

The Zeal of Jesus

In the first half of John's gospel, we are given what is known by scholars as "the book of signs." There are seemingly seven signs that John records for us of Jesus being the Son of God and Messiah. In these first 12 chapters of John's gospel, Jesus shows us that He is the fulfillment of all of Israel's basic institutions (weddings, the temple, the religious teachings, the perspective towards the Gentiles), and He also shows that Jesus fulfills all of the Jewish festivals (the Sabbath in Chapter 5, Passover in Chapter 6, Tabernacles in Chapters 7-9, and Hanukkah in Chapter 10). The text for today especially focuses upon Jesus' fulfillment of all that the temple represents.

John 2:13-25

13 The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. **14** In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. **15** And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. **16** And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." **17** His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." **18** So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" **19** Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." **20** The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" **21** But he was speaking about the temple of his body. **22** When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Jesus Knows What Is in Man

23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. **24** But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people **25** and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

I. Jesus comes to the very center of our lives (vv. 13-14).

In verse 13 and 14 we see three key words: Passover, Jerusalem, and temple. Jesus makes His way to the very heart of Israel's national and religious life, just as He makes his way to our very hearts when we meet Him. When He comes to our hearts, just as He did at the temple 2,000 years ago, He challenges our most cherished institutions and values. It is important for us to ask ourselves how we have established traditions, conventions, opinions, and perspectives that have somehow kept Jesus from taking over the center of our lives.

II. Jesus comes to the center of our lives to reform our worship (vv. 15-17).

There is debate among scholars about how this temple cleansing compares to the parallel event recorded in the synoptic gospels. Some scholars believe that John has simply taken the literary license to move this event to the beginning of Jesus' ministry for thematic purposes; and some scholars suggest there are two cleansings — one at the beginning of His ministry and one toward the conclusion of His ministry. Ultimately, there is really no way to know. But here, clearly, John is demonstrating Jesus' lordship over the temple and all that it represents. Jesus takes very dramatic, prophetic action in this event, as He overturns the tables of the moneychangers and drives out the animals and their vendors from the temple precinct. The reason for His actions is, "zeal for your house will consume me." Jesus wants us to push out of our lives the good things that displace the best thing: the worship of God. A.W. Tozer one time famously said,

I say that the greatest tragedy in the world today is that God has made man...to play the harp of worship before [His] face day and night, but [man] has dropped the harp. It lies voiceless at his feet.

Whether it be our private worship, our family worship, or our corporate worship, we must give attention to the high priority that Jesus places upon this central aspect of our daily and weekly lives.

III. Jesus comes to the center of our lives to renew our faith (vv. 18-25)

Upon cleansing the temple, the Jews ask Him, "What sign..." It is certainly appropriate for them to ask a person who takes such authoritative action for a sign to indicate the authority by which he takes such action. The problem here is that Jesus has already given them a sign by His entering the temple and cleansing it (see Malachi 3:1-4), suggesting that no sign will really fulfill their demands. Jesus then gives them an extravagant claim: that if they destroy the beautiful and enormous temple, He will raise it up in three days. They are not about to destroy their temple! But the disciples realize, after Jesus' resurrection, that He was really talking about His own body which He clearly raised up three days after it was put to death. This remains the greatest sign that God has ever given to validate the person and work of Jesus Christ for our salvation.

John goes on to explain that those who simply believe in signs of miracles, do not necessarily trust in Jesus Christ savingly. The language of verses 23-25 is quite arresting, stating that there were some who "believed in his name when they saw the signs," but whom Jesus Himself did not trust. One has to ask how this can happen. Look at Acts 8: 9-25 and see how Simon the Magician is said to have "believed" (vs. 13) and yet, because of his greed and obvious lack of godly motive, Peter says to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God...for I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." Clearly Simon, who had "faith," was not saved. John seems to be teaching us that real faith in Jesus is a faith that includes us in Him, so that we, too, share a zeal for God's house that ultimately consumes us. We care about His Kingdom, His glory, His mission here and around the world. We simply love Him.

Discussion Questions

1. If Jesus were to visit the Church with major revival today, what would be the first changes that would occur in our churches?
2. In his sermon, Sandy suggests that the opposition to Tennessee's Amendment 1 by Memphis' liberal clergy represents an inappropriate distortion and defense of a cherished national tradition of individual freedom and privacy rights. What cherished traditions most often keep evangelicals from serving Christ faithfully?
3. In the private and corporate worship of today's believers, what is in most urgent need of reform?

4. How can we strengthen our belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ? Why is this vital to our Christian walk?

5. Give some examples (without names) of “phony faith” that you have witnessed or experienced. What is the difference between phony faith and saving faith?

Going Deeper

1. If Jesus were to cleanse your heart of cherished traditions contrary to His will, what would He remove?

2. What about your personal, family, and corporate worship needs to change in order to please the Lord?