

February 20, 2011

Living Out The Gospel In Real Life

Destroy This Temple

John 2:12 – 25

Let's look again at the picture presented in the first part of chapter 2: Jesus begins His ministry with a miracle at a wedding in Cana, the purpose of which John says, was to display the glory of the Son of God and cause His disciples to believe in Him. And we see His glory in the fact that Jesus deliberately chooses a wedding to inaugurate His ministry, at once sanctifying the marriage relationship, and demonstrating His relationship with His followers as that of a bridegroom to a bride – looking ahead to the great wedding feast of the church, the bride of Christ. With the sign of His miracle there in Cana, He implicitly condemns all religious self-effort that would seek to make ourselves acceptable to God, and demonstrated that mere outward washing can never take the place of real inward cleansing and renewal. ***Real cleansing, real redemption, real acceptance by God comes by way of the blood of Christ at Calvary.*** In effect He is announcing that the days of types and shadows were over and the reality had come.

Furthermore He took those dead, stone waterpots, symbolic of man in his deadened condition, and filled them up with water, symbolic of the water of the Word of God that awakens dead souls to new life, and through that word produces good wine, symbolic of the divine cleansing through the blood of His sacrifice, and witness to the divine joy that fills the soul of everyone who believes in Him. And this was the beginning of His signs – the first miracle. And certainly this is the first miracle every believer experiences – the miracle of new birth. Remember, everything Jesus did had a point – ***they were not random acts of kindness but purpose-driven acts that were meant to demonstrate His glory and cause people to believe in Him as the Son of God.*** So John turns from this beginning of signs and moves right on to another.

After this He went down to Capernaum, He and His mother and His brothers and His disciples ; and they stayed there a few days. John 2:12

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. John 2:13-14 Again, like the wedding in Cana, this first Passover visit to the temple is not recorded by the other gospel writers. And there are significant enough differences to convince us that Jesus went up to the temple at least twice and made quite a scene. And some would ask, 'Why, if Jesus did this twice, didn't all the gospels reflect that fact?' And the answer as we have already seen comes near the end of John when he says, *'Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book ; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ; and that believing you may have life in His name.'* John 20:30-31

The point of this gospel, and the others, is not to give us a chronological review of Jesus' life and ministry – ***the point is to display the glory of the Son of God and cause us to believe in Jesus.*** And John felt, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that this visit to Jerusalem would be the best one for the purpose of this gospel. And we can understand a little bit of the why of that when we understand that at Cana Jesus was implicitly announcing the replacement of the old religious order – the water of ceremonial cleansing – with the new wine of the New Covenant. ***And here He is implicitly announcing the end of temple worship, which itself pointed to the genuine worship of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.***

This is key to understanding His ministry. The worship of God by the Jews had lost any reality it once had by and large over the years and when Jesus arrives on the scene, the worship of God had degenerated into hollow formalism, empty of any real meaning. Oh to be sure there were individual exceptions like Simeon and Anna in the temple when Jesus was presented at eight days old. But every time Jesus is confronted and opposed, it is those in the religious community that are against Him – the scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees. All throughout Jesus' ministry He is implicitly or explicitly announcing the end to the dead formality of Judaism, and the introduction of the New Covenant. The whole point of Jesus' life and ministry was to be slain on the cross as the perfect Lamb of God that permanently takes away the sin of the world. He is the perfect sacrifice that was foreshadowed by all the sacrifices of oxen and sheep and doves that was still going on in the temple.

Now at Passover, every Jewish male over twelve years old was expected to go up to Jerusalem to celebrate, and Barclay estimates that there were probably two and a quarter million Jews in attendance at these events, and they were all there to worship at the temple and carry out the Passover, which commemorated the passing over of the angel of Death in Egypt all those Jews who were inside their homes with the blood of a lamb on their doorposts and lintels. When the angel saw the blood, he passed over that household – but any house without blood saw the death of the firstborn in that house. **The Passover feast was inaugurated to provide a picture for the Jews of the coming sacrifice of the Lamb of God.**

So Jesus goes up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and finds these guys in the outer court of the temple selling oxen and sheep and doves for the sacrifices the people needed to make at the temple. And he finds the money changers doing their thing. The money changers were in business because you couldn't pay the required temple tax with foreign currency – it had to be sanctified coinage, which was the Jewish shekel. Providing the sacrificial animals and changing money for temple shekels was really not the problem. Most of these people had come long distances to worship and couldn't bring their own animals, and they didn't carry shekels with them, they were only used in Jerusalem, so you might say that these guys were doing a good ministry in providing what was necessary for worship.

But what they hadn't counted on that day was the reality of what they were celebrating showing up. In Malachi 3, the prophet prophesied that the Messiah would show up unexpectedly one day: *"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple ; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts.* Malachi 3:1 The first part of that verse refers of course to John the Baptist, but the rest refers to Christ. And He was going to appear all of a sudden at the temple. That day I doubt if any of those present realized they were seeing the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Malachi goes on to say: *"But who can endure the day of His coming ? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.* Malachi 3:2 His appearance at the temple was for the purpose of cleansing it. The Lord, the Messiah, was going to show up suddenly one day at the temple and give it a good scrubbing. Now when the Bible talks about the temple, it is usually referring to the whole complex, of which the temple proper is only a small part. Immediately surrounding the temple itself, composed of the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, or Holy of Holies, was the Outer Court, and then separated from the outer court by a low, chest high wall was the Court of the Gentiles, and this is where we find the animal traders and money changers.

And this is where Jesus comes first. *And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen ; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables ; and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away ; stop making My Father's house a place of business."* John 2:15-16 This is not gentle Jesus, meek and mild – this is more like Rambo. Jesus goes into the temple area, looks at what is going on, sits down and makes a whip, gets up and starts beating these people unmercifully, driving them and their animals out of the temple area. This is remarkable in itself, but what makes it even more remarkable is that no one stands up to this one guy among thousands, we must presume, to stop Him. It is as though He has a perfect right to be there and do what He is doing – and indeed He does.

But we need to ask ourselves, 'Why was He driving everyone out? What was behind this cleansing?' First of all, one of the express requirements to observe the Passover, was that all leaven had to be cleaned out of every house of every Jew observing the Passover. **No leaven in your houses** was the requirement of the Law. *'Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses ; for whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is an alien or a native of the land.* Deuteronomy 12:19 So before the Passover, every Jewish home would have a thorough cleaning of all food and beverages that contained fermented grain products or yeast. Religious Jews were, and still are, meticulous about preparing their homes for the Passover by cleaning out the leaven. Not a speck of leaven anywhere.

Leaven in the Bible is primarily a symbolic word picture of corruption. Jesus talks of the corrupt doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees in Matthew 16 and elsewhere. The apostle Paul talks about the corrupting influence of leaven in 1 Corinthians 5 and Galatians 5. Leaven corrupts by changing the nature of something from one thing to another. Leaven is stealthy as it works; it spreads by contact of particle with particle; its influence is out of proportion to its size, one small bit of leaven being able to change a much greater amount of flour; and it changes the stuff it comes into contact with into its own nature. So one of the things Jesus is doing here is cleaning out the leaven.

So what is the leaven here? It wasn't the oxen or the sheep or the doves, or the money. **It was the hypocrisy and extortion, and coveteousness and idolotry that was going on in the temple.** The other gospels record the second cleansing, near the end of Jesus' ministry and they say that on that occasion the animal traders and money changers were perverting the worship of God by making it a den of thieves instead of a house of prayer, and the focus was on robbery. That is, what they were doing had the effect of robbing not only the worshippers but God – robbing God of the glory and worship and honor due Him. But here, Jesus says that they were making His Father's house a house of merchandise. It was crass commercialism.

One commentator writes that in todays terms, nickle doves were selling for four bucks, and the money changers were making money hand over fist with their exchange rates. What these people were doing under the guise of worship **had the effect of turning the house of worship into a house of trade.** What caused the change was the leaven. If you look at Paul's description of leaven in 1 Corinthians 5, you see what he means when he talks about leaven: *Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?* 1 Corinthians 5:6 And then he tells us what that is: an *'...immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler...'* 1 Corinthians 5:11 And in Colossians [3:5] Paul connects coveteousness with idolotry. So leaven refers to those who practice, among other things, coveteousness, extortion and idolotry.

And at the root of all this was not love of God but the love of money. Jesus didn't just blow a gasket here. He was being obedient to the law that said *Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses.* And when He came into His Father's house – there was leaven all over the place. And more than anything, this was the fault of the leaders of the Jews. Jesus made it clear that underneath the dead, ritual, legalism of the Pharisees was a root of all evil, the love of money. In Luke 16, Jesus told them: *"No servant can serve two masters ; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."* And then Luke makes this comment: *Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him.* Luke 16:13 – 14 That is the root of coveteousness and extortion and idolotry. You can almost hear Him saying, as He did in Matthew: *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence.* Matthew 23:25

And so Jesus identifies Himself with the promised Lord in Malachi and makes a whip of cords and physically cleans them out. I often wonder what the disciples were thinking right then. They had just come from a wedding celebration where everything was happy and joyful, and the next thing they know, Jesus laying about with His whip and overturning the money changers tables – chaos in the temple with people and animals running for cover. You have to wonder if they were rethinking their commitment to follow Him right then. But the Scripture record that as they looked on this scene, they were struck by the fulfillment of prophecy: *His disciples remembered that it was written, "ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME."* John 2:17

What was missing in all the observance of this Passover celebration was the passion or zeal for God. God was not being worshipped, money was. All the religious ritual, all the supposed helpful provision for worship, was simply a cover for greed. We face much the same problem in the church today – wolves in sheeps clothing who are fleecing the flock. One prominent ministry in the Christian world has an estimated revenue that exceeds \$100 million a year. This has allowed the head of that ministry to accumulate a fortune as a television faith healer and to live in a big, expensive mansion. His personal perks for he and his family and his entourage include a \$10 million seaside mansion; a private jet with annual operating costs of about \$1.5 million; a Mercedes SUV and convertible, each valued at about \$80,000. With many like him, what is being worshipped is not God but money.

I'll say it up front and I'll say it out loud: The faith healers and health-and-wealth preachers who dominate religious television are shameless frauds. **Their message is not the gospel of Jesus Christ.** There is nothing spiritual or miraculous about their on-stage abracadabra. It is all an elaborate ruse designed to take advantage of hurting, desperate, and biblically illiterate people. The prosperity preachers are **not godly ministers but greedy impostors** who corrupt the Word of God for money's sake. They are not real pastors who shepherd the flock of God but wolves whose only aim is to fleece the sheep. Their love of money is glaringly obvious in what they say as well as how they live. They claim to possess great spiritual power, but in reality they are rank materialists, imposters, and enemies of everything holy.

And so the wolves of Jesus' day, instead of recognizing who Jesus was and what He was doing, ask Him a question that really confirms what they are hiding behind: *The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things ?"* John 2:18

It is the same question they hit Him with everytime they are confronted by their sin. Over in Matthew 12 they ask Him the same thing and Jesus says: *But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign ; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet"* Matthew 12:39 Why is it evil and adulterous for them to ask Him for a sign? It is because they already know what the truth is, they simply do not want to acknowledge it – it is a dodge, a cover-up, a ploy. They are trying to turn their problem of loving money more than God into an issue of authority. If they can deflect the issue, their sin won't stand out like a sore thumb.

They were dissembling, that is, **they were concealing their own motives by a pretense.** They just had a huge sign of His authority. One man, one whip, clearing thousands out of the temple? What more do you need? But they were unwilling to face their sin and they were unwilling to believe. After all, who is it that asks for signs? Only those who do not believe. **Unbelief always needs a sign, always asks for signs.** Unbelief always wants miracles, tricks, magic acts. But Jesus wasn't there for that.

But He gave them a sign anyway: *Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days ?"* John 2:19-20 The Greek here is very precise. Our English versions simply say 'Destroy this temple' but in Greek the verb 'destroy' is plural, indicating that these religious fakes were the ones destroying the temple. He was saying, 'You destroy this temple'. This operates on a couple of levels. First, Jesus meant that what they were doing, their greed and coveteousness and idolotry, had the effect of destroying the temple they claimed was the House of God. He was saying that 'When you desecrate this house with your money-loving practices and your pretense of loving God, you destroy this temple. And indeed it will be destroyed.' And it was in 70 AD by the Romans.

But He was also saying that the same misguided, sinful materialism that destroys this temple of stone, will one day destroy Him, by putting Him to death on the cross. Because they treasured money more than God, they would also take pleasure in His destruction – buying it with 30 pieces of silver. So He is talking about the destruction of the temple of stone and the temple of His body. Which is what John says: *But He was speaking of the temple of His body. So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this ; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.* John 2:21-22

Finally, there is something else in here we should not miss. Just as He talked on two levels about destroying the temple of stone and the temple of flesh, He also spoke on two levels when He said: *and in three days I will raise it up.*" This is the great truth of His resurrection – died on the cross on Friday, rose triumphant from the grave on Sunday. But He was also pointing to the resurrection of the true temple of God – Christ Himself. He is now the temple where man and God are reconciled and have communion. **Authentic worship is no longer connected to the temple, but to Jesus.**

This is why the temple in Jerusalem will never be rebuilt. I say this, because the eschatology of many Christians today include a third rebuilding of the temple and reinstition of the sacrifices. But my only question to that would be 'Why'? Jesus' ministry was always aimed at announcing the end of the types and shadows of the Old Testament and demonstrating that He was the reality of which all of that spoke. The reason the temple existed in the first place was so that offerings and sacrifices could be offered for the temporary atonement of sin. But now the perfect Lamb of God has come, offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin, once for all – never to be repeated. So what possible use would a temple and sacrifices have? God in history has also spoken very loudly – He leveled the temple 2000 years ago – in fact there was a valley there in Jerusalem that is no longer a valley because it was filled with the rubble from that temple complex. That is a pretty strong statement. And God allowed the Muslims to profane the place by occupying the area and building their own house of worship there.

When Mark records the trial of Jesus before the high priest, witnesses are brought to testify against Jesus and they said: *"We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.'*" Mark 14:58 This new temple, one made without hands, is clearly the church. Jesus had no intention of rebuilding the old temple and reinstiting the old sacrifices. The work of Christ on the cross was to destroy the old temple and build a new one – His church. When He died on the cross the veil in the temple was torn in two, rendering it unfit as a place for God to dwell because a new place had been created – the body, the church of Christ.

His followers had the same thought. When the apostles in Jerusalem got word that Gentiles were turning to God – they saw the prophesy of the rebuilding of the temple as applying not to an actual wood and stone structure – but to the church: *"With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, 'AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT, SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,' SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM LONG AGO.* Acts 15:15-18

Paul thought so as well: *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.* Ephesians 2:19 – 22 When the reality comes, there is no place left for the symbol. Today we worship God in the temple of the church – not a building but a people. This is what Jesus told the woman at the well: *"Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father... "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.* John 4:21, 23

What Jesus says to us is that "I am the new temple. When I raise my body from the dead, everywhere in all the world, people may come to God through me. There will be no pilgrimage to Jerusalem, no more sacrifices that cannot remove the stain of sin, no more self-efforts at cleansing and redemption, no more wailing at the wall.' In Jesus we meet God. We know God. We fellowship with God. In Jesus we find the infinite treasure of the all-satisfying God.

Our gracious God and loving Father,

Your purpose and the end of Your will is to make Christ Your Son glorious and beloved on earth and in Heaven where He is now seated, where one day we will all behold His glory and love and glorify Him forever. He is the real temple, the true sacrifice, the place where God and man are perfectly reconciled. Forbid it Lord that we would substitute real worship for a form of godliness. Let us not revere the structure but glorify the reality. Come and cleanse Your temple, the church of God and let no corruption remain. May Christ be exalted in our lives and our worship; may we wash in no other fountain, but the fountain of His blood. May we build on no other foundation than Jesus the cornerstone. May we receive from no other fulness and rest in no other salvation. Let us be Your holy temple, reflecting Your glory, so that the rest of mankind might seek the Lord, we pray in the precious, holy name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.