

August 3, 2008

“Jesus at the Temple” John 2:12-25

FCF: Confusion as to what worship is and who it's for

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Because of what we see of Jesus in the cleansing of the temple,
(anchor) we must let our view of worship (and life itself) be transformed.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

“Worship Wars” – one of the most hotly discussed topics in church circles. How should we dress? What should we sing? Who are we reaching? Who can speak? What types of sermons? So many opinions. So many questions. Sadly so often answered more by the venting of our personal preferences than the study of biblical principles.

At the core, what are such squabbles about? More importantly, what is worship to be about? Indeed, what is our life itself to be about? Fundamentally, who is this for?

SCRIPTURE READING: [John 2:12-25](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

[\(READ 750 Illustrations, 667 – Spiritual Discernment\):](#)

There is a haunting photo by Alain Keler in the October 1993 issue of Life magazine. It is of a boy playing a flute. The boy, named Jensen, is only ten years old, but he probably can play some very sad songs. When you look at his eyes – or where his eyes should be beneath his long, dark bangs – you see only redness, empty sockets. Jensen lives in a charitable institution in Bogota, Columbia.

Blindness is always tragic, but the cause of blindness in this case only multiplies the sorrow. In the caption next to the photo, Robert Sullivan explains that the boy was likely the victim of “organ nappers.” Eye thieves.

When Jensen was ten months old, reports his mother, she took him to the hospital with acute diarrhea. The next day when she returned, bandages covered Jensen’s eyes. Dried blood was spattered on his body. Horrified, she asked the doctor what happened.

He answered harshly, “Can’t you see your child is dying?” and dismissed her.

She rushed Jensen to another hospital in Bogota. After examining him, the doctor gave chilling news: “They’ve stolen his eyes.”

Jensen is somewhat fortunate. He is alive. The organ traffickers usually kill their victims, excise body parts, and broker them to those willing to pay for healthy kidney or cornea transplants.

I was struck at two levels. First, that such a thing could happen at all. Second, that it's happening all the time – not on the physical level but on the spiritual. Our sight stolen, our being unable to see. Blind to God, not knowing Him or living for Him, committing a form of “cosmic treason” – foolishly thinking ourselves to be sufficient in ourselves, dependent on ourselves, and so then living for ourselves. But our sight can be restored.

John paints a portrait in recounting these events, making clear who Jesus is and what it is He came to do. He is the Christ, the Son of God. Last week, we saw that His turning water into wine demonstrated that, with His coming, the wait is over, a new day has dawned. All of which the prophecies spoke and the ceremonies pointed has come.

That theme now continues here. Some quick setting of the stage. The Temple in Jerusalem was to serve as a tangible reminder and expression of God's presence with His people. The Passover celebration was to serve as a tangible reminder and anticipation of God's deliverance of His people. This cleansing of the Temple was the first of two. John records the first. The other gospel writers the second. That's the background. Here's the main point John is making to the reader. Because of what we see of Jesus here in the cleansing of the Temple, we must let our view of worship and all of life be transformed. That said, what is it we see of Jesus here? And just how does it transform our view?

I. THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

Look with me first at the cleansing of the Temple (**READ John 2:13-17**).

A) What He Did

When you consider what Jesus did here, it was really quite audacious.

1. The setting

The setting was the Temple courts during the Passover celebration. We see two groups of entrepreneurs. The first group sold animals to pilgrims for the sacrifices. Many traveled too far to bring suitable animals. So this was a convenience. The second group exchanged money. Temple authorities wouldn't take Roman coins. Romans would not allow Jews to mint their own coins. So to purchase a sacrifice or pay the annual Temple tax, the money had to be changed to Tyrian coins. Again, a convenience and service.

2. The cleansing

But Jesus came in, violently upsetting the whole thing – including our idea of a “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild.” Consider the strength, the courage, the passion shown here.

B) Why He Did It

Which brings us to this – why He did it. What caused this passion to burn so hot?

1. Purposes violated

The purposes of His Father were being violated. This outer court area was the only area open to Gentiles, people of all nations. And the atmosphere? (**READ Carson quote**):

Instead of solemn dignity and the murmur of prayer, there is the bellowing of cattle and the bleating of sheep. Instead of brokenness and contrition, holy adoration and prolonged petition, there is noisy commerce.

2. Passion burning

All which caused Jesus' passion to burn. The presence of these dishonoring distractions. Thus this quotation from Psalm 69 speaking of His zeal, holy jealousy, consuming Him.

His is a zeal, a holy jealousy, for all which God is due. Which is everything.

Application:

Zeal, a holy jealousy for all which God is due, is to be why we're here as well. Certainly in corporate worship. How we worship – not just that we worship – is vitally important. Clearly, according to Jesus, this is not about us. It's about Him. Which raises questions. Where is our focus? Who are we praising? Why are we here?

Pushing further. Zeal, a holy jealousy for all which He is due, goes into all of life. How we worship is important to Him. How we live is important to Him as well. In our daily callings, do we long to see God honored, “hallowed,” in all we do, in all we see, close to home and far abroad? It's what's to drive evangelism. Can we say, with the 19th century missionary to the Muslims, Henry Martyn (**READ quote**), “*I could not endure existence if Jesus were not glorified.*” Could it be said of us, as it was the Apostle Paul as he entered the city of Athens, that our hearts are “provoked” and “greatly distressed” within us as we see our communities filled with idols? That our hearts just ache to know what is being denied – the deep joy of people and the great glory of our God?

Which just brings me back to this. Because of this consuming zeal for the Father we see in Jesus, we must let our view of worship – really all of life – be transformed.

II. THE REPLACING OF THE TEMPLE

We see this all the more with the replacing of the Temple (**READ John 2:18-22**).

A) What He Said

What's going on here with this dialogue? What is Jesus saying?

1. Their question

The Jewish authorities ask Him a question, demanding a sign. In a way, they had a right to ask. Who was He to think He could do such things? But there is a problem with their question. It's focused on the wrong thing. They're asking about the authority He has when they should be asking about the issues He's raised. No consideration given there.

2. His response

Jesus' response is deliberately puzzling. The setting is the Temple. He speaks then of a temple – Himself. He gives them a sign but on His terms – a prediction of His death and resurrection at their hands. This will be what authenticates what He's done and said.

B) *Why He Said It*

But why in these terms? Though no one understood Him at the time...

1. He is the presence of God

Jesus is saying He is the presence of God. He is the fulfillment of the Temple imagery, the living manifestation of God in human flesh. He is the Temple, the presence of God.

2. He is the provision of God

And He is the provision of God as well – the fulfillment of all the ceremonial images.

And it is in this temple, Himself, that the ultimate sacrifice would take place.

Application:

Now, it's worth noting here that Jesus knew full well what He was getting Himself into. No surprises. It was not an accident that set Him on this path but His zeal for His Father that drove Him to give Himself for us. Which transforms our worship to make it completely Christ-centered. "How?" you ask. It is His work of the cross which allows our worship, opening the way to God, enabling us to come at all. It is His work which impels our worship, compelling a response, driving us to the throne of grace. And it is His work which shapes our worship as well, forming it to certain patterns. It is what makes this, again, not about us but Him. Not about what we want but what He wants.

Which, as a parallel to the last point, speaks specifically to corporate worship but then more generally to all of life as well. Questions such as "What does He want me to do?" "What is the will of God?" "What would be pleasing to Him?" become our focus.

Illustration:

Listen to this quote. It's speaking to the broader question of worship. Let it speak specifically to that and then the more general questions as well ([READ Curry quote](#)):

If you really want to please your wife, you give your wife something she wants. Who knows best what she wants other than your wife? Likewise, that's the way we should understand worship. God desires praise, honor and adoration. If we want to give God proper worship, we must give Him what He wants. In order to give God the worship He desires, we need to be sure of what He wants - and God tells us.

Or, to put it another way, what you give is dictated by who you're giving to. These times together are something we offer up to our Creator and Savior. And so too our very days.

CONCLUSION:

To see these things is then to recover our sight. Back to "worship wars." The real battle over what churches do on Sunday morning and how they do it is really not fought in the pews or the parking lot. These are wars fought in the heart. And that war, as I've already alluded to, extends out to all of life. "Why am I here? Who is this for?" That's where the war is – hearts declaring one thing but yet so divided ([READ John 2:23-25](#)).

John shows us here there are two levels of believing in Jesus. One is fleeting, more a fascination than anything else. That's what we see here. The other we read of in John 1 ([READ John 1:12](#)). So we have two levels of believing. And stemming from

that, we have two types of worship and life. John 2:23 belief leads to worship and life with zeal for ourselves. John 1:12 belief leads to worship and life with zeal for Him. They are worlds apart. How do we get from one to the other? Seeing His zeal for us.

What do I mean? Think with me. Jesus knew what He was getting Himself into. He predicted it. He knew what He was getting Himself into. He also knew who He was giving Himself for. A people abusing the Temple system. A people easily turned in their hearts. And yet, despite all He knew of them, He gave Himself for them. And for us.

Zeal for His Father and His glory, that we might know, trust and serve His Father, consumed Him. It drove Him to cleanse the Temple. And it drove Him to a cross where He showed Himself to be the sacrifice of the Temple. The One who cleansed the Temple came to replace the Temple. And it is that consuming zeal for His Father's glory and our deep joy which will fuel our zeal for Him. That zeal for His Father's glory and our deep joy is what will fuel our zeal for Him. And it transforms our worship and our very lives.

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