

Zeal for My Father's House

John 2:12-17

43-9

In John chapter 2, verses 12 to 17, we read this: “After this He went down to Capernaum, He and His mother and His brothers and His disciples, and they stayed there a few days. The Passover of the Jews was near and Jesus went up to Jerusalem and He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves and the money changers seated at their tables. And He made a scourge of cords and drove them all out of the temple with the sheep and the oxen and He poured out the coins of the moneychangers and overturned their tables. And to those who were selling the doves, He said, ‘Take these things away, stop making My Father’s house a place of business.’ His disciples remembered that it was written, zeal for your house will consume Me.”

Now remember, the overarching purpose of John’s entire gospel is stated in chapter 20 and verse 31, and I remind you of it every time because it’s the reason for everything that John writes. You’re going to be able to quote this from memory, “These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” So he has a...an apologetic purpose, a polemic purpose to prove that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah. And then he has an evangelistic purpose, so that you will believe that and in believing that have eternal life. Everything in this gospel then is driven in the direction of proving the deity of Jesus Christ, proving that He is divine, that He is the Word made flesh, that He is God who was with God by whom everything that exists was created. All the way through by the action of Jesus, by the miracles of Jesus, by the works of Jesus, by the words of Jesus there is evidence of His deity.

Now when we come to the miracle that we just read, on the surface it may not appear as a miracle because nothing really obviously supernatural takes place as it does in a resurrection or a healing, or the casting out of demons, or the creation of wine as we saw in the first miracle in the prior passage. But this is nonetheless a miracle. It is a miracle of mammoth proportions, and I will try to help you to understand that. It is a miracle driven not by compassion, but driven by anger. The first miracle that John records and the beginning of miracles that Jesus did was a private miracle. It happened among family and friends; it happened in the little town of Cana nine miles out of Nazareth with people they knew and grew up with. Mary was there and the family of Jesus and the extended family, and this was a...this was the first miracle and it was sort of His embarkation point as He left thirty years of obscurity and did a miracle for family and friends.

The second miracle is not a private miracle; it’s not a family and friends miracle—this is a miracle in which tens of thousands of people participate, and they’re not watching and they’re not innocent bystanders. They’re in the middle of the drama and the power and the divine energy of this miracle. It is a miracle, as I said, not driven by compassion which is why Jesus made wine and why He casts out demons and why He heals sick people and why He raises dead people. Those are miracles of kindness and compassion. But at the beginning of His ministry and the end of His ministry, He did two miracles, essentially the same thing—He threw the entire mass of humanity at Passover out of

the temple. He did it at the beginning and did it at the end. Those were not miracles of compassion, those were miracles of holy anger and they were previews of future judgment, a judgment that would come in the destruction of Jerusalem temporarily and a judgment that will become a reality forever before the throne of God at the Great White Throne.

And what causes Jesus to do what He does here is an age-old problem and one that we must address as well. If you go back to Isaiah chapter 1, all the way back before the Babylonian captivity, way back into the era of Isaiah, you read this, coming from the mouth of the Lord, Isaiah 1:11, “What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?” Josephus says there would have been as many as a quarter of a million animal sacrifices offered at a Passover. Isaiah asks hundreds of years before, “What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me,” says the Lord, ‘I’ve had enough of burnt offering of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before Me, who requires of you this trampling of My courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer. Incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath, the calling of assemblies, I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts. They have become a burden to Me. I’m weary of bearing them. So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you. Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Come now and let us reason together,’ says the Lord, ‘though your sins are as scarlet they will be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. If you consent and obey, you will eat the best of the lamb. But if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword. Truly the mouth of the Lord has spoken.’”

That message could have been given by Jesus on the day He cleaned out the temple. It’s the exact same issue. It is an age-old problem of hypocrisy in Israel, false religion, superficial worship. And it infuriates Jesus because it is irreverent and it is blasphemous. In Amos the Lord says, “Stop your songs; I don’t want to hear your songs.” It’s a very appropriate passage for us as we come to the Lord’s Table because the Lord feels today and here and now exactly the way He did in Isaiah’s day and in our Lord Jesus’ day about false worship, about superficial worship, about hypocrisy.

So let’s look at this story and how it applies to us. Verse 12 says, “He went down to Capernaum”; that’s 16 miles from Nazareth. He went and His mother went and His brothers, John tells us later in chapter 7. They were not believers in Him. The family goes, and then His disciples—Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathanael, James and John—so far are following Jesus. They all head down to Capernaum, that little village on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. That little village, by the way, was a place where Jesus did so many miracles that their unbelief is worse than Sodom and Gomorrah. Jesus said in Matthew 11 that if it had been done in Sodom and Gomorrah what was done in Capernaum, they would have repented. Jesus spent a few days there this time and later in His ministry—many many months there doing miracles.

On this occasion they stay only a few days because they’re headed to Jerusalem for the Passover. They go toward Capernaum and then, verse 13, they arrive at the Passover because it’s near and Jesus then comes with the entourage and everybody else to Jerusalem. The Passover of the Jews, that’s an annual feast followed by another feast of seven days of unleavened bread that God mandated. You remember when Israel was delivered from Egypt—Exodus chapter 12—they were told the last plague is going to be the death of the firstborn. The angel of death is going to come and kill all the firstborn. And if you want the angel of death to pass over your house, then sacrifice a lamb,

sprinkle its blood on the doorposts and the crosspiece, eat a meal together and have unleavened bread, get ready to go. The angel of death will pass over you and deliver you from judgment if the blood is on the door. That was a symbol of the work that Messiah would do when He put His blood on a cross and provided deliverance from divine judgment. So the Passover is instituted in Exodus 12. In Exodus 23 God mandates that they keep that Passover every year along with a couple of other feasts as well.

Jesus, always obedient to the Word of God, always obedient through everything in the Old Testament, fulfilled all righteousness, Scripture says. He obeyed everything that was moral in the Law of God, everything that was religious in the Law of God, and everything that was ceremonial in the Law of God, everything that was practical, whatever it was that was written by God and prescribed for the people of Israel, Jesus did it. And so, as He always did, He comes to the Passover. In fact, His ministry begins at a Passover, and it ends at a Passover. And at both of those Passovers, the first and the last, He does the same action against the Temple. At the first Passover, He cleanses the Temple to publicly begin His ministry. At the last, He cleanses the Temple to publicly end His ministry; then becomes the Passover Lamb. And in between during His ministry, there will be two other Passovers. John tells us about one in chapter 6, and another in chapter 11. He always kept the Passover, always.

This time as He enters into the Temple to begin His ministry, and by the way, He had been there every year of His life. But this time He had engaged in His ministry, and so He comes with a different mindset. We have a glimpse of Him coming there, don't we, when He was twelve. And at that point He's only asking questions, trying to get answers out of the leaders in the Temple. But this time He's entered upon His messianic ministry and He's going to do His Father's business. This is the first act of His Father's business. They have turned His Father's house into a place of business, but He's going to do His Father's business.

He goes in. He found, verse 14, in the Temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers seated at their tables. And you have to understand a little bit about this. I don't know if I can paint the whole picture in the brief time that I have. The number as to the population of Jerusalem at the time of Jesus, a little bit hard to identify. But if you look hard enough and sort of put everything together, it appears as if the city of Jerusalem could have had a hundred to three hundred thousand inhabitants normally, we don't know exactly. Several hundred thousand seems to be a safe number. However, at Passover that number would be expanded to read a million. Josephus goes so far as to say 2.7 million, but that's because he multiplies the number of sacrifices by ten. I don't know how legitimate that would be, but let's say for the sake of being conservative there are a million people—and I think that's pretty safe—that have literally descended upon the city of Jerusalem for the Passover and the subsequent feast. That means that every room in every inn and every room that wasn't a room for occupancy was turned into a room for occupancy. Every...every extra room in every single home was filled and people were packed into rooms in multiples to get this mass of people in. The population fourfold what it normally would be, let's say.

And a focal point of all the activity of these million people is the Temple, and the Temple courtyard, the outside courtyard, the Court of the Gentiles as it was called, would be only acres, only some number of acres at that time, and it would have to absorb this mass of humanity coming there. How many animals did they slaughter? Was Josephus right in saying 250 thousand? The slaughter of the animals officially took place at three o'clock, between three o'clock and six o'clock on the afternoon of the Passover. But if there were that many animals, they might have started slaughtering them

even earlier, and there would be people coming and going for the purpose of bringing their sacrifice to be offered.

But there was more than that going on. Apparently by this time and there's some historical indications of this, the people who used to buy and sell outside the Temple have now moved inside the Courtyard. This may well be because the High Priest has now taken over this business for his own aggrandizement. In fact, they were called the Bazars of Annas. So when you get inside, you not only have this crush of humanity of people coming and going and some people coming ostensibly to talk to God, to praise God, to worship God, to see the Temple as pilgrims from other places. We can't even estimate how many people were there. It would be well into the tens or twenties of thousands of people at any given point in time.

In the middle of this there are people selling oxen, sheep and doves which means there are oxen, sheep and doves there. And there are moneychangers seated at their tables. The reason they were selling sacrifices is because people coming from long distances would find it inconvenient and cumbersome to take animals with them, and so they would purchase an animal when they arrived there. And experience told them that if they brought an animal, it would probably be rejected by the folks that checked out the suitability of the animal and if the animal was refused, they would have to buy one of the temple animals anyway. That's kind of how they did their business. They rejected the ones that were brought so they could make money on exorbitant prices on the ones they sold.

Also, by the way, everybody had to pay for the animal and the temple tax in the currency that was accepted in Israel. And these people would be from other countries, have different currency, would have to be changed. Some historians say the exchange rate went over ten percent, twelve percent of the coin exchange. So there was business going on there in the temple. Extortion, really, Matthew 21, when Jesus does this again, He says, "You've turned My Father's house into a den of thieves, robbers."

So into this crushing place with tens of thousands of people and animals, buyers and sellers, under the control of about three hundred Temple police, if you add all the folks who were responsible to keep the peace in there and to manage the crowd control and to make sure that they took care of any incidents and disruptions, you'd get about three hundred, maybe a little less, maybe two hundred and seventy. Fort Antonia was next to the Temple and the Romans had built it high so they could sit on the top and watch what was going on. If needed, they could dispatch a Roman garrison to go down there and put down any kind of action that was threatening. So it was a well secured place and, after all, it was a temple and people were supposed to be worshiping there. So they were supposed to maintain a proper attitude.

Jesus sees all of this, selling sacrificial animals, money changing, and He sees that they have totally polluted His Father's house. Their hearts are the same as the hearts of the people to whom Isaiah wrote, to whom Amos wrote. Their hearts are like Psalm 51:16 to 19, you can read that at your own leisure. They're irreverent. Should have been a place of repentance, a place of reverence, a place of humility, a place of worship, a place of praise; it's a chaotic marketplace—abusive commerce and corruption marked that place. Nothing...say that advisedly...nothing enraged Jesus with holy anger and fury like irreverence. And He did His most severe action in these two incidents in His life. All the rest of the time it was compassion and mercy. Here it was divine fury, divine fury. These are the most severe things Jesus did in His entire life and they were done against hypocritical worship.

The Jews expected the Messiah to come and attack the Gentiles. Instead, the Messiah came and attacked them. And He attacked them at their best. He attacked them in the middle of their worship, at their high point, the Passover, in the Temple. They expected a conquering warrior for sure, but who would come after the nations that had abused them, mistreated them and were currently occupying them. But instead He sends an unmistakable message that judgment is coming on them, not their enemies. In fact, at the end of His ministry after doing the same thing again, He sat and looked at the Temple and told His disciples that this thing is coming down and not one stone will be left on another, 70 A.D. It happened and it is no more to this day.

Well, Jesus saw all of this and in holy fury He acted. Verse 15, “He made a scourge of cords.” Cords would be lying all over the place because there were animals everywhere and the animals were always tied to ropes and they would be also tied to crates, to keep the crates closed or to carry the crates that the birds were in. And He was picking up some of these cords and braiding them into a scourge. It doesn’t seem much of a weapon against tens of thousands of people who were all going to have plenty of reason to resist what you’re doing. Now remember, this is an unknown man, this is the beginning of His ministry...this is the beginning. They don’t have any history of Jesus to expect anything. They don’t know who He is. He is just a man; He’s just a man at the Passover, perhaps recognizable as a Galilean by the way He dressed. Put some little ropes together, makes a little whip. And then He unleashes miracle power. There is no human explanation for what happened. The miracle is in these words, “And drove them all out of the Temple.”

Again I remind you how understated the miracles of Scripture are. There’s no lightning, there’s no thunder, there’s no angelic fanfare, no trumpets blow. He just drove them all out. Just an unimaginable act of power.

How did He do it? Well it’s sort of the reverse of what happened in Galilee when they tried to kill Him and He disappeared. You remember that? He was in the middle of a crowd; they wanted to stone Him and He left. This time He’s in the middle and they leave. All the animals leave, all the people with the doves grab their crates and leave. He flips over all the tables of the moneychangers. They scramble to get whatever they can and they evacuate the place to such...in such an orderly fashion that we don’t even have any word that the Romans turned a garrison loose on the crowd. We have no instruction in Scripture to indicate that anybody was injured, anybody was hurt. I’m sure some people bumped into counters and tripped over tables and bumped into animals and bruised their knees and all of that kind of thing. This was not an act of cruelty on people. This was an act of judgment on a system of religion.

I know the Roman Catholic Church uses this as a justification in the Middle Ages for the Inquisition and torture and imprisonment and execution. But Jesus did no harm to people. He attacked the system. The merchants would want to stop Him. The Temple police would feel completely responsible to stop Him. The crowd would want to stop. All it would take was one big burly guy to wrap his arms around Him and say, “Whoa, whoa, what are you trying to do, buddy?” And a few other people would grab Him and they’d take the same cords that He had made His little whip from and they’d tie His hands up and say, “We’ve got to deal with this guy. That doesn’t happen. This is miraculous power. This is crowd control, the likes of which has no human explanation. He goes from this very private family miracle to this massive public miracle in which tens of thousands of people participate and no one can do anything. Unparalleled display of divine force creates an evacuation as the merchants frantically chase their beasts, as the money changers scramble to grab what they can and everybody’s completely obedient. This is a preview of the power that Jesus has to judge—the

inescapable power of His judgment. “You have polluted,” He says, “My Father’s house.” You have corrupted My Father’s house. This is the loyal Son of God and He is, first of all, loyal to His Father, loyal to His Father. He will do this on a massive scale at His Second Coming. At a massive scale He will do this, only there at His Second Coming there will be death, there will be death. Revelation says a sword will come out of His mouth and there will be a slaughter, the likes of which the world has never seen.

“My Father is being dishonored by what you are doing.” “My Father”—what a statement. The Jews didn’t say that about God. That would be presumptuous. John 5:18, “For this reason the Jews were seeking to kill Him because He not only was breaking the Sabbath but was calling God His own Father. And they said, “If You call God Your Father, You make Yourself equal with God.” That’s My authority for doing this, He says. “I’m one with God, and You’re desecrating God.”

Did things like this ever happen in the Temple? Yes they did. There’s a book called *The Jews at the Time of Jesus*. It’s written by a man named Wylan, W-y-l-e-n, and he says in there, and this is a quote, “Such incidents were not unusual as trouble in the Temple.” And he gives one very interesting one. The high priest was in the Temple at one of these events and the Jews were very unhappy with the high priest. And so they started throwing lemons at Him, blasting the high priest with lemons. He unleashed His private mercenaries, His mercenary army, and according to the record, slaughtered the people in the courtyard in the multiple thousands for throwing lemons at the high priest. That’s a far cry from what our Lord does. He doesn’t kill anybody, but He does more than throw lemons at the high priest because He doesn’t like the high priest. He pronounces judgment on the entire religious system, priests and people.

Verse 17 then says, “His disciples remembered that it was written.” Now you’ve got to remember, these six men were really true Old Testament believers. They were followers of John the Baptist, preparing for the Messiah. And John it was, you remember, who said, “Follow Christ,” and they had followed Him. They have been with Him now for a while, a week at least between when they first started following Him and had the wedding at Cana and now a few days more. They know their Old Testament. And when they see Jesus do this, they remember a verse; it’s Psalm 69:9. This is the verse they remembered: “Zeal for Your house will consume me.” They know that passage. Psalm 69 was written by David. And David was calling the people to true worship, that’s the scene. David was calling the people to true worship and what He was getting back was resistance and hatred and hostility. The people were in the same condition then that they are in Jesus’ time. But David is doing his best to call them back to faithfulness. And David says they’re mistreating me, they’re hating me; and then he says in verse 9 of Psalm 69, “But zeal for Your house has consumed me and the reproaches of those who reproach You are fallen on me.”

I have to do what I do because I feel the pain when You’re dishonored. That’s what that means: my passion for Your house consumes me. The reproaches that fall on You, fall on me. When somebody criticizes You, when somebody dishonors You, I feel the pain. And by the way, that’s when you know you’re spiritually mature; when God is dishonored and you feel the pain. When God is dishonored and you feel the pain. And they think of David. Wow! When he saw God dishonored, he felt the pain. And they see Jesus doing the same thing. That psalm is messianic in that sense. Here is Jesus acting like David, the same devotion to the glory of God and the honor of His house and reverence. And Jesus felt the pain far more than David. And David couldn’t seem to do anything about it, not like this. Jesus is consumed with this same truth—God is to be glorified. God is to be glorified. And He was not being glorified there and Jesus basically declares the whole thing irreverent, blasphemous.

So what does that have to do with us? There's no Temple anymore. Oh, at least there's no building that is the Temple, but there is a temple. We are the Temple, aren't we? Turn to 1 Peter 4 and we'll wrap up there, and then we'll share in the Lord's Table together. First Peter 4, verse 17, "For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God and it begins with us first." Time for judgment to begin with the household of God. Who...who is that; what is that? Listen to Ephesians 2:19, "You are fellow citizens with the saints and you are God's household." The judgment begins with the house of God. We are the Temple of the living God, He indwells His church. And it is time for judgment to begin here and this is where we come to grips with that, right at this table. And I'll show you that. Turn to 1 Corinthians 11. This is where Paul institutes the Lord's Table, repeating what our Lord did in the night of the Passover. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:27, "Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup in an unworthy manner shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." That's a frightening thing if you come to this table in an unworthy manner, that is celebrating the death of Christ for sin while holding on to sin, if you come in a hypocritical manner, you're guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. "So let a man examine himself and in so doing eat the bread and drink the cup, do some heart examination, for he who eats and drinks eat and drinks judgment to himself."

And then verse 31, "If we judge ourselves rightly, we will not be judged." So judgment begins in the church, in the household of God, and here is where it starts. If we judge ourselves, we won't be judged. That's what it's saying. The Lord's Table then becomes the point of our initial self-judgment. When we are judged, Paul says, we are disciplined by the Lord, not condemned with the world. There's no condemnation to those who are in Christ. But judgment begins here so that we don't become disciplined by the Lord. And this is where the judgment starts. If we examine ourselves and come in a worthy manner, then there's no further judgment—that judgment stands as the final judgment. If we don't judge ourselves rightly and discern our condition and come in a pure way, then we are exposed to the judgment of God in forms of discipline. And that's why we come to the Lord's Table. We come to be judged if we do not judge ourselves. So when you come to this table you are saying to the Lord, "I'm exposed at this point, to Your judgment if I don't examine my own heart and honestly confess my own sin."

What would happen if the Lord showed up here? Would He do something like He did then? I think there might be many churches where He would. He is here and He will judge those who will not examine themselves and repent. So we invite you to do that. Let's pray.

Father, again we come before You fearing that our familiarity with these things keeps us from a genuine examination of heart. Show us anything that's wrong in our lives and help us to confess and yield to everything that displeases You. Forgive us, cleanse us, wash us. May we be honest in that self-examination, honest as we repent so that we might not be in a position to be disciplined. We want Your favor and we want the joy of obedience. And You've put this table in the life of the church as the point at which that judgment takes place—that self-judgment, that honesty of heart that protects us from Your divine discipline. Open our hearts, show us what we need to give to You, let go of, confess that we might honor You even as we partake. Amen.

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