

“Focused Zeal”

When Jesus lived on this earth Passover was one of the three times of the year where worship attendance at the temple in Jerusalem increased significantly. However, keep in mind that there was constantly worship activity at the temple. So what our sermon lesson tells us Jesus encountered at the temple wasn't an unusual thing. What did Jesus encounter when he went to the temple that day?

- Business people focused on making a buck as they sold substandard animals for sacrifice at inflated prices.
- Currency exchange business people accepting foreign currency and exchanging it for the proper currency so worshippers could pay the annual temple tax. No doubt a convenience fee charge was added to the transaction.
- The sounds and smells of animals!
- The boisterous banter of business people promoting their services and the haggling between seller and buyer!
- Worshipers who failed to plan ahead to bring proper sacrifices to God and take care of currency exchanges elsewhere so that when they came to the temple they were ready to worship!
- Robbers who saw the people and businesses crowding the temple grounds as an opportunity to carry out their criminal activity.
- Sincere people trying to worship at the temple but being unable to focus because of all the other distractions taking place.

With that background info, listen to John 2:13-22.

**(13) When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. (14) In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. (15) So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. (16) To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!” (17) His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.” (Psalm 69:9)**

**(18) Then the Jews demanded of him, “What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?” (19) Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” (20) The Jews replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” (21) But the temple he had spoken of was his body. (22) After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.**

All four Gospel writers record this event. As we consider all four accounts it seems that Jesus did something like this twice during his ministry. The first time at the beginning of his ministry (John records this) and the second time at the end of his ministry during Holy Week (Matthew, Mark, and Luke record this). Typically, Jesus got his message across with calm authoritative preaching and miracles. Our sermon

lesson shows us a different side of Jesus. Perhaps we don't like seeing this side of Jesus, the righteously angry Jesus. Be comforted in knowing that Jesus actions were not sinful, but rather were the fulfillment of a Bible prophecy: **"Zeal for your house will consume me"** (Psalm 69:9). More often than not Jesus used the calm authoritative preaching and miracle route to positively impact people's lives and many people listened and benefitted from that approach. Many people, however, were oblivious to the help Jesus was trying to offer them through that approach, so Jesus tried a different approach, the righteously angry table flipping animal scattering approach, to positively impact people's lives. Jesus plan seems to have worked because there is no mention that the people who were the recipients of his righteous anger objected to his actions. Perhaps some of their consciences were actually pricked by Jesus actions and it led them to repent and change their ways. The problem was not that people were running businesses that involved selling/buying animals for sacrifice or exchanging currency. The problem was that their desire to make money led them to make some decisions that distracted people who were there to worship God. That should have been obvious to them, but it wasn't. The problem was that their desire to make money led them to sell blemished animals even though God commanded that the sacrifices be without blemish because these animals were supposed to be a picture of Jesus. That should have been obvious to them, but it wasn't. The problem was that the people coming to worship should have taken care of buying their animal for sacrifice and exchanging their money BEFORE they arrived at the temple so that when they arrived at the temple they could have been focused on worshipping God. That should have been obvious to them, but their desire for convenience made it so that it wasn't. The problem was some people's zeal for money and convenience was distracting them and others from enjoying the real purpose of the temple – a place where people came to encounter God, repent of their sins, be comforted by God's forgiveness, and be empowered to live a life of thankfulness. So Jesus gets their attention as he tries to refocus their zeal where it should be – on him, their need for him and the blessings that come through knowing him in faith as Savior.

Everything in Scripture is meant to teach us so that we can apply it to our own lives. So it is fitting for all of us to honestly ask the question, is there anything in my life that is distracting me from having a zeal that is focused on Jesus – knowing him better, living for him, and telling others about him? Is your zeal for making money distracting you? Is your zeal for your hobbies – sports, travel, home projects, entertainment, etc... distracting you? Is your zeal for rest and relaxation distracting you? Is your zeal for politics distracting you? Is your zeal for arranging the next party/gathering with your family or friends distracting you? Is your zeal to spend time with certain people, who maybe aren't the best influence on you, distracting you? Is your zeal to portray a certain lifestyle image to others distracting you? Is your zeal for social media distracting you? Is your zeal for checking off all the items on your earthly bucket list distracting you? All those things I mentioned are wonderful blessings from God, but our zeal for them can often times interfere with having a focused zeal for Jesus. So Jesus shows up in the temple that day and approaches church going people and gets their attention by scattering the animals and flipping over some tables so they would consider this question – "What is your zeal truly focused on?" I find it interesting that the Christians who put together the appointed Scripture lessons for today selected Exodus 20:1-17 as the Old Testament lesson to go with the Gospel lesson from John 2. As Christians I think many of us have been lulled into thinking that, "God is okay with my level of zeal." Jesus comes along and says, "Compare your life to the 10 commandments. Do you still think God is okay with your level of zeal?" Every congregation I've served and every congregation I have considered a call to serve have all said the same

thing – “we need to do more evangelism.” Pastor Eric Roecker, chairman for WELS evangelism, is starting an initiative in WELS that is focused on creating an evangelism culture in our churches and schools. Those comments and that initiative would suggest to me that our zeal to tell others about Jesus isn’t as focused as it could be. Twice this past week I had conversations with people in which they said that they personally were turned off toward Christianity because they knew Christians who attended worship every week, yet the other six days of the week they didn’t live much like a Christian. Those comments suggest to me that our zeal for living for Jesus during the week isn’t as focused as it could be. Every week our teachers at St. John’s ask the school children if they attended worship in person or watched it online with their family this week. The data compiled from asking that question would suggest that members of St. John’s zeal for knowing Jesus isn’t as focused as it could be.

The secret to having a more focused zeal for Jesus – knowing him, living for him, and telling others about him is to admit that each of us still has a focus problem and zeal problem when it comes to Jesus. And each of us still rightfully deserves from God his consuming zeal and punishment in Hell. When we see that and admit that then we are prepared to hear this good news: **“There is now NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”** (Romans 8:1). You deserve to be condemned to Hell for eternity for your focus and zeal issues, but you won’t be because Jesus was condemned to Hell in your place. Jesus willingly suffered your punishment so you could be freed to spend eternity in Heaven and so that you **“are controlled not by the sinful nature, but by the Spirit”** (Romans 8:9). Go into this week focused on that good news. Through faith in Christ you will spend eternity in Heaven. And the Holy Spirit controls you, not your sinful nature. Through Christ and the Holy Spirit, you have been empowered to put on display a focused zeal for Jesus – knowing him, living for him, and telling others about him. So go do it. Amen.