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## Jesus: Zealous for God's House

John 2:12-22

The Gospel According to John

Series #10

**Introduction:** Take your Bible and join me in John chapter 2, the Gospel of John, chapter 2.

The Scripture passage we will be studying this morning is found in verses 12-22 of the second chapter of John's Gospel. You will remember that John has told us why he is writing these things to us. John 20:31 states his clear purpose – "these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John is writing to prove to all of his readers in every generation that this Jesus of Nazareth is more than a man of influence and prestige and power. He is more than a good man. He is more than a moral man. He is more than a great teacher and more than a miracle worker. This Jesus is the Messiah – the one promised from Genesis to Malachi who would come and free his people from their sins and slavery to other nations. This Jesus is the Son of God – co-equal with God and co-eternal with God and co-existent with God – in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God!

But John is also writing – not just to convince us that Jesus is God in the flesh – but also to cause us to believe in Jesus. He has an evangelistic purpose. He wants you to see the good news that is found in Jesus alone – that he alone can save from sin and give eternal life through faith in him. And so, it is with that intent that John penned these words so many years ago. Verse 12 says this

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The apostle John has introduced us to Jesus by walking us one day at a time through his first week of public ministry. He will end his Gospel by walking us one day at a time through the final week of Jesus' ministry. At the end of this first week we see Jesus perform his first public sign at the wedding feast in the backwater town of Cana of Galilee. By miraculously changing water into wine our Lord pointed ahead to the true and everlasting joy he would bring as the Bridegroom to His Bride – the Church - through his supernatural supply. This first sign was public and obvious, but it was in the northern highlands of the nation of Israel. Now it was time for Jesus to move into the hotbed of Jewish culture – the capital city of Jerusalem. And so, we are told in verse 12 that he leaves Cana and goes down to Capernaum for a few days before heading for Jerusalem. Most likely this is Jesus' official move to Capernaum from Nazareth, and we are told here that his mother and brothers went with him and his disciples. Capernaum would become the hub of Jesus' ministry over the next 2 years or so, to the point that Mark will say that Jesus was at his home when he was in Capernaum. And so, this is probably the move from the out of the way Nazareth, to the more central hub of Capernaum. Capernaum was a fishing town that was located on the NE shore of the Sea of Galilee. But they don't stay there long this time around. It is the time for the Jewish feast of the Passover, so they head for Jerusalem.

Can you imagine what might have happened here if Jesus had a public relations team? If he was concerned primarily with public opinion and gaining followers, then this would have looked much different wouldn't it? You could imagine in the back room strategy sessions of the public relations team they would be advising Jesus about his next move – “That miracle at the wedding was amazing – great job! Now you have to capitalize on that and go to Jerusalem and declare all the wonderful things you will do for the people as their Messiah. Use the water into wine as a talking point to tell them that this is but a foretaste – quite literally – of the good things which will come in the months ahead. Oh, and while you're at it Jesus, go ahead and give a speech detailing all the things you are for – all the positive elements of Jewish culture that you love and cherish and how you are planning to keep Judaism great in the coming years of your Kingly reign. And just for good measure – let's leave the negative things – you know the things you want to change – let's leave those for another day. Let's get this thing off to a positive, heart-warming, and encouraging start!”

Well, praise God that His Son is more zealous for His own glory than he is for the praise of unbelieving men! Because what he does next is a public relations nightmare! But it is the clear expression of his zeal for God's glory as the very Son of God. He is not interested in winning friends and influencing people to join his movement. He is interested in the truth and in revealing God and in redeeming mankind to God. Therefore, he enters this very public venue and brings this very condemning judgment upon the premier expression of Jewish worship – the Passover Feast. And we know this is a controversial move by Jesus because of how the Jews in Jerusalem respond in this text. At the wedding in Cana Jesus was glorified and further believed in by his disciples. But here in Jerusalem he is challenged and questioned by the unbelieving religious leaders. His first sign was among family and friends, and yet so many of them still did not see him for who he was. In Jerusalem, his second move will be extremely public and will bring to the surface the overwhelming unbelief that resides in so many hearts. And all of this is given to us so that we might know that this Jesus is the Son of God. It is in this text that we are clearly confronted with the divinity of Jesus. He is more than a man – he is God in the flesh – and we must believe in him and find life in his name. We see this clear truth of Jesus' deity in that he perceives the authenticity of worship in verses 13-14.

**I. Jesus Perceives the Authenticity of Worship – vs. 13-14**

- a. John sets the scene for us in verse 13 by telling us that the Passover feast of the Jews was at hand. This was the yearly commemoration of God's miraculous freeing of the whole nation from Egypt in the time of Moses. The last plague was the death angel coming upon the Egyptians and putting to death all the first born males in every household. The Israelites were to sacrifice a pure male lamb or young goat and they were to spread its blood on the doorway of their houses, so that the angel of death would pass over them. Then in Exodus 12 they are told to remember this yearly with a Passover feast, followed by the feast of unleavened bread – lasting for a week. There were three feasts prescribed in Leviticus 23 that required all the men of Israel to gather in Jerusalem for a public feast. These were to be times of worship and consecration and contrition and sacrifice for sins and renewal of covenant commitment to the Lord their God. These were to be solemn feast of holy reverence and also of praise filled joy.

- b. We will be told of 3 different Passovers that Jesus will attend in the Gospel of John. His ministry here begins in Jerusalem at the Feast of the Passover, and it will end at the Feast of the Passover. And this is not the first Passover celebration Jesus has been to. We know he came to the Passover feast when he was twelve because he stayed behind and was conversing with the religious leaders and experts in the Law for days after the feast had ended. Most likely, he had come to the three public feasts every year of his adult life – he was in fact, the perfect Jew – obedient to the Law in every way.
- c. And so, as he comes upon Jerusalem in John 2, this is not a new scene to him. He has seen this chaos in the temple courts every other year he had come. And when he looked at it, he saw it for what it was. He saw it truly and really. What should have been their most sacred gathering was cluttered with the sights and sounds of the marketplace. The Temple courts should have been filled with the sounds of confession and praise, prayer and adoration, but instead they are filled with the noises of animals, the clinking of coins being exchanged, and the loud voices of people bartering over price.
- d. Why is this all here? Well, they arrived at this place through human intuition and opportunity. The celebration of the Passover required a sacrifice, and so many of the Jews would have to travel to Jerusalem so they found it easier to purchase an animal when they got there, than to bring one from home with them. On top of that, the priests and Levites were probably in cahoots with those who were selling the animals – if someone brought one from out of town the priests might find a blemish and not allow it to be used for the sacrifice. Then they would have to buy one from the High Priest approved market right there – conveniently placed on the Temple grounds. And sure, it was way more than what you would pay for a sheep or an ox or a dove outside Jerusalem – but just like that drink and hot dog at the football game – you pay what you have to because you have no other option.
- e. And the coin exchange – well, that was because every male had to pay the Temple tax according to Mosaic Law and so the High Priest demanded this be paid in the local currency, not with any coins brought in from other regions or lands. So, now, these travelers had to exchange their hometown coin for the official Temple recognized coin – and this too was conveniently accessed right there on the Temple grounds. And they also needed money to buy the animal for sacrifice, and maybe a little extra for their stay in lovely Jerusalem, so by now they are exchanging a good chunk of change so that they can operate in this contrived system.
- f. And they are doing all of this in the name and under the umbrella of worship of the living God. That's why they are in Jerusalem – to remember God's mighty acts of the past and to celebrate his great grace. And certainly, there were righteous souls who were vexed when they walked into the Temple courts and saw this circus taking place. Certainly, there were righteous men and women who chaffed under the exorbitant exchange rates and the ridiculous practices to make you buy the High Priest approved animals. But no one saw this whole thing as clearly as

Jesus. No one perceived what was really happening like our Lord did. He saw down into the hearts of the religious leaders and he knew the selfish agendas and the financial gains that were driving this system. He did not suspect greed – he perceived it clearly in this whole debacle. And this proves his divinity – that he truly and really is the Son of God. And this is what he perceives in our gathering today as well. He knows the heart of each worshiper and see clearly where there is selfish ambition and greed and lust for fame lurking behind our outward expressions of worship. He knows when we are proclaiming our love and allegiance to the Lord for the sake of our own gain and clout with others. Jesus sees things as they truly are, not as we pretend them to be. He saw through the hubbub and the holy air of the Temple courts, and he was appalled at their man-centered system which operated under the ruse of honoring God and sacrificing to Him.

## II. Jesus Condemns False Worship – vs. 15-17

- a. But what he does with this true knowledge is another clear indicator of his deity. He condemns false worship in verses 15-17. Which he can only do if he is truly God in the flesh. Seeing this worship charade for what it was, Jesus made a whip of cords and drove the animals and their owners out of the Temple. He poured the coins out on the ground and he turned over their tables. It is hard to overstate how incredible this is. One Jewish commentator calls it the sign that isn't the sign. It is hard to think about what takes place here without seeing that divine power and presence had to be at work to make this happen. Jesus is one man – and we know from Isaiah 53 that he was quite common looking – so it is not like he was some burly and bulky body-builder type who no one will mess with. So, why didn't the animal traders and money changers turn on him and crowd around him and make him stop? Why didn't just one burly man come up behind him and bear hug him and remove him from the scene and preserve their worship bazaar?
- b. The only explanation can be that Jesus' divine presence overwhelmed the situation and allowed for this orderly condemnation of this chaotic courtyard. We know that it didn't turn into a riot because the Roman garrison is overlooking this courtyard and they would have been on the scene in minutes if they saw any signs of an uprising. And Jesus did not hurt any of the animals or sin against any of the sellers or money changers. He was completely justified in this move because he saw what was really going on – He perceived the lack of authenticity in their worship and as God in the flesh, he had the authority to judge it and condemn it.
- c. And this is clearly a condemnation of what is going on. He clears the Temple courtyard of these religious hucksters, but in case they miss the point, he tells them in verse 16 – “Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade.” He is clearly telling them that he knows their true motive – they are using the Temple for their own financial advantage. Which by the way – they don't quibble with do they? But he also equates himself with God by calling the Temple his Father's house. The Jews never referred to God as their Father

because they understood that to be placing yourself on the same plane as God – as making yourself equal with God. In fact, in chapter 5 Jesus will heal a man at the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem on the Sabbath day and then he will say that he is doing the work that his Father has given him to do. And then in verse 18 John reports – “This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”

- d. So, this was a clear claim by Jesus here in chapter 2 to equality with God. His actions and His words here combine to condemn this false worship. He did not come to make some small tweaks to their current religious practice. Rather, he came to turn it over – just like these tables. He came to abolish their practice through his perfect and complete fulfillment as the true Passover Lamb.
- e. And his own disciples seem to catch some of that because verse 17 tells us that they remembered what was written in Psalm 69:9 and they saw in Jesus this same zeal described there. Psalm 69 is a song written by David to cry out to God for his intervention against his enemies who are attacking him for reasons he doesn't understand. He has this consuming zeal for the house of the Lord which is part of why he is being attacked by his opponents. Well, what David was in part, Jesus is in full. Great David's greater Son – Jesus of Nazareth is more zealous for God's house than David could ever have imagined. And his zeal puts him immediately at odds with the religious authorities who have the rule over the Temple. Like David's opponents they will attack Jesus and seek to destroy Him for his righteous zeal for what is right and good. This hatred and opposition will ultimately lead to their full rejection of Jesus as they seek to put him to death.
- f. This is the first of two times that Jesus will cleanse the Temple like this. The synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark, & Luke – will tell us of Jesus cleansing the Temple at the last Passover feast he will attend. John tells us of the first one here in the first few weeks of his public ministry. Which means that the religious leaders didn't learn their lesson. Jesus was essentially doing their job by guarding the Temple against false worship – but they were working an inside job. They were more concerned about their pocketbook than they were about authentic worship. And so, Jesus begins and ends his ministry with this public and clear condemnation of the biggest and brightest display of Jewish worship. He was saying it is all corrupt and it all must go. And he can do this only because he is Divine!

### III. Jesus Promises an Undeniable Sign – vs. 18-22

- a. And that is exactly what gets challenged in verses 18-22. The religious authorities can't believe what has just happened, and so they come to investigate who it is that would do such a thing and completely disrupt the well-organized system. And so, they come demanding from Jesus a sign to prove that he has this kind of authority to completely upend the religious system. They inherently understood that for someone to do what Jesus just did, they must have some divine prerogative. They must be the Messiah – they must be sent from God and they must be operating on divine authority. But notice that they don't come seeking to

truly know if Jesus is the Messiah. They don't humble themselves before Him and evaluate what they were doing that went against God and His holiness. Rather they deflect the attention away from their wayward hearts and they turn the spotlight on Jesus. "What right do you have to do this? Show us a sign to prove that you are actually Divine."

- b. The Jews of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century were obsessed with signs – particularly in their thoughts about the Messiah. This is so true that Paul can say in 1 Corinthians 1 "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles." And this is nothing more than rebellious unbelief. They refused to consider that Jesus of Nazareth might actually be their Messiah, sent from God. They deceived themselves to think that if he would perform a sign at their demand then they would believe that he was the Messiah. But Jesus knew better than them once again. He has divine knowledge and divine wisdom and divine authority – and this comes into immediate conflict with their abject unbelief.
- c. Notice that this unbelief looks like self-protection and self-justifying. Instead of asking clarifying questions of Jesus from humble hearts, they immediately launch a counterattack against Him. Instead of considering that they might have created a system which obviously doesn't honor the Lord, they consider that this Jesus must be the one who is not honoring to the Lord. This is what unbelief that is unchanged by God's grace will look like – it will play the religious game and it will even look the part of a follower of Christ, but deep down it will be self-justifying and self-protecting. It will not actually consider what is dishonoring to the Lord and what is sinful before Him, rather it will make demands of God for some action on his part to prove himself as truly God. And God never responds to this pride filled unbelief. He resists the proud, but gives more grace to who? To the humble. Humility is the sure foundation of faith.
- d. Jesus responds to their pride with a shrewd promise of an undeniable sign. He refuses to be their circus pony who jumps on command. But he does promise them a sign they will not be able to deny. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Jesus uses an imperative verb here to communicate the future certainty of the sign he is giving them. He is telling them to destroy this temple, but he is also, as God in the flesh, guaranteeing that it will happen. They will indeed be the ones who will destroy the temple he is speaking of. The word Jesus uses for Temple here is different than the one used in verses 14-15. This word in verse 19 speaks more of the inner sanctuary of the Temple whereas the previous word meant the larger complex of the Temple. So, he is telling them to destroy the inner sanctuary of the Temple – a horrific act of sacrilegious blasphemy – and he will raise it up in three days.
- e. Of course, they object to this promised sign. And he puts them in a no-win situation. They can't call his bluff about the sign because he has put the onus back on them, so they just object to the nature of the sign that is promised. Again, instead of asking questions and humbly seeking to understand, their unbelief demands that they go on the attack. And so, they point to how long it has taken

to build this temple complex – how could he rebuild it in three days. This is not the Temple of Solomon, which was destroyed by the Babylonians in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC. Rather, this was the Temple that was rebuilt by the returning exiles, but that was later refurbished and improved by Herod. Historians tell us that Herod began that project in 20 or 19 BC. And they are saying to Jesus that this construction has been going on for the last 46 years. And in fact, their will be ongoing construction on the Temple complex until about 4 years before its complete destruction by the Romans in AD 70. The point is, we've had our best workmen on this project for the last 46 years – which by the way puts this confrontation in the Spring of AD 26 or 27 which is helpful when trying to figure out the year of our Lord's crucifixion – but how in the world can Jesus promise to do in 3 days what has taken them this long!

- f. This statement by Jesus went viral by the way. It spread like wildfire throughout the Jewish people – probably as the fodder of unbelief. If they had social media back then it would have been trending on Twitter with the hashtag #hesaidwhat.
- g. We know it went viral because three years from this encounter, when Jesus is on trial during his last Passover Feast the Sanhedrin will be looking for some evidence to condemn Jesus to death over and this will be the saying they will bring up. But it will be distorted by the gossip and rumor mill. Instead of saying that he ordered them to destroy the Temple and he would raise it up in three days – they slandered him as saying, in Matthew 26:61 – “This man said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.’” Not only did this come up at his trial, but this slanderous accusation was also on the tongues of those who passed by and mocked him. So, even in the fulfilling of this undeniable sign these hearts of unbelief are so blinded that they cannot see the truth.
- h. But John gives us the interpretation of this undeniable sign in verses 21-22 – the temple he was referring to was his own body and the fulfillment of this sign would come when they would destroy that body on the cross and he would raise it up in three days. His body was the temple of God on earth. It was where God dwelt and where man met God and brought true and right worship. This temple was veiled behind true and real humanity, so many missed it. But Jesus here promises an undeniable sign – his own death and resurrection. He says that he will raise himself from the dead. Usually the Scriptures refer to the Father as raising the Son from the dead as evidence of his acceptance of the sacrifice made. But in the New Testament all three members of the Trinity are said to be active in the raising of Jesus from the dead. In Romans 1 for example, Paul says that the power of the Spirit of holiness raised Jesus. Ephesians 1 attributes this resurrection power to the Father. But here, Jesus says that he will raise himself from the dead.
- i. And this is the sign that is always offered to the unbelieving heart by Jesus. He will not perform some Messianic sign on demand, but he will always point them to his death and resurrection as undeniable proof of his deity. They were so concerned about protecting their false worship at this physical structure of God's temple. It was here that they thought they were meeting with God, but in reality,

they were propagating their own selfish interests. And so, Jesus tells them that they need a greater work than this. In the Temple of his own body he would offer the perfect sacrifice that would end all other sacrifices at their Temple. His zeal for his Father's house would compel him to give his own body to hang on the tree as a curse for us so that we might be brought near to God. And we know that this sacrifice was accepted and we can dwell forever with him because he raised himself from the grave. The offering was accepted and was perfect!

**Conclusion:** And the disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed. They believed the Old Testament Scriptures which pointed to this and they believed Jesus' own words which promised this. Is that your response this morning? Do you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? Let's pray!