

## John 2:12-25

### Lessons from Our Savior's Zeal

*The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up – v. 17.*

It's not uncommon in our day for people to have preconceived notions about Christ. Just as surely as man demonstrates his fallen nature by declaring how God must be and how God must run the universe, so do men also have ideas of their own about how Christ must be if they're going to believe in Him. The verses that are before us this morning very often serve to smash such idols found in men's imaginations.

The common notion of a Jesus who is never anything but soft spoken and gentle and kind isn't sure what to make of a militant Jesus who in His righteous indignation drives out the animals from the temple and turns over the tables of the money changers. If this was a onetime incident in the time of Christ perhaps it would be tempting in the judgment of some to expunge the narrative from Scripture altogether under the guise that this kind of action is just too uncharacteristic of Christ. This event must have been added to Scripture perhaps by some militant Essene who gloried in such a thing.

But as most commentators recognize, this was not a one time incident during Christ's time in this world. The accounts we have in all 3 of the other gospels take place near the end of Christ's time in this world. This account in John's gospel clearly takes place near the beginning of Christ's earthly ministry. It follows right on the heels of His beginning of miracles which we studied last time. And so it seems that these two purges of the temple function as bookends as it were to Christ's time in this world.

And as some commentators point out, the strength of inbred sin in man is so strong that not long after this purging of the temple the first time the commercial merchandising from within the temple was up and running again. So what about this righteous indignation of Christ? In a sense there's no denying that it is uncharacteristic of Christ. When Christ says in Mt. 11:28 *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.* Does this narrative in John 2 and Mt. 21 and Mk. 11 and Lk. 19 really fit the bill so to speak?

I'm personally glad that Jesus purged the temple twice and that we have the account of such purgings in each of the 4 gospels. It leaves no room for doubt that this is indeed the work of Christ. He was provoked to this righteous indignation. The narrative itself provides the answer of what drove His action. Verse 17 tells us *And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.* This is a quote from Psalm 69. Arguably Christ is fulfilling prophecy by His action. But it would be a mistake to assume that He's engaged in this harsh action simply to fulfill prophecy. No, He was driven by a zeal for His Father's house. He was jealous for His Father's honor.

And I think it's worth noting that it wasn't so much the activity as it was the location of that activity that so moved Christ to do what He did. I won't take the time to go there just

now but if you want to follow up this study this morning on your own time then turn up Deut. 14:22ff and you'll see that God actually made provision for those who had to travel a long way to come to Jerusalem for the Passover. *And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from thee, which the LORD thy God shall choose to set his name there, when the LORD thy God hath blessed thee: 25 Then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose.*

So the activity taking place in the temple was not in and of itself illegitimate activity. And collecting the temple tax through this action of the moneychangers was not illegitimate activity either. Exod. 30 calls for such a tax to be paid. So what about Christ's action of driving out the animals and turning over the tables? What about His zeal for His Father's house? I'd like to look at Christ's zeal this morning. There is a time and place for such zeal to be exercised by the Christian. But alas, unlike our sinless Savior, I'm afraid we have too much of a tendency to be carried away in our zeal.

I'm reminded of the time when Christ and His disciples approached Samaria in Luke 9 and they were not received by the Samaritans. In response to their rejection we read in Lk. 9:54 *And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? Was this holy zeal? Was this the same zeal that Christ manifests in Jn. 2? Definitely not for Christ goes on to say to them *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them* (Lk. 9:55,56).*

So there's good zeal and there's bad zeal and having the carnal natures that we have even as Christians we have to be very careful and on our guard when it comes to our zeal. So let's look at the narrative, then, from John 2:12-25 and from this narrative I want you to consider with me:

## The Lessons that Spring from Christ's Zeal

### I. The Lord Hates Irreverence

I pointed out a moment ago that the activity itself of selling animals for sacrifice and collecting the temple tax were perfectly legitimate activities. One commentator has captured the problem in this scene in Jn. 2 very well when he states in his heading: **Legitimate Activities; Inappropriate Place.** Listen to this explanation – this is from RC Sproul's commentary on John's gospel:

The critical words in this verse are "in the temple." The oxen, the sheep, the doves, and so forth were being bought and sold in the temple, and the money changers were practicing their trade there. If these activities had been going on outside the temple, there is every reason to believe that Jesus would have done nothing. But He took issue with the fact that these things were going on inside the temple precincts.

Why was the livestock there and why were the money changers there? The answer is simple. At the Passover, every pilgrim was required to sacrifice an animal. However, it was very difficult for the people who came to Jerusalem from the outer villages of Israel to bring their livestock with them. It was much easier for them to purchase the animals that were necessary for the sacrifices when they arrived in Jerusalem. The money changers were there because a temple tax had to be paid at this time, and the temple authorities were very particular about what kind of coinage was acceptable the currency had to be minted from the purest silver that could be found. Unfortunately, there were numerous types of currency and coinage in Israel at this time, and some of them were very impure. Seeing a business opportunity, money changers had set up shop to exchange local currencies for the official currency for the tax. For this service, they received a commission, which, some say, may have been as high as twelve percent.

Nevertheless, each of these activities was a service to the people who were coming to the temple. Prior to this time, the booths for the sale of the animals and the exchanging of the money had been set up across the Kidron Valley, up on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, significantly removed from the temple complex. But by Jesus' time, for the sake of convenience, the outer court, the court of the Gentiles, had been transformed from a place of worship and prayer to a place of commerce. As noted above, it was this inappropriate location for these legitimate activities that so incensed Jesus. Thus, when He came into the house of God and saw that it was being used for something other than that for which it had been consecrated, He fashioned his whip and took action.

Imagine if you went to church on a Sunday morning and went into the sanctuary to pray, but you couldn't focus your thoughts because of the loud and persistent bleating of sheep and goats. That's what was going on in the temple. The sacred grounds that had been set apart for worship had become chaotic. Yes, people's needs were being met. I'm sure the temple authorities were saying, "We're just trying to be relevant; we're being seeker-sensitive sensitive for those who can't bring their lambs from home and who need their money exchanged." But in their efforts to make these procedures easy and convenient for the people, they had impacted the people's ability to worship.

Think for a moment on the history of the temple, not just this temple but all the temples in Jewish history. You'd have to start with the tabernacle in the wilderness. That's where God met with Moses. I'm reminded of the scene in Exodus 33 where the people had sinned and Moses went into the tabernacle to intercede for them. There was a great awareness on the part of the people that they deserved to die for their sins. And so we read in such a context in Ex 33:8 *And it came to pass, when Moses went out unto the tabernacle, [that] all the people rose up, and stood every man [at] his tent door, and looked after Moses, until he was gone into the tabernacle.*

There was reverence and humility on that occasion wasn't there? And when the temple was built in Solomon's day we have the account of the dedication of that temple and how the Lord's glory filled the place in such a way that the priests were unable to minister. That temple became a place that was marked by the peculiar glory of God. And when the

temple was rebuilt after the Jews time in exile there came a word from the Lord with regard to that temple in Haggai 2:9 *The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.* This is the temple that existed in Christ's day, a temple that had been greatly enhanced and made, I suppose, to be much closer to Solomon's temple during those days.

So when you begin to see how the temple was associated with the glory of God and that the temple was designated as a place of worship, worship that should have been taking place with an awareness of that glory then you begin to see how Christ would become provoked when reverence had given way to convenience and commerce.

And don't we have to concede that reverence is conspicuous by its absence in many churches and in the lives of many Christians today? The emphasis is so much on being casual and informal and relevant that the glory of God has become irrelevant. Christ is no more pleased with pragmatism and convenience in the church today than He was in the days He walked this earth.

So how should you and I practice zeal today? We realize, of course, that there is no temple today the way there was in Christ's day. The building that we meet in I don't think strictly speaking would be called a temple (although some churches use that name). Whether or not the church building is regarded as a temple or not it is a place where the people of God meet with Christ and the same spirit of reverence that has characterized true worship in every age should certainly characterize our worship in the sanctuary.

This is the place that we meet to worship Christ and that should mean something, indeed it should mean a lot. So we want to be careful to maintain humility and reverence. Not that worship should be a heavy spirited dreadful thing. It should be joyful. We are after all the redeemed of Christ. We've been purchased by His blood. Our sins have been forgiven. The joy of the Lord should be our strength in all things and especially in worship but it should be a joy that is tempered with the solemnity of worship.

I preached at the Wheeler Mission a week ago Friday night and my text was Psalm 2. In the course of that message I made application from the advice given to the kings and the rulers of the earth in vv. 10,11 *Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. 11 Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.* There's the fear of the Lord – rejoicing but with trembling. Rejoicing in salvation but trembling to think of where you were headed and what Christ bore for you. That's the kind of thing that Christ was and is very jealous for.

But before I leave this point let me make another point of application. We know that today it's the people of God themselves that make up the temple of God and we know that on a personal level your body is a temple of God. Christ expounded the kind of zeal that should be manifested toward the temple of your body when He said in the Sermon on the Mount in Mt. 5:29ff *If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. 30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from*

*thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*

I don't believe the Lord was teaching that we should physically mutilate ourselves but He was most certainly teaching that we should exercise great zeal when it comes to dealing with the sins committed in our bodies. Don't take sin lightly. Don't excuse sin too easily. When we studied that portion in the Sermon on the Mount a number of years ago I made the application from these words of Christ that we should preach to ourselves when we sin. Indeed preach fire and brimstone to ourselves when it comes to our sin. And look to Christ not only to forgive you your sins but plead with Him earnestly to grant you the enabling power to overcome your sins.

So that's the first lesson that we draw from Christ's zeal. The Lord hates irreverence and all manner of uncleanness. The Lord is not pleased when we forget the glorious and majestic and holy nature of the God we worship and serve. And that's what happened in Jerusalem. The Jews had forgotten their theology.

The next lesson I want to draw your attention comes more from the narrative than it comes directly from Christ's zeal although there is a connection to His zeal nevertheless as well as an application that we can make to our own zeal. The next lesson is simply this:

## II. The Lord's Word Comes to Fruition in Our Lives at Various Times

Twice in this narrative we have statements about the disciples *remembering* the Word of God or the Scriptures:

*Jn. 2:17 And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.*

*Jn. 2:22 When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.*

In the first instance we're not given a specific time reference as to when they remembered what was written. It's possible that either during or immediately after the incident of Christ driving out the animals and turning over the tables the disciples may have thought on the phrase from Psalm 69:9 *For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.* Or perhaps it was much later when they would have reflected on this notable event in the life of Christ and at that time remembered what was written.

There's no doubt that in the second reference it was much later even following Christ's resurrection that they remembered the Scripture as well as Jesus word. We read in Jn. 2 how the Jews approached Christ and demanded a sign from Him in order to prove that He had the authority to drive out the animals and turn over the tables. And Christ says to them in v. 19 *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*

I think it's worth noting with regard to this statement that the Jews took Christ literally when He was using the word *temple* metaphorically. Isn't it interesting that with such an

emphasis placed the literal interpretation of the Bible we find Christ being mistaken because He was taken literally. I've wondered at times if *literal interpretation* is the best phrase we can use to describe the way we interpret the Bible. I've wondered at times if the phrase *natural interpretation* wouldn't be a better way to describe our interpretation method.

At any rate v. 22 makes it very clear that at a much later date following Christ's resurrection from the grave the disciples remembered this incident and they remembered Christ's response to their demand for a sign and they remembered in close connection with Christ's words the Scriptures also. The Scripture they may have remembered is suggested by commentators as being Psalm 16:10 *For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.*

This is the very text that Peter would preach on the Day of Pentecost and Paul would also preach it in Acts 13 and in both cases the text from Psalm 16:10 is utilized to prove and proclaim the resurrection of Christ from the dead. I love the explanation and application that J.C. Ryle gives of these verses. I can do no better than to cite his words for you:

"We are told that our Lord said to the Jews, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." John informs us distinctly that "He spoke of the temple of His body," that he referred to His own resurrection. Yet the meaning of the sentence was not understood by our Lord's disciples at the time that it was spoken. It was not until "He was risen from the dead," three years after the events here described, that the full significance of the sentence flashed on their hearts. For three years it was a dark and useless saying to them. For three years it lay sleeping in their minds, like a seed in a tomb, and bore no fruit. But at the end of that time the darkness passed away. They saw the application of their Master's words, and as they saw it were confirmed in their faith. "They remembered that He had said this," and as they remembered "they believed."

Isn't this a perfect illustration right from the Word of God itself to show how *faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God* (Rom. 10:17). Now listen to the application Ryle draws from this incident of the disciples remembering the Scriptures:

"It is a comfortable and cheering thought, that the same kind of thing that happened to the disciples is often going on at the present day. The sermons that are preached to apparently heedless ears in churches, are not all lost and thrown away. The instruction that is given in schools and pastoral visits, is not all wasted and forgotten. The texts that are taught by parents to children are not all taught in vain. There is often a resurrection of sermons, and texts, and instruction, after an interval of many years. The good seed sometimes springs up after he that sowed it has been long dead and gone. Let preachers go on preaching, and teachers go on teaching, and parents go on training up children in the way they should go. Let them sow the good seed of Bible truth in faith and patience. Their labor is not in vain in the Lord. Their words are remembered far more than they think, and will yet spring up "after many days."

Here then is another lesson we can draw from the narrative that pertains to our Zeal. Be zealous to sow the good seed of God's Word. Be zealous to sow it to your own heart. You may not see immediate benefit but you will certainly be doing your soul good for the future. I remember Dr. Allison describing Bible reading and Scripture memorization as a process of plowing furrows in the mind. And by constantly reading and reviewing and reciting and memorizing Scripture we make those furrows deep.

When you see this phenomenon on the part of the disciples taking place you're taught that the impact of Bible reading and memorization may not be immediate. I'm afraid there's a tendency at times on the part of Christians to come to church and expect your soul to soar to the 7<sup>th</sup> heaven when you listen to the Sunday School lessons or the morning and afternoon sermons. And when following so long a period of time you don't have those euphoric experiences you mistakenly think that your time in church was in vain. And you become tempted to find another church that you hope will bring about that sense of euphoria that you've known along the way.

It's good to keep in mind, therefore, that while those mountain-top experiences with the Lord are great there also comes the time when you have to come down from the mountain back to the plain. We read earlier in the service the account of 3 of the disciples in the mount of Transfiguration with Christ. And I think you can draw legitimate analogies from the glorious event that there are times when our souls do soar we the Holy Spirit so ministers Christ to our souls that our cups are filled to overflowing, so to speak. Those are wonderful times but they're also rare times. I've never forgotten an observation a preacher once made about the Mount of Transfiguration that when they came down from that mountain, Christ came down with them. Their fellowship continued with Him even though it didn't come with the exhilarating thrills of the mountain top.

So when you read the Word and memorize the Word and sit under the preaching of the Word, never forget that it's never in vain even if the effect is not immediate. And what this means for parents who children who have grown up and have gone off into bypath meadows – you can still pray over those many seeds that were sown and those lessons that were taught and those sermons that were preached. Pray that the Lord will bring them to remembrance even as He brought the Word to the remembrance of the disciples which led to the increase of their faith.