

THE ZEAL OF OUR LORD

John 2:13-17

Intro: This event in the life of our Lord is, to say the least, shocking! It seemed so out-of-place with the character of the ministry which our Lord had, while He was here on earth. In fact, it is amazing (from a human standpoint) that the Jews did not put an end to our Lord's ministry before it began because of what He did when He went up to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover. Alfred Edersheim made this comment about what our Lord did, recorded for us in his very valuable two-volume work, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*:

He inaugurated His Mission by fulfilling the prediction concerning Him Who was to be Israel's refiner and purifier (Mal. iii. 1-3).

Before going further with what Dr. Edersheim had to say about this event in the life of our Lord, let me read Mal. 3:1-3 to you. This is what Malachi predicted:

1 Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.

2 But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap:

3 And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.

But to return to Dr. Edersheim's comment:

Scarce had He entered the Temple-porch, and trod the Court of the Gentiles, than He drove thence what profanely defiled it. There was not a hand lifted, not a word spoken to arrest Him, as He made the scourge of small cords (even this not without significance) and with it drove out of the Temple both the sheep and the oxen; not a word said, nor a hand raised, as He poured into their receptacles the changers' money, and overthrew their tables. His Presence awed them, His words awakened even their consciences; they knew, only too well, how true His denunciations were. And behind Him was gathered the wondering multitude, that could not but sympathise with such bold, right royal, and Messianic vindication of Temple sanctity from the nefarious [iniquitous] traffic of a hated, corrupt, and avaricious Priesthood. It was a scene worth witnessing by any true Israelite, a protest and an act which, even among a less emotional people, would have gained Him respect,

approbation, and admiration, and which, at any rate, secured His safety (Vol. I, pp. 373, 374).

Verse 16 of our text tells us why the Lord was so indignant at what was going on. (Read.)

But let me leave this scene for a moment and take you to an event which took place toward the end of our Lord's ministry. Only John recorded this first incident, but all three of the other Gospel writers recorded the similar event which we read about as taking place approximately three years later. You will find it in Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:41-48.

In all three passages we are told that the Lord referred to Isa. 56:7 in his denunciation of what was going on. Isaiah had been speaking of how the Gentiles were to be included in the work of salvation, and this is what that verse tells us:

Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people (Isa. 56:7).

And to our Lord's quotation of the last statement of Isa. 56:7, He added, "But ye have made it a den of thieves."

So what God intended to be a place of fellowship for Himself and His people, the ungodly religious and covetous leaders of the Jews had turned it into a place of merchandise, a place of personal gain for themselves. What a difference there is between "the house of prayer" and "a den of thieves." The word "den" would suggest that they were doing all that they could to coverup what was actually going on.

I. THE SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR PURCHASING SACRIFICES.

One of the sad things about this was that there was a Scriptural basis for what they were doing. And it is found in Deut. 14:23-27. There we read these words:

23 And thou shalt eat before the LORD thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the LORD thy God always.

24 And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from thee, which the LORD

thy God shall choose to set his name there, when the LORD thy God hath blessed thee:

25 Then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose:

26 And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after [desires], for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household,

27 And the Levite that is within thy gates; thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part nor inheritance with thee.

Although the people were living under the Law, yet this was an act of grace on God's part. He was showing mercy to those who lived at a distance, and yet who wanted to come to offer their sacrifices to the Lord. But, as is so often the case, this practice had become corrupted by selfish and unscrupulous men. This corruption probably took place over a long period of time, but it had become about as wrong as it could be when our Lord was on earth. What the Lord intended for the blessing of His people had, under their religious leaders, become sin. And even the Levites, for whom the Lord had made a special provision, were involved in taking from the people that which they had no right to take. It was all what one writer has called, "a terrible desecration" (Edersheim, I, 370).

Let us think now about:

II. THE MONEYCHANGERS.

The priests and the Levites were in charge. It seems that it was never in the mind of God that they would become involved in receiving money in return for sacrifices, an accommodation that God had made for His people who had to come a long way to get to Jerusalem. But they became involved, and saw in this an opportunity to make money, supposedly for the Temple, but much of it found its way into their own pockets. And it was not limited to such purchases.

It also was required of the people that they bring Tribute money to the Temple, and it had to be in the coinage that was used either in Judaea or Galilee, and this was silver. But Jews would come from all over the Empire to observe the Passover. And so coinage was circulated in Jerusalem from Persia, Tyre, Syria, Egypt, Greece, and Rome. This money

had to be changed into Jerusalem currency, and a charge was always made for this service.

But this was not all. Money was coming in from the sale of animals, and from the exchange of coins, but also it became the practice that the priests would examine all of the animals which were being sacrificed to make sure that they were acceptable. And so here was another source of income. Therefore, what God intended to be a concession to the worshipers turned out to be a money-making scheme for the priests and Levites. Many of them became very wealthy as a result of these procedures.

One other point needs to be mentioned. The collection of these funds started a month before the feast days. Collection booths were set up all over Israel, and only just a few days before the holy day would the money-changers come into Jerusalem.

The two terms that the Lord used for this practice was that they were turning the Father's house into "an house of merchandise," and that this house of merchandise had become "a den of thieves." The people were furious about what was going on, but there was nothing that they could do about it. Therefore, our Lord would have won their support by driving the moneychangers with their animals and other products out of the Temple. Humanly speaking, this is one reason why the authorities did not take action against the Lord. He had the support of the people. And we can understand that the policy of the priests and Levites was putting any worship out of the reach of many of the common people. It is easy to understand also how concerned godly Jews would be with the cost of worship so high.

It is good for us to remember at this point what Paul taught Timothy about "the love of money," that it is "the root of all [kinds] of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). Also we need to remember the words by which the Lord denounced the scribes and Pharisees, found in Matt. 23, calling them hypocrites. They did not enter the kingdom of heaven themselves, and prevented others from entering in. They "devoured widows' houses, and then prayed long prayers to cover up what they had done. And all of this and more was being done by the men who were supposed to be the religious leaders of the people.

This brings us to the quotation that is given from Isa. 56:7 concerning:

III. THE ZEAL OF THE LORD.

It is expressed in our Lord's words, "Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise" (John 2:16). It was then that the disciples remembered the passage from David in Psa. 69: "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (Psa. 69:9).

Toward the end of our Lord's ministry practically the same thing happened again, as we have seen. But, as the Synoptic writers reported, at that time the Lord did the same thing, but said,

My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves (Luke 19:46).

See also Matt. 21:12-13 and Mark 11:17.

As I said earlier, this must have been a very shocking incident to behold. But the Lord had every right to do what He did because it was His house, or His Father's house. He was exercising His divine authority. But the fact that the Lord did this at the beginning of His ministry, and then had to do it again toward the end of His ministry, is evidence that the wicked practices did not stop, and we can be sure that they continued until Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D.!

Why did the Lord do it? Because, taking David's words, which were also Messianic, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." What does this mean?

It means that our Lord was so grieved by the sins of the priests and Levites, and so jealous for the glory of God, and for the will of God, that He was consumed with the desire to make things right. It made him forget himself. It made Him disregard His own safety.

Some people would have argued that at least people were coming with their offerings, coming in large numbers and from great distances, and so that should have made the Lord close His eyes to the things that were not exactly as God intended that they should be. But the Lord is not satisfied with mere outward conformity to His will.

David was eaten up with zeal for the Lord's house. So were the prophets. Think of what Jeremiah experienced. John the Baptist and the Apostles John and Peter, as well as the Apostle Paul were eaten up with zeal for the Lord's house. It is not enough for us to profess to be the servants of the Lord. A true servant of the Lord will seek to do God's will just as God has ordained that it should be done. There is a close connection in Scripture between the words *zealous* and *jealous*. In fact we could very accu-

rately translate John 2:17, *Jealousy for the Lord's house hath eaten Me up.* " How we need to thank God for men like our Lord, and thousands upon others throughout the history of time who have been concerned that the will of God be done exactly as the Lord has declared that it should be, and that it be done from the heart.

Concl: How do you think the Lord feels about His work today? Are people in the world justified in saying that the church of the twentieth century has become big business? Megachurches don't deal in the thousands of dollars any more, but in the millions. And thousands of people are coming to the meetings. Many seem to have forgotten that the church historically has met on Sunday because the Lord was raised from the dead on the first day of the week. Now you will have no trouble finding a church that has services on Friday night so you can have the rest of the weekend to do whatever you want to do. Many churches and other Christian works have no conscience against taking money from secular sources to support the work of the Lord. Seminaries are even teaching their students to make churches meet certain demands, financial demands, if they want them to come as their pastors.

The Lord wants us to honor Him with our money, but can you imagine the Lord, or any of the OT prophets, or any of the NT apostles, charging admittance to their meetings? Didn't the Lord say on one occasion, "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8).

Do you ever find in any passage, OT or NT, where true servants of the Lord were brainstorming to come up with new methods which could be used to cause people to come to their meetings? When the Lord spoke to His disciples about their ministry, did He talk in terms of entertainment?

It is easy for us to look back upon what happened in Bible times with shock and amazement at some of the things which took place in the Name of the Lord, but close our eyes to things that are just as bad which we are doing today. *Oh, may zeal for the will of God and for the glory of God eat us up!* Compromise with the world has *sapped* the church of her God-given power, and we will not become a mighty force in the hand of God until we get back to doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way and only for the Lord's glory. If we are not abiding by Scripture, temptation will sap us of our strength, and compromise (which is nothing less than disobedience) will do the same.

J. Hudson Taylor, the founder of the China Inland Mission (now the

Overseas Missionary Fellowship) used to say, “God’s work done in God’s way will never lack God’s supply.” We could also say that “God’s work done in God’s way will never lack God’s blessing.”

I spoke to you this morning about what we need to do *personally* if we are to be kept from the sins of this ungodly world, and so we can be *personally* a testimony to our generation. Tonight we have been thinking about God’s will for the church. May God help us to be pleasing to Him in both of these areas, refusing to swerve to the right or to the left from what God has told us in His Word. All we need is within the covers of this Book. Our wisdom is faulty; God’s wisdom is perfect. So let us live and let us work as much as we can within the limits of God’s infallible Word. If we stay there, we can’t possibly go wrong. It ought to be our goal to hear our Lord say in that day when we stand before Him, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: ...enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Matt. 25:21).