



October 28, 2012  
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*All Things New:  
New Temple  
John 2: 13-22*

Last week we read of Jesus' first miracle at a wedding in Cana. He changed 6 jugs of water that was normally used for religious purification into the finest wine—180 gallons of it! Impressive! But really, hardly anyone noticed. It was a modest miracle in a private party in a tiny little village. Now, Jesus heads to Jerusalem, the center of the Jewish universe, to celebrate Passover. He is about to go very public with actions that will kick off his ministry... and tick off a lot of people.

<sup>13</sup>When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"

*(During reading, Bible hawkers noisily enter sanctuary, disturbing the peace.)*

<sup>17</sup>His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

<sup>18</sup>Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" <sup>19</sup>Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." <sup>20</sup>The Jews replied, "It has taken forty–six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" <sup>21</sup>But the temple he had spoken of was his body. <sup>22</sup>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.

Perhaps you were a little distracted earlier. Listen to the first two verses again:

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Why do we read that Jesus went "up" to Jerusalem? Because it's built on a hill! You always say that you are going "up" to Jerusalem, no matter where you are coming from. But here's the other reason: the temple. It was considered one of the most beautiful buildings in the world. As you approached Jerusalem, the white marble and the gold covering the temple, when it was struck by sunlight, made it

shine like a beacon that could be seen from miles away. You always went “up” to Jerusalem because here was the temple of the Most High God. It was to be approached with awe and reverence.

You never forget your first glimpse of Jerusalem. Not now, and not back then when hundreds of thousands of religious tourists descended upon it to celebrate Passover. Even access into the temple was designed to be dramatic. These steps led into the temple compound through those gates, which are now filled in with stone. As you walked up those stairs, you rose, step by step, right into the middle of the temple court.

Can you imagine the excitement, especially if you were a foreigner? You have saved all your life for this journey and now, here you are! Every step up these stairs takes you closer and closer until, finally... finally, you are standing in the Court of the Gentiles. If you are a non-Jew, this is the end of the road. It’s as far as you can go. In fact, this sign hung at the gate of the inner walls warning that any Gentile going beyond that point would be executed. Still, even what you could see was magnificent!

The Court of the Gentiles was surrounded by a portico—a porch—made of beautiful stone pillars. It provided a cool, shady place where merchants could sell their wares... and did they ever! It was packed with people selling oxen and lambs and sacrificial birds... and over there in another corner were the money changers. Utter bedlam! Animal sounds and bird cries and screaming merchants... it was deafening... and crowded... and disturbing!

When I lead folks to Israel, the Holy Land “virgins” are always shocked to discover that every time they turn around, they are being pursued by vendors selling scarves or jewelry or postcards or a piece of the original cross... or something! It is one of the disappointments of the Holy Land... something you have to work through. You come expecting sacred places and spiritual experiences; instead, you often find yourself in the midst of a very noisy, very pushy religious shopping mall... just like our story. At times when I am trying to shepherd my tourists safely to the sites, I wish I had the courage to do what Jesus did!

<sup>15</sup>So [Jesus] 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.

<sup>16</sup>To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!”

Why was Jesus so mad? Weren’t these merchants providing what pilgrims needed? If you traveled a long distance, you couldn’t exactly schlep your own sacrificial ox, could you? And if you had foreign coins with pagan emperors on them, you couldn’t offer that at the temple of Yahweh who forbids idolatry, could you? Just like the Bibles we were “selling” earlier in the sermon, weren’t these

necessary services? Yes, but not here... not in the middle of the temple! It dishonored the God of that place, cheapened his worship and distracted His worshipers... and Jesus was ticked!

There is something else troubling about this. Where did they set up shop? In the Court of the Gentiles. Isaiah once spoke for God saying, "I will bring foreigners to my holy mountain... my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." The Jews were God's chosen people, yes, but they were chosen to bless the entire world. God wanted outsiders in his temple. He still does!

But the Court of the Gentiles was the only place they were allowed! Jews could go farther into the temple to worship where it was quiet, but not the Gentiles. This was their place of worship, yet the temple leaders had commandeered it and turned it into a bazaar. Those who were not in the Jewish club, who could not get past the next gate, had no choice but to stay there in the midst of the noise and smells and screaming and bedlam... and do their best to worship God. And Jesus was ticked!

This story provides me one of my favorite glimpses of Christ. I was never very drawn to the Sunday school pictures of him: long, silky hair that was carefully brushed, spotless white robe... He looked so dainty. That is not John's picture of Jesus. Tell me, what kind of man walks into a courtyard filled with thousands of people and clears the place out with a few strands of rope? What kind of man inspires such awe that merchants leave their cash registers, turn tail and run? And where were the temple guards? They were on duty, yet no one dares stand in the way of this man who was so obviously on a mission.

I am inspired by the courage of Jesus: one man, filled with righteous conviction, outraged at the outrageous, one man willing to stand for truth, one man willing to defend the rights of those who had no voice, one man willing to cry out against what everyone had come to accept as inevitable.

Jesus was outraged for God's honor. People were treating the holiest place of Yahweh worship as if it were a strip mall; the things they did and said they were bringing dishonor to God. And Jesus would not stand for it. Tell me, are there times and places and conversations in your life today where Yahweh is dishonored? Where his ways and his commandments and his reputation are mocked or scorned or assaulted? Quietly, we put up with this behavior because we don't want to stir things up. But what happens when one courageous man, one courageous woman, one courageous student, one courageous church stands up and says, "Do not speak that way about God!"

Jesus was outraged for God's honor. He was also outraged for the sake of the Gentiles. The religious insiders couldn't care less about the outsiders. The Gentiles wanted to worship... wanted to meet God but didn't know how, didn't know the codes, didn't dress properly, didn't have the right habits or the right credentials.

It is still too easy for the church to become the place for insiders and to ignore or penalize or chase away those God-seekers who cannot figure their way through the maze.

Rachel White is passionate about this. She is building a hospitality team whose job it will be to make sure that every single newcomer has the best possible experience, from the moment they drive into our parking lot until that afternoon when they receive a bag of homemade cookies delivered to their doorstep. If you want to be a part of such a team, let us know. I think Jesus would approve! But as awe-inspiring as Jesus' actions were, there is something even more audacious about this story.

John continues to make the case that Jesus is the fulfillment and replacement of the Jewish religious system. In chapter 1:17, John writes, "...the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Jesus is the new and perfect Moses. At Cana Jesus replaces Jewish purification water with wine that symbolizes His cleansing blood. Jesus is the new and perfect wine. But what is Jesus in this story? The new and perfect temple! The temple was the center of the Jewish universe. Why? Because this was where God dwelt on earth. This is where God met his people, and where sacrifices were made to atone for sin and allow God's people to be in relationship with God.

So, when Jesus describes himself as the new temple, what is He saying? You no longer need a building to meet with God. You have me, God in the flesh. I have come to dwell with you, and you don't need to offer sacrifices any more because you have me! I am the Lamb of God slain for the sin of the world. And after they kill me, I will raise myself back to life on the third day to prove who I am. You will never need another sacrifice... never need another temple. If you want to make things right with God, if you want to meet with God, voila!

If this is true, if Jesus is the new temple—the perfect and permanent way for us to be with God and have our sins forgiven—then surely one of the messages of this story must be this: when we discover anything that distracts, overwhelms or steals away our worship of Jesus we must pick up a whip and with Jesus-intensity, chase it out of our lives! anything that keeps you from dwelling in Christ... chase it away!

It's easier to recognize when you are doing things you know God doesn't want you to do—when you sleep with your boyfriend or flirt with your secretary or run up a porn bill at the hotel; when you drink too much or waste food money on the lottery or neglect your teenage daughter—obviously, that noise and that distraction will make it impossible for you to worship Jesus. What must you do? Chase it away!

But often the things that ruin our relationship with Christ aren't obviously bad things. In the temple, they needed sacrificial animals and they needed to

exchange idolatrous money. Those things were necessary for worship, but good and necessary things became so dominant that soon there was no space left for the worship of God.

What are the good things you need to chase out of the center of your life so that you might make room to worship God? I spoke with a woman who struggles in her worship of God because of perfectionism. She feels like she has to have everything in her life just right before she can worship.

I talked with a dad this week who struggles with the demands of Sunday sports. He can't get his kids to their Sunday tournaments and to Sunday school at the same time. Church always loses out. My question to him, and to every parent, is this: what do you want most for your child? That they be a champion athlete... or that they be a champion disciple of Jesus? What you allow, what you model, what you prioritize will set the compass for your kid's choices in their future.

Or maybe it's relational distractions that need to be chased out of your life. The start of this week was awful. I was aware of dear folks who were in conflict... all part of this church family, but deeply divided and angry with each other. It seemed insurmountable, and then one of them picked up a whip! I watched as she took the initiative, in complete humility, to apologize and seek reconciliation. The other responded graciously. Together, they fearlessly chased away the disunity that threatened their spiritual health. I guarantee you, these brothers and sisters are worshiping God this morning with a freedom that would not have been possible if they hadn't picked up a whip.

What do you need to chase out of the center of your life so that Jesus can fit there? In a moment, we are going to share a precious tradition: the reading of the necrology. Every Chapel Hill member that has gone to be with the Lord will appear on that screen. As you see the name of your loved one, stand in honor and gratitude for them. But here's the truth of it: their story is done. Some of them lived lives focused on the worship of Christ, others had stuff that they should have chased out decades earlier and never did, and most probably fell somewhere in between.

Their story is done. Their legacy is complete; it is what it is. Yours is not! Decisions you make right now, today—including the decisions of what you must chase ruthlessly and courageously out of your life—will shape your spiritual legacy forever. The spirit of the courageous Christ lives in you. He can turn over the tables you dare not touch. Think about that in these coming moments.

## Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.

- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.

- **DIG DEEPER**

1. What does Pastor Mark mean when he says that John is a more theological gospel while the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark and Luke) are more biographical?
2. Why do you think John puts the two stories, the wedding at Cana and the cleansing of the temple, in the same chapter? And why at the very beginning of his gospel? What is he trying to say?
3. Why was Jesus so upset with the merchants in the temple? Weren't their wares necessary for proper worship?
4. If Jesus were to "enter into" your worship experience, what do you think he would want to upset and chase out? Why?