly plausible that this is an earlier account because the Pharisees tell Jesus that it has taken forty-six years to build this temple (John 2:20). Given that the temple construction began in 20/19 B.C. (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 15.380), that puts us around 27-28 A.D., three years before the most probable time of Jesus’ death. There seem to be two very different reactions by the Pharisees in the two temple accounts. In the first, Jesus is protesting corrupt trade; in the second he is threatening the entire sacrificial system. The first raises the Pharisees eyebrows; the second raises their dander. The former is a nuisance; the latter is threatening. The former causes them to question, the later makes them want to kill. Different OT texts are quoted in

the two stories. And so on. So, there is no need to see the Gospel accounts contradicting.¹⁶

I'm **not entirely convinced** of this, but that doesn't mean John just contradicted the Synoptics. I understand that John uses repetition throughout his writings, he doesn't actually give any timeframe for this event, and if he wants to use something at the end of Jesus' life here at the beginning as a kind of literary frame, that's fine by me. Of course, skeptics can't stand any idea of that. To them, it's only about finding ways to make the Gospel's contradict. And I bring this up because they have a kind of **hardness of heart** that equals that of the Pharisees. They are the people who run our ivory towers, our pillars of religion, our mainline churches, even many evangelical ones, and in this way are very much a kind of contemporary equivalent of Pharisees.

It's curious that Luke only tells us that Jesus **entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold**. This is shortened from Matthew and Mark (and John if it is the same event), where they tell us that he overturned the tables of the **money-changers** and the **seats of those who sold pigeons**,

¹⁶ See for example **Craig Blomberg**, *Historical Reliability of John's Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 90-91. This is a minority of scholarly opinion. **Calvin** also holds this view, but **Luther** thinks all refer to the same episode.

and would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple (**Matt 21:12; Mark 11:15-16; cf. John 2:14-15**).¹⁷

He does this, we are told, in fulfillment of Scripture. Actually, two. “It is written, ‘*My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a ‘den of robbers’*” (**Luke 19:46**). The house of prayer is taken from **Isaiah 56:7**, which expresses “the temple’s intended role as a religious focus for all nations (an especially appropriate allusion in the court of the Gentiles).”¹⁸ The den of robbers comes from **Jeremiah 7:11** and

¹⁷ **Going Deeper:** Believe it nor not, this was not necessarily evil. **Deuteronomy 14:24-26** gives permission for this very thing, “If the way is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe ... because *the place* is too far from you, which the LORD your God chooses, to set his name there, then you shall turn it into *money* and bind up the money in your hand and go to the place ... and spend the money for whatever you desire—*oxen* or *sheep* or *wine* or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves. And you shall eat there before the LORD your God and rejoice.” Clearly, Jesus and John have this passage in mind.

But this leaves us with a **question**. If these things were permitted by the law, why was Jesus so upset? What are those in the temple doing wrong? At the very least, what was going on must have been **highly disturbing**. I can tell you firsthand that with all the commotion that goes on in Jerusalem in our day, be it in the old city markets or down by the wailing wall, there is nothing about the place—because of all the activity—that makes it conducive to worship. It is just a clanging gong and a resounding cymbal of hustle and bustle, buying a selling. If we move all of that business into the temple, it only exacerbates the problem.

Jesus basically says as much when he tells the “**sellers of pigeons**” in **John 2:16**, “**Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house a trade.**” In line with our own tradition, Jesus was a great Reformer, a work which is never complete because we continue to sin. Jesus is telling these people that the “house of prayer” has become a house of commerce. As **D. A. Carson** says, “**Instead of the solemn dignity and the murmur of prayer, there is the bellowing of cattle and the bleating of sheep. Instead of brokenness and contrition, holy adoration and prolonged petition, there is noisy commerce.**”¹⁷ See **D. A. Carson**, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 179 and my sermon, “**The Final Temple (John 2:12-25)**,” *rbcnc.com* (1-22-2012).

¹⁸ **R. T. France**, *Luke*, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 311.

his great temple sermon which denounced the people's sinful behavior while claiming God's presence among them.¹⁹

But the idea also reminds us of his title as the “refiner” and “purifier” in **Malachi 3:1-3**, a passage that more than one person has thought of when reading this text. “The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple ... He is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD.” Then there's **Zechariah 14:21**, “And every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holy to the Lord of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and take of them and boil the meat of the sacrifice in them. And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day.”

There are all kinds of OT passages that relate to this, and the John story even quotes, “Zeal for your house will consume me” (**Ps 69:9**). Why? Because the stubborn, hard-heartedness of those who refuse to see Christ before their eyes turns religion upside-down. And Jesus will have none of this, for this is *his* house, *he* decreed that it would be for

¹⁹ Ibid.

the good of the nations, not for lining the pockets of priests. The Lord despises religion that fleeces the sheep while enriching the shepherds. It isn't that he hates religion, *as religion*, but the religion that he loves cares for others as opposed to oneself.

This obviously struck a chord with the people, for **Luke 19:48** says that “**all the people were hanging on his words.**” **They couldn't believe what he was saying.** They couldn't believe what he was doing. Who was this man from the north, so bold as to come into the holy city itself and start forcing reform?

Meanwhile, this **protected the Lord** for the time being. But from what? From “**Chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people who were seeking to destroy him**” (47). Why? Besides everything else that had happened between them the last three years including public humiliation, constant one-upping their arguments, and even magically passing through their midst, here it is because **he would not stop the people from claiming he was the King.** He was accepting their praise! That's **blasphemy.** Then he had the unmitigated gall to prance into the temple, drive out the

sellers, and then quote verses about this being his house! **Blasphemy.**

But why did they do this? Why did they react this way? It is because **they truly hated God.** And they could not more change this of themselves than a leopard can change its spots. If they had loved the Father they would have loved the Son. If they had loved God, they would have loved his laws, they would have obeyed them. If they had loved the Lord, they would have loved his prophecies and sought to find their fulfillment, even if it didn't meet their expectations. God comes before self.

All this was due to **their hardened wills**, enslaved to their selfish passions and lusts: the love of **money**, the love of **attention**, the love of **fame**, the love of **power**, the love of the **world**. These are the things that destroy the human will, causing it to choose wrong. There is no such thing as the neutral person. It doesn't exist. Not even the nicest pagans are ultimately neutral towards God. This is because there is no such thing as the sinless person—except Jesus Christ. **Our sin causes us to run from God like the robber runs from the police.**

We are not naturally inclined to love God or our neighbor. We are naturally inclined to love *ourselves*. This is where

Pelagius had it all wrong. He did not take into account **his own heart**. He did not see his own rebellion against God as he ought. Neither did the Pharisees. And for it, their entire religion was ruined. It was a sham, a joke, the opposite of true religion. And for it, their temple would be destroyed. Men may care about their magnificent buildings. Not God. They are only as good as the people inside them.

Even if they would have shut the people up, the stones themselves would have cried out in praise to Jesus. That's the lesson **they would not learn**. And Jesus wept over this hard truth. At the end of the day, the first cause of all things is God. But the instrumental cause, the responsible cause, the culpable cause of evil—is us.

Thank **God** that he sent his Only Begotten Son to be our King. Thank **Jesus** that he obeyed his Father in all things perfectly, where we fall short, so that we might be given grace. And thank the **Holy Spirit** who breathes on anyone he chooses through the word of God to bring them to new life with new affections, new desires, and new wills. See the love the Father has bestowed on us through this gift of the Son, the Spirit, and the Gospel. And do not harden yourself towards his grace. Hang on the words of Christ as if your very

life depended on it. In doing so, you may know that God has given you a new heart, faith, and has chosen you to be one of his children by his grace alone.

Luke 19:38-48	Luke 13	Matthew	Mark 11
39 And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples."			
40 He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."			
41 And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, 42 saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes."	34 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!	23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"	
43 For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side 44 and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."	35 Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' "	38 See, your house is left to you desolate. 39 For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' "	
45 And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold,		21:12 And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons.	15 And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 16 And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.
46 saying to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers."		13 He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."	17 And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."
47 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,			18 And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him,
48 but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words.			for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching.

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