

- I. The second of many signs and wonders (the first half of the story)
  - A. John 2:13-17 . . . The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. [14] And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. [15] And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; [16] and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business." [17] His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house will consume me."
  - B. Today, it is my intention to convey three primary truths about living the Christian life. The first truth has to do with having a tender heart toward the poor. The second truth deals with what is necessary for true and lasting change. And the third truth is about having a consuming zeal for purity in yourself and in the church.
  - C. Pray
- II. Cleansing the Temple
  - A. John 2:13 . . . The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.
    1. Jesus grew up going to Jerusalem every year for the Passover, and we know this because Luke tells us in Luke 2:41-42, "Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. [42] And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast."
    2. However, by the time Jesus started going to Jerusalem with His parents, the original Temple built by Solomon no longer existed. It was destroyed by the Babylonians around 587 BC. Zerubbabel led a number of Jews from the Babylonian captivity back to Jerusalem to begin rebuilding the Temple – and though we only have a general idea when he began that work, it was finished around 515 BC. Many years later, Herod renovated the Temple, and that is how it was in Jesus' day.
  - B. John 2:14 . . . And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables.

1. According to the OT scriptures, all the animals mentioned here were required for fulfilling the various forms of worship and sacrifices required by God at the Temple.
    - a. For example, those traveling a long distance (possibly a hundred miles or more) would have a hard time getting their animals to the Temple in the kind of condition required by God for sacrificing.
    - b. Therefore, being able to purchase animals in Jerusalem for Temple sacrifices was a good thing, for it met a legitimate need.
    - c. And it was this provision of animals for sacrifice, along with the Temple tax or tithe, that made the money changers necessary for Jews coming from foreign lands with foreign currency.
  2. The point I want us to see is that in driving the animals, the sellers, and the money changers out of the Temple, Jesus was not reacting against the service they provided. But we will look at that more closely when we get to vs 16.
- C. John 2:15-16 . . . And [Jesus] made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; [16] and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business."
1. All four Gospels tell this story, but only John mentions a scourge or whip. It seems most probable that Jesus used the whip to drive out the animals, which in turn would have caused the sellers to chase after them so as to not lose their merchandise.
  2. The next thing John tells us is that Jesus poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. This had the effect of spreading the coins all over the floor and mixing all the money together – which would have made it hard to identify, let alone prove what local money, what foreign currency, and how much money belonged to each of the money changers.
  3. Jesus then told those who were selling doves to take them away, that is, to take them out of the Temple.
    - a. The doves were in cages, and if Jesus had treated the doves like He did the rest of the animals, they would have ended up flying all over the Temple – which would have made it very hard to get them out of the Temple. So, by leaving the doves in their cages, Jesus only had to tell their owners to take them out of the Temple.
    - b. But there is another side to the doves, and this other side deals with the reason they were selling doves in the first place. You

see, God allowed doves to be sacrificed because they were the least expensive blood sacrifice available to the poorest of the Jews.

- (1) Now my reason for pointing this out is because we are wise to remember that Jesus had a tender heart toward the poor, and like Jesus, we too should be tender hearted toward the poor.
  - (2) In fact, we read in Proverbs 22:22-23 . . . Do not rob the poor because he is poor (in other words, don't take advantage of the poor just because they don't have the means or skills to resist you), or crush the afflicted at the gate (where the judges often sat to hand out decisions in court cases); [23] for the LORD will plead their case and take the life of those who rob them.
  - (3) This Proverbs takes on even greater meaning when linked to Mark's account of Jesus cleansing the Temple. We read in Mark 11:17, "And [Jesus] said to them, Is it not written, 'My House shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a robbers' den.'"
  - (4) But who where the merchants and money changers robbing? Everyone they could, but most often those who could least afford to be robbed by the inflated prices charged for the convenience of doing this kind of business at the Temple.
4. At this point in driving the animals and business people out of the Temple, Jesus said, "Stop making My Father's house a place of business."
- a. As I just pointed out, in this part of the story, Mark records Jesus as saying, "Is it not written, 'My House shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a robbers' den" (Mark 11:17). Both Matthew (21:13) and Luke (19:46) record Jesus as saying almost the exact same thing.
  - b. Turning the dwelling of God into a robbers den provides a much clearer picture of the evil taking place in the Temple than John's words of turning it into a place of business.
  - c. Therefore, if we only look at John's account of what Jesus said, it raises the question, "What is so bad about doing business at the Temple, especially since the business that was being done benefitted those who came to the Temple to worship God, offer their sacrifices, and pay their Temple tithe?"
  - d. Well, we will get to that in a few minutes, but before we do, there is something else to consider first. It is likely that in spite of what

Jesus did in cleansing the Temple, the merchants and money changers were back in their usual places soon after, if not the next day. And why is this significant for us today? Because it teaches a lesson about changing that is vital for all Christians everywhere and at anytime.

- D. True change – change that stands the test of time, that is, that stand the tests of such things as temptation, difficult days, injustice, and self-pity – requires changing on the inside as well as the outside.
1. When Jesus cleansed the Temple, He was cleansing the outward manifestations of an evil that resided within the religious leaders, the priests, and the Levites.
    - a. And though this part of the cleansing process is vital, it is not all that is necessary for true and lasting transformation.
    - b. Without question, we must take the steps necessary to bring an end to the outward manifestations of evil, such as selfishness, pride, greed, gluttony, envy, immorality, and the like.
    - c. But to be made whole – so as to become a new creation in Christ Jesus and continue on in the way of godliness – we must also put to death the evil desires, foolish fears, fleshly passions, longings for unholy pleasures, self-importance, and any other felt-need, belief, and value that drives our outward manifestations of evil.
    - d. And the reality is, we cannot stop there, for equally important to killing off the evil within is the activity of replacing that evil with godly desires, passions, longings, beliefs, and values.
  2. Jesus stated this truth this way in Matthew 23:25-26, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. [26] “You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.”
  3. God, speaking through Malachi, said that He would purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness (Malachi 3:2-4).
    - a. In other words, as we are purified within, we more naturally behave outwardly in pure ways.
      - (1) I say “more naturally” because in the midst of strong temptation to return to old sinful ways, we will probably need a good measure of self-discipline, prayer, and trust in God to remain on the narrow path.

- (2) But other than those times, when we are cleansed within, we will naturally do what is right, because that cleansing has created a new nature.
    - b. Therefore, if the religious leaders of Jesus' day had been holy inwardly, they would never have allowed the merchants and money changers to operate as they did within the Temple walls.
  4. This same principle of change is found in other portions of scripture.
    - a. James confirms this principle when he said, "Cleanse your hands you sinners (the outward manifestations of selfishness and sin); and purify your hearts, you double-minded (the inward motivations for selfishness and sin)" (James 4:8).
    - b. And Paul pointed to the necessity of inward and outward cleansing when he said, "Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. [21] Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. [22] Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:20-22).
  5. The truth here is simple, yet extremely vital. To truly change, long-term we must put a stop to the outward manifestations of the sin we are committing and replace them with godly manifestations.
    - a. AND, we must also cleanse the evil desires, passions, fears, double-standards, and pride that resides within because they are powerful motivators for the outward manifestations of sin.
    - b. AND, we must replace the evil that was within with godly desires, godly thinking, faith, selflessness, and humility.
    - c. Therefore, when we bring both the outward and the inward into conformity to the likeness of Jesus Christ, then we are able to think, speak, and behave as a true follower of Jesus Christ.
- E. John 2:17 . . . His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house will consume me."
1. This quote comes from Psalm 69:9 . . . "For zeal for Your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me." This phrase contains two words that make it an exceedingly strong statement – zeal and consume.
    - a. Zeal is an intense feeling or motivation that drives you to do something.

- b. The word consume, when used in this way, means to eat up or devour. In other words, Jesus' zeal for God's house, that is, Jesus' zeal for the dwelling place, or the dwelling places of God, devoured Him.
  2. But what was His devouring zeal about? The context tells us that Jesus was consumed with zeal for the purity of God's dwelling place. And today I hope we can see how this kind of zeal applies to us, because we, as individuals, are a dwelling place of God, and we, as the church, are the dwelling place of God.
    - a. Paul confirms that we, as individuals, are the dwelling place of God in 1 Corinthians 3:16 . . . Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?
    - b. And Paul confirms that we, as a church, are the dwelling place of God in Ephesians 2:19-22 . . . So then . . . you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, [20] having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, [21] in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, [22] in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.
  3. This raises a question that each of us ought to seriously consider, and the question is: As God's dwelling place, both individually and corporately, are you, am I, are we devoured with zeal for the purity of His dwelling place? Do you have a consuming zeal for personal purity? Do we have a devouring zeal for the purity of the church?
    - a. Do you realize that both you and the church can slowly and almost imperceptibly sink into the mire of impurity if you, as an individual, and we, as a group, lack zeal for the purity of God's dwelling place?
    - b. Sadly, there are Christians who lack zeal for purity in themselves, and they live a hypocritical, double-standard life while thinking and believing they are living a good Christian life.
    - c. And when you have a church made up mostly of Christians who lack a devouring zeal for purity, you get an impure church which then makes it easy for the leaders of that church to believe it is wise to operate their church as if it were a business.
  4. It is my observation that it has become all too common for churches to follow the same principles of doing business that have made big business successful in our country.

- a. And though many argue that this approach to running a church is wise, let me ask one basic question in several ways.
  - b. Who are successful business in business for? For whose benefit are they wanting to be successful? Are the owners or CEO's or board of directors or share holders doing this for altruistic, serve the good of others, reasons or for personal gain?
- F. As I said earlier, if we only look at John's account of what Jesus said about turning God's dwelling place into a place of business, it raises the question, "What is so bad about doing business at the Temple, especially since the business that was being done benefitted those who came to the Temple to worship God, offer sacrifices to God, and pay their Temple tithe?"
1. What is so bad about this is that it changes the direction of who benefits the most, from God to those in charge. It takes what belongs to God and what ought to be directed toward God and turns it toward me and you.
  2. I know this truth first hand, for there was a time when I wanted to fill the chairs with people who wanted to come and hear me.
  3. Was this for God's sake? If what was, then only in part, and a small part at that. For the truth is, I wanted to feel important, and I wanted to have my importance proven by folks coming to hear me.
  4. I had enough humility and common sense to know I didn't want a big church. But I also had enough pride to want my teaching to be the reason people came. And it was in this way that I turned God's dwelling place into a place of business. You see, I was trying to use God to gain something for myself. My zeal, though camouflaged by humility and the pursuit of godliness, was none-the-less self-directed rather than God directed. What is your zeal directed toward?

### III. Conclusion

- A. May we, like Jesus, have a tender heart toward the poor.
- B. May we pursue change outside AND inside.
- C. And may we have a devouring zeal for the purity of God's dwelling places, be it in us, individually, or in the church, both local and universal.