

## John 2:13-22

We are continuing this morning in our study of the Gospel of John, picking up at verse 13 of chapter 2 and working through to verse 22 of the same chapter. If you were with us last week, then you will know that we spent our time looking at the first part of this chapter where Jesus performed his first miracle of turning water into wine at a wedding in a place called Cana.

As we looked at that story we saw how Jesus was doing more than just dealing with a catering problem but was, in fact, revealing something glorious about himself and what he came to do, namely this: He came to usher in or inaugurate the new Messianic age, of which the prophets had spoken, and which was characterized, among other things, as a time when the wine would flow, and was associated with other such images of fullness and celebration.

Along with this we saw how the particular *manner* in which Jesus brought about this miracle was making an important statement about Christianity *over against* Judaism. By taking these water pots that were used in Jewish purification rites and filling them with wine Jesus deliberately interfered with their being used for the purification rituals and thus signaled and symbolized what the effect of his coming was going to bring about: the fulfillment and replacement of the temporary OT sacrificial system with something superior, something final, something fully satisfying to a Holy God and completely sufficient for sinful men and women.

If we take a step back from that to take in more of the landscape of John's Gospel what we see thus far is how all this fits into what has been the overall pattern of this part of the Gospel - which is to clarify through events and explanations exactly who Jesus was/is. Ever since the opening of this Gospel, John has been building a case for Christianity and in doing so he has had in his sights, primarily, the Jewish exiles that were in and around the city of Ephesus - which is where he was when he was writing this Gospel.

With those particular people in mind then, John opened his Gospel with a prologue which showed the clear and divine relationship between Jesus and God and which makes him co-equal with God the Father and even identifies him as an agent of creation, right there with God from the very beginning. Following that you get the record of a couple of incidents which, among other things, show the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist and the superior nature of Jesus' ministry over against John's - a fact which John the Baptist himself was only too ready to acknowledge.

And so it is that the passage before us this morning is in keeping with this general and larger theme of the revelation of Jesus' identity through various events and through John's explanations and reflections *upon* those events. This morning brings us another installment of this sort of thing, but before look at that let's pray together.....

*Great Father in heaven, Help us to listen now to your Word as those who are hearing the very voice of God for, in fact, that is precisely what is going on whenever we come to the Scriptures. Help us to receive these things with all the humility and brokenness required for you to have your way with us this morning. And we pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.*

(Read John 2:13-22)

## II First Move

The first thing I want you to notice here is *Jesus' ferocious concern for the honor of his Father in heaven*. Clearly, Jesus was passionately committed to making sure that God the Father was esteemed and adored and awed and revered among his people.

Now the setting for this story is the Jewish celebration of Passover. Passover, if you do not know, was a festival of remembrance where the Hebrew people recalled the night when God, through Moses, delivered them from the oppressive rule of an Egyptian Pharaoh. And that deliverance came about through God's sending a number of plagues or catastrophes upon the Egyptian people until the final one which involved God's sending a curse which saw the death of every firstborn child and even firstborn *cattle* in Egypt. The only people that would be unaffected by this curse would be his own people - and *that* only if they followed God's instructions which included, among other things, sacrificing a lamb and painting lamb's blood above their door so that when God "saw" this sign, he would "pass over" that house and those inside it would be spared this judgment.

So this is the festival that Jesus is on his way into Jerusalem to celebrate and remember, along with every other devout Jewish person in his day. Now the fact that this story takes place on *Passover* has a certain significance that I don't want you to miss, but we'll come back to that in a moment.

So, here is Jesus, coming into town and he heads over to the Temple at some point and when he arrives, discovers that *inside* the Temple courtyards is an entire marketplace with people selling doves and sheep and other such creatures for use in making the sacrifices, as well as people there to collect the annual "temple tax" which was given by every faithful Jew to support the temple and its construction and maintenance, etc.

And upon seeing all of this, Jesus - gentle kind never-hurt-a-fly Jesus - goes into this holy "temple rage", so to speak, and makes himself an impromptu whip, presumably to help move the livestock along - but he makes this whip and begins cracking it and herding people and animals out of the temple, overturning the moneychangers tables and chairs along the way and generally creating this huge scene. And he must have been a sight to behold and I'm quite sure the people didn't know what to make of it all. After all, they were in the temple with the express permission of the Jewish authorities - and yet, in spite of that, in comes this rank stranger who forces them all to leave. So they do.

Now, before we dissect what is going on here a little further, it is important to clarify something that *may* be a question for some of you and which has *definitely* been a question for a number of scholars over the years, and it has to do with the *timing* of this "temple purging" that takes place. And the question arises because, when you read the other Gospels you discover that they speak of a "temple purging" which takes place at the END of Jesus' ministry while John shows it to be at the very BEGINNING of Jesus' ministry.

Now a number of scholars, upon the assumption that this event only took place once, have come up with all sorts of ways to try and reconcile and justify why John has “dis-chronologized” this event. And, to be sure, the practice of dis-chronologizing an event is not itself an issue - especially if a writer is more thematically than historically driven.

However, and without going into all the arguments behind this, while a number of scholars - including some conservative ones - have seen this as the same event as recorded in the other Gospels - there are also some, including heavy-hitters like Leon Morris and Don Carson, who hold the view that Jesus “cleansed” the temple at both the beginning AND the end of his ministry. And that is my own view as well.

Now why do I bother to point this out? Because it makes a difference in how we handle the text. You see, one of the problems that Christians run into when it comes to reading the Gospels is that, because there are 4 of them, and because they contain a lot of similar, but not identical material, then it is very easy when you are read the account of Jesus in one book - like John, for instance - to *read into that account* events and truths that come from one of the other Gospels. The end result is that what often happens is that instead of a person reading Matthew on his own terms, he will muddle it together with the other 3 gospels in his head so that, in effect, what he is reading is a *5<sup>th</sup> Gospel* that is the combination of all four which we’ll call “MattMaLukeJohn”. And this happens not only when people *read* the Gospels but it can also happen very easily when someone *preaches* one of the Gospels.

Now, on the one hand, that’s okay because, in fact, all four Gospels are absolutely true. All four Gospels are talking about the same person, and often the same events. And, while they do highlight different things and each one has some unique material that none of the others has, the end result is that they tend to inform and interpret one another - which is a good thing.

That being said, however, it is important when we read any book of the Bible to, as much as possible, read it within its *own* context and on its *own terms*. And this is *especially* true when we read the Gospels because they have so obviously have been written by different authors for *different audiences and with different purposes in mind*. And when you lump the Gospels all together, you miss out on these realities and thus, are in danger of missing a particular writer’s emphasis and point.

That danger is one which we face when looking at the passage before us today. Because, while we are, in my view, looking at a temple purging that is *different* from the ones recorded in the other Gospels - nevertheless, because these two events necessarily have a lot in common, it is easy to read emphases made in other Gospels into John’s purposes here - and so miss *his* point.

So, for example, when we look at the temple purging that took place at the END of Jesus’ life - as found in Luke’s Gospel - what we see there, among other things, is Jesus talking about how people have made his Father’s house a den of thieves, or robbers (Luke 19:46). And so, one of the points that Luke is making has to do with the crass materialism and idolatry of money that was going on - as characterized by the greedy and dishonest practice of some of the temple merchants.

And let me be clear on this because the problem was not with *what* these merchants and moneychangers were doing. *What* they were doing was perfectly legitimate - even helpful. They were basically providing a service, in two ways. For those who lived far away, rather than their having to go through the hassle of driving and herding a sacrificial animal or animals all the way from their home to Jerusalem they could go by the local “Sacrifices-R-Us” store, so to speak, and pick one up, when they got into town.

And the same could be said for the “money changers”. Because the temple tax had to be paid and it had to be paid *with a certain coinage*. People in that day had different currencies from all sorts of places but when they came to Jerusalem, those currencies were not acceptable and so had to be converted to one that was.

As for why the temple accepted one currency over the others, while it has often been speculated that it was due to the fact that all the other currencies, except one, had images of emperors on them, and Jewish people didn’t worship images and so this was a big NO-NO - while that sort of thing has been speculated, it has been shown that even the coinage they *did* accept had images upon it and so the more likely reason for accepting the Tyrian coinage over the others was because it had a reputation for having a higher percentage of precious metal in it.

In short, it’s metal was *purier* and thus ultimately more valuable and stable. So, it wasn’t images they were worried about; they just wanted the good stuff. And so, because this tax was a requirement, and because it had to be paid with a particular currency, the moneychangers were providing a valuable and necessary service.

And so the problem, again, was not with *what* these people were doing but rather *how* they were doing it. That is one concern that comes through in Luke’s Gospel. Another concern that came through in Luke’s Gospel was not only *how* they were doing it but also *where* they were doing it. Simply put, they had set up shop in the outer court of the temple - in what was called the “Court of the Gentiles” as it was the only place where a non-Jew could go and worship God. And so, by setting up their market in *this* part of the temple they were, in effect, kicking all the non-Jewish people out of the temple - blocking their access. Again, in *Luke’s Gospel* this is a huge concern.

Now, it may have been the case that both of these concerns were *also* on Jesus’ mind during his first temple purging - as recorded here in John’s Gospel. However, if that is so, John’s Gospel doesn’t go out of its way to make that obvious. However, what IS highlighted in John’s Gospel is not the greed and dishonesty, and not the presence of merchants in the Court of the Gentiles, but rather *the simple fact that there were ANY merchants in the Temple AT ALL*. Their mere presence itself was problem enough in Jesus’ eyes.

Because, you see, they hadn’t always been inside the temple. That was a fairly recent innovation. For a number of years before this they had set up shop “across town” so to speak, but not in the temple itself. But now they are IN the temple - and Jesus is furious about it. Why? Because they have made a place of worship into a place of trade, a place of *business*.

So here's this person, comes walking into the temple, looking for a good bargain on a sacrificial animal. And he starts haggling over the price with one merchant and then the next. And the merchants are shouting across the way - trying to coax people into buying what *they* have to offer - and so there is this whole bargaining and competition process going on. And finally a price and an animal gets settled on and then the person turns to the money changers - and the haggling starts all over again to see who will give him the best rate of exchange for his currency, so the temple tax can be paid. And then, when that gets taken care of, at that point the person turns around and has to mentally shift gears from business mode, from bargaining mode, to worship mode.

And in addition to having to shift gears and to try and put all of that stuff aside, the person has to compete now with the marketplace, that is just behind him. As one writer puts it,

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.....

The problem, you see, with all the trading going on was that the traders seem to be either unaware or worse, *unconcerned* about the effect of their conducting business on the temple grounds, all of which showed, among other things, a remarkably LOW grasp of what was going on in the Temple and what the whole thing was about.

I can well remember how in Australia, at our first location for worship, we were inside a YMCA and often, while we were having services in the hall upstairs, there would be business going on downstairs, people playing basketball, people doing aerobics classes. And I can remember in particular one Sunday when, while we were in the middle of serving communion, the exercise class below suddenly cranked up the sound of Madonna singing, "Like a Virgin" - and it became *terribly difficult* to stay focused on what we were there for. Now that is not exactly the same situation at all - but it is something like what would have been going on in the Temple daily - that is, until Jesus came and threw everyone out.

And why did he do this? Because he was, as the text tells us, *consumed* with zeal for his Father's House. Because he could see how this must have been so distracting and how it would have been so easy, under those circumstances, to have your faith become less and less a matter of the heart, and more and more a going through the motions, getting your sacrifice, getting it taken care of, and getting out of there. And so the business transaction in one part of the temple would become a *worship transaction* in another part of the temple.

And this is where the whole Passover connection is so significant. Because one of the things that took place in the observance of the Passover was that people had to go through their houses and get rid of all the leaven - all of the stuff that was used to cause flour to rise and make the baking of bread possible. They had to get rid of all of that in remembrance of the Passover night when God's people had to ready themselves for departure, and thus had no time to waste on making leavened bread, etc. Leaven was no good to them at that point and would only slow them down.

And so, Jesus comes into town *for the Passover* and just as everyone else in town was throwing out the leaven from their houses, Jesus marches over to his Father's house - the Temple - and *throws the leaven out of it*. He gets rid of these things that were a hindrance and which stood in the way of God's people responding to him in an appropriate manner. That's what is going on here. Jesus is throwing the leaven out of the house.

And this is where the connection comes in for you and me. Now, to be sure, we don't have a temple anymore - why that is the case we'll see in a moment. But we don't have a temple. We just have buildings *in which we gather* but they are not temples and they are NOT "God's House". And neither do we have people inside our church buildings selling sacrifices and changing out money, trying to make a profit, although, can I just say, I *have* seen this sort of thing in some of the great Cathedrals I have visited around the country where just inside the front door there will be a little gift and memorabilia shop! Amazing!

Nevertheless, that is not the normal or usual situation in our churches today. *But that doesn't mean that we are entering into our times of corporate worship any less distracted than the people in Jesus' day*. It's not just the selling of goats and lambs that has the ability to interfere with our adoration of God. It's not just stuff "out there" that gets in our way. There's a great deal that we bring with us when we come together to *be* the house in which God dwells by His Spirit. There's a great deal going on *up here* and *in here*, in our hearts and minds, that has the same potential for drawing us away.

What those *particular* things are for you - I don't know. But I do know this: *You know what they are*. And whatever they are, like Jesus in Jerusalem, you need to go through and take these things and *throw them out*. And because worship is not just about what happens here on Sunday but is about your whole life, then that applies not only to things related to *this* day, but to things that affect us *every day*, to things that daily have the ability to lure us away from pure and unhindered devotion to God.

And this applies to us as a whole, as a church. We need to be alert and mindful of those things which get in the way when we DO come together for corporate worship. We need to be wary of those things - both in terms of attitudes and practices - which can creep in and which tend to *encroach* upon our worship of God, drawing attention away from him, making something else or someone else the object of our attentions and affections. Find the leaven, whatever it is, and *throw it out*.

The second thing I want you to see this morning - and don't panic, this will be briefer - but the second thing is simply the request that is made for Jesus to give them a sign. In the aftermath of this surprising show of righteous anger and authority we see something else that is equally surprising - and that is the fact that the Jewish authorities don't go *ballistic* on Jesus and have him arrested for his actions. After all, they have given approval for these merchants and moneychangers to be doing what they are doing. Who is Jesus to just come along and contradict their own decisions and permissions?

Well, that was precisely the question on the minds of the Jewish authorities - *Who was this Jesus?* You have to remember that this is still very early in the piece, long before the Jews have had a chance to make up their minds about Jesus. Perhaps he was a legitimate prophet. After all, some very strange things had been going on with regard to John the Baptist, and there was already an air of expectancy at that time with regard to the Messiah. And so, rather than being too hasty, rather than hauling off and going after a man that may turn out to be the genuine article, the Jewish authorities take a more cautious approach to him - THIS TIME, even though the next time this happens they won't.

But this time, they exercise some restraint and some come to Jesus asking him for a sign. His actions are strong, as well as his words. And those words and actions carry with them certain prophetic implications and so the authorities want Jesus to do something *more*. They want him to perform some sort of miracle that will confirm what his actions seem to imply - that he truly is a prophet of God.

But Jesus does not submit to their request. Instead, rather than giving them a sign then and there Jesus tells them about *another sign*, one that he *is* willing to give them and in fact will give them - but not just yet. To give into them now, to perform some miraculous display *on demand* would, as Carson puts it, "signal the domestication of God." But that sort of God, a God who does amazing stunts to maintain allegiance is not a God worth having, and is certainly not the God who *is*.

And so, rather than submitting to their agenda, he offers one of his own. He talks to them about destroying a temple - saying "Destroy *this* temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Now the Jewish authorities, upon hearing this, and not surprisingly, understood Jesus to be talking about the actual physical temple - the temple that had been under construction for 46 years and which was not yet finished and would not, in fact, *be* finished for another thirty years. They thought Jesus was talking about *that* temple and so, understandably, were quite incredulous over this claim.

But, as we know from John's Gospel and subsequent history, the temple that Jesus was referring to was his own body - signaling here his own upcoming death and resurrection. Now, admittedly, Jesus is being fairly cryptic here and this will not be the last time he does this sort of thing. This same pattern of Jesus saying something, and then his words being misunderstood, followed by a clarification of what was truly meant - but that same pattern will re-appear in a number of places in this Gospel - in 3:3ff, 4:10ff, 6:41ff, etc.

Why does Jesus do this? Well, one reason is because, as we see in the other Gospels, in the early days of his ministry, Jesus is quite concerned to not "let the cat out of the bag" with regard to his identity, any sooner than necessary. Why? Because he is dealing with a whole society that *thinks* they know what the Messiah is all about. Everybody has their blueprints on the what the Messiah will be like when he comes. But Jesus did not come to be the Messiah they had constructed in their heads, he came to be the Messiah that he WAS.

And so, because these two were not the same, and because he did not want to deal with the pressure of their trying to squeeze him into that mold any longer than necessary, he was purposefully evasive about some things in the early days of his ministry. The other reason for his doing this had to do with the eventual impact and effect that his saying these sorts of things would have on his disciples much later on when they recalled his words on these occasions and, in the process of doing that, would have their own faith affirmed and confirmed.

So, the Jewish authorities ask for a sign, and Jesus does not give them one, at least not the one they wanted and not when they wanted it.

And that desire for signs - that still continues today. People still want some sort of sign or "proof" that they imagine would make the difference between belief and un-belief. But the request for signs, says Jesus in another place, is an indicator of a wicked and perverse generation. And that is still true today. Which means that as God's people today, we too need to resist the temptation which has appeared in the church in recent decades to give into this belief that signs and wonders are necessary things for the life and work of the church.

And, further, we should resist the temptation to think that somehow a church that is without them is anemic and sub-spiritual. Taking Jesus' own lead, when people indicate a desire for a sign, or want something to confirm to them the identity of Christ - we need to point them to the cross and the resurrection, and we need not go anywhere else. Because if they will not accept *that* sign - then no amount of other miracles will do the trick. Miracles and signs do not generate faith, they do not create life in spiritually dead people. The most they can do is reveal faith, and make apparent faith and expose faith - like turning on a flashlight makes things apparent that were not apparent before - not because it creates them but because it reveals what was formerly hidden. The "sign" of the cross functions in the same way today. That is the only necessary sign, and it is the only one that we have any business pointing people to.

The last thing I want you to see, but not the least important, is this: By both his actions and his words, as seen in this passage, Jesus shows that one of the big shifts that was taking place on account of him and through his arrival on the scene was that whereas the temple was formerly the focal point for the worship of God's people - now that focal point lay somewhere else.....

Notice, for instance, how just as we saw last week, Jesus' actions in the temple, again, interrupt and disrupt something that was part of the OT system of ritual activities and observances. Just as the turning of water to wine disrupted one household's ability to carry out the purification rituals and ceremonial washings, so now his activities make the offering up of the sacrifices much more difficult. Why? Because the system that, up to now, had been a foreshadowing of what God was going to do was now in the process of being replaced by that which it was actually foreshadowing - Jesus Himself.

Secondly, the symbolism of what Jesus does in the temple also points us to the shift in the focal point for the worship of God's people. is not to be missed here. Here he is, in the temple where once were *all* the animals for sacrifice - and he throws all of them out. And what is left? What is left is a temple that is completely empty, with all the sacrificial animals gone.

Except one. One sacrificial Lamb remains in the temple. The lamb that will take away the sin of the world.

Thirdly, Jesus words in which he equates his own body with the Temple of God - the meeting place of God, they place of sacrifice for the sins of God's people - those words are not to be passed over lightly. All of these things point to the fact that the focal point of worship for God's people, from the time of Jesus forward, is no longer a place but a *person*. Jesus is "the place", if I can say it that way, where God and man meet. Jesus is the place where we go to have our sins dealt with. Jesus is the High priest that represents us before God. And Jesus is the lamb that takes away our sin.

This has tremendous implications for our worship. It means that the new "holy place" for God's people is the person of Christ - and the people in whom He dwells by his Spirit. Buildings are not holy, they are just buildings. If we ever put up a church - our sanctuary will not be a holy place - we'll probably call it a sanctuary - but not because it is a holy place. It's not. And whatever we build, it will not be "God's House". It may be a place *in which* God's people - God's household comes together. But the building itself will remain just that - a building. And it will not be any more holy than the parking lot in front of it.

More importantly, this shift in the locus of our worship means that when we place a high priority on Jesus and the cross and the resurrection - it is not because we are neglecting God the Father, or because we have no concern or theology of the Spirit. It is because we are taking our cue from the Scriptures and the emphasis and focus that is found there on the person and work of Christ.

Still further, this shift from Temple to Jesus means that the sacraments, which speak of our union with Christ and our being spiritually fed and nurtured by him - those things ought to have a deep significance for us as the people of God.

Finally, it means that if Jesus and his, life, death and resurrection are the new *locus* for the worship of God's people, then one of the the most God-honoring, worshipful things we can do is to believe that Gospel, and live that Gospel and SPEAK of that gospel and proclaim that Gospel. What that means is that when you are sitting next to your friend in some coffee shop somewhere and you are telling them of the forgiveness to be found in the cross, and the hope and wholeness to be found in the cross - when you do those things you are *worshipping* God in one of the deepest and most significant ways you can ever worship him.

And one implication of that is that if THIS if what we do in here doesn't result in your speaking and living the Gospel OUT THERE, then there is something fundamentally wrong with our worship. Worship that does not culminate in witness is weak, anemic and in need of a heart-check. And so, whether we are the church GATHERED or the church DISTRIBUTED - the focal point of our worship is and can be the same - the amazing love and mercy of God seen in the Gospel of His Son.

And let me tell you - that is the purpose of your life. It's not some side purpose. It's not some add-on purpose. That is THE purpose.. Achieving the American dream is not your purpose. Being financially independent is not your purpose. Having killer ABS is not your purpose. Winning the approval of whoever that person is that sits on your shoulder and tells you every day that you are not good enough - that is not your purpose. Even Your job is not your purpose. It is a means to your purpose. It's a vital aspect of that purpose - but it is not your purpose.

Zeal to see your heavenly Father receive the praise that is rightfully his - that is your purpose, that is my purpose, that is this church's purpose - and everything else about who we are, and what we have been given, and what we do with our lives - everything else is to be brought into the service of that. And if it isn't, whatever it is that is getting in the way of that - whatever is proving to be a hindrance to that - then like Jesus in the Jerusalem temple - we need to do a little house cleaning.

Zeal for his father's house, in the end, did consume Jesus. And that would be a fitting epitaph for every person in this room.....