

“Zeal for God’s House”

This morning we are going to talk about having zeal for God’s house.

We learn from our text today that this was something Jesus was very passionate about, as evidenced by how upset he got when he saw what was happening in God’s holy temple.

The scriptures tell us that the clearing of the temple took place during the time of the Jewish Passover. Only John’s gospel sets Jesus’ three year ministry into the context of the Passover.

We read of three Passovers in this gospel, thus we conclude from it that Jesus had a three year public ministry. Since John alone does this we know that it must have been important to him to get across to us how passionate Jesus was about the One true God who was to be purely worshiped.

Humanly speaking, because Jesus was a Jewish man, it was not surprising to find him in the temple at Passover. As a follower of Yahweh, the God of Israel, he was there to worship his Heavenly Father. He had been doing this since he was a kid. Luke’s gospel tells us that when Jesus was twelve (before his public ministry) that his parents took him to the temple to worship God at Passover. (Lk. 2:41-52)

Divinely speaking- because Jesus is not only fully human but also fully God- it is not surprising to find him there either because he is the Creator of both the event that the holiday commemorates and the religious ceremony itself.

John’s gospel tells us that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” (Jn. 1:1) and that “through him all things were made.” (Jn. 1:3)

This means that when God sent the plagues upon Egypt and parted the waters of the Red Sea, Jesus was there in the eternal holy communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit making all of that happen as the One Triune God who exists in three persons. It also means that when God gave instructions for the Passover Meal to Moses, that it was the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who were inspiring Moses to record the Passover instructions for the people of Israel. All of this was the pre-incarnate ministry of Jesus Christ.

Jesus was at Passover because (1) the pure, zealous worship of God consumed him and because (2) the feast actually pointed to himself! Jesus Christ is the One who is to be worshipped as Emmanuel, God with us, though the people did not understand all of that just yet.

What Made Jesus so Angry?

Now the question that the text raises for us today is what was it that made Jesus get so angry? What was it that incensed him so much?

On the surface, it simply seems to be the fact that there were people in the temple selling animals and exchanging money amongst themselves (v.14), but this was not entirely out of the ordinary, or even necessarily a bad thing to do.

In Deuteronomy 14 the Lord gave to Moses special provisions for the people of Israel to buy animals in the city where the temple would be located. The purpose of this provision was for the benefit of those who might live far away from the temple and have to travel a long distance to get there. Instead of having to take their animals on such a long trip they could sell their animals and then take the money to the city of the temple and buy replacement animals there and offer them as a sacrifice. So the mere fact that animals were being sold to people coming to the temple in Jerusalem for Passover was not what upset Jesus so much. That was not the problem.

So what was it?

The problem had to have been an issue of impure motive. The situation in this story seems to have been one where those who were selling the animals were taking advantage of those people who had traveled long distances and needed to buy them. Perhaps they were charging excessive fees for the animals. Perhaps the money changers, who were there to collect the temple tax in one unified currency, were taking advantage of people by not giving them a proper exchange rate.

It was also likely an issue of flagrancy. The law did not instruct vendors and money changers to set up shop **inside** the temple. It just simply gave them permission to do this in the general vicinity of where the temple would be located. There is "a time and place for everything" and something that is considered to be ok by God can quickly become un-ok if it is done in an improper way or context.

The reason Jesus was so upset was because these people were selling their animals and exchanging their money **inside** the temple courts. It would have been more appropriate for them to set up shop outside the temple, but instead they turned the temple into a money-making racketeering scheme. This was a flagrant, flippant, irreverent act of defiance so Jesus strongly rebuked it. He turned over tables, slashed his whip, scattered the money, drove out the merchants, and screamed, "How dare you turn my father's house into a market!"

It might seem a little disconcerting to us to see Jesus get so angry. Sometimes we think of him as being meek, mild, and passive, but here he gets really angry. The fact that Jesus got angry should not surprise us. Remember, he is God in human flesh, and God **is** the creator of anger.

If you are a good student of the Bible then you know that at times God gets angry with his people, with things that happen in the world, and with sin and injustice. God has a holy anger and because it is holy it is always controlled, and is never used in ways that would be inconstant with God's character.

Anger, when it is justified and properly expressed is a good thing. We reflect the image of God when we properly exhibit anger over the right things. The apostle Paul tells us to be angry but do not sin. (Eph. 4:26)

What Are We Angered By?

A point of life application that this text raises for us this morning is this- what makes us angry? Do we get angry about the right things in life? And when we are angered do we properly express it?

Our Lord was angered because he saw that God was being mocked. Jesus' anger was justified. But how about us? Do we get angry when we see God's house turned into a market place?

There may not be people selling animals in the temple anymore, but what about when the church abandons the core doctrines of the Christian faith? Does this bother us? Or do we just ignore the problem for the sake of inclusivity and keeping peace?

What about when a church abandons the rich use of scripture in its worship- whether it be in sermon, song, or liturgy- in order to have a more seeker sensitive type of service so as to meet people's felt needs and not offend them?

What about when the right preaching of the Word of God is abandoned in favor of positive, feel-good, self-help, therapeutic sermons that stroke our egos but do nothing to build us up in the Word of God that is sharp enough to divide between joint and marrow?

Or what about sin? Are we really angered by sin? The sin that we see is in our own lives- if we will but open our eyes and read the Word of God- or the sin that we see in the world.

I do think we are living in a time where it takes something pretty extreme in order to elicit a sense of moral outrage. We have become so desensitized to sin, even in the church. We are more like the vendors and money changers than we care to admit. We don't see where we have gone wrong.

What Are We Passionate About?

Another point of life application that this text raises is the question of what are we passionate about in our lives?

Our text tells us that Jesus Christ was consumed with zeal for his Father's house. His relationship with his Heavenly Father was what was most important to him in life. This came before all things. It came before his family. It came before his work. And it came before his relationship with his disciples- for he was always finding time to be alone with his Father in heaven. His relationship with God consumed him. What are we consumed with? What are we passionate about?

It is so easy for us to get passionate about things like our work, or our favorite sports team, politics, the president, and health care reform, or some type of hobby or interest that we have, but not the things of God. The Lord wants us to be passionate about our relationship with Him. Jesus wants us to go hard after him, as John Piper likes to say. He wants us to pursue him with all we got, with every fiber of our being. God wants us to love him "with **all** of our heart soul, mind,

and strength.” but sometimes we fall asleep at the wheel, we get bored with God, we get bored with worship. We fall into the trap of going through the motions in our faith.

Do We Have a Marketplace Worship Mentality?

A final point of application that this text raises for us is this- Do we have a marketplace mentality when it comes to worship?

This question gets at the heart of our motives for worship. Do we come to worship to give something to God or get something for our own benefit? Is our worship self-centered or God-centered?

In our text today the vendors and money changers in the temple had turned the worship of God into something that would benefit them. They sold the animals and exchanged the money in order to make an unjust profit for themselves. What they were doing was very self-centered.

Again, we don't sell animals or exchange money in God's house of worship today, but how many so-called TV ministries have turned into nothing more than massive revenue generating business? This scandalizes the gospel. How ministries are preaching a prosperity gospel that is very self-focused? Always and only talking about how God wants to bless you financially, how God wants you never to be sick, and how God wants you to have your best life now? No wonder it is growing so fast, it's feeding of mankind's greatest deception, that our needs stand at the center of the universe. Do you see how that can be so self-focused?

We must also turn a critical to ourselves and confess before God how often we come to worship looking for what we can get out of it. Worship fundamentally becomes about me and my needs and how the worship is supposed to meet them.

The problem with this approach to worship is that it will ultimately disappoint us because it will lead to a lot of church shopping, or worse not going at all. People who don't get their needs met end up constantly looking for the perfect church experience, but they will never find it. It is an elusive lie.

This is not to say that godly worship does not meet our needs or speak to our hearts, it most certainly does, it's just to say what is our starting point in worship. Is it us and our needs (like it was for the vendors and money changers) or is it about God and him being glorified (like it was for our Lord Jesus Christ, who was consumed by zeal for God's house and God's ways.)?

May God grant us all the grace to have a zeal for His house of worship that is pure and unadulterated, and all-consuming in our lives.

Amen.