

It seems to me that everyone's emotions are running at a fever pitch lately, and they are willing to let everyone know what they are feeling. It might be whether the publishers of Dr. Seuss are no longer going to publish several of his books because of "racially insensitive" pictures, or it might be whether one should get the COVID vaccine shot or not, or whether states should continue to enforce pandemic restrictions. People have strong opinions on each side of the issue, and they are becoming more and more vocal in speaking to those whose opinions differ from theirs. It is good that people are zealous over such issues, but how they treat those of differing opinions has been leading to violence or hatred towards others. So it is not just zeal that is needed, but it is a zeal that is properly directed toward something good and beneficial. Today we see that Jesus was also very zealous about something. His zeal caused Him to take actions — actions which not all understood, but were intended to preserve the good which the Lord wanted in regard to His house. Jesus was filled with zeal for the Lord's house so that all would be able to hear and learn His Word. From Jesus, we shall also see that **WE NEED A ZEAL FOR GOD'S HOUSE!** This zeal for God's house will include a passion for preventing abuses within God's house, and it will include a fervor for receiving the Father's blessings.

On two separate occasions, Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem. He did it right before He would suffer and die on the cross, but He also did it as He began His public ministry, and it is that occasion which is before us this morning. **"In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money."** (14) We might wonder what these merchants were doing there in the temple courts. They were there actually providing a service to those who were coming to the temple to worship. When worshipers came from a distance to offer a sacrifice at the temple, they could bring their animal from home, or they might just purchase an animal once they got to Jerusalem. Certainly there would be a lot less inconvenience for the worshiper who came from a distance just to purchase a sacrificial animal once they got to Jerusalem.

Worshipers came to Jerusalem from all over the world, but the offerings to the temple were to be made in the currency of Jerusalem. So there was also a need for money changers to convert foreign currency into the currency of Jerusalem. So the money changers were providing a service to those who were coming to the temple for worship. They had legitimate business which they were providing for God's people.

So why did Jesus chase them out of the temple? The answer is given to us in the words which Jesus said, **"Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"** (16) Notice that Jesus did not tell them to stop doing business, but what He objected to was the place where they were doing their business — they were doing it in the Lord's house. By conducting business there, they obviously were a distraction to what is really to be going on in the Lord's house, and that is the teaching and hearing of God's Word.

When we come to the Lord's house, the Lord is not looking only at outward actions — that we are physically present in His house. Just "going to church" is nothing more than work righteousness — if I go to church, then I have done my duty and God will not be angry with me. That was the impression that the merchants were giving to the people by doing business in the Lord's house.

When the Lord gave the command to remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, He was not interested in just physical attendance in His house. What He wanted was people who were filled with zeal for the Lord's house where they would be nourished and refreshed from the Word which they heard there. Jesus cleansed the temple of merchants because they were abusing His house by distracting from the real reason that people were to come. We need a similar zeal for the Lord's house that has a passion for preventing our own abuses of worship.

We are guilty of despising God's Word even when we come to church if we leave without knowing what the Lord had said to us. That means that we need to listen to the lessons which are read so that we hear what truths the Lord was speaking to me this day. We need to listen to the sermon, not just to be

entertained, but to grow in the truth from God that He wants us to know and to treasure. On our journey home, and throughout the week, those truths should remain a part of us as we continue to read and study His Word to flesh out those truths and those promises even more. That is a real passion or zeal for the Lord's house.

We are also guilty of despising God's Word if we listen to His truths, but then do not believe them or put them into practice in our lives. If we hear God speak against sin, and then feel that we can continue to commit that sin, we are guilty of despising that Word. If we hear one of God's promises of love and comfort to us, and do not trust that the Lord will give us that blessing, we are guilty of despising God's Word. God desires all of His children to have a zeal for the Lord's house and for His Word.

Not only will we want to have a passion for preventing abuses which will prevent us from receiving the blessings which God has in store for us, we will also have a fervor to receive those promised blessings. That means that in our zeal and love for God's house, we are going to let nothing get in our way of coming to that house at the appointed times so that God can come to us and bless us through His Word. There are many times that we like to make excuses for not coming to the Lord's house. And we realize that they are just excuses because anything that is truly important to us we do find the time to do. We definitely live busy and hectic lives. But within our hectic schedules, we find time to take the medicine or go to the doctor for the scheduled appointment because it is important for us to do so. The only way that we would forget or neglect to do it is if we did not consider it to be important.

Last Fall I was watching a football game, and they interviewed a fan who was attending the game. He had come to cheer on his team, and he made the statement that he goes to all of their games, no matter where they play. He had zeal for his team — zeal that did not consider the time and expense to attend those games all over the county to be something that was too burdensome for him to do. That is true zeal and passion! Do we have the same zeal and passion for the blessings the Lord wants to us give to us as we come to His house to worship?

We realize that a zeal for God's house is important to us because it is in His house that He comes to us in His Word to bring us blessing after blessing. Even the liturgy which we use each week points us to the blessings which God wants us to receive from Him. We begin the service by confessing our sins, and then hearing God's promise of love through forgiveness won by Jesus. We hear other promised blessings through the readings each week. We receive the personal assurance of forgiveness through the sacrament, and we conclude the service with the Lord's promised blessings which will remain on us day after day. Throughout the service, we are pointed to the blessings which God is bringing to us.

We need a zeal for the Lord's house because that is a fervor for the Lord's blessings. We recognize how important it is for us to be in the Lord's house each service — without exception. We also recognize how important it is for us to prevent abuses which are going to distract us from those blessings. When we come to the Lord's house, we are going to seek to arrive in time so that we have time to prepare ourselves quietly before the service begins by prayer, and by meditation on the hymns and readings which are going to be used in the service that day. We have stained glass windows so that we are not distracted by what is happening outside our building. If it happens that we arrive late for a service, we seek to enter at a time when we are not going to be distracting the worship of others who have already begun to worship.

Right now people get passionate about many things which are going on in our country. These things are important, and they let everyone know how important they think that they are. If our nation can get so passionate about such things, how much more passionate are we not going to be about the Lord's house and the blessings which He seeks to give to us here. Jesus was passionate about the Lord's house so that people could come to be nourished and strengthened in their faith. May we be as well.