

Holy Zeal John 2:12-22

Chuck Swindoll tells the following story of a man who took a dinner on a flight.

After the stewardess had served him his meal, he unwrapped the salad and noticed right on top a rather large roach!

Infuriated, he couldn't wait to get home and write the president of the airline a letter — hot and to the point.

Within a matter of a few days he received a special delivery letter in return, an answer signed by the president himself, typed beautifully on the letterhead of the airline. It was dripping with apologies.

“I have taken immediate action” it said.

“In fact, I have temporarily pulled that airplane off the line. We have stripped the seats. We have stripped up the upholstery. It will not go back on line until everything is in shipshape condition. You have my word. The flight attendant who served you that meal, well, her job is in jeopardy. As a matter of fact, I promise you that will never occur again. Please continue to fly on our airline.”

Well, the man was remarkably impressed. However, he noticed something unusual. Quite by accident the president's secretary had inadvertently allowed his original letter to be stuck to the back of this [apology] letter. And as he turned it over, a note at the bottom said, “Send this guy the standard roach letter.” (*Tale the Tardy Oxcart*)

It's maddening isn't it? This kind of lack of professionalism and customer service? This casual attitude to a real problem? (This kind of story has been told in various other contexts, like when an airline send the standard letter but didn't change the name of the person from the previous letter).

When it comes to worship, it's very easy for us to have “the standard roach letter” kind of attitude.

Just going through the motions; lacking passion; being distracted; being unconcerned and indifferent to God and neighbor.

Jesus here shows us a different kind of approach. He shows us passion.

Those in the temple had a “standard roach letter” attitude before the man of zeal entered the temple, and woke them up.

This is a wake up text for religious people today!

Religious people may go through the motions of worship, but not truly worship.

**In other words, religious people need Jesus
– not just irreligious people!**

In this passage, Jesus deals with **religious unbelievers *publically***.
In the next passage, he deals with **a religious leader *privately* (Nicodemus)**.

These are important passages when you consider where we live.

I remember Sam Allberry saying to me, “It is the wisdom of God to have Tim Keller in Manhattan, and Matt Chandler in Texas. Chandler wouldn’t work in NYC; Keller won’t work in Dallas.”

- Keller preaches built his ministry on reaching skeptical, cynical unbelievers with winsome apologetics.
- Chandler has built his ministry on telling religious people in Texas, “Some of you really don’t get it. You may be going through the motions, but you don’t understand the gospel, and you need to spiritual life.”

Jesus deals with all types in his ministry.

- In chapter 4, he deals with a very **immoral lady at a well** and speaks to her about worship.
- Here, he is at the center of religious life, the temple, and he cracks the whip on **outwardly religious people who have missed the point of worship**.

What he does here is revolutionary!

- He is predicting his death and resurrection, which will create a new covenant with God and make the sacrifices of the temple obsolete.

I would like to look at this passage three parts, which I hope will serve as a way for us **to examine our own hearts as it pertains to true worship**.

Hebrews 12:28-29:

²⁸ Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire.

There was an **absence of deep gratitude**, an **absence of reverence and awe** in the temple. Let’s look at Jesus’ words and actions to detect **what acceptable/true worship involves**.

#1: True Worship Involves Zeal for God’s Glory (2:13-17)

Compare Jesus’ zeal, and the heart conditions of the others...

A. The Setting: (13-14)

“The Passover of the Jews”

Transitional Verse – Verse 12

- Jesus didn't stay long in Capernaum. He needed to leave for the Jewish Passover. (2:13).
- The "disciples" are those mentioned in John 1. The "brothers" refer to his half-brothers.
- **Passover was a big deal! Every adult male living within 15 miles of Jerusalem was required to be there. If they're over 19, they had to pay a temple tax. Many Jews made very long pilgrimages. Upon their arrival, they would go to the temple and pay the tax before offering a sacrifice in worship to God. When Jesus arrived, this temple doesn't like a place of worship; it looks like shopping country fair.**

The Passover commemorated the night when the angel of death 'passed over' the homes with blood on the doorposts (Ex. 12).

- The seven-day Festival of Unleavened Bread followed the Passover
- Why the redundancy? ("**Jews/Passover**").
 - It's *not* about **clarification** but **separation**.
 - John is separating himself from his fellow Jews.
 - He was a Jew, but he is now a follower of Jesus.
- **For John (and us!) the last Passover has been held!**
- The Lamb of God has been slain!

The "Temple"

Jesus is like "undercover boss" here in chapter 2. Have you seen that show?

- Someone in an upper-management position at a major business goes undercover as an entry-level employee to discover the faults in the company.

Here's the temple. God gave the plan for it. Now, Jesus God incarnate, the undercover boss, comes in the flesh discovers many faults!

- **But it's actually more than Jesus cleansing the temple.**
- **He does more than give make some modest changes.**
- **This story is actually an anticipation of what's coming next – the temple will be obsolete, as Jesus replaces it with himself.**
- He will be the new temple, the new place to meet God.
- The temple's days are numbered.

Brief Biblical Overview of the Temple:

1. In the beginning, God gave our parents a "garden sanctuary," a place where they could live in the presence of God: Eden.
2. But because of sin, we were banished from the sanctuary of God's presence.
3. In the wilderness, God created a moveable sanctuary — the tabernacle where people could draw near to meet him (Exodus 25:22). But only the high priest could go into the Holy of Holies, and then only once a year.
4. God allowed Solomon to build a permanent physical sanctuary, but it was destroyed and the people were carried into exile.
5. The temple was rebuilt after the exiles returned to Israel from Babylon, but it didn't fulfill this grand vision of the prophets. It was this post-exilic temple that existed in Jesus' day.
6. Jesus is the final temple.

- The gospels show us how this could be —the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.
- We have access to the presence of God because of Jesus.

Why is this chapter here in John?

In the other three gospels, the temple cleansing appears at the end of Jesus' ministry. It's difficult to resolve this matter. Either:

(1) **There were two temple cleansings** (very possible – John includes some different events around the crucifixion during Jesus' last days that the Synoptics include; the Synoptics don't include a lot of Jesus' ministry in Judea in his early days), or

(2) **John placed it here for theological purposes, not because it happened this way chronologically.**

- In my estimation, option **two** is the best.
- Remember, John is not writing a historical biography like we may think – it is historical, but remember: **it's history with an agenda**. What's that agenda? It's **20:30-31**.
- **He was an inspired theologian who arranged his material in a particular way so that we may believe.**
- **Further, we must remember that he knew the whole story of Jesus in its entirety.**
 - He's writing from **a post-resurrection perspective**. He tells us that in **2:22**.

Why was it important for John to place it here?

It's hard to know John's precise intent of its placement, but the result is this:

(1) **He is showing Jesus in the light of a series of Jewish institutions: wedding (2:1ff), temple (2:12ff), rabbi (ch 3).**

(2) **It introduces us to the mission that Jesus was involved in -- being the new Passover Lamb, the new temple.**

(3) **It also contains important prophetic fulfillment, by which we should see the rest of Jesus' ministry.**

- There is an allusion to **Zechariah 14:21** here: 'And on that day there will no longer be a merchant in the house of the LORD Almighty.'
- John may also have **Malachi 3:1, 3** in mind: 'Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple ... he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver.'
- John is saying, **"He's here."**

B. The Problem (14-15)

It involved (1) desecration, (2) exploitation, and a (3) lack of compassion for the people/nations.

Here's what's happening:

- Because people needed something to sacrifice, birds and animals were being sold in the temple court. (that's what's meant by the word "temple").
- **You can imagine traveling to Jerusalem with your own animals!**

- How many of you – if you had to walk 10 miles with some pigeons (those things are nasty) and goats, would probably not make the trip this morning?
- So they would provide animals for pilgrims.
- Further, people were coming from all over the world, and so they needed currency exchanges. So now the temple looks like a bank also.
- The whole affair was abominable to Jesus. Why?

Why doesn't Jesus view this as convenient service to the people?

1. **Desecration:** It was being done in the temple, specifically in the court of the Gentiles (the outermost courts).

- At one time, merchants set up shop across the Kidron Valley, at the Mt of Olives, but now they have set up shop in the sacred area!
- These merchants and moneychangers had desecrated this place of prayer/worship/reverence. This was **an inappropriate location!**
- The temple looked more like a market or a country fair, than a sacred place (contrast: Zech 14:20–21; Mic 6:6–13; Jer 7:4).
- Jesus' actual complaint in the text is that they should not be in the temple area at all.
- **Instead of worship, prayer, contrition, repentance, spiritual encouragement, there is the noise of business.**

2. **Exploitation:** Shady business (not just business) was happening. Elsewhere Jesus called it "a den of robbers" (Matt 21:13).

- **MaCArthur: Merchants inflated the prices.**
- **Bruce: Money changers charged exorbitant fees for their services.**
- Kind of like an airport a pastor friend mentioned: once you got up to the security line, your plastic bag wasn't sufficient. You had to pay for their baggy – no belt, about to lose your pants!
- Or it's like Disney World – you need to eat, and there are no other options than those in the park – so you *may 50 bucks for lunch!*
- Some have surmised that there was an inspector that would turn away your sacrifice, and force you to buy another one – at a higher price, and that the exchange rate was jacked up also.
- If this were the case, not only was it not ethical, but it was **crushing to the poor.**

3. **Lack of compassion:** The temple was to be a "house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:17).

- By setting up in the Gentile court, they were sending a signal to the Gentiles.
- This wasn't welcoming.
- So there's a **vertical** problem (worship of God), but also a **horizontal** problem (lack of welcome).
- They were sending the wrong signal to Gentiles worshipers, and to the watching world — about God and the community of faith.

One thing that should mark corporate worship is a compassion for people.

- You see God is building a different temple, of living stones, as Peter says (1 Pet 2).
- What unites us is the blood of Christ.
- We are broken; we are different. We are united in the Cornerstone.
- Our worship should send that message.

Rus Moore tells the story of having a woman in his congregation several years ago that was going through a serious form of dementia. But she could still live at home, and she attended worship every week at the church building.

Because of her condition, she would randomly yell things during the sermon! The problem was, she would yell out strings of profanities! (Now, this was a really godly saint, who would have never uttered such things).

But these shocking thoughts were imbedded in her mind, and she would yell out, “Well you _____.”

Rus: “I found something happening in my heart, I’m looking around saying, ‘Who is visiting here? Who will be freaked out this week? What mom with her 4-year-old kid will have to answer the question, ‘Hey mom, what does _____ mean?’ And I’m looking at this other group of ladies, thinking, ‘How upset are they right now? How upset are they *with me* right now?’”

“... Until one day that group of ladies came and said, ‘Brother Rus, when Mrs. _____ starts cussing, it seems like your embarrassed?’”

“Yes, I guess I am” he said.

They replied, “Well, we just wanted to come and rebuke you for that – because she can’t help it. And when she’s screaming this stream of profanities, that’s just her way of saying ‘Amen.’ And if we’re going to be the body of Christ to her, then we need to stop worrying about everyone else is going to think, and instead say to the outside world around us, if you want to know the kind of church we want to be: we want to be the kind of church, where our sister, who is suffering, and is screaming out things that would humiliate her during any other time of her life, doesn’t embarrass us. We love her and we receive her, and she’s welcome here because everyone of us are bringing to the table all kinds of other things that need to be borne up by everyone else that maybe quite as visible as what she’s dealing with right now.”

Rus said, “I was convicted to the core. I had made worship about me instead of the good of others” (Para).

Jesus is furious at this lack of compassion on the outsider and the poor.

- Love is not indifferent.
- It involves passion that leads to action.
- A husband doesn’t just sit there when his wife or kids are being abused.
- Luther couldn’t just sit there when indulgences were being sold to build the Cathedral in Rome.

C. Jesus’ Actions (15-16)

15 – How many of you didn’t realize Jesus could *make* a whip of chords!?

- “What are you doing over there?” “Oh, I’m about to show you.”

- You've heard the expression of "cracking the whip?"
- "That coach cracked the whip. Mama cracked the whip."
- Joshua: "Papa, if you don't obey Mama, you gonna get some consequences, man."
- Well, Jesus is the cracking the whip and bringing some consequences!
- Can you imagine this scene? What is happening here?
 - Doves flying everywhere, goats running... "Jesus shoved me this I know"

This is the only place where we read of such a whip used for this purpose.

- Did Jesus use it on the merchants and the animals? Possibly.
- Some have objected that one man couldn't have driven out all of those animals and people.
- They've obviously never been to Texas. Or watched a Western.
- (I thought about Wyatt Eerp clearing the saloon in Tombstone!)
- Jesus is greater than Kurt Russell.
- Jesus overturns the tables and scattered the money.
- Then he makes a demand...

16 – "Get this stuff out of here!"

- Jesus cares about his Father's house.
- Early on in his childhood, remember his parents couldn't find him. He says, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Lk 2:49)
- They went away thinking, "He says the strangest things sometimes, doesn't he?"
- Now Jesus is grown up, and puts on display his passion for God's house, "My father's house will not be a house of trade!"

How do you react to this picture of Jesus rebuking these people and cleansing the temple? This doesn't look very "tolerant."

It's important to remember that you can tell what a person loves by what they hate.

- Do a simple study and look at what God hates – get a concordance and search it. It will actually show you what **God loves**.

- Jesus is the man of Zeal. He's passionate.

- Listen to **Romans 12:9-11**

⁹ Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. ¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.

What we see in chapter 2 is this: Jesus is both Lion and Lamb.

- In **John 2:1-12**, Jesus is very "lamb-like." He is gentle, gracious, even anonymous at the wedding party.
- Here, he's very lion-like. **He's bold, active, and public.**

It reminds me of the book *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. (HT: Hughes)

- Lucy and Edmund are engaged in their adventure when they come to a large grassy expanse, which has a white spot in the middle of the green expanse.
- As Edmund and Lucy look at this spot intently, they have difficulty making out what it is.
- Being adventurous, they travel across the grass until finally the white spot comes into view. It is a lamb! The lamb, white and pure, is cooking a fish breakfast (probably an allusion to John 21). The lamb provides them with a most delicious breakfast.
- They go on to have a conversation about how to get to the land of *Aslan*—Heaven.
- As the lamb explains the way, something amazing happens: Lewis writes, “**His snowy white flushed into tawny gold and his size changed and he was Aslan himself, towering above them and scattering light from his mane.**”
- Lewis was illustrating this glorious truth that Jesus is lion and lamb.
- He is the lamb, who sacrificially lays down his life for his sheep – or for his *bride*.
- Yet, he is the lion of Judah. We **see Jesus’ holy ferocity**, as he cleanses temple.

17 – Psalm 69 and the New David

- Jesus’ zeal is on display.
- The disciples actually view Jesus’ actions as a reflection on this particular Psalm (69:9).
- In that Psalm, David is crying out to God because of his foes — **foes who fail to understand or be sympathetic with his commitment to the temple.**

Jesus burns with zeal for the glory of the Father.... Does yours?

Applications on Worship:

1. Examine your heart.

- **God is considered with the way in which you worship, not that you just show up to public gatherings.**
- Here are some unacceptable ways:
 - Dry ritualism
 - Cold Indifference
 - Self-centered consumer
- God is not just concerned with what we do, but how we do it!
 - Kimberly, Birthday. Get a gift. Why? “I had to.” That doesn’t honor her!

What is acceptable? **Zeal. Passion.**

- **It’s expressed differently by people; but it’s there!**
- Jesus is showing us that real worship involves a zeal for God’s glory.
- “I could not endure existence if Jesus were not glorified,” Henry Martyn the missionary said about his missionary service in the Muslim world.”

2. Examine your welcome and your witness.

- **Welcome.** Does this scene express Romans 15:7? Welcoming one another – Jew/Gentile?

- **Witness.** What would the outside world have thought about this whole scene?
- Would 1 **Corinthians 14:25** have happened. Would they have fallen on their faces and say, “God is among you!”? No.

#2: True Worship Requires a Right Understanding of Jesus (2:18-22)

In both stories in John 2, we find a similar theme: the new is superseding the old.

- He changed **the water of Judaism into the wine of Christianity.**
- Something better is here. Something more glorious is here.
- Now we see with the coming of Christ **the temple is rendered obsolete, as Jesus is better than the temple.**
- “The old is gone, the new has come!”

This is preparing the way for “I am the way, truth, and the life...”

18 – “**sign**” in this context has a different connotation than in 2:11.

They meant “**what proof**” do you have – that you can say and do these things.

- They are saying, “**Justify yourself!**”
- But Jesus **refuses to give them more proof** in that moment.
- He **refused to be a magician performing regular signs.**

Jesus has given the world one universal sign of who he is: **The resurrection.** It’s THE sign.

- In Matthew, he refers to it as the “**sign of Jonah.**” (Matt 12:39-40)
- **Just as Jonah was in a watery grave for three days/nights, so Jesus will be in his earthly grave for 3 days/nights....** Something greater than Jonah is here – and the Ninevites believed Jonah, why don’t you believe in me?

It’s that sign – the sign of the resurrection – that Jesus points to here in John also....

19 – **Destroy the temple/Raise it in three days**

Here is Jesus’ astonishing prediction of his own death/resurrection.

- You have to be really confident or insane to predict your resurrection!
- They didn’t really get what Jesus was saying.
- He’s not actually referring to the temple, but what the temple points to: himself.
- Destroy him, and he will rise in three days.

20-21 – **Misunderstanding and explanation**

20 – “It took us a long time to build this thing, and to rebuild it! – what do you mean raise it in three days?!”

- It took forty six years to build the temple, and he will rebuilt it in three days!
- I know you are a carpenter, but come on!

21 – John reflects on this event from a post-crucifixion, post-resurrection perspective, saying, “He was talking his body.”

22 – Disciples, Scripture

This is an important word for Bible interpretation.

- The crucifixion and resurrection changes the way we read the Bible.
- Our perspective is forever changed based on the fact that Jesus is alive.
- He is the fulfillment of the storyline of the Old Testament.
- John doesn’t necessarily have one verse in mind – but the message of Scripture that prepared them for Christ, predicted the coming of Christ, and that gave patterns and types of Christ.

Application: We offer our worship through Jesus Christ alone.

“Through him let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.” (Heb 13:15)

- **Worship is not about a place, but a Person.**
- **Something better than the temple is here!**
- **The temple was where God met humans; but we meet God now through Jesus.**
- **The temple was where sacrifices were offered — but Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice.**
- **The temple was a sign of authority, but Jesus resurrection provided the ultimate sign of authority, authority that is over the temple.**
 - **We meet God through Jesus.**
 - **We pray to God through Jesus.**
 - **We get close to God through Jesus.**
 - **We have hope over the grave because of Jesus.**
 - **We seek cleansing through Jesus. (including the sin of heartless worship)**
 - **We yield our temple to Jesus.**
 - **We say “Jesus, turn loose the whip of the Spirit in my heart, and cleanse me.”**

True worship is Trinitarian: to the Father, through the Son, by the power of the Spirit.

#3: True Worship Begins with Genuine Belief in Jesus (23-25)

**We don’t have to spend a lot of time here, but it’s important.
This is another transitional verse for John.**

What’s clear is this: Not all “faith” is saving faith.

The people were “believing in Jesus, but Jesus did not believe in them!

Real saving faith has to be directed to the right *object* for the right *reason*.

Many people may be attracted to Jesus.

Some may have give mental ascent to Jesus, but not be fully trusting him.

The only way to know God, and the only way to have true worship is to truly believe in Jesus and have life in his name.

It involves resting all that you are in him.

Look to him, unbeliever, and find life.

Believer, let's examine our hearts today, and repent of coldness in worship.

- **Let's repent of our low thoughts of God.**
- **Let's pray for fresh zeal for the glory of God, and greater affections for Jesus.**
- **Let's be known for our hatred of sin and idolatry.**
- **Let's be known for our love for neighbor.**
- **Let's be known for welcoming people – who are unworthy – but have been welcomed by Jesus.**
- **Let's be grateful for Jesus, who is the Lamb of God, the perfect sacrifice – who has made it possible to worship God in Spirit and truth now and forever.**