

7 A Market Trader

(Matthew 21:10-13)

Well there was plenty turned up-side-down that day I tell you, plenty, and not just tables and chairs! I've had my stall for years, in fact my father had it before me and I'd helped him since I was a little boy. And there I was, all those years later, doing just what he did. Hoiking the price for those who knew no better, telling a little lie here, a little lie there. After all, pilgrims are such gullible people. All excited, filled with awe and wonder and all that stuff. Ideal people for pulling a fast one, for earning an easy buck if you can.

Oh come off it! Don't look down your nose at me like that. Do you blame me? You'd have done just the same in my position, well you would if you'd got the number of kids I have to feed.

Well that day was a strange day from the start. There was a strange feeling about the place. "Something in the air," Samuel said as he set up his stall next to mine. And through the morning things got stranger and stranger. There was noise and commotion. People rushing to and fro. Temple officials huddled in groups in animated and sometimes angry conversation. It felt as if something was about to happen, something beyond our control. And then it did.

He burst into the courtyard wielding some stick or something and shouted, shouted in a voice that seemed as if it shook the very foundations of this great temple it's self. And what he shouted? Well that's the thing, that's the thing about all of this. It's not what he did, overturning tables, scattering money everywhere, setting birds and goats and lambs free to fly and roam. No it's not all that, it's what he said:

"It is written, My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'"

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"A den of robbers"

I stood motionless as my stall went the way of all the rest, crashing to the ground. But that word, that word 'robbers.' It seemed to stick to me, it seemed to cover me, it seemed to work it's way under my skin. It was almost as if it was suddenly tattooed across my forehead for the whole world to see, 'robber.' Because suddenly that is what I knew I was. Suddenly I knew that everything I had built my life on, everything I thought was clever, everything I regarded as legitimate

and justified, was nothing but robbery, daylight robbery from those who came to my stall wanting to do nothing more than obey the law and worship God. And I had robbed them!

I watched him as he left through the other end of the court. There was complete chaos around me. People shouting, people fighting, and yet no one touched him, no one. No guards, no traders, no pilgrims, no one.

I followed the events of that week of course, who didn't? I was there in the square when they brought him out. I heard the priests and others turning the crowd against him. And I saw him dragged away, crossbar over his shoulder, to Golgotha, to the place of the skull.

And there they crucified him, between two robbers.

And there I heard his words, his words to a robber, a robber just like me. "I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

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And suddenly, as I gazed upon this dying man, suddenly I felt clean. That word seemed to be washed away, scrubbed from me, inside and out. I left my tears at the foot of his cross, I left my heart, my soul, my spirit, my all, at the foot of his cross, and now I am free! free from that crushing guilt, Free to know him, free to follow him, free to love him as I know he loves me.

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