

John 2:13-22

The account of the Cleansing of the Temple by Jesus has made many people **uncomfortable** - perhaps even you. The point which causes the **rub**, is **anger**. The **angry** Jesus whom we see here appears to be quite **different** from the gentle and understanding Jesus whom we see in so many **other** places in the Bible. Therefore, the event has been pointed to by at least **some** individuals, to prove that Jesus was **not perfect**. Viewing the actions of Jesus from their own human perspective, they say, "Look at how **angry** He got! Look at how He **lost control**, and flew into a **rage!**" But such people are **wrong** in their deductions. Jesus was, is, and will remain **perfect** forever. What our text points out to us is that **anger**, in the right place, at the right time, and with the right motive; is **not** sinful. Yes, Jesus was **angry** - yes, Jesus **hated** - but He did not hate **people**. He hated their sinful **actions**. Christ's anger flowed out of **love** for those people, and for God's house. He loved those **individuals** too deeply to let them continue **harming** their immortal souls with such blatant, open sin; and He loved God's **temple** too much to allow it to be defiled and desecrated.

What an example! If only **we** had that kind of **Zeal For God's Temple**. Too often we show **apathy**, or even **disdain** for God's temple, as the people did in Christ's day. But Jesus shows us a zeal for His temple that we would do well to imitate. **Be Zealous For God's Temple**. Show your zeal in the way you **worship**, and show your zeal in the way you live the **rest** of your life as well.

It was again the time of the Jewish **Passover** - a seven-day festival which was ushered in by the celebration of the Passover **meal**. Every Jewish male age twelve and older was expected to attend that festival at the temple in Jerusalem. And so they came from all over the land - rich and poor, from the country and from the cities. They went **up** to Jerusalem. Why? Actually, if you were going to Jerusalem the only way you could **go** was up. Jerusalem stands about 2,500 feet **above** sea level, while the area surrounding the city drops to about 680 feet **below** sea level. So, it was a **long, hard** climb - almost 3/4 of a mile **uphill** - and of course, many of the people were traveling on **foot**.

Even **Gentiles** came. In fact, a special area had been built for the Gentiles in the temple complex, since they were not **allowed** to enter into the actual **sanctuary** itself. It was in this **outer court** which had been built for the Gentiles, that we find all the **action** taking place in our text. Not only were there **Gentiles** out there, but there were enterprising **businessmen**, with a wide array of sacrificial animals - oxen, sheep, and doves. I'm sure it had started out as a **convenience** for those who

would have had a hard time bringing sacrificial animals along with them. But, just like most modern-day convenience stores, they charged the people **exorbitant** prices. And their business had grown to such large proportions that the entire area had become a virtual **stockyard** - and that was where the Gentiles were supposed to **worship**! Can you imagine trying to worship with cattle lowing and sheep bleating, in the midst of all the stench and filth of a stockyard? If the Jews had really **cares** about bringing the Gentiles into God's fold, they would have supplied them with a suitable place to **worship** God. But they **didn't** care. They were **apathetic**.

Then there were also the **money changers** - people who would take whatever currency the people brought with them, and would give them Jewish **shekels** in exchange. This too was a **service** to the worshipers, because only **Jewish** currency could be offered in the temple. However, they did not offer their services **free of charge** - and those who were **especially** greedy made use of these transactions to "rip off" many unsuspecting pilgrims through their unjust fees. Besides the fact that there was much **graft** involved, the animal sellers and the money changers were not **worshipping** inside the temple where they **belonged**. To make a little play on words, they were more concerned about turning a **profit** (p-r-o-f-i-t), than they were about hearing a **prophet** (p-r-o-p-h-e-t)!

That's the kind of apathy **we** must be on our guard against, especially during the Lenten Season. When we have church services **twice** a week, doesn't it become easy for us to say, "Oh no, not **another** church service!" And, do you perhaps find yourself wondering, "Why do I have to go to church so **often**? When I'm at church so much, I barely have any time left to do the **other** things I want to do." When we feel that way, we must remember that **all** worship services - and **especially** Midweek Lenten services - have a very special **purpose**. They are not meant to be a **burden** or a **chore** for us. Rather, they are meant to offer us a special opportunity to **meditate** on the cross of Christ - to think about the suffering and pain which He endured for our sake. These are times when the work of Jesus is brought especially **close** to our hearts, so that we may **thank** Him, and **praise** Him, and **worship** Him for His great mercy toward us.

Jesus was well aware of the purpose which the **temple** was meant to serve. Jesus said, "*My house will be called a house of **prayer**, but you are making it a den of **robbers**.*" And Jesus was **not** apathetic in regard to what had **happened** in His Father's house. He **cleansed** the temple by driving **out** those who profaned it, and thus fulfilled the Messianic prophecy of **Malachi** who wrote, "*He will be seated like a **refiner** and a **purifier** of silver. He will **purify** the sons of Levi and **refine***

*them like gold and like silver.*” Notice that Jesus didn’t **punish** those people with His homemade whip. He didn’t attempt to beat them into **submission** either. Rather, Jesus drove the evil ones out of **His temple** - a place which was meant to be a place for **worship**. And they didn’t **resist** Him either. They **couldn’t** - because Jesus is the **all-powerful** Son of God.

We would think that the religious **leaders** would have been extremely **grateful** to Jesus for this cleansing - but instead, we find them seeking a **sign**, and **questioning** His authority! In reality, the cleansing **was** a sign all by itself. But Jesus gave them **another** sign too - one which would be fulfilled some three years later. He said, *“Destroy this **temple**, and in three days I will **raise it up again.**”* We don’t know whether Jesus used any body language when He spoke these words, but if He did, I would be rather surprised. This statement was meant to be a **veiled** sign - a **paradox** - a message which has **two** meanings. But the religious leaders **obviously** missed the point. They were so blinded that they could only see **one** meaning - namely, the temple which had just been **cleansed**. And they were **outraged**. It took us **46 years** to build this temple, and now You say that **You** are going to rebuild it in just **3 days**? That’s utter **nonsense** - completely **impossible** - totally **insolent** - and they would see to it that Jesus **paid** for His insolence too. Three years later, false witnesses would **twist** Jesus’ words, making it sound as if Jesus had said that **He** would destroy the temple, and not **they**.

They didn’t **understand** what John very **clearly** tells us. Jesus was **not** speaking about the earthly temple **building**. He was speaking about His **body**. The building was only a **type** - a **symbol** pointing to Christ. The 9th and 10th chapters of the Book of Hebrews clearly point that out for us as well. This Jesus would offer the one supreme **Sacrifice** - His own life - and in doing so, would **cleanse** the temple of **our** bodies with His **blood**. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *“**You are the temple of the living God, just as God said: ‘I will live and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people.’**”*

Jesus not only cleansed the temple in **Jerusalem**, but He also cleansed our **hearts**. And after He **completed** His house-cleaning within us - washing away our **sin** by the waters of Holy **Baptism**, getting rid of the **filth** and **stench** - He then **refilled** our hearts with His **law**, lest Satan would return and find our hearts **empty**. The Ten Commandments, recorded for us in today’s 1st Lesson, serve as a **guide** for our life - a guide which will constantly remind us to **Be Zealous For God’s Temple**. As Christians, we ourselves will strive to be **zealous** in these two ways. First, by **gladly worshiping** the LORD at **every** opportunity, making the best possible use of this **feast** which God is giving us for the nourishment of our souls

in His **Word** and **Sacrament**. And then we will **also** strive to **Be Zealous For God's Temple** by striving to keep our bodies, which are God's **temple**, **free** from all types of **sin**. We will need **help**, but our help is already **here**. As the Psalmist said, "*Our **help** is in the name of the **LORD**, the Maker of heaven and earth*" - and that LORD will **never** fail us. Amen.