

Sermon March 3 John 2:13-22

This week, we join Jesus in the temple, and today's passage from John's gospel account finds itself smack dab during the final events in the life of Jesus related to Holy Week. The passage is fitting because it describes the temple during a time of preparation for the weekly Sabbath, just as the season of Lent helps us prepare for Easter. We see a virtually unknown Jesus early in his Judean public ministry going up to Jerusalem to Herod's temple, where Jews traveled to purify themselves for the Passover celebration. The many people who gathered in the temple were completely unaware there was anything wrong. John records Jesus arriving to find merchants with their animals, moneychangers exchanging coins with those seeking to pay the temple tax, and tradespeople seeking priests to complete sacrificial rituals. The issue here is the extortion and racketeering: It's crowding out the only space available to the Gentiles for prayer. The temple is a Holy place for those gathering to seek and honor God through rituals and repentance.

Although all the other gospels record some account of the temple cleansing, they differ in the facts. John, it appears, was more interested in the truth than in the facts, supremely interested in telling all who would hear that Jesus spiritually cleansed the Temple. This visit to Jerusalem and the temple at the beginning of Christ's ministry is recorded only by John, as is true with many of the other events and discourses in this Gospel. The cleansing of the temple is not about this image of getting a broom out and sweeping the floors, but instead, Jesus rejects the outer area of the temple known as the Court of the Gentiles. The Temple grounds were a place to transact business, but the place smelled of the barnyard, sounded like a cattle market, was filled with noise and commotion, and was the scene of many a scam. The Passover, the Jewish festival commemorating Israel's deliverance from bondage in Egypt, was near. Jesus went up to Jerusalem, not from south to north, but up into the higher ground. In this last section of chapter 2, John highlights three attributes of Jesus that confirm why he came—his passion for reverence, His power of resurrection, and His willingness to give His life a ransom for many.

Suddenly, Jesus appeared after beginning his ministry and declared his presence by insisting on greater purity in the temple and insisting on removing sin in the temple worship. Religion had become materialistic, and the temple of God had become a "robbers' den." Although what Jesus does looks outrageous where a few scholars might believe that Jesus was an angry maniac who had come to disrupt worship with his radical actions because of the gravity of the situation. No, Jesus' zeal was out of godly jealousy fixed on how to prepare for a holy day. What we need to understand is that he, Jesus, is the location of God's glory rather than the temple building in which he stands. **Jesus was righteously purging His Father's house of its impure worship.** Jesus' anger was righteous. Jesus was provoked by the merchants exploiting those who had come to God's house of prayer and worship. Although God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and plentiful in mercy, He will eventually step in when people continue to do what is evil in the Lord's sight.

One Hebrew scholar suggests that Jesus' zeal was to purify the temple from ungodly men. We read in verse 17 that Jesus' disciples remember that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." Jesus' zeal was like the flame of a candle that consumed his heart. Zeal for God is

so little understood by the world, and when zeal eats us up, the world seeks to destroy us like a roaring lion. What consumes Jesus? A love for His Father's house.

Let's pause here and pray.

Heavenly Father, we come to you today, asking that you will fill us with hunger, with a burning zeal to keep our eyes, hearts, and thoughts on you. Teach us, guide us, and fill us with a clear understanding of what your will is in our lives. May every worldly desire fade away, and let our lives be a clear reflection of who we are to those around us. In this, we pray in the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

As time continues in this world of products, I have become a bit more skeptical of over-the-air public ministries that have become little more than marketplaces for religion. We live in an increasingly technological age, and all types of media play an ever-growing role in church worship services. I've found that Jesus' passion for the proper worship of God is not always convenient because worship demands true devotion and self-sacrifice. We know this by the rows of empty seats. I see ministries spending a great deal of their air time discussing premiums and offers we can receive by sending in a donation that will be used to continue and increase programming so that more people can be contacted to send more money. Jesus would not condemn all fund-raising, but when worship services are broadcast for no apparent reason other than to raise money, we should be suspect.

However, the Bible gives guidelines to worship, which are found in Hebrews 10:19-25.

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

We, as Christians, must live in the world, but we should not let the world live in us. In essence, Jesus says, stop making my Father's house a crooked place of business. Imagine those in the Temple hearing Jesus referring to the Temple as His Father's house, clearly implying that he, Jesus, claimed to be the Son of God, making himself equal with God. Even as a child, in Luke 2:49, Jesus asked his parents why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in my Father's house?

Here is a thought. Where is God's temple today treasured? Well, it is you! Your body! I'm sorry to burst your bubble if you think that the temple is a building. In 1 Corinthians 3:16, “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” And so, this begs the question, “Are you consumed with zeal for the holiness of Christ's Temple, your body?” God has in mind a temple within us where he can be glorified, where our deepest human

desires will find satisfaction and fulfillment, and that folks requires cleansing of sin. Let's face it: some people get upset at God for this, for we feel God should settle for what we think is holy enough.

You know I love to research questions, and as a pastor, I've heard it all, and one of this week's questions should concern all of us. The question? What is the greatest threat to today's evangelical church that poisons and infiltrates the body? What do you think is the greatest threat? Would you choose racism, conspiracy theories, government overreach, sexual immorality, biblical illiteracy, and the list goes on? It's hard to agree. I, for one, would have to agree with Dr. R.C. Sproul that the gospel itself is at stake. The church's witness to biblical truth is jeopardized simply because of the straightforward reality of that widespread biblical illiteracy and that there are no moral absolutes that apply to everyone all the time. Secondly, we are witness to the pull of secularism among younger Americans, who are less likely to select God as the basis of truth.

Truth is a purpose, and truth is a person; in John 14:6, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me." This is how Jesus defined Himself. Truth is a Word, and Truth is a book – it is the Bible. God's Word is truth. Who is worthy of worship? The Father, who is the truth.

Jesus was zealous for the purity of worship – worship that he was going to make universally available through his death. Only by destroying the old system, destroying the temple, would Jesus be able to offer all believers personal access to God. Only by fulfilling the system of sacrifice could he become the perfect and final sacrifice for all humanity. The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple (of Herod), and will You raise it up in three days?"

We see Jesus zealous about breaking down the barriers, excluding anyone from the presence of God. His entire life, death, resurrection, and ascension were about making God's presence in our home. It is the atonement in a nutshell. As the late Christian evangelical scholar and professor of the New Testament, George Beasley-Murray, summarizes, "The risen Lord is the place where the glory of God is revealed, where his forgiveness and renewal are experienced, and where fellowship with God is grounded and forever maintained."

What John wants us to remember is that we are dealing with a God of reality, a God who cannot be fooled, a God who will always deal in loving forgiveness, and with anyone who does not defend evil.

In closing, as we walk the path to Jerusalem during Lent, we join crowds of pilgrims remembering God's salvation. We, too, should be careful of missing God's earth-shattering word in our midst. Remember that Jesus is much bigger than any building on this earth. Rather than coming to a physical temple, this church building, we need instead to come to worship Jesus in Spirit and truth wherever we might be. The actual temple is you, for He deposited His Spirit within your heart. If our faith is to grow, we need to remember the cross and the empty tomb. We know the time is coming when Jesus will change everything. Jesus cleanses the temple of our hearts each day. We need to shine His light while there is still hope for all to repent. We need to spread the Good News while there is still time. He is coming soon, so blessed are those who

obey the written Word of God. As we leave here today, may the zeal for the Father's house consume you, a zeal for God's Word and zeal for God's heart for the hurting. Amen.