

Building on our Knees, Part One: Zeal for the House

John 2:13 ESV 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."

- I. Without a doubt, the passage of scripture that we just read makes many people uncomfortable. Most people, believers and even some secularists, really enjoy the image of Christ taking children on his knee, or teaching people to love their enemies on a grassy hillside. People may even be fine with Jesus outsmarting his opponents, the Pharisees, or calling his dead friend Lazarus out of his tomb, that he might live again.
 - A. But if we're honest, the story we read today makes us squirm a little. Jesus comes into the Temple, the undisputed centerpiece of Jewish life, politics, and religion only to notice that this sacred place, where God had promised to cause his glory to dwell, and where he would meet with his people, had been turned into the "Mall of America".
 1. It was more of a convenience store now than a holy place. Vendors had brought kosher oxen, sheep, and pigeons into the temple for people who needed to offer a prescribed sacrifice from the mosaic law. But for the people who didn't want to, or couldn't bring their own, an animal was sold to them, with an exorbitant fee added for profit.
 2. And since people couldn't pay their monetary offerings and temple taxes with that polluted, false-image-of-Caesar-bearing, pagan money, they had to convert their Roman currency into a Jewish, God-honoring variety from a "money-changer"...who would exchange it for an extreme take, enriching themselves on the sacred gifts of God's chosen people.
 - a) You may think that this doesn't happen today, but I can tell you that the most sure-fire way to make a lot of money in America is to travel to China and buy a bunch of cheap, plastic trinkets and imprint them with a fish, a cross, a Bible verse, or WWJD, and then you can jack the price up through the roof and make a fortune.
 - (1) I remember one time I saw a packet of tissues in a Christian bookstore. These tissues were exactly like the ones you buy in the dollar store, two or three for a dollar.
 - (2) However, these were being sold for \$1.50 each. You know why? They had "God bless you!" emblazoned across the plastic wrapper (not even on the tissue itself!). Since when must we "blow our nose for Jesus"?!?
 - b) Beware of those who would want to sell you a t-shirt, bumper sticker, back-scratcher, or breath mint in order to proclaim the gospel, when it costs you no money to open your mouth and tell of the goodness of the Lord.

- B. Well, all this “pious profiteering” was too much for Jesus, and in an era when “open carry” was illegal, and the second amendment didn’t exist, Jesus brings a weapon (a whip) into church and terminates their sacrilege with extreme prejudice. (This is Texas, I just thought I’d speak the language!)
1. He set the animals free, and turned over the tables of the money-changers, sending their coins everywhere with no way to sort out the resulting mess!
 2. What was the reason for this outburst of anger and passion from the one about whom Old Testament prophesied **Isaiah 40:11 ESV** He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.
- C. The answer to that question is found in the words Christ proclaims as He is cleansing the Temple:
1. In the account from John that we read he says, “Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade.”
 2. Matthew puts his words like this: **Matthew 21:13b ESV** “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.”
 3. Mark: **Mark 11:17b ESV** “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.”
 4. Luke (similar to Matthew): **Luke 19:46b ESV** “It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of robbers.”
- D. In every instance but John’s, Jesus directly quotes Isaiah 56:7. This is not just something he pulls out of the air to justify what he has done. That verse has extreme prophetic significance to the plan of God in the gospel. Let’s read it together, beginning in verse 6 (take careful note of what I’ve highlighted).
1. **Isaiah 56:6 ESV** “And *the foreigners* who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—**7 these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer;** their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; **for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”** **8** The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, “**I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.**”
 2. This is one of many passages in the Old Testament that tells us clearly that God’s heart was turned, not only to his people the Jews, but to the whole world.
 - a) In other words, sin that separates us from God was not just a Jewish problem, but a human problem.
 - (1) It was true that God loved the Jews and had ordained them by his sovereign will to be the custodians of his law (as Jesus said to the woman at the well, “Salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22).
 - (2) Similarly, Paul spoke of their distinctiveness. **Romans 9:4 ESV** They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. **5** To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

- (3) But their stewardship of the revelation of the One True God was to be a temporary one, until the day that the fullness of God's revelation would be revealed in his Son, made incarnate and dwelling among us.
- b) Isaiah 56:6-8 (as well as literally hundreds of other Old Testament passages) points out that God always had the salvation of people from every nation in mind, and not just the Jewish one. This is why the Isaiah verses speak of "foreigners" and "others". And the way he would accomplish that salvation would be through the cross.
- E. There would not be two covenants, either. Instead of having a Jewish sect and a "separate but equal" group of Gentile believers, God's temple would be a single "house of prayer for *all* nations".
1. **Ephesians 2:12 ESV** ...remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. **13** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. **14** For he himself is our peace, who has *made us both one* and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility **15** by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself *one new man in place of the two*, so making peace, **16** and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.
 2. Now Paul says that a "true Jew" is one inwardly, defined by a work of the Spirit, initiated through belief in Christ. To the Philippians (3:3) he says, "...we are the circumcision, who *worship by the Spirit of God* and *glory in Christ Jesus* and *put no confidence in the flesh.*"
- II. So if we believe that the gentiles have been grafted in to the Jewish vine, and that all peoples and nations have access to the house, or Temple of God we must acknowledge a difficulty.
- A. Jesus, quoting Isaiah, said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer *for all the nations.*" He said this while standing in an actual, physical temple that really existed in the real city of ancient Jerusalem.
1. As I have already said, that Temple represented something vital to the Jewish understanding of who God was, and how he related to man.
 2. It was the place where worship was conducted, and prayers were offered; the place where the priests would offer sacrifices to atone for the sins of the people. Most of all, it was the place that represented the dwelling place of the Almighty, Yahweh God.
 3. All of Jewish life was kept in a tight orbit around that structure. Christ said the the Father's house *would be* a house for all nations. This is future tense. My house isn't yet for all nations (at that time it was strictly for Jews only).
 4. But our problem comes to light when we examine a very interesting conversation the Lord had with his disciples within the same week that he ran the money-changers out of the temple .
- B. **Matthew 24:1 ESV** Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. **2** But he answered

them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, **there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.**

1. And in case there was any doubt about the timeframe within which this dire prophecy was to come to pass, Jesus tells them very clearly.
 2. **Matthew 24:34 ESV** Truly, I say to you, **this generation** (the one living at the time of the prophecy) **will not pass away until all these things take place.**
- C. And as sure as Jesus predicted, in A.D. 70, less than 40 years later, the Roman general (and future emperor) Titus and his army, besieged Jerusalem, eventually sacking the city and utterly burning and demolishing the Temple. And no Jewish temple has stood in the city of Jerusalem for almost 2,000 years.
- D. So with no temple, no “house” for God, what of the prophecy made by Isaiah, and confirmed by Christ some 600 years later as he stood, whip in hand upon the coins of the thieves with their animals scurrying throughout the temple? Was he mistaken? Merely guessing? Misinterpreting Isaiah? Was he lying?
- E. The answer is “E”: none of the above! In order to understand what is going on you must realize that the Old Testament was the New concealed and the New Testament is the Old revealed.
1. Paul understood this when he wrote to the Colossians. **Colossians 2:17 ESV** These (Old Testament realities) are a **shadow** of the things to come, but the **substance** belongs to Christ.
 2. In 2 Corinthians he also says that the things that are unseen (like the spiritual realities brought about for us in the New Covenant, are **more real** than the things that are seen (like temples and sacrifices, etc.)
- F. So what bearing does this truth have on the declaration of Jesus that the Father’s house would be for all nations? Let’s look at a verse in First Corinthians:
1. **1 Corinthians 3:16 ESV** Do you not know that **you are God’s temple** and that God’s Spirit dwells **in you?** **17** If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and **you are that temple.**
 2. God does not make his home in a big, regal building, constructed of wood and stone, in a special city anymore; he makes his home in anyone, anywhere that calls upon him in Spirit and in truth. Soak that in for a minute. Meditate on it. Let the Holy Spirit reveal it to you.
- G. And this temple is more real, and just as holy, as the one that stood in Jerusalem. And just like that one there is worship to be conducted in the presence of God, and a sacrifice that must be applied to all of our sinning.
1. And that is our job; to minister as priests in this internal Temple where God dwells. In fact, Peter says that as believers, we are a “kingdom of priests”. We are entrusted to make sure that the lamp of worship is never extinguished within God’s temple.
 2. And the sacrifice in this temple is not done with the blood of bulls and goats. On the contrary we appeal night and day, year after year, to the one sacrifice that was sufficient for all of our past, present and future sinning; that of Jesus, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.
- III. But how do we gain access for worship and to see the sacrifice of Christ applied within this temple? Notice again what Isaiah and Jesus said: “**My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations.**”

- A. The way we find our way into this New Covenant temple of the heart is through prayer. Plain and simple. Intimacy and fellowship with the Father, Son and Spirit happen in no other way, nor can a non-praying person ever expect to be transformed into the image of Christ, which should be the foremost desire of every believer.
1. I realize that sometimes in our fast-paced world, talking about prayer seems archaic and outmoded; for most churches, prayer is not quite as sexy as having a rockin' worship band, a famous pastor, state-of-the-art facilities, or cutting-edge programs.
 2. As individuals, we don't pray because quite frankly, there's not an app for that. Praying takes time, and with jobs, families, hobbies, kid's extra-curriculars, and, oh yeah, church stuff, who has the time?
 - a) But deep down inside, we know we're fooling ourselves. We make time for all kinds of things throughout our weeks that we want to do.
 - b) The truth is that you and I don't pray because we don't want to pray.
 - (1) it's awkward! We don't know what we're supposed to do. What are we supposed to say?
 - (2) And for how long? And how do I keep my mind from wandering? What if I fall asleep?
- B. It is a fact that cultivating a vital prayer life requires commitment, discipline, practice, and a heavy dose of alternating failure and success. But for those that will press through, the benefits are amazing and undeniable.
1. I truly believe that if we could see how vital, beautiful and effective prayer is in the heavenly realm, we would repent and cry out in bitter tears with the disciples when they said to Jesus, **Luke 11:1b ESV "Lord, *teach us to pray...*"**
 2. The Bible says the disciples asked him this ***after he had finished praying***. Being around the Lord and watching his prayers had a dramatic effect on those guys!
- C. But could our prayerlessness also be because many of us didn't really sign up to know the Father? We weren't really looking for a long term relationship. Maybe a ticket out of Hell, or help with a habit, but not intimacy. Prayer is fine when we're sick, or needing a promotion, or a girlfriend.
1. But would we ever be found on our knees like David when he cried out, **Psalm 139:23 ESV Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! 24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!**
 2. This is the language of a heart that wants to know God and be known by him!
- IV. Perhaps you are beginning to recognize that perhaps your desire to walk in fellowship with God is diminished. Perhaps the Holy Spirit is working in you right now, and causing you to hunger and thirst for more of Christ through prayer.
- A. Increasing your ***desire*** for the things of God is critical to successful spiritual living.
1. **"Lack of spiritual heat creates more infidelity (sin) than lack of faith. Not to be consumingly interested about the things of heaven is not to be interested in them at all." E.M. Bounds**

2. If the Holy Spirit is sparking a flame in you, let me help you know how to fan it.
- B. First, like David, ask God to show you what is really inside you. Secret sins, open sins, habits, distractions.
 1. **Psalm 66:18 ESV** *If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.*
 2. Peter even said that if men don't treat their wives right, that their prayers would be hindered! Our character matters when we come before God!
- C. Secondly, ask the Lord to reveal what you are chasing or consuming that is weakening your hunger for him.
 1. Sometimes we satisfy our appetite with entertainment options, or vainly stroking our egos, or intellectual stimulation, or financial pursuits, or hobbies, or other distractions. It is considered to be our "divine right" as Americans; what our forefathers fought and died for, "the American dream".
 2. But these are the very things that sap our ability to hunger for Christ, or for righteousness! How very different were the priorities of David!
 3. **Psalm 27:4 ESV** *One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.*
 4. Most of us have appetites and desires that are spread way too thin! Lord, help us to desire one thing! If this is you, ask the Lord to reprioritize your life.
- D. Third, meditate on and memorize what the Bible says about the beauty and power of prayer.
 1. Use the scriptures (especially the Psalms) to guide your prayers. Personalize the words.
 2. Find some good teaching books (Tim Keller, E.M. Bounds, Andrew Murray, etc.) that will guide you as you build a disciplined prayer life.
- E. Next, read stories in scripture about people who prayed and saw God move on their behalf. Start with Jesus!
 1. Also, read biographies of men like Hudson Taylor and George Muller. You will be inspired by their prayer lives.
 2. As you do these things, remind yourself that God is no respecter of persons. He loves no one in scripture, or any other saint, more than he loves you! He will work through your prayers as well! He even loves you as much as Jesus because you are in Jesus!
- F. Then, get started! Set a time.
 1. Don't try to marathon it, start with 10 minutes tops, where you'll turn off all your screens and give God your undivided attention.
 2. Expect obstacles as you begin (attention span, urgent things that just seem to "come up", etc.), but stick with it! If you miss a day, don't condemn yourself, just start right back up the next day!
- G. Take every opportunity to pray with others (you'll quickly find that they're just as weak in this area as you are!). Start a small prayer group with a friend. Join us on Sunday morning. Come to our monthly prayer gatherings. Doing things together is a great way to learn to do things better.

- H. Lastly, realize that a wavering desire to pray will never get fixed by sheer force of will. You and I are still way too polluted by our fallenness! Therefore, in the words of E.M. Bounds, "We ought to pray for the desire to pray."
1. God loves to woo you into his presence! And he will implant the desire to be there, if you sincerely want him to and ask.
 2. But don't think he's going to kick the door in and force you to spend time with him! He wants to be what you **desire**; but if you will acknowledge your frailty in this area, and cry out to him, he will come to your rescue!
 3. **Philippians 2:13 ESV** for it is God who works **in** you, both to **will** and to **work** for his good pleasure.
 4. God will freely bestow on you both desire (by giving you the will), and the ability (by helping you to do the work) of prayer if you only ask!
- V. Do you remember what our text today said that the disciples remembered after Jesus cleansed the Temple? **John 2:17 ESV** His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."
- A. This is a direct quote from Psalm 69:9. The Holy Spirit reminded the disciples of this verse as they watched Jesus drive out the pollutants and reclaim the holiness of the temple. This paved the way for communion, fellowship, and intimacy in God's house again.
- B. But the house of the Lord is no longer a big building in Jerusalem. It is you. It is in your innermost being that you can have fellowship with God.
1. Does zeal for this house consume you? Like your master Jesus, are you willing to take up arms in order to drive out every thing that offends your heavenly Father?
 2. Are you willing to "cause a ruckus" within yourself, and disrupt some long-standing habits and sins so that you can say with David, **Psalm 27:4 ESV** **One thing** have I asked of the Lord, **that will I seek after**: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.
 3. He's awaiting your reply.