

I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the House of the Lord.” (Psalm 122:1). Amen.

¹³The Jewish Passover was near, so Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and money changers sitting at tables. ¹⁵He made a whip of cords and drove everyone out of the temple courts, along with the sheep and oxen. He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶To those selling doves he said, “Get these things out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a place of business!” ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” ¹⁸So the Jews responded, “What sign are you going to show us to prove you can do these things?” ¹⁹Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again.” ²⁰The Jews said, “It took forty-six years to build this temple! And you are going to raise it in three days?” ²¹But Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body. ²²When Jesus was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this. Then they believed the Scripture and what Jesus had said. **This is the Gospel of our Lord.**

Dear Friends,

What is church all about? The obvious answer is church is all about God and hearing his Word and praising him, but that’s not always the answer we hear. Sometimes we hear that the church is all about money or it’s all about sin or all about the music or all about feelings or helping those around you or community projects or any number of things. When God gave his Old Testament Laws it was pretty clear that church was all about worship, sin, and forgiveness. But the people didn’t always see that because there were a lot of distractions that pulled their focus away from the true purpose of the church and things haven’t changed throughout the centuries. There are still many distractions that try and disrupt our worship.

As we consider the portion of John’s gospel we just read, Jesus is warning us about distractions that might affect our worship life. These distractions can very easily kill our zeal for the gospel and they can pull us away from our Savior.

I. Imagine you came to church one Sunday and there in the back one of the ushers had a cow. It’s calving season and he didn’t want to leave Bessie all by herself. Or what would you do if the person sitting next to you brought their laptop computer or Smartphone along and was checking their e-mail during the offering or playing some game during the sermon. What if the person next to you was listening to music loud enough so that you could hear noise coming from their earphones. What would you think if the chairman of the congregation stood at the back doors and informed you that before you can go in to worship you had to pay \$6.00 per person and it had to be cash only but for an additional fee he would convert your check or credit card to cash so you could come in and worship. And it was no secret that he pocketed his cut of the fee too.

Could you imagine how distracting this might be to your worship life? Between the noise and the fees and the electronic gadgets – would you really be able to worship?

Jesus encountered something very similar when he got to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. John tells us, **“In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep, and**

doves, and money changers sitting at tables.” This was supposed to be the area where the people could pray and prepare for worship but it had become like the city market.

The people needed to buy animals for their sacrifices and needed to exchange their foreign coins for the local ones needed to pay their temple tax, but what may have seemed like a good idea at one time had created a great distraction for worship. Worse yet, this area of the temple had become known for its cheaters and thieves. For many people worship had become a necessary duty but was far from enjoyable.

“So [Jesus] made a whip of cords and drove everyone out of the temple courts, along with the sheep and oxen. He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶To those selling doves he said, “Get these things out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a place of business!” This is a side of Jesus we don’t often see. Usually he was a humble servant showing mercy and love, but here Jesus displayed a righteous anger – anger over the fact that his Father’s house was being abused. The disciples were amazed at his zeal and yet Jesus was fulfilling a prophecy from Psalm 69 (the psalm we sang this morning) **“Zeal for your house consumes me.”** (Psalm 69:9).

One Old Testament story tells us about God talking to Moses from a burning bush. When Moses approached this bush God told Moses to take off his sandals because he was walking on holy ground. I want to make it clear that the church is not holy ground, but do we give our worship services the proper respect and reference? Do we come prepared to be fed by the word and to give all glory to our God? Do we express zeal for God’s House and for our worship life?

Take a reality check for a moment. When you leave church, what do you talk about? Do you become angry if there is a lack of reverence for God before the service as well as during the service? Do you ever find yourself complaining that you didn’t like the service or the hymns or the pastor’s sermon or the organist was playing too loud or too soft or too fast or that you didn’t like the video. Are your comments positive or negative? Many times our comments are pretty negative because they are centered on ourselves. It is so easy to get caught up in thinking church is all about what I like or what was uplifting to me so that we sometimes lose focus on what did God’s Word say to me today or how a particular aspect of the worship service helped me to give praise and glory to God or the opportunity to talk to and encourage my brothers and sisters in Christ.

So often we get caught up in thinking “what’s in it for me?”, when it would be better to ask, “did that worship service glorify God? Did it help me to get a stronger hold on God’s grace?” Could it be that Jesus needs to overturn our hearts and set us straight on what is really important? During this season of Lent we focus on our Savior and now is a good time to focus on what he has done for us. This portion of scripture encourages us to drive out the things in our lives that pull us away from God’s Word and our focus on our Savior.

Let’s make Christ and worship a priority in our lives because that is what is most important – to know and believe that Jesus paid for each of our sins on the cross – to receive that forgiveness through faith and to praise and thank our God for this gift of salvation. Ask God to help clear the

distractions from your heart and as he helps us focus on our Savior, everything else in life becomes a little easier.

II. I think it's interesting that as Jesus went about his "Father's business" clearing the temple, the Jews did not question what he had done. The abuses must have obvious – maybe some of the people even cheered as Jesus cleared the temple. But **"The Jews responded, "What sign are you going to show us to prove you can do these things?"** The Bible records how God's people have been living by faith since the time of Abraham and so the unbelief of the Jews is clear by their demand for a sign. Jesus had already told them this is his "Father's house," a clear statement that he is God's son, but he also offered them another sign: **"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again."**

We might recognize that Jesus was talking about his death and resurrection two years in the future but when Jesus said these words, no one really understood what they meant – not even his disciples. But there was a difference between these Jews and the disciples. The Jews were already rejecting Jesus and all the signs that he was the Promised Messiah while the disciples held onto everything that Jesus said and did. Everything Jesus did became clear to the disciples after Jesus rose from the dead and the Holy Spirit opened their hearts to a greater understanding on that first Pentecost. That's why John was able to write, **"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."**

Even at the beginning of Jesus ministry – when this incident happened – Jesus knew what it would take to pay for our salvation. The Jews would reject Jesus – in effect they would fulfill Jesus' words to destroy this temple; his body. God would use the evil intentions of these unbelievers to pay for their very sins as well as all our sins. We are just as responsible for the **"destruction of this temple,"** as the Jews but we rejoice that after three days, this temple – the body of Christ, was raised to life again to assure us our salvation is complete.

As we journey to the cross during the season of Lent, it is nice to have these glimpses of Easter to help us rejoice in the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation that are ours because of that journey.

May these words remind us of the zeal our Savior had for his Father's house and May they move us to have just as much zeal to come and hear the gospel as well as share it with our friends.

May these words remind us of the perfect sign our Savior gave to the Jews. How Jesus, the true temple and focus of our worship, would rise in the ruins of the symbolical temple to assure us of our salvation.

May we hold onto these words through faith – avoiding the distractions that would try and draw us away from God's Word – and trust in Jesus as our only Savior. Amen.