

Turning Over Tables

John 2:13-25

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Tom Eglinton

Camden Valley Baptist Church

www.cvbaptist.com

Before we read our passage, I'd want to, I guess ask a question to begin with, maybe to lead us in.

We can try this. Maybe raise your hand if you know what it is to feel outraged and angry.

Oh, there we go. I thought that might be the case.

Now, you don't have to tell me the answer to this question, but think of it in your own mind. What gets you angry? What gets you really fired up?

Is it when someone cuts you off in traffic? Is that what gets you angry? Or is it when someone disrespects you in public, or when someone lies to you, or when your peace and quiet is interrupted, perhaps?

Well the answer to that question, if you if you think through it, and I want you to really think through it carefully, either now or when you go home, when you next get angry, think through, "Why why am I getting angry right now?" Because the answer to that question tells us something very important. It tells us what we love.

We get angry when the thing that we love is threatened.

In fact, anger is a good thing. Anger is given to us by God to rouse us to action. You know that feeling you have? Like you want to punch something? Yeah. That's that's given by God to rouse you to action in order to protect the things that are lovely.

Our problem, of course, is that the things we love are not the right things. Our loves are not aligned with God's loves. I love myself and so I get angry when my pride is threatened. My anger ignites action from me in order to protect my appearance by defending my own honor or by attacking others and putting them down so that I appear good in comparison. You see? My anger tells me what I love.

In the passage we're about to read today, Jesus gets angry. There's no soft way to put it.

And we're going to look at that and learn from Him. But so let's come and read the text now and notice what our Savior is like. From verse 13 of John chapter 2.

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. 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 money changers, the changer's money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away. Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise."

Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."

So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us since You do these things?" And Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Then the Jews said, "It has taken 46 years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He'd said this to them, and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

Now, when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them because He knew all men and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

It's just a few verses. But I want us to just stop and actually try and picture this. because what we just read is astonishing.

The temple was a huge, like unbelievably huge and impressive building that towered over Jerusalem. I'm talking the the lower wall was something like 46 stories high. The temple itself was, yeah, well over 10 stories high, sitting on top of this large platform, this this pad where there was a massive outer court, called the court of the Gentiles. And then there was an inner court where the the Jews and the women could go to, and then there was an even closer court where the Jews could gather. And then there was the temple precinct, the sacrificial area where the altar was, and then the temple itself, right? Imagine all of these different areas.

And we're told in the text that it's the time of the Passover. That's when

Jesus is coming to Jerusalem. Now, at Passover, Passover was one of three times during the year where all the Jews and all the God-fearing Gentiles from all among the nations would gather into Jerusalem and worship God. A whole week of celebrations. Now, Jerusalem itself probably had about 20 to 50,000 people living there. The estimates are really hard to work on, but that's the sort of order of magnitude, 20 to 20 or so thousand people. During Passover, that's going up to 150,000 plus. Okay?

And all of these people are coming in from around the area and they're coming to sacrifice to God, to come and meet with God at His temple, to be in the presence of God and worship Him and praise Him. And Jesus walks into this temple where there's over the course of a week, 150,000 people milling around, and he finds money changers and people selling sacrifices in the actual temple area itself.

Now, I was trying to work out how to give you a gauge as to what this would feel like. Have any of you been to Flemington markets, Paddy's markets? Some of you? Yeah?

Paddy's markets has over the course of a week, 150,000 people go through it. So at a minimum, in terms of area and number of people flowing through, and everyone who's going to Jerusalem is buying something to sacrifice, right? So think Paddy's Markets. Flemington Markets. Stalls, heaps and heaps of people gathering around. Right? You can hear the people. There's Farmer Joe over there, he's trying to sell off his sheep for the sacrifice, he's got the better ones and Frank down the road, he's calling out, "Hey, I've got the best price for money changing." Right?

And Jesus walks into this. And He looks around and He's fuming.

Can you see what John tells us in verse 15 there? He sits down and makes a whip of cords. I don't know how long that takes. But can you see Him in the corner there looking out at Paddy's Markets in the temple where everyone's gathered to worship God? Right? Can you picture His face? Can you feel it inside of Him? He finishes making the cord. He gets up, He walks over to the nearest stall,

"Get out! Get out!"

People, "What is what's going on?" This is Paddy's Markets. There's not just one stall. He's pushing people out, He's whipping them. He's driving the animals. He's turning the tables over, pushing the coins off the tables. This is not just a moment of energy. This would have taken Him significant time. Can you see the dust? Can you see the commotion? Can you see

the sweat on Jesus's body as He's ripping this stuff out and driving these people out of the temple area?

This is righteous zeal, holy passion, godly intensity.

Is that the picture you have of Jesus Christ? A man who can do that sort of thing? How can a gentle Jesus, meek and mild who sits holding a little child gently, who who weeps at the tomb of Lazarus, who's so tender and compassionate towards the the woman at the well, all of a sudden start causing a riot in the temple.

This is how. Because Jesus is meek and mild. Jesus is tender and full of love. But anyone who is full of love must also be full of hate. must also be filled with anger against that which threatens the thing He loves.

Picture the soldier picking up his baby, playing with his toddler, holding his wife, and then rising, putting on his armor, picking up his shield, and cutting down the enemy, smashing them, slashing them with blood going everywhere. That this, this is the picture with any strength must come, with any with any love must come anger and hatred. There's a there's a great quote that kind of captures this from Faramir in The Lord of the Rings. He says, "War must be while we defend our lives against a destroyer who would devour all. But I do not love the bright sword for its sharpness, nor the arrow for its swiftness, nor the warrior for his glory. I love only that which they defend." You see that?

Jesus is a violent king. He's a an angry king. Not because He gets a kick out of being angry, but because He is filled with righteous indignation when that which He loves is threatened.

That's precisely what we see here in our text. But in order to understand our Lord Jesus Christ, we must understand precisely what it was that got His blood boiling. Remember what we get angry at tells us what we love. So what is it that these sacrificial animals being sold in the temple and the money changes in the temple, what is it that they were attacking? What is it that Jesus was defending?

Was it wrong to sell sacrificial animals? Was it wrong to change money so that people could pay the temple tax that they were obligated by God to pay? No. It wasn't.

Deuteronomy chapter 14 actually provides for this. verse 22 to 27 says, "You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the Lord your God in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new

wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always." He's saying that your job, one of the commands of God is to tithe your produce and the way that you tithe it is by coming and having a feast at the temple.

But listen to this. "But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where the Lord your God chooses to put His name is too far from you when the Lord your God has blessed you, then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand and go to the place where the Lord your God chooses. And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires, for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, or whatever your heart desires, you shall eat there before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household." So, if the journey is too long, you can sell your produce, carry the money over to the temple and buy something there.

And it's what these people are doing. They're providing this for the people who have traveled from all over Israel, from Gentiles, we know from Acts, there's there's some people traveling all the way from Ethiopia. There's people traveling all over the world at this stage to come to Jerusalem. So this actual activity of of selling sacrificial animals so that people can sacrifice before the Lord, this activity of changing money from different currencies into the temple currency so that they can pay their temple tax. This is not a problem. This is not what's getting Jesus angry. It's it's provided for. So what is it?

Well, maybe these people who were selling were corrupt. Maybe they were extorting people. You know, you've just traveled all the way from Ethiopia to the temple, they can charge whatever they want now, can't they? Right? Demand is high, supply is low. That's a good time to make some coin.

And it's actually well documented that the high priest at the time of Jesus, Annas, was a corrupt man who used his position for financial gain. The stalls selling sacrificial animals that Jesus drove out of the temple were called the Bazaars of Annas. Forget Paddy's Market. Inside the temple, Jesus found Annas's market. That's what the the historical record teaches us. And there are records of these markets selling animals at grossly inflated prices.

The priests had control of the location, they had the premises. They had control of the approval process as to whether or not your animal was fit for sacrifice. They had inspectors who would train for 18 months to work out whether an animal was suitable, and then they would charge a fee for the approval, the stamp duty, right? We all love our stamp duty.

And it's very likely that part of Jesus' fury at this site was because of the way in which the priests were using this trade to make, to line their own pockets. We know that this was a problem because it's not a new problem. Ezekiel says that this is exactly what the priests have been doing for hundreds of years.

Ezekiel says, "Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds," that's the leaders of Israel, "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves. Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock." He's saying, "You're you're extorting these people. You're using them for your own personal gain and your own benefit."

And Jesus certainly hates people using the worship of God as a means of personal gain. He's infuriated by those who leverage their position as ministers or as teachers to extort money from God's people. It's a problem in Ezekiel's day. The historical record tells us it was a problem in Jesus' day, and it's not, guess, it's still a problem today. Prosperity gospel preachers use manipulative tactics to turn God's house into a place of profit for them.

But it's not just people in the prosperity gospel. Even those outside of that that camp can be tempted to use their position for their own benefit. It might be through seeing the ministry as a cushy job where you can get paid for doing very little. That's a that was a problem during the time of the Reformation. All through, you see this sort of thing all through history. It's still a problem today. It might be through using the ministry as an opportunity to gain something other than finances, status, loyal followers, a sense of self-importance. Right? All of these things are things that Jesus hates.

But I actually don't believe that this is the aspect of what's going on that Jesus, that that John particularly is highlighting for us. Our passage doesn't mention the corruption of this trade at all. It doesn't mention the pricing. The emphasis in our passage is actually the location. Did you see that?

As Jesus drives out the temple market stalls, He says, "Do not make My Father's house a house of trade." And we've already seen that the trade itself is not wrong. He's not pointing out the extortion or the the corruption in the trade, he's saying, "Do not make My Father's house a house of trade." And then His disciples recall the scripture which we read, Psalm 69, which says what? "Zeal for Your house has eaten me up." And in case we're not getting the point, when the Jews request a sign, Jesus tells them, "Destroy this temple," speaking of His body, "and I will raise it again in three days." Once again, John's highlighting the place, the temple. And yes, He's He's bringing in a new idea. He's saying that the physical temple is going to

be replaced by the body of Jesus Christ. But the idea is the same. He's emphasizing, this is about the temple. This is about the temple. This is about the temple.

And so we should think, what is it about the temple? Why is this, what is it about the place, My Father's house, that is so important? What is it about the place that means that you shouldn't have market stalls inside of it?

Well, the temple is a place where God lives. It's My Father's house, Jesus says. And the the glory of that is something very real. The picture of temple is God walking with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. That's what a temple is. Imagine that, the cool of the day, the late afternoon stroll with God. That's temple. The temple is the the glory of God, the Shekinah glory descending on the Tabernacle or Solomon's temple, where all of Israel can see God lives right there among us. It's it's looking out of the tent in the morning as you're going through the wilderness and seeing the Shekinah glory cloud just over there, right next to you.

It's a place where God lives among His people. It's a place where God meets with His people. It's a place where God invites people in. You can think of the courts of the temple as His living room and His dining room. Remember what we read in Deuteronomy, where He's saying, "Come and feast before Me." Come and have a meal with Me. Where? In My house, in My temple.

This is what was wrong with the money changers and the sacrifice sellers being in the temple. They were a distraction from the real thing. They were a distraction from the main purpose of the temple.

What drove Jesus to such a violent, strenuous flurry of activity as he drove the money changers and the sacrifice vendors out of the temple? It was zeal for God's house, a burning desire to see God's temple to be a genuine meeting place between God and man.

In Matthew's account of the the second time, Jesus actually does this twice in His ministry, once at the start and once at the end. In Matthew's account of the second time that Jesus cleansed the temple, he quotes Isaiah 56, which says, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." Do you see this? At Passover, you've got all these people gathering in from around the the countryside and around the world to do what? To meet God in the temple. And they walk into the temple to meet God, and what and they're encountered with stalls and animals and money changes and clinking and calling and all this noise, all this distraction.

Christ's passion project is to see God and man in close communion. Jesus

loves the idea of God meeting with man, of God living with man, of of man coming and being in the very presence of God. That's what Jesus loves. And so when Jesus walks into the temple and he sees, hang on, this place which is meant to be a place where people gather to be in the very presence of My Father has become a place where you can't do that anymore. It's a just it's full of distractions. It's full of things that are good and necessary, absolutely, but they shouldn't be here. Do you see the point?

Christ's desire for this goal consumes Him. It eats Him up. It it was the, it's the driving force behind His very life. Why did Jesus come to earth? Why did Jesus engage with people? Why did Jesus do all those things we talked about, having little children on His knee and talking to women at the well and, why did He do all of these things? Because His deep passion, His deep desire is to have God meet with man. That's what He wants. Zeal for God's house eats Him up.

But there's actually a double meaning in that that quote from Psalm 69. You can think of it as zeal for God's house drives me. It eats me up, consumes me, like pushes me on. Or you can think of it as zeal for God's house actually destroys Jesus. It consumes Him. He he is so zealous for it that he is consumed in the process of pursuing the goal.

And this this is what Jesus actually connects us with when He's challenged by the Jews as to where His authority comes from to go about causing such a riot of violent activity. And when they ask Him this, Jesus says, "Well, you're going to destroy the temple and I'll raise it up in three days." And John fills us in in verse 21 and says, "Jesus is speaking here about His body."

There are two takeaways from this exchange as we as we think about these ideas. The first is that Jesus is so passionate about having a place for His beloved people to meet with God that He's not satisfied with the temple building in Jerusalem. It's not good enough. It's too limited. It's too easily corrupted. It's too easy to miss the point. It's not good enough.

That's why Jesus took on flesh. That's why the second person of the God-head came down into our world and became a man, because He wanted a better temple. He wanted to to have man meet with God in a better way.

John has already told us that Jesus deeply cares about this at the end of chapter one when he records Jesus as saying, "You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." Think about that. Jesus so loves having God walk with man that He, the eternal Son of God, forever living in perfect joy and happiness with the Father and the Holy Spirit, chose to come down from glory, take on flesh and

all the constraints that that entailed, humble Himself, veil His glory, live amongst the filth of this cursed world. Why? So that heaven could be connected with His people. So that God could walk once again with man.

But our text helps us to consider that Jesus didn't just take on human form so that God could live with man. He was also willing to be consumed, to die, to suffer so that God could live with man. Christ speaks in John 2 of his own death. His zeal for God's house was so strong that it took Him to the cross, because it was only through the cross that God and man could truly and fully be reconciled. Jesus through the suffering and death He experienced in His body and through His bodily resurrection, brought a way for God to live once again with man. He took away the greatest hindrance to our communion with God, the greatest distraction, if you like, the greatest thing that that keeps us from actually meeting with God in His temple. Our sin, our uncleanness. Our sin keeps us from God and stops us from walking with Him. And Jesus suffered and died to take away the sins of all those who repent and believe in Him.

Do you want to walk with God? Does Jesus's passion project of having God live with man sound like a good thing to you? Well, He's made a way by repenting of our sins and by trusting in His death. He was so zealous for this this goal that He was consumed on the cross under the wrath of God so that you and I might once again commune with a holy God. Repent and believe in Him.

And the remarkable truth of the New Testament is that Jesus wasn't just finished with the temple of His body either. If you are someone who has trusted in Christ, if you are in Jesus, then you are the temple of God. is what the New Testament says. Both individually and corporately as a church. And Jesus is just as full of zeal for His temple, His new temple, as He was for the old temple. Jesus wants your heart and he wants us collectively as a church to be walking with God right now. He is full of zeal for this.

Just think about our church for a moment. How does this all apply? The question is is not so much are we making this church a place where there's a trade going on. Remember, it's not it's not actually the the activity of this thing that's the problem. The question is, are we as a church focused on the main thing? That's what Jesus wants, right? Jesus knows you got to sell animals so that you can have sacrifices. He doesn't want them to be a distraction from meeting with God, from living in the presence of God, from walking with God. That's why we are gathered here together. That's why God has called each of you from different places and different parts of the of Sydney and and gathered you here as Camden Valley Baptist Church. He's called you here because He wants to have a place where He lives among His people. That's the main thing. That's why we, that's what Jesus wants

from us. That's what Jesus wants for us.

Peter lays this out so well in 1 Peter chapter 2. He says that we come to Him, Jesus, a living stone, rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house. Why? To be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ Jesus, we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that we may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His glorious light.

Did you catch that? We are stones being built up into God's temple. Why? To offer spiritual sacrifices. And what are those sacrifices? Well, the the core of our spiritual sacrifices is to proclaim the excellencies of God. If you like, to look on the glory of God as He's revealed to us and to rejoice in that and to say, "Wow, look at how good God is." To meet with Him, to see Him, to praise Him, to worship Him, to walk with Him. That's why we're here.

2 Corinthians 6 puts this in a very similar light. Verse 16 says, "You are the temple of the living God." Speaking to the church corporately. "As God has said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.'"

Now it's so easy for churches, for us, to bring in distractions to that. Things that are good and necessary, like the money changing tables and the sacrifice sale yards, but things that are a distraction. And we bring them in and make them the main thing instead of seeing the main thing as the main thing, and seeing these as good and necessary things that sit outside somewhere.

What sort of things am I talking about? Well, might be our programs. We have to make sure we have a kids ministry or a music ministry and a youth group and this and that and the other thing and and we become consumed with making sure the schedules are organized and making sure everyone has a place to serve and and making sure that every every felt need in the congregation is catered to by what we put on. Good. Necessary. Not the main thing. What's the main thing? "I will dwell in them. And I will walk with them. And I will meet with them. And they will be My people."

What else? We might get distracted by talking all the time about the maybe family worship or theological doctrines and distinctions. We spend our energies trying to work out how Jesus applies to the politics of our day. Or we make morning tea or lunch something that just consumes all of our thinking and our thought. It it becomes the most important thing in our mind and and just the logistics around all of that becomes so all consuming.

Good. Necessary. I'm all for having those discussions and getting those things happening. Great. Not the main thing.

The main thing, coming into the presence of God. Meeting God together as a people. Seeing Him and declaring His praises. Jesus does not burn with passion for any of these other things. Jesus will not flip any tables if we don't have a good enough morning tea. It won't happen. Like, he's not going to do that. It is way, way down on His priority list. But I'll tell you what He does care about. He cares about us coming into His Father's presence, delighting in His glory, proclaiming His praises, meeting God, walking with God, being God's people.

You know, the best way to maintain unity as a church is to see this main thing as the main thing like Jesus does, to burn with passion for it. And when we maintain our focus on gathering to meet with God, to honor Him together, to live as God's people with God among us, then all of these other things become far less important. And all the bickerings and the squabbles that tend to happen around all these things become irrelevant. Who cares? It doesn't matter. Good, necessary. We'll do something. It'll be fine. We meet to worship God.

But the scriptures push these truths even deeper into our life and our soul because, remember, it's not just the church corporately that is the temple of God. It's each of you individually. If you are one of Christ's people, you are the temple of God.

1 Corinthians 6 says it this way. He's speaking about sexual immorality, so it's very it's very personal. And he's saying, "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."

You should you should be like absolutely smiling right now. You are God's temple. God in the past had a place in Jerusalem. You had to travel from Ethiopia thousands of kilometers just to meet with God. You would, if you're a Jew living around Israel, you would meet with God once or three times a year, right? You are God's temple. God has chosen through the work of Jesus Christ, if you are trusting in His death and His resurrection, to come and live in you, to dwell in you, to meet with you, not just every Sunday when we gather together, but every single moment of every single day.

And Jesus burns with zeal. He is absolutely passionate about you walking with His Father. About your heart being a place where you delight in the very presence of God. Not just every now and then, not just in your quiet

time in the morning, but every moment of every day.

Now, I'm assuming in all this that we understand that that sins distract us from this, right? Sins are a problem to this. But remember, that's not what Jesus is dealing with in this passage. There are things in our life that are good and necessary that we elevate to being the main thing over walking with God and living in His presence moment by moment. There are tables in my heart that are good and necessary. My job, my family, good books, my desire to be productive. These things are all important, they're good, they're necessary, they're they're wonderful, they're given to me by God, but do they have the right priority in my heart? Are they crowding into the temple? Is the the noise and the the bustle of these activities and these things crowding out my desire to live **coram Deo**, before the face of God.

I can't really flesh this out in too much detail because we're talking about very deep personal things of your heart. But I can say this, you were designed to be a temple of God. Even if you're not a Christian here today, even if all this stuff sounds crazy to you, you are actually designed to be a temple of God. You will never be satisfied in this life until you see the main thing of life as walking with God and until you come to accept the sacrifice that Jesus made to remove your sins out of the picture so that you can once again have the God living with you. You'll never be satisfied.

But if you are a Christian, you are a temple of God, and God lives in you, and you walk actively with God every moment of the day. That's God's greatest desire. That's why He made you. That's Jesus' greatest desire. He burns with zealous passion over the temple of your heart. He wants your heart to be an undistracted house for His Father.

And what that means is that there's a way to live where you go about your day, where you're changing nappies and cooking food and driving down the road and answering phone calls and exchanging business and and whatever else you do, where you're actively doing that in the presence of God. Where the where the inner courts of the temple of your heart are uncrowded and undistracted. Where you sense His presence, where you're engaging with Him and communing with Him and meeting with Him and walking with Him.

Is that your greatest desire? Christians are the sorts of people who know Christ's heart and who don't act like the Jews when Jesus comes into the temple and they say, "Well, hang on a second, mate, you better better make like, we better check your credentials for this sort of thing." Christians are the sort of people who say, "Jesus, I know my temple is crowded. Jesus, I know there are things wrong in my heart. Jesus, I know that I should long

to live day by day, moment by moment in the presence of Your Father, and yet there are all these distractions that are crowding me out. Lord Jesus, make a whip. Lord Jesus, drive them out. Lord Jesus, turn the tables over. I don't want it. I want You."

Is that the passion of your heart? Lord Jesus, Lord God, give us a holy zeal like Christ. Help us to hate everything that distracts us from meeting with You. May our delight, may our joy, may our deepest desire, may our greatest love be to live day by day, moment by moment, as individuals and together as a church in the very presence of God. Lord God, how glorious it is that You would come and want to live with us. And You we thank you that you've made a way. Lord, clean our hearts, we pray. Amen.