

JESUS FEELS RIGHTEOUS ANGER

John 2:13-25

Today is Palm Sunday, when we celebrate Christ's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem near the end of His earthly ministry. In our passage in John today we will look at an incident that took place early in Christ's ministry and probably also again later, during the week between Palm Sunday and Easter.

Last time we left Jesus and His small band of disciples and close followers after the wedding at Cana where Jesus performed the first miracle of His ministry by turning water into wine. After leaving Cana, Jesus and His followers went to Capernaum for a very brief time and then left for Jerusalem and the Passover Feast.

John 2:13-25 ESV:

13 The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

14 In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there.

15 And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.

16 And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade."

17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

18 So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?"

19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

20 The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?"

21 But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

22 When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.

24 But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people

25 and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

We will now go back and look at these verses more closely.

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17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

This is the first of 3 Passovers in the book of John. The Passover was celebrated on the fourteenth day of the lunar month of Nisan which would fall at the end of March or beginning of April. Passover as you may know is a celebration to remember the deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt under Pharaoh, when the angel of death "passed over" Jewish homes in Egypt where doorposts were sprinkled with blood. This protected the firstborn children of the Jews when God executed judgment on all the firstborn children of Egypt because Pharaoh had refused to free God's people.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus went to the Temple. What He saw must have repulsed Him. There were merchants selling livestock to be used in the sacrifices along with money changers who exchanged other types of currency for coins that were specially minted at the Temple. The religious leaders insisted that only Temple money could be used to buy the animals used for the sacrifices. The money changers would set the rate of exchange so that they would receive far more for The Temple coins than the people would pay on the open market for the same animal. It was kind of like if you go to a Cubs baseball game. If you want a soft drink you have to pay \$5 for it because it is the only source available. You cannot bring anything into the stadium with you, so you pay the price or go without. In a similar manner if you are thinking why not just bring an animal from home and sacrifice that? Not a bad idea, but the religious leaders of the Temple had a way around that as well. If the animal was not purchased from the merchants at the Temple, the priests would claim that the animal was in some way flawed and not acceptable for a sacrificial offering.

So everyone had to purchase an animal from the merchants in the Temple and they had to pay for that animal with Temple coins that they bought from the money changers. Let us try to explain this in terms that everyone might understand.

Assume that you were a Jew who has come to make a sacrificial offering to God for forgiveness of your sins at the Passover in Jerusalem as all devout male Jews over the age of 12 were expected to do every year (if they lived within reasonable travel distance). You would be among a huge throng of people descending on Jerusalem. When you

arrived you would go to The Temple to offer a sacrifice for your sins. Upon entering the Temple, if you did not already know, you would be told that you would have to exchange the money you were carrying for **Temple coins** in order to purchase an animal to be sacrificed. Here is how the process worked:

- 1) You would go to the booth where the **Money Changers** conducted business.
- 2) You would be told the price of the animal for the sacrifice you wanted to make (say \$200).
- 3) You would give the Money Changer \$200. He would give you \$200 in Temple coins.
- 4) You would then take the coins to the **Merchant** selling the animal and he would give you the animal to be taken to the Priest who was to offer the animal sacrifice on the altar.

Now here is what happened at the end of the day when all these dedicated servants of God distributed the profits:

- 1) The Merchant who sold you the animal would take the \$200 in Temple coins you had paid him, along with the coins he received from all his other sales that day, and return them to the Money Changer.
- 2) The Money Changer would give the Merchant say \$100 for each animal sold. Animals which probably cost the Merchant no more than \$50 either to raise or buy in quantity from some herdsmen. So the merchant makes a whopping 100% profit or \$50 on each animal sold. It should not take long for that Merchant to get rich with profits like that.
- 3) Now that leaves the Money Changer with \$100 profit for every transaction he made during that day.
- 4) From that \$100, the Money Changer gives perhaps \$25 to the **Priest** who will not permit an animal to be sacrificed unless it is purchased from the Temple Merchant. That is his cut of the pie for using his trusted position as a servant of God to cheat people out of their hard earned money.
- 5) This leaves the Money Changer with a cool \$75 or 75% profit on each transaction for simply exchanging your dollars for Temple coins. A profitable way to make a living if you do not mind being a crook.

So, you have paid \$200 for an animal that should have cost no more than \$60 or \$65 with a normal profit mark-up. In other words you have been the victim of **extortion**, a gross overcharge.¹ That should make you mad. But worse yet you have been made a victim of extortion in the Holy Temple of God by God's Priests and Temple leaders. That should make you hopping mad. And it may very well make you think less of God if that is the

¹ Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition.

way the people who represent Him in the Temple behave. Kind of like the feeling many people have developed toward the Church over the last 2000 years because of the conduct of some of the people who make it up.

How do you think this made God feel? I do not think God will consider me to be disrespectful if I suggest it probably made Him hopping mad as well. When Jesus saw this He was outraged. To see such behavior in the House of God was something Jesus could not tolerate nor allow to continue. He literally chased all of these crooks out of the Temple.² Jesus shows us here His passion for reverence toward God, a passion that we should share. The whip Jesus made was certainly not for the money changers or merchants but was undoubtedly necessary to control the animals in order to drive them from the Temple as well.

People who take advantage of the poor and weak; who use their position of responsibility to abuse others or to line their pockets with gold; who cheat, lie, and steal to satisfy their own selfish needs, whether it was in 2000 B.C., 27 A.D., or this very day, will pay dearly for such abusive behavior. How do I know that? Because God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow (Hebrews 13:8), and this is what He told the Jews through the prophet Ezekiel and His disciples Matthew and Peter:

Ezekiel 22:1-31 NLT:

1 Now this message came to me from the Lord:

2 “Son of man, are you ready to judge Jerusalem? Are you ready to judge this city of murderers? Publicly denounce her detestable sins,

3 and give her this message from the Sovereign Lord: O city of murderers, doomed and damned—city of idols, filthy and foul—

4 you are guilty because of the blood you have shed. You are defiled because of the idols you have made. Your day of destruction has come! You have reached the end of your years. I will make you an object of mockery throughout the world.

5 O infamous city, filled with confusion, you will be mocked by people far and near.

6 “Every leader in Israel who lives within your walls is bent on murder.

7 Fathers and mothers are treated with contempt. Foreigners are forced to pay for protection. Orphans and widows are wronged and oppressed among you.

8 You despise my holy things and violate my Sabbath days of rest.

9 People accuse others falsely and send them to their death. You are filled with idol worshipers and people who do obscene things.

10 Men sleep with their fathers’ wives and have intercourse with women who are menstruating.

11 Within your walls live men who commit adultery with their neighbors’ wives, who defile their daughters-in-law, or who rape their own sisters.

12 There are hired murderers, loan racketeers, and extortioners everywhere. They never even think of me and my commands, says the

² See Malachi 3:1-3.

Sovereign Lord.

13 “But now I clap my hands in indignation over your dishonest gain and bloodshed.

14 How strong and courageous will you be in my day of reckoning? I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will do what I said.

15 I will scatter you among the nations and purge you of your wickedness.

16 And when I have been dishonored among the nations because of you, you will know that I am the Lord.”

17 Then this message came to me from the Lord:

18 “Son of man, the people of Israel are the worthless slag that remains after silver is smelted. They are the dross that is left over—a useless mixture of copper, tin, iron, and lead.

19 So tell them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Because you are all worthless slag, I will bring you to my crucible in Jerusalem.

20 Just as copper, iron, lead, and tin are melted down in a furnace, I will melt you down in the heat of my fury.

21 I will gather you together and blow the fire of my anger upon you,

22 and you will melt like silver in fierce heat. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have poured out my fury on you.’ ”

23 Again a message came to me from the Lord:

24 “Son of man, give the people of Israel this message: In the day of my indignation, you will be like a polluted land, a land without rain.

25 Your princes plot conspiracies just as lions stalk their prey. They devour innocent people, seizing treasures and extorting wealth. They make many widows in the land.

26 Your priests have violated my instructions and defiled my holy things.

They make no distinction between what is holy and what is not. And they do not teach my people the difference between what is ceremonially clean and unclean. They disregard my Sabbath days so that I am dishonored among them.

27 Your leaders are like wolves who tear apart their victims. They actually destroy people’s lives for money!

28 And your prophets cover up for them by announcing false visions and making lying predictions. They say, ‘My message is from the Sovereign Lord,’ when the Lord hasn’t spoken a single word to them.

29 Even common people oppress the poor, rob the needy, and deprive foreigners of justice.

30 “I looked for someone who might rebuild the wall of righteousness that guards the land. I searched for someone to stand in the gap in the wall so I wouldn’t have to destroy the land, but I found no one.

31 So now I will pour out my fury on them, consuming them with the fire of my anger. I will heap on their heads the full penalty for all their sins. I, the Sovereign Lord, have spoken!”

Some people have a hard time with the fact that God is a Judge who will ultimately

punish and destroy all evil. They want God to be merely a benevolent grandfather³ who will pat them on the head and give them candy. But God is our Father. He is interested in guiding and disciplining us so that we become upright individuals. When we do something wrong and stray from the path He has directed, He may have to correct us, or let us suffer the consequences, just as a good earthly father does for his children. He will one day judge the evil that would lead His children away from Him. Without God's justice and judgment of evil, He cannot really be true love and goodness.

In the New Testament we hear Jesus' words from the Gospel of Matthew.

Matthew 23:23-29 NLT:

23 *"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things.*

24 *Blind guides! You strain your water so you won't accidentally swallow a gnat, but you swallow a camel!*

25 *"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and self-indulgence!*

26 *You blind Pharisee! First wash the inside of the cup and the dish, and then the outside will become clean, too.*

27 *"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity.*

28 *Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.*

29 *"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you build tombs for the prophets your ancestors killed, and you decorate the monuments of the godly people your ancestors destroyed*

30 *Then you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would never have joined them in killing the prophets.'*

31 *"But in saying that, you testify against yourselves that you are indeed the descendants of those who murdered the prophets.*

32 **Go ahead and finish what your ancestors started.**

Is Jesus predicting here that the Jewish religious leaders are going to murder Him just like they murdered the prophets before Him? That would certainly appear to be the case.

2 Peter 2:1-19 NLT:

³ Inspired by C. S. Lewis' statement in *The Problem of Pain*, chapter 3, that "We want, in fact, not so much a Father in Heaven as a grandfather in heaven—a senile benevolence who, as they say, 'liked to see young people enjoying themselves' and whose plan for the universe was simply that it might be truly said at the end of each day, 'a good time was had by all.'"

1 *But there were also false prophets in Israel, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will cleverly teach destructive heresies and even deny the Master who bought them. In this way, they will bring sudden destruction on themselves.*

2 *Many will follow their evil teaching and shameful immorality. And because of these teachers, the way of truth will be slandered.*

3 *In their greed **they will make up clever lies to get hold of your money.** But God condemned them long ago, and their destruction will not be delayed.*

4 *For God did not spare even the angels who sinned. He threw them into hell, in gloomy pits of darkness, where they are being held until the day of judgment.*

5 *And God did not spare the ancient world—except for Noah and the seven others in his family. Noah warned the world of God's righteous judgment. So God protected Noah when he destroyed the world of ungodly people with a vast flood.*

6 *Later, God condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and turned them into heaps of ashes. He made them an example of what will happen to ungodly people.*

7 *But God also rescued Lot out of Sodom because he was a righteous man who was sick of the shameful immorality of the wicked people around him.*

8 *Yes, Lot was a righteous man who was tormented in his soul by the wickedness he saw and heard day after day.*

9 *So you see, the Lord knows how to rescue godly people from their trials, even while keeping the wicked under punishment until the day of final judgment.*

10 *He is especially hard on those who follow their own twisted sexual desire, and who despise authority. These people are proud and arrogant, daring even to scoff at supernatural beings without so much as trembling.*

11 *But the angels, who are far greater in power and strength, do not dare to bring from the Lord a charge of blasphemy against those supernatural beings.*

12 *These false teachers are like unthinking animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed. They scoff at things they do not understand, and like animals, they will be destroyed.*

13 *Their destruction is their reward for the harm they have done. They love to indulge in evil pleasures in broad daylight. They are a disgrace and a stain among you. They delight in deception even as they eat with you in your fellowship meals.*

14 *They commit adultery with their eyes, and their desire for sin is never satisfied. They lure unstable people into sin, and they are well trained in greed. They live under God's curse.*

15 *They have wandered off the right road and followed the footsteps of Balaam son of Beor, **who loved to earn money by doing wrong.***

16 *But Balaam was stopped from his mad course when his donkey rebuked him with a human voice.*

17 These people are as useless as dried-up springs or as mist blown away by the wind. They are doomed to blackest darkness.

18 They brag about themselves with empty, foolish boasting. With an appeal to twisted sexual desires, they lure back into sin those who have barely escaped from a lifestyle of deception.

*19 They promise freedom, but they themselves are slaves of sin and corruption. **For you are a slave to whatever controls you.***

I think you can hear the themes that run through these passages: God has set a standard of righteousness for His people. Those people who supposedly say they love God yet disobey Him big time are particularly revolting to God, and the worst offenders in this passage are the priests and religious leaders. So God promises judgment and destruction.

Look again at Christ's words in Matthew 23:23 where He accuses the Pharisees of being hypocrites and says, "*you ignore the important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith.*" Those words resonate with Micah 6:8 where we are given God's formula for a successful life:

Micah 6:8b, NIV:

What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

"Act justly"—in other words, do the right thing, follow God's way. "Love mercy" (or "kindness" in some translations). Give compassion and do good deeds for people who do not necessarily deserve them. Let the law of kindness guide your interactions. And "*walk humbly with your God.*" Worship Him, exalt Him, and seek His guidance every day, well aware that you are "a sinner saved by grace." Then you will have a successful life and there will be no reason for you to experience God's anger or judgment.

Now if you are able to catch your breath, let us get back to John. Jesus drove the money changers and merchants out of the Temple. This act of cleansing the Temple was a statement in itself by Jesus that He had the authority to do this as a representative of God.

John 2:18-22 ESV:

18 So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?"

19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

20 The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?"

21 But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

22 When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

The *sign* that the Jewish leaders were looking for in verse 18 is a miracle of major

proportions. They wanted to see something so spectacular that it would prove beyond any shadow of a doubt that Jesus was the Messiah, the son of God. Jesus' answer was exactly what they asked for but it is not surprising that they did not understand what He meant in verse 19. Verse 22 makes it clear that the disciples did not understand it either until after Jesus' resurrection. Jesus was speaking of Himself as the *Temple*, a kind of temple no one understood at the time. The present Temple that they were standing in had been under construction for forty-six years and it would not be completed until thirty-six years later.

Of course the reference Jesus made to the Temple referred to His body at the time of His crucifixion and resurrection. It is true that Jesus was raised three days after his death.⁴ Jesus' statement had nothing at all to do with the temple building itself.

John 2:23-25 ESV:

23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.

24 But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people

25 and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

As Jesus became more popular with the crowds He began to perform any number of miracles, which made the people wonder even more who He was. But He did not yet feel comfortable enough with the people to let them know He was the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus did not feel that they were yet willing to abandon their old ways and accept His new revelation about God. Jesus looks for a "true" conversion rather than just responding to a highly emotional event. Believing "in His name" involves far more than outward response. Rather it calls for a whole-hearted commitment of one's life to be a follower of Jesus.

May God help any of us who have not yet done so to be willing to abandon our old ideas when He calls us to believe fully in the teaching of His Son, Jesus, so that we might find salvation and eternal life now.⁵

In these last three verses of chapter 2 the issue between signs and faith is raised. This is an issue that will be discussed again later in this book (John 20:30–31). Here the faith of the people was inadequate. Jesus saw through them and would not trust them. Verse 25 emphasizes Jesus' supernatural abilities and wisdom. This verse also introduces us to the incident involving Nicodemus which follows in chapter 3.⁶

There is a question often discussed by theologians as to whether there were one or two Temple cleansings because the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke place the

⁴ Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition. 4th ed.* Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA : Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, S. Jn 2:18

⁵ Richards, Larry ; Richards, Lawrence O.: *The Teacher's Commentary.* Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1987, S. 715.

⁶ Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition. 4th ed.* Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, S. Jn 2:23.

event at the end of Jesus' ministry. It is generally supposed that John has brought it forward for symbolic purposes. But it is quite possible that there may have been another cleansing after some two or three years. The specific time references here would support that idea. John, however, seems more concerned with more meaningful events in the ministry of Jesus and so arranges his material to highlight them. He could have done that in this case because he wanted to introduce early on Jesus' mission to cleanse out the abuses that had been put in place by the Sanhedrin, the Jewish governing body. Verse 17 shows that only later did the disciples see the significance of what Jesus did here in light of Psalm 69:9:⁷

Passion for your house has consumed me, and the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me. (NLT)

Here we see the psalmist has brought upon himself the resentment of the people because he insisted that the peoples' behavior measure up to their outward claim of their devotion to God. Whenever the people showed any disrespect toward God, the psalmist felt the pain because of his love for God. Jesus felt the same when He saw what the people were doing in God's Holy Temple.⁸ I hope we all feel some pain when we see what our culture today is doing with God's Holy Word. I know I also feel pain when I see what God's Church is doing with God's Holy Word. Please include in your prayers every day a request that God would send a revival to His Church and to the United States as a whole.

⁷ Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition. 4th ed.* Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, S. Jn 2:12.

⁸ MacArthur, John: *The MacArthur Study Bible*; 1997, Word Bibles, Nashville. Footnote on Psalm 69:9.