

## 023: Eaten Up with Zeal

*(based on Sermon #016 in the Life of Christ Series)*

I grew up in a neighborhood of Chicago called “Back of the Yards.”

- Our neighborhood was literally adjacent to the Union Stock Yard & Transit Co., otherwise known as *The Yards*, which I remember vividly.
- *The Yards* officially closed in 1971, when I was seven years old, but I remember seeing it many times as a youngster before that — and smelling it!
- The stock yards started in 1865, just after the Civil War, as a centralized place in the U.S. where cattle, hogs and sometimes sheep would be brought in by train, unloaded, stored in pens as far as the eye could see, and then slaughtered in the meatpacking houses within days.
- The place was made famous by Upton Sinclair’s 1906 book, *The Jungle*, which had nothing to do with a literal jungle but was the metaphor used by Sinclair to describe the deplorable conditions in the meatpacking industry in Chicago during the early twentieth century.
- It’s a fascinating read.

There are three things about the *The Yards* that I will never forget:

- It was noisy, dirty, and smelly.
- I can’t help but imagine that the temple precinct in Jerusalem in Christ’s day was like a miniature version of *The Yards*, having the same distractions.
- John 2:13-14 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business.

- Undoubtedly, the temple precinct in Jerusalem is noisy, dirty, and smelly because of the stockyard of animals waiting to be slaughtered in the temple.
- Hundreds, if not thousands, of sheep and goats and oxen are pent up in the temple precinct.
- Thousands of Jewish families are ascending to Jerusalem from all around the nation for the Passover, and many need to purchase animals for their sacrifice.
- The outer precincts of the temple have been turned into a stockyard and merchandise mart, which is greatly distracting the worship.
- Jesus, arriving on the scene, drives out the money changers and their animals.

John 2:15-17

- 15 When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers’ money and overturned the tables.
- 16 And He said to those who sold doves, “Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!”
- 17 Then His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.”
- Zeal is good, if focused on the right cause and applied in the proper way.
- The apostle Paul said, “It is good to be zealous in a good thing always” (Gal. 4:18).
- Most would agree that Christ’s zeal is for a good purpose and He applies it in the proper way.
- Zeal for God’s house eats Him up.
- What is it that eats you up?
- Three lessons are taught by Christ in this episode.

### 1. He teaches us to exercise the emotion of anger in a spiritual way.

- Why is Jesus so disturbed about these vendors in the temple?
- As He arrives in Jerusalem, he heads toward the temple.
- Coming around the corner, he sees the outer court of the temple precincts, and He cannot believe His eyes and ears!
- Vendors are everywhere, selling animals to the travelers for their sacrifices — sheep, goats, oxen, and doves.
- After observing for a moment, Jesus quickly analyzes what is happening.
- Jews are arriving in Jerusalem from all over Israel for the great Passover feast.

Because of the long and arduous journey, most of the pilgrims have not brought animals with them, knowing they can be purchased at the temple.

- Not to mention, the temple priests will only accept for sacrifice those animals approved by the priests.
- Those who do not have the proper sacrificial animal or do not have one that meets with priestly approval, have to purchase one from the priests at the market.
- Because the priests have a monopoly on the market, they are selling at exorbitant prices.
- It's quite a racket!
- Adding insult to injury, the priests are charging ridiculous temple dues.
- In the book of Exodus God commanded a tax of sorts to be paid annually by the people for the administration of the tabernacle, and later the temple.
- The priests of Christ's day have taken advantage of the system, charging more than God had required.

Furthermore, they require the dues to be paid in temple currency, not Roman currency or any other coinage, requiring the pilgrims to exchange their money.

- Of course, the priests control that market also, charging a fee for the monetary conversion.
- The religious leaders have made God's house a place of merchandise, a house of profiteering and even extortion!
- Edersheim notes that not only is this a terrible desecration of the temple, but that the high priestly family of Annas — who owns these bazaars — becomes fabulously wealthy by running these businesses and exploiting people.
- Rabbinic sources from this time period reveal that the house of Annas was luxurious, wasteful, gluttonous, and corrupt.

This is why, in the parallel account in Matthew's gospel, Jesus cries out, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of thieves" (Matt. 21:13).

- This temple activity is "highway robbery," full of corruption, so that God's house is no longer a solemn place, conducive for worship and prayer, but a noisy bazaar.
- Furthermore, it is a place of greed and covetousness, which God equates with idolatry (Col. 3:5).
- Though there are no statues dedicated to Baal in the temple at Jerusalem, God's house is rife with another form of idolatry, which is just as displeasing to God.

It is important to insert a parenthesis at this juncture.

- All four Gospels record Jesus driving out the money changers, but Matthew, Mark, and Luke report that it happens *late* in Christ's ministry, just before the cross.

- John includes it at the *beginning* of Christ's ministry.
- While it is possible that Jesus drove out the money changers on *two* occasions, that doesn't seem likely for several reasons, not the least of which is that not even one of the Gospel writers records this happening twice.
- Why, then, does John record it near the *beginning* of Christ's ministry?
- Keep in mind that John is not as concerned with a biographical sketch of Christ's life, as much as he is demonstrating to his audience that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.
- It seems John puts this event here, out of chronological order, to prove a point.

Notice the order in John's Gospel.

- In chapter one, priests are sent by the Sanhedrin to query John the Baptist about His ministry.
- In the first half of chapter two, Jesus turns the water into wine.
- In the latter half of chapter two, Jesus cleanses the temple. A.W. Pink says:
- "Here, then, is the first reason why the Holy Spirit has placed this incident just where He has in the Gospel (of John). It furnishes a striking climax to what has gone before. Put together these three things, and see what a glaring picture they give us of Judaism: first, a blinded priesthood (John 1:19-26); second, a joyless nation (no 'wine,' John 2:3); third, a desecrated temple (John 2:16)."

In the Jn. 2 passage Mary says, "They have no wine," signifying that Israel has no joy.

- The waterpots are made of stone, representing Israel's heart of stone.

- Furthermore, the waterpots are empty, showing the failure of the Israelite nation to please God.
- But then after the six waterpots — representing the six thousand years of man — are filled, Jesus turns them into wine on the seventh day, representing the seventh thousand-year period, which is the Millennium.
- That age is characterized by new wine, good wine, unlike anything known in our post-diluvian world.
- Why, then, does John follow the water-to-wine miracle with a zealous Messiah clearing out the Temple?

Because this is what must first happen to the nation in a spiritual sense before Jesus can launch His millennial kingdom and before Israel can be restored as Jehovah's wife and enjoy the blessings of the kingdom.

- Namely, Israel must be cleansed of leaven.
- The nation must repent and return to Jehovah!
- Because Israel rejected Messiah at His first coming, God will use the tribulation as His means of scourging and cleansing the house of Israel to restore the nation to fellowship with Himself.
- Tragically, the nation's sins and refusal to repent are delaying implementation of the kingdom.
- This makes Jesus angry! Rightly so, for this is His house.
- John refers to it as "my Father's house," but Matthew calls it "My house."
- Both statements are accurate, for Jesus is God, and He is right to be angry!

Incidentally, anger is a God-given emotion alerting you that something is wrong and needs to be corrected.

- You cannot stop the emotion from rising up, but you can avoid expressing it sinfully or unrighteously.

- Jesus is rightfully angry because of the sinful corruption that is desecrating the house of God.
- Eph. 4:26 warns children of God, “Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath.”
- Believers are commanded not to respond sinfully to anger, and to resolve anger quickly, not holding it over until another day.
- When angry emotions are allowed to build up over time, they eventually implode or explode in ways that hurt you and others.

The righteous response to anger is to confront the evil or wrongdoing, right the wrongs, and change things for the good.

- The sinful response to anger is to let it control you by destroying people and/or things, often accompanied by yelling, derogatory speech, or abuse, whether physical, emotional, or both.
- Sinful anger distorts your perspective, blocks your ability to love, and restricts your ability to think clearly, and it is very unhealthy.
- Medical studies bear out the fact that angry people (those who continue in anger) typically die earlier than those who resolve the anger quickly.

Is Jesus angry? Without a doubt. Is He out of control?

- Absolutely not! Is He right to be angry? Yes, indeed.
- Does His anger prompt Him to right a wrong? It does.
- So the anger of the Lord Jesus is righteous anger.
- What about you? Do you get angry at sin?
- How do you resolve the anger? Have you gotten out of control?
- Have you become derogatory in speech or abusive in some way?

- If so, you stand indicted before God, and you need to make it right before God and man.
- You must go to those you have wronged in carnal anger, and ask for their forgiveness.
- It may be a husband or wife, a parent or child, a church member, a friend, a neighbor, an employee or coworker.
- If you want to move forward in victory, then you must deal with the past.
- Prov. 28:13 He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.

Jesus has authority to cast out the money changers, for the temple is His Father’s house; indeed, it is His house.

- How does He go about righting this wrong?
- According to v. 15, He makes a scourge, a small whip.
- The Greek words suggests these are twisted strands of rushes or reeds, the ancient material for making rope.
- Perhaps there are pieces of this rope laying around, used for tying up animals.
- Jesus then uses the simple whip that He makes to drive out all of the animals.
- They would need prodding, and this make-shift whip does the job.

Lenski points out that the construction of the Greek in v. 15 indicates that Jesus also uses this makeshift whip on the vendors.

- If so, it is a lesser punishment than what they should be facing under the Mosaic law.
- Not to mention, it is a minimal representation of what is coming in AD 70 if the religious leadership continue in their rejection of Jesus and desecration of the temple.
- Jesus dumps out their money bags and overturns their merchandising tables, expressing His indignation with

their vice and demonstrating His authority to purge the temple.

- He cries out — and sometimes it is appropriate to raise your voice to get attention — “Do not make my Father’s house a house of merchandise!”
- The animals are now running about, the tables are overturned, vendors are scrambling about to pick up their money on the ground.

Interestingly, the religious authorities do not rush out with the Roman guard to arrest Jesus.

- They do not beat or threaten Him, because they are guilty as charged, and they fear the people.
- Edersheim reports how this temple abusiveness has been a real sore spot for the people, and they are quite upset about it.
- Annas and his family would be unwise to make a federal case out of Jesus’ actions, at least not in this case, for public opinion is on Jesus’ side.
- The authorities, though angry, merely ask Him a question, and that leads to a second lesson that Christ teaches in this text.
- John 2:18 The Jews answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?”

**2. He teaches us to know the Word of God so we can grow in faith.**

- Because of their characteristic skepticism and unbelief, the Jews require signs.
- As mentioned in the previous study, signs are miracles, demonstrations of the power of God that confirm the authority of the one performing the miracle.
- Furthermore, signs point the way to divine truth regarding the kingdom.

- They are intended to foster belief.
- Signs are used extensively by Jesus, but some refuse to believe, nonetheless; they require more and more signs.
- That prompts Jesus to say:
- Matt. 16:4 A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.
- These Jewish religious leaders want Jesus to perform some miracle to prove that He has the authority to purge the temple of graft and corruption.

Jesus gives them a beautiful sign:

- John 2:19 Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”
- John doesn’t leave his readers guessing as to the meaning of Christ’s words. He clarifies in v. 21, “He was speaking of the temple of His body.”
- Using a metaphor as a sign, Jesus essentially forewarns these priests that when they destroy *Him* (i.e., crucify Him), He will rise again in three days.
- Edersheim comments:
- “Thus, He meets their challenge for a sign by the challenge of a sign: Crucify Him, and He will rise again; suppress the Christ, and He will triumph.”
- The reply of the religious leaders shows they do not understand.
- John 2:20 Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?”

These religious leaders do not *know* the Scriptures, much less *believe* the Scriptures.

- That is why Jesus speaks using metaphors, so that only those with spiritual eyes will understand.

- Unfortunately, His disciples do not understand either.
- John 2:22 Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.
- After the resurrection of Christ, the disciples have an “Aha!” moment.
- I can imagine it something like this.
- As the disciples are gathered in the upper room after Christ’s resurrection, enjoying a meal together, John — the perceptive one — jumps up from where he is sitting and says: “Peter! It just occurred to me.

“Do you remember when Jesus cleansed the temple and chased out the money changers?”

- He told the priests, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ Jesus was talking about His death and resurrection!”
- Peter looks up, surprised, thinks for a moment, and says, “John, you are absolutely right! How could we miss that?”
- Thus, after their eyes are opened, they believe the Scriptures and the words of Jesus, as the end of v. 22 makes clear.
- Hindsight is always an advantage.
- We should keep that in mind when we tend to be critical of the disciples.
- They didn’t have the full revelation as we do.

Those who do not know the Scriptures and who, therefore, do not believe the Scriptures, look for signs to razzle-dazzle.

- But mere signs are never a substitute for the Word of God.
- Here’s the point for New Testament Christians:

- Rom. 10:17 Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.
- Interestingly, the Greek word for *word* in this verse is not *logos*, as in John 1:1, a Greek word that most Christians have heard, referring to the Word of God as a whole.
- Paul uses a different Greek word in Rom. 10:17, *hrema*, referring to specific statements from the Bible.
- Faith is developed when a believer hears and appropriates specific statements from the Word of God, claiming them for daily living.
- For example, when you are afraid, you happen to read in your morning devotions, “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You” (Ps. 56:3).
- You take God at His Word, trust Him, and the fear dissipates.

When you are anxious about your financial situation, you read, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

- You become confident in the Lord because of that passage, knowing that your needs will be met, and your worry fades away.
- The *hrema* — the specific statements of God’s Word — build your faith, as you read them (or hear them preached), and appropriate them as your own.
- But oftentimes in life, believers do not consistently spend time in the Word of God, so that when dilemmas, trials or temptations comes along, they are unprepared with a *hrema* from the Word to claim in that specific instance.
- Instead of responding to God in faith, they instead look for a sign, some miracle or incredible phenomenon that reveals God’s will.

Some may ask God for a fleece of some sort or repeated evidences that their prayer has been answered, rather than simply trusting the Lord.

- Has not God spoken through His Word?
- But because they are not spending time in the Word, they cannot hear His voice.
- It's a wonder that God is so patient with us!
- But He is, and despite our theological shenanigans, Jesus is praying for us, as He did for Peter, so that our faith doesn't fail.
- At times He may indulge with a miracle or outward confirmation because we are so weak in faith and He is so gracious.
- But if we require confirmations in order to believe Him, then we are weak in faith.

He wants us to get to the point where we will trust Him and not require a sign.

- Jesus said, "Remember: A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign" (Matt. 16:4).
- Doubting Thomas, in the upper room would not believe until he could see the nail prints in the hand of Jesus.
- And what did Jesus say to him?
- John 20:29 Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."
- A word of advice: don't require signs of God, don't put out fleeces, and don't require evidences before you will believe.
- Spend time in the Word of God, claim the *hrema* of truth as your own, and watch your faith become strengthened.
- Thus far, Jesus has taught two lessons to His disciples by casting the money changers out of the temple:
- 1) to exercise the emotion of anger in a spiritual manner,

- and 2) to know the Word of God so we can grow in faith. That leads to a third lesson:

### **3. He teaches us to be zealous about His temple.**

- After Jesus drives the money changers out of the temple, his disciples recall the Old Testament passage that He quotes:
- John 2:17 Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."
- This is an exact quote from Psalm 69:9, which is prophetic of the Messiah.
- The disciples seemingly understand why Jesus quotes this text.
- Zeal comes from a Greek root word, meaning "to boil."
- To be *zealous*, therefore, is to be fervent, passionate, having intense enthusiasm.
- In this context, it is Jesus having a burning desire and excitement about the temple of God.

Commentator Robert Govett said:

- "In the boldness which led one man, and that all but unknown, to set himself against the evil practices of his nation in their stronghold, the disciples saw the fearless energy wherewith Jesus began to imperil his life, and was content to do so. Where others trembled, He advanced alone and won the day ... A self-consuming zeal for all that was His Father's led on against all dangers."
- He is overwhelmed with the burden that God's holy temple must be kept holy.
- These corrupt religious leaders, with their vice and greed are desecrating the holy temple of God and Jesus gets stirred up about it.
- He takes impassioned action to see the wrongs righted.

The temple, for the Jews, is the most sacred place on Earth, for it is the holy dwelling place of God.

- Yet Jesus, in a profound statement, stuns the religious leaders by referring to His body as the temple of God.
- The apostle Paul goes one step further and proclaims that the bodies of believers are the temple of God.
- 1 Cor. 6:19-20 Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.
- This is an astounding statement!
- The Holy Spirit of God lives within your body.
- Indeed, He owns it, for He bought it.
- Your body, therefore, ought to be a most sacred place, holy, and dedicated unto the Lord.

Consider the Jewish temple, which was comprised of three zones:

- 1) the outer courtyard where the priests offered sacrifices;
- 2) the holy place inside; and
- 3) the most holy place, a smaller room behind a veil.
- The inner sanctum housed the ark of the covenant, where the shekinah glory glowed between the cherubim.
- Many commentators have pointed out the striking parallels between the temple and the bodies of believers.
- The outer courtyard seemingly represents the body, the holy place represents the soul (mind, will, and emotions), and the most holy place represents the spirit.
- The day you were regenerated, your spirit — the innermost part of your being, which is your interface with God — came alive when the Holy Spirit took up residence.

Going forward, His will for you is to offer yourself as a “living sacrifice” in your temple.

- Rom. 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.
- In these verses Paul is using “temple-talk.”
- Since believers are likened to the temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19-20, quoted above), God's expectation is that we would climb up on the altar daily and die to self.

In order to fully understand the spiritual applications, one additional truth needs to be drawn out of the text.

- Notice the timing of Christ's cleansing of the temple:
- John 2:13-14 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business.
- Jesus cleanses the temple during Passover week.
- That little detail is significant.
- Passover was the time each year when the Jews would remember the first Passover back in Egypt, signifying the salvation of the nation, nearly fifteen hundred years previously, when every family applied the blood of a lamb to their doorposts so the angel of death would pass them over

The annual Passover celebration in Israel, not only recalls the first Passover, but also points to Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.



- In 1 Cor. 5:7b Paul refers to Jesus as, “Christ our Passover.” But the full verse reads:
  - 1 Cor. 5:7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened.
  - For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.
  - According to the Mosaic law, one of the prerequisites for celebrating the annual Passover was that all leaven had to be swept out of the house.
  - Leaven is a type of sin, so the picture conveyed is that sin must be cleaned out of the life.
  - Now connect this truth with Christ’s actions in John 2.
  - It is during Passover week that Jesus sweeps out the leaven of the money changers — the extortion, corruption and idolatry from His father’s house.
  - This is a grand picture of how God wants believers to live — constantly sweeping out the leaven from our bodies, the temple of God.
- Oh, that zeal for God’s house (for His temple, our body) would eat up His children!
  - I challenge you to THINK ON THESE THINGS

God wants you to willingly allow His Spirit, who resides in your spirit, to lead your soul as to how you should think and feel and choose.

- He then intends for your Spirit-led soul to dictate to the body how it will live and act — spirit leading soul, ultimately leading body.
- A life lived in that way will be considered by God a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God. What a temple!
- Tragically, many Christians do not live in that fashion.
- They reverse the God-sanctioned order, allowing their body or soul to dictate to their spirit how they want to live.
- Does that describe you? Is your temple dirty?
- Does it need cleansing?
- If so, then Jesus compels you to get zealous about your temple, purging out the filth.