

John 2:12-17 "Is Our Zeal that of the Lord's?"

JOH 2:12-17 After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days. 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."

You might remember that the last time we met we were in Cana of Galilee at a wedding feast attended by Jesus, his mother, Mary, along with His disciples. The wine had run out and our Lord obliged his mother's request to assist in making the celebration a success.

It was this miracle of turning water into wine that marked the beginning of Christ's public ministry with power. You can imagine the buzz in the region as excited and yet somewhat bewildered people began to inquire how such a man as a son of a carpenter could do this thing.

And yet, what is interesting is that nowhere does the apostle John make any comment about the reaction of the people to this incident; only that the servants knew that Jesus had done this.

But as we move from Cana to Capernaum we'll find that the reputation of Jesus will begin to spread throughout the region; and it won't be very favorable among the Jewish leaders.

Now, as we come to our text this morning we see a change in stories. The curtain comes down on Cana and it opens with a brand new town and a brand new scene as Jesus moves about 16 miles East/Northeast of Cana. In fact, if you look at a map Capernaum is near the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee.

What I find interesting about the beginning of this passage is that John makes a note of who travels with Jesus to this town; His mother, His brothers and disciples.

Now, we all know who His mother is; it's Mary. And again, notice that no mention of Joseph is made, probably, as we surmised a couple of weeks ago, he had died by this time.

But along with Mary it mentions the brothers of Jesus. Now, at first glance this seems to be pretty straight forward. It appears that Mary had more children after the birth of Jesus.

The problem this raises for me as a former Roman Catholic is that we were always taught that Mary remained a virgin for the rest of her life. Her special place in God's plan was to give birth to Jesus and then remain perpetually a virgin.

As a Catholic it was inconceivable that she would participate in any human relations of such an intimate nature when her womb carried and delivered the Son of God. She was a holy vessel.

The problem with this is that nowhere in the word of God do we find such a notion. Only the traditions of the Catholic church espouse this teaching which assumes she must have remained a virgin since her own conception was immaculate, according to Rome's traditions; that is she was conceived without sin.

Of course, this is not taught in God's word. In fact, just the opposite is taught when Paul writes to the Christians in Rome.

ROM 3:22-24 "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

When Paul says, all have sinned, he means all. There is no exception, not even Mary. The other problem with Mary not having sexual relations with her husband is that the word of God is very clear that this would be a gross violation of the proper role of intimate relations in all marriages.

At the very outset God told Adam and Eve their role as married partners.

GEN 1:26-28 "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." <sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and

female he created them. 28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number..."

Now unless we believe that the stork brings babies there's no way to get around the necessity of intimate relations in marriage. And this is mandated by God. In fact, there is only one place where abstinence in marriage is mentioned in the New Testament.

1CO 7:3-5 "The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. 5 Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

By its very nature, as God intended, marriage is not meant to deprive either party of those things God has deemed good. In the case of Mary it would be inconceivable as a Jew to dishonor God's design of marriage which is clearly taught in the Scriptures.

But the other thing which comes in to this debate is what we're told concerning the birth of Jesus in the gospel of Matthew.

MAT 1:18-20,24,25 "This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. 20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus."

Joseph was not to come together with Mary until after the birth so as to leave no confusion as to who conceived the Christ child. It was the Holy Spirit. But after the birth of Jesus there was no restriction on Joseph's part and he would have carried on a normal marriage relationship with his wife.

Now, the reason I even spend this kind of time on this subject is that I know that about 60% of the people in this congregation are former Roman Catholics and I know there is confusion on this matter.

Jesus did have brothers, and yet Rome insists that what our passage means is that His cousins are the one's being mentioned. Well, we need only go to the Greek language which identifies these brothers mentioned in our text.

The word for brothers in our passage is the Greek word *adelphos* from the connective particle "a" and "delphus", the womb; that is the same womb. And so, our text is saying that these relatives of Jesus are *adelphos* or of the same womb, thus brothers.

If John meant cousins he could have used the Greek word most often used which is *anepsios*. It means cousin, just as it's used in COL 4:10 "My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas."

But John uses the term for brothers because that's exactly what he means. And of course we know that he had a few brothers as well as sisters.

MAT 13:55-56 "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? 56 Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"

Okay, I think we've established who is going to Capernaum with Jesus along with His disciples. And we're told they're going to stay there a few days. Maybe it was a family vacation. Maybe Joseph had built a summer cabin get-away there on the banks of Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee.

In any event, they all go up to Capernaum until the time of the Passover takes place.

JOH 2:13 "When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem."

A quick side note. If Jerusalem is south of Capernaum by about 80 miles as the crow flies how can you say they are going up to Jerusalem when we all know that we go up when something is north of us and we go down when it's south?

Well, the answer simply is that for the Jews Jerusalem is the focal point of Israel. And wherever you are in Israel all points lead up to Jerusalem as you ascend to the throne of David, the name by which Jerusalem is known.

But the reason Jesus and His family and disciples are going up to Jerusalem is that this was a holy time of the year. It was required of all Jews to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover; that time in which their fathers were delivered from under the bondage of Pharaoh as God brought them out with a mighty hand.

In submission to the law Jesus would celebrate this time knowing that He was the ultimate Passover Lamb who would be sacrificed to deliver His people from among the Jews and Gentiles from the bondage of sin and its penalty and power.

And so, this would have been a time of reflection for Jesus as it was each year at this time. And so, it is His intention to spend time with His Father in heaven, to pray to Him and thank Him for the opportunity to redeem a people for Himself.

But notice what Jesus finds when He gets to Jerusalem.

JOH 2:14 "In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money."

Well, what's wrong with that? People would be coming from all over Israel and points beyond and it would be next to impossible to bring livestock to sacrifice from such distances.

In fact, our Lord made such a provision for His people in the book of Deuteronomy.

DEU 14:22-26 "Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. 23 Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always. 24 But if that place is too distant and you have been blessed by the LORD your God and cannot carry your tithe (because the place where the LORD will choose to put his Name is so far away), 25 then exchange your tithe for silver, and take the silver with you and go to the place the LORD your God will choose. 26 Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and

your household shall eat there in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice."

And so, it was common place for the Jews to come to Jerusalem with their money and exchange that for an animal to sacrifice. They would also exchange their Roman money for money that did not have the inscription of a Roman leader on it since it was customary to bring only money that was considered holy into the house of the Lord.

And so, there was a need for both retailers of animals and money changers. So, why does John mention that here in our text? Well, you'll notice where these entrepreneurs are set up. They are set up in the temple courts.

The temple courts are made up of three main divisions. The outer court, sometimes referred to as the court of the Gentiles, where both Jews and Gentiles could congregate, the inner court where only Jews were permitted, and of course the Holy of holies where the presence of the Lord was located.

Arthur W. Pink in his commentary on John points out that "the outer court had an area of about 14 acres, and was separated from the inner court by a wall breast high, and bearing [signs] which [forbid] the [intrusion] of Gentiles on pain of death. Around this outer court ran marble [columns] richly ornamented by four rows of pillars, and roofed with cedars, affording ample shade."

It looks to me like these merchants wanted to be out of the heat and decided they could better serve their customers in the comfort of the shade. The problem is that this is still a part of the temple area which is designated for purposes of worship, not setting up shop. And it appears that none of the Jewish leaders seemed to mind.

In fact, there are those who subscribe to the idea that the Jewish leaders allowed this to happen so that they could get a percentage of the profits. It certainly sounds feasible. But there is one Jewish Rabbi who will not tolerate this.

JOH 2:14-15 "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."

You can imagine this sight. You've got crowds of people trying to yell over each other as they try and get a bargain for their animal to sacrifice. You've got others who are excited to see old friends and family they haven't seen in a year and children running around trying to pet all of these animals.

And all of a sudden, off in one corner of this 14 acre parcel of ground there is a man with a wild look in his eyes beating these animals and any person who gets in his way. And what starts out as a small commotion has now got the attention of everyone in the outer court.

Tables are dumped over, silver coins are flying through the air as the merchants scatter to get them before anyone else steals them. Jesus is driving these animals out of the area and in all likelihood other merchants are now doing the same as they try and avoid His wrath.

And yet there is no indication that anyone is calling the police. And part of the reason for this is because they sense that this is no ordinary man who is simply bent on going on a rampage.

They know that what they're doing in selling and buying in the temple area is wrong and the Lord is only doing what any of the other Jewish leaders should have done. But it does raise questions as to our Lord's reputation of being meek and mild. How can He seemingly lose His temper and act out in an aggressive way like this?

Well, to understand this we need to bring verse 16 and 17 into the picture.

JOH 2:16-17 "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."

What if someone came into your house without your permission and took up shop. Maybe they were advertising that they do auto work and they're going to be working out of your garage. We would be alarmed at best and outraged at worst.

Whose house is this in Jerusalem? This is the Father's house. And His Son comes home to worship and talk with His Father and these people have set up shop, not to worship the Lord, but to make

merchandise of the Lord in a place where worship is the reason for this house.

The temple area is the place where God's people would come to honor God and draw close to the Lord and these people are making the excuse that they are providing a service for people to worship God. "How is it that what we are doing is bad when we're the one's making sure everyone has an animal to sacrifice to God?"

It sounds so good. In fact, I liken it to much of what is happening in the church today where Christians are making merchandise of the gospel. Now, I don't mean to suggest that there is anything necessarily wrong with Christian bookstores or merchandise with which people want to express their faith.

But that is different from people coming to church where the leaders are going to take advantage of them with false teachings, intimidation with tactics of manipulation to separate Christians from their wallets.

It grieves me to see some of these tele-evangelists who are using the kinds of tactics to prey on the emotions of people so that their ministries continue as though God couldn't do it without essentially stealing the pension of some senior citizen, as they intimidate them with fear if they don't supply God's work.

Or how about those who essentially sell healings? If you want to be assured of your healing just send in a love gift of at least a thousand dollars and God will surely meet your need as you are faithful to support His work. And we do take VISA and Master Card.

These people's tables need to be overturned and there are those who are exposing these false teachers and prophets for who they are. But here in Jerusalem Jesus is personally taking care of business. As to the issue of whether or not He should express a holy and righteous anger we need to keep in mind that this is the Lord of Glory in the flesh. This is the Son of God who came down out of heaven to die for our sins.

What we see in our text here is God showing His displeasure. Is that so unusual? In a related case of Israel disgracing God's temple many years before we read this.

2CH 24:18 "They abandoned the temple of the LORD, the God of their fathers, and worshiped Asherah poles and idols. Because of their guilt, God's anger came upon Judah and Jerusalem."

God is a righteous God and His anger burns against those who reject Him. He is well within His holy character to do this. And Jesus is none other than that same God who is in the midst of Jerusalem.

The God they claim as their own, whose presence is demonstrated just a few yards away in the holy of holies, is literally in their midst and He is angered at their disrespect for the Father. And Jesus, instead of destroying them, which is well within His ability and power and prerogative as God, tips over some tables and drives the animals and the people out.

To me that is restraint and grace being extended to these people. To me that is the long-suffering of God coming to the forefront. And notice too that nothing is destroyed or lost.

Tables are tossed over, not destroyed. Animals are driven out, not destroyed. Money is swept to the ground to be recovered. In fact, there is an interesting sentence in our text showing the restraint of Jesus here.

JOH 2:16 "To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here!"

If you've ever had to herd animals like sheep and oxen, a whip is often necessary to move them. You can't hurt one of those animals with such a whip as Jesus made. But you could hurt a small bird like a dove if you tipped over their cage or hit one of them with such a whip.

And what does Jesus do? He doesn't touch the doves. He commands the owners to get them out of the court area. Our Lord is quite restrained. Again, this may be the reason no one calls for the police, the Roman Guard. Jesus is not out of control. He has touched on the truth of what these people are doing, being primarily Jews, and they instinctively know that He is right.

He rebukes them. "How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" Imagine being personally rebuked by your God and Creator. But this is exactly what is taking place here in the temple courts. Instead of using it as a place of worship they abuse the kindness and grace of God for their own purposes.

But here is where all of this is going. It's not just that Jesus tips over some tables and gets angry with an obstinate people He called out of captivity and provided for in the desert and finally brought into the Promised Land. He is demonstrating His love for the Father and how these people need to love Him too.

JOH 2:17 "His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

It's not clear from the text if the disciples remembered the moment this happened or if they remembered this after His resurrection. The point is they made the connection of the relationship between the Father and the Son and how that relationship must not be taken for granted.

These disciples knew that the word of God addressed this matter of zeal Christ had for the Father and His work. This was one more indication of how Jesus fulfilled prophecy. We read of this in Psalm 69.

PSA 69:8-9 "I am a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my own mother's sons; 9 for zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me."

Jesus was a stranger among His own people. And when they insulted the Father they insulted Him. This act of anger in the temple area isn't about the people doing something stupid, it's about the love God has for us as He comes into this world at the request of the Father to bring us back to Himself.

And our God wants us to have the same zeal for Him and others in this world. Instead of approaching the eternal life we have in Christ as some sort of club where the only thing that distinguishes us from the world is the T-shirt we wear or the bumper sticker we have on the back of our car, our lives ought to be telling the world that we have a zeal and a love for the One who first loved us.

May we never turn our relationship with the Father through faith in Christ into some sort of game we act out in a "holy" way. May our relationship go much deeper and may our appreciation be heightened as we realize each day from what we've been delivered and unto the very thing we've been promised.

We have been delivered from eternal damnation. We have been delivered into the arms of a loving God who now calls us His children in Christ.

Paul gives us a glimpse into what zeal for Christ produces when writing to the Romans.

ROM 12:10-12 "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer."