

## **John 2:12-25**

*When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. 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. To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"*

*His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."*

*Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"*

*Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."*

*The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple he had spoken of was his body. 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.*

*Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.*

We're encountering a different Jesus this morning than we met last week. Last Sunday, Jesus was happy, enjoying a wedding with some friends, literally becoming the life of the party by changing water to wine. It was a big celebration.

Today, who do we have? An angry Jesus, a violent man who is making people upset and causing a commotion in a public place. That's why I called this morning's sermon the Messy Messiah. Is this the same person? What is going on here?

We're more comfortable with the wedding Jesus. We want him to be nice and gentle. When Addison was in preschool, he came home at Eastertime with a poem about Jesus being the Lamb of God. That's all very true when you're talking about him being the Passover lamb, God's sacrifice, etc. But this poem talked about how Jesus was like a cute fluffy little lamb that was quiet and soft and harmless. We'd prefer a tame Jesus.

But as they said about Aslan the lion in the chronicles of Narnia, just because he's good doesn't mean he's safe. That's what we discover here. Jesus' goodness is manifesting itself in a different way. And on the surface, we can find it a little disturbing.

But that's just the surface. When we really dig into this story we find it's not only disturbing – it's downright convicting.

Temple worship was an important part of Jewish life during Jesus' day, particularly on special holidays like Passover. Jews from all over the world would make a pilgrimage at this time of year in observance of Passover and to offer sacrifices.

On any normal day, a Jewish family could go to their local synagogue to worship and study Torah. But there were two things that were special about going to the Temple in Jerusalem. First, it was the only place where sacrifices could be made. You couldn't perform the rites to atone for your sins at a synagogue with a rabbi. You had to go to the Temple where the priests were, where they would slaughter an animal in your name. The animal would bear your punishment, your death sentence for that year. If you didn't go to the Temple, you had no other recourse for experiencing forgiveness. Animal sacrifices only occurred there.

The other unique aspect to the Temple was that it was the place where God's glory lived. The ark of the covenant was there with the mercy seat where God's "shekinah" -- his glory -- was centered. There was a special mystique to the Temple that separated it from other structures. It was such a sacred spot that no one could even enter the center of it, except the high priest once a year. To be in the general area of the Temple courts had to have been a very impressive, emotional experience.

So Jews would flock to the Temple on Passover, and you would have this massive surge in activity in the Temple courts. Imagine all those people bringing their animals to town for these sacrifices.

Now God had given instructions about making animals available for poor people who perhaps could not afford to raise their own. And that's why there are these people who had set up shop in the Temple.

And of course, when you have people coming from all over the world, they're using all different currencies. That meant you had to have the money changers there to help out. It was all legitimate business in the service of the Temple.

So when Jesus gets upset, it's a surprise to everyone. There was nothing criminal going on -- just business as usual.

Which is exactly the problem. Things had degenerated into nothing more than transactions. The Temple was a place to carry out business, make a buck, close the deal and move on. It was changing the quality and character of the worship that was happening there. Buying what you needed at the Temple was easy and a whole lot more convenient than bringing an animal from your own flock. You could meet the same requirements with much less effort. Of course, more of your Temple time would be spent waiting in line, choosing an animal, haggling over price, paying the vendor, etc. Your focus would be different.

Let's put it in a more contemporary context. When New Day was first meeting on a weekly basis, we met in a room at Our Saviour's Baptist. Imagine that one Sunday afternoon, in the middle of our meeting, the youth group from Our Saviour's comes in the back of the room and starts setting up tables for the bake sale they're going to have for their mission trip. It gets a little noisier and noisier, and before long, you can smell the doughnuts. It would be hard for the New Day crowd to concentrate. Technically, since the building belongs to OSBC, they would have the right to do that. And it is a good thing to raise money for a mission trip. But doing it that way at that time would totally interfere with the purpose that room had been set aside for at the moment, which was a worship service.

The Temple courts were the only area non-Jews were allowed in the Temple. If they wanted to come worship God, that was the only place for them. And here it was being crowded out by the Jewish people who were trying to take care of their own business.

Several years ago, I wrote a song and entered it in this Christian songwriters contest. I made it to the "regional finals", so I got to go to this big gathering in Tacoma.

They had several seminars there about writing Christian music. So I sat in on a couple of them. The speakers were very talented and successful people from the Christian music industry. But I found out that was exactly what it was – an industry. There wasn't any discussion of the spiritual side to writing worship songs. Nothing about the importance of lyrics that expressed good truth about God. Even though the songs under discussion were Christian in content, the focus had shifted from worship to business. I came away feeling very jaded. Not only that, I didn't even win...

In the process of fulfilling the requirements of the Law, people had lost their focus. It was more and more about business. God lost his place at the heart of everything.

If you were to go to Jerusalem today, you wouldn't find a Temple. There's nothing but the Wailing wall, which was part of the foundation underneath the Temple. It is no longer where God's glory resides.

So where is he? Now he makes his home in the hearts of us, in people who put their faith in Jesus.

### **1 Corinthians 3:16-17**

*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.*

If that is true, if we really are God's temple, we can expect that Jesus will have the same attitude about us as he did about that Temple building. When we look at this incident

more closely, I believe we can find there are several parallels to how Christ responds to what's going on in our hearts, the new Temple that God lives in.

John tells us the first thing that happened when Jesus arrived at the Temple was that he discovered the merchants.

*In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money.*

You could put it this way: **Nothing gets past Jesus.** The merchants were found out. They couldn't hide from him. They were in plain view.

It's the same way when he walks into our hearts. He sees everything that's going on in there. We might be able to do a pretty good job about covering up our real thoughts and feelings from other people. But Jesus sees our truest selves.

I was flipping channels the other night and saw a few minutes of Dr. Phil. There was a man on there who had apparently cheated on his wife in the past, who was now complaining that she didn't trust him anymore. He said, "Dr. Phil, I call her 10 or 12 times a day. She constantly knows what I'm doing. Why doesn't she believe me?"

Dr. Phil's response was, "I don't care if you're calling 10 or 12 times a day. If you want to deceive her, you still can."

That's true. We can put on a really good show for other people and still hide a lot inside. But we can't hide it from Jesus. Nothing gets past him. He has full access. We can try to justify what he finds, but he sees it for what it is.

It's interesting to note that this wasn't the first time Jesus had been to the Temple. He had probably been there at least once a year for most of his life. Some of those instances are recorded for us in the other gospels. But it was at this time that he chose to notice the merchants and do something about them.

It's easy to think about Jesus seeing a lot of flaws and wanting to clean house the first time we invite him into our lives. We would expect that. But even after he's been in our hearts for a long time, after he's made us his Temple for years, he still notices things. There is still junk to be exposed and called for what it is. Nothing gets past him, no matter what stage of our spiritual life we're in.

He doesn't stop at noticing though. The next thing is that **Jesus stirs the pot.** When he saw what he did, he couldn't stand it. He physically turned over tables, scattered the animals, and he even made a whip to drive people running from the scene. It was upheaval. It's like a tornado has touched down, throwing everything in its path.

Here are his words:

*He said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"*

He was outraged that this place of worship had become something else entirely. The people weren't doing anything illegal – they were just distractions from the main point.

How much of the Temples of our lives get filled up with distractions? Jesus comes in, and he notices all these things. Pretty soon, we discover that he's turning over tables in our hearts. He's causing upheaval, making a mess. He's giving us new priorities.

Sometimes the old ones aren't all that bad. We can even be doing service in the name of God, like these merchants were, and have it become something more than it should be. Jesus says, "Get these out of here! Make room in this Temple for God himself."

Preaching is a good example of that. It is so easy to think of many, many good and valuable things that could be talked about. Lots of "how to" messages and ways for people to better themselves. But I'm not doing my job when I slide into that, and when that happens, I hope you'll keep me accountable. Paul says "We preach Christ and him crucified." Anything else may sell well, but it isn't gospel, it isn't the good news. A friend of mine from seminary said there was an old man in his congregation who would sometimes come up to the preacher afterwards and say, "You didn't take it to the cross." A preacher's job is not to tell people how to live – it's to point them to Jesus over and over and over again, because it's so easy to take our eyes off of him.

I had lunch with a client this week who was asking a bunch of questions about this church thing I've got going on the side. He talked about growing up in church. He and his wife don't attend now, but he was talking about how he felt it was important for kids to go to church, because that's where he got his sense of morality and concern for people besides himself, etc.

Morality is a great byproduct of Christianity, but it isn't the centerpiece of church. If that becomes the main reason you go, Jesus has a few things to say to you. Because you've not left room for God at the center.

Spiritual pride – feeling good about what we're doing for God – can creep in so easily, and pretty soon we start to feel like that's the reason God loves us. We imagine if we work harder, if we live cleaner lives, we'll be more valuable to God. So we set about doing our best, making great sacrifices for God. Jesus comes along and shoves that all to the side and says, "You're missing the point." He stirs the pot and knocks over the tables we have set up in our lives.

It sounds harsh and almost mean. But the action tells us something else about Jesus, and that is this: **Jesus is passionate about his people.**

John tells us that when the disciples saw what Jesus was doing, they remembered this verse from the Old Testament:

*Zeal for your house will consume me.*

He was overcome by emotion. He cared so much about God's Temple that he couldn't just stand by and do nothing. His actions were motivated by love. It isn't a "This is my temple," selfish attitude. It's a "This temple has so much more potential," protective attitude.

As many of you know, we used to live on a very busy street. It made me nervous sometimes, because I expected a break in. It seemed like there had possibly been some incidents for the previous owners, and our neighbors had a few bad experiences. We had a police chase end in a shoot out right outside our window.

I can remember many nights waking up to a noise in the middle of the night and being convinced there was a burglar downstairs. You know those times when your adrenaline starts pumping, you're fully awake – but not entirely rational. And in those moments I would usually begin formulating a plan in my mind for how I was going to leap out of bed and to the hallway to cut off the intruder.

In those moments, my thought was never, "Oh no! Someone's taking the TV!" It was always "How can I get between them and my family?" I had this overpowering urge to protect what was most important.

That's what Jesus is doing in the Temple, and that's what he does in each of our lives. There are wolves that look as harmless as sheep that would want to tear us up. We often don't even recognize how they are eating at our soul. But Jesus' love is fiercely protective of us. He holds onto us and says, "This one is mine, and no one can snatch them out of my hand." When we get to chapter 10 in John, you'll see he says that not once, but twice. No one can snatch us away from him. He is passionately protective of those who are his.

John ends his account of this event by telling us what Jesus did afterwards.

*Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name.*

Matthew gives us a description of the same events at the Temple, but he adds a couple more details on the end:

**Matt 21:14-15**

*The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them.*

After getting rid of all the stuff that was happening, after clearing out the debris, Jesus sits down in the temple and introduces something brand new. He brings healing.

**Jesus replaces what he kicks out**, and he does it with a new order. You no longer go to the Temple just to do your civic duty. You no longer go there to offer a sacrifice. You

go there and you find Jesus, who after becoming the sacrifice himself, now offers us life and wholeness. It's like Isaiah said – by his wounds we are healed.

When Jesus turns over the tables in our hearts, and upsets all our preconceived ideas of God, it isn't to just leave us devastated. He replaces what we had with something new and better.

It's like those Trading Spaces or While you were out home shows, where someone comes in and looks at a room in your house and completely dismantles it. Then they put it all back together in a new and hopefully better way that more reflects what the feel and purpose of the room are about. They don't just leave it torn apart – they bring something new to give it life and character.

I'll leave you with three questions to think about today. First, what tables in your life does Christ need to overturn? Do you need to let him drive something out of your heart? Have you been relying on your own goodness, your own religious activities to make you right with God? Does he have center stage in your heart?

Second, where are you needing his protection? Is there an area of your life that the enemy could get in and dig at your relationship with God? Do you question his promise that nothing can snatch you out of his hand?

And finally, what do you need to bring to him for healing? He is ready to offer you something new. Being his Temple means being a place where he is actively repairing you and making you a whole person. What areas of blindness or weakness do you want to ask him to heal?

John tells us that when people saw the miracles Jesus was doing, they put their faith in him. What Jesus is doing in our hearts and lives then becomes a powerful witness – a witness to the God who loves us fiercely enough to make our lives messy so that he can then make them beautiful. Which is how he always intended them to be.