

John 2:13-22: ¹³ When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵ So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."¹⁸ Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." ²⁰ The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" ²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

For the last few Wednesdays, I have been going from place to place, congregation to congregation preaching about Peter's hands of misguided zeal. (I traveled to St. John Redwood Falls, St. Matthew's Danube, St. Matthew Flora Twp, Zion Olivia, and RenVilla nursing home.) During this Lenten season, we are once again walking through the incredible history of Jesus' passion, and this year the theme for our meditations and messages has been "The Hands of the Passion" and so I spent a lot of time thinking about and talking about Peter's hands of misguided zeal. Peter wanted to help his Lord and Savior, but in a misguided effort, he struck the high priest servant with his sword, cutting off his ear. It was a sinful mix of emotions and a desire to help his Savior mingled with a lack of self-control that led Peter to do a regrettable thing. And Peter was rebuked by Jesus and told to put his sword away. After all, Jesus was about to drink the cup of suffering as he went about the work of the Father. He was going about this all-important mission of accomplishing God's plan of salvation. Jesus would willingly go to the cross to pay for Peter's sin of misguided zeal and for all of the sins of the world.

With each congregation, we spent some time with that idea of zeal and asked the Lord to help guard our hearts against similar misguided words and deeds of aggression and violence when dealing with those who stand opposed to Christ and his followers. We asked God for forgiveness for the times that we have gone too far, and we were encouraged to trust in the power of God's Word.

So what are we supposed to do with our lesson for today?! Jesus heads into the temple and grabs a whip and he overturns tables of those exchanging money and he scatters their coins and drives out those selling animals and the animals themselves and that same word that we heard on Wednesday night is used: zeal. How are we supposed to understand this? Is this an example of the Bible contradicting itself? Certainly not! As

we take a closer look at this account of Jesus cleansing the temple, we see Jesus compelled by Godly zeal as he went about his Father's work.

Let's take a few moments to contrast those two events. We remember that with Peter's actions in the garden, his zeal was misguided and unnecessary. His action involved striking a single soldier in a compulsive act that lacked self-control. It was out of place and ignored the will of God and was a clear example of Peter doing something that wasn't needed and harmful. What Jesus does at the temple stands out as something entirely different right from the start.

As Jesus approaches the temple, we recall that this is at the very beginning of his public ministry and Jesus is embarking on his task of going about the Father's work. John records this after Jesus' first miracle of changing water into wine. At the wedding, the Lord Jesus acts in compassion, yet he makes it clear that the performing of miracles is not why he came. However, in love he answers his mother's persistent request and helps the couple, shows his compassion and power, and his disciples begin to put their trust in him. Now Jesus heads up to Jerusalem as the one who was sent to fulfill the law. And the Lamb of God notices something that was deeply disturbing and out of place. ¹⁴ ***In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money.*** During a busy time like the Passover, those activities would have been common and even necessary, but the location where there were taking place and how this business was going about was not to be tolerated. This was happening inside the temple courts. And the money changers and those selling the animals were known to be not so noble or fair in their dealings. So this is how a person would enter in this place of God's presence that the first thing that would catch the eye and hit one's senses is this scene of obvious corruption. Something had to be done. And so Jesus took the necessary action. He addressed the sinful practice without hesitation. ¹⁵ ***So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.*** ¹⁶ ***To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"***

Jesus was going about the work of the Father. He was addressing sin and it was obvious and great, and yet no one else was doing anything about it! Instead of this solemn space that prepared the senses for an encounter with God, it had become an exercise in the commercialism of the world, a window into the corruption of human hearts, and the cheating and greedy and empty habits of self-serving sinners. A consecrated space had become taken on the dignity of an overrun convenience store, where distracted patrons could make their festive transactions. Many would drop their coins in the baskets grab a head of cattle, any cattle would do, and then pay their dues as they went about the cues of fulfilling their duty, while the business and busyness of this machine churned on and on. And what a loud and smelly machine it was. Cattle, sheep, and doves, and all their noise and all their mess, this was all so horribly out of place, but it had grown like a thick and invasive weed with no one bothering to clear it out. And

thus, it had become the norm. It was a thing that no one else seemed to mind, and so as is the nature of such things, it would likely grow more and more.

And so this burning concern, this zeal sprung up and compelled him to action. Jesus took action to weed out this blight that had crept into his Father's house and would crop up again. It appears that he would come and have to do this again at the end of his ministry. Matthew records for us that occurrence as Jesus zealously makes known his disgust with this corruption with these words, He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. ¹³ ***"It is written," he said to them, " 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'"***

The buying, the selling, the cheating, the animals, it all took away from what was supposed to be a beautiful and wonderful opportunity – to spend time with God. For children of God to approach and worship the Father who in his love delivers them. But there was so much in the way and so it had to be removed. In his zeal, in his genuine and deep concern for the people in his love for God, in his burning desire for this interaction between God and human beings, Jesus took up a whip and cleansed the temple.

What things are standing in the way of us and God? Maybe some of those things are standing out in the open and are obvious but we do nothing or say nothing about it. What is "the elephant in the room" or "the cattle in the temple" so to speak that needs to be addressed in your life? In his great concern for you and your life with God, Jesus comes forward to address what needs to be addressed. The one who is your gentle Shepherd and friend, your compassionate helper and healer, is also the one who wields his Word and passionately calls for action. In his burning concern for you and me and our fellow believers, and for the lost, he comes near with zealous force. He comes not to harm or abuse, but he comes to cleanse and to restore, to make new, and to save. He comes to address that which needs to be addressed so that we may be made right with God and approach him in repentance and faith.

Our worship of God is not to take on an attitude of laziness and convenience, but we are led by Jesus to repent. We are compelled by Jesus' driving concern to turnover and to scatter and do away with the things that pile up in our lives and hinder our worship of God.

And with these words and actions of Jesus, we also have a clear testimony from the Son of God that we are to view the house of God as precious, a place to be visited. It is to be approached with honor and respect and treated as a sacred place where we spend time with our Father. This place is special, for here we hear God's Word, we talk to our Father in prayer, we gather as a family to celebrate and eat his meal and follow the customs he has guided us to establish for our good.

And yet like those in the temple that day who could only question Jesus' authority, we too balk at his words and actions as too shocking. It should be pretty obvious that Jesus has every right to come in and disrupt these sinful norms that crop up in our lives over and over. He has every right to address our laziness, our apathy, and our shallow transactional view of our relationship with God. He has every right to object as we punch in and out and make our offering of time and move on our way from God's house

without much thought or effort given to the things of God. And yet still we offer up those defiant questions. Who are you to call me on these things Jesus? What authority do you have? Who do you think you are?

In love and zeal for the Father and for all God's children, Jesus points to his coming death and resurrection, as both proof of his authority and proof of his love. It wasn't so much about the temple or the building, it was all about the promises of God that the temple pointed to that Jesus was actively fulfilling. Pay attention to the one who stands in the temple courts that day. Jesus is the Son of God, the promised One, the one and only Sacrifice for sin. His body was the temple that held forgiveness and God's presence and peace with God. He was the dwelling of God with men who was sent by God to restore the permanent dwelling of God with mankind. He is the one who comes to bring sinners the gift of eternal life. He is the one who came to wash away sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And he would do that at the altar of the cross offering his own body as the price of redemption. ¹⁹***Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."*** The one who was willingly delivered over to death for our sins would be raised to life for our justification!

Marvel at his zeal, at his passionate concern for you. Stand in awe of his zeal for the Father's house and the Father's business that that leads to his passion, that compels Jesus to walk straight into opposition, rejection, as well as his suffering and death, and know that he goes for you. He goes to be the sacrifice that has paid the sins of the whole world. No transaction on your part is needed anymore. Greater than any sacrifice you could ever offer. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Come and worship and praise the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As the Father sends his Son for you. As the Son goes about the work of the Father. As the Spirit drives away our unbelief and leads us to put our trust in our Savior.

And so compelled by God's zealous love we approach our Savior in our Father's house of prayer. Lord, open our eyes so that we may see and remember your great concern, your passionate zeal for sinners like us. In your driving affection for sinners like us you willingly went about the work of the Father. You came as our substitute. You proclaimed the good news of repentance and salvation without hesitation. You faced rejection and opposition, ridicule, criticism, and temptation. You overcame and overturned and scattered the obstacles that were laid before you because you had a deep and burning desire that we might dwell with you in your Father's house in heaven forever. Lead me to remember your zeal to save and restore God's children, including me. Renew in me a love for God's house and the blessed opportunity that you have given me to gather in our Father's presence as the family of believers now and throughout my life. Help me to acknowledge and root out and overturn those things which would hinder my worship of you. Fill me with a zeal for your Father's house so that I may be encouraged, and I may encourage others to come and worship you as Savior and Lord. You are the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us and grant us your peace. Amen.