

The Way of Worship

John 2:13-22

INTRODUCTION

A year or so after my mom died, my dad resigned his call from the church he had served as pastor throughout my high school years and accepted a new call in a different state. That meant, of course, he moved out of the parsonage that had been our family home for about eight years. A new pastor was called to that church and he and his family rightfully moved into the parsonage. Everything was as it should be.

In the course of his move, though, my dad found some things that needed to be returned to his former church, so since the college I was attending was closer to that church than was the place where dad was currently living, he asked me to deliver those to the new pastor. Which meant, I returned to my former home. No problem. Glad to do it.

Have you ever walked into a house where you used to live? Wow. What a traumatic experience that is! First of all, knocking on the front door was a strange feeling. But imagine my surprise when that door opened, and I discovered that the new pastor and his wife had all their furniture in the wrong places. For example, their dining room table was right in the middle of our family room. Can you believe it?

- I was stunned! So I dropped the package off and left. I was invited to stay, but I just couldn't. How do you have an intelligent conversation with people who don't even know where the furniture goes?

When Jesus was twelve years old, He went with His earthly mom and dad (Mary and Joseph) to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. It was on that occasion when Jesus was left behind when the family caravan started back for Nazareth. Remember the story? Luke's Gospel records it like this:

After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:43-49)

My Father's house.

Fast-forward 21 years. Once again Jesus goes to the Temple – the place He referred to as His Father's House – only to find that everything was different. And different in a very bad way.

In the 21 years between those two recorded visits, some new man-made regulations had been put into place.

- Every Jewish male over the age of 19 was required to pay a tax that would be used for the upkeep and maintenance of the Temple. That tax was the equivalent of two day's wages. But the common currency used by everyday people was minted by the Romans. That made it "unclean." So the new rules said the tax could only be paid "sacred" money – a half shekel. The exchange rate was the equivalent of another day's pay.
- You also needed to buy your unblemished lamb or dove from the Temple marketplace because nothing you could bring from home would be deemed "perfect" by the religious authorities. Yes, it was convenient to buy it there, but you paid an outrageous amount of money for it. It is what we know today as "dynamic pricing."
- But worst of all this marketplace where animals were sold and money was exchanged was set up in the Court of the Gentiles – the place where non-Jews were invited to learn about God and begin to walk in His way.

During this Lenten season we here at Grace are walking in the way of Jesus. Our theme for these 40 days is:

THE WAY

Because we are convinced of the truth in our theme verse:

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

So far in this series, we have walked with Jesus along:

- The Way Through
- The Way of the Kingdom
- The Way of the Cross
- The Way of Provision

Today we walk with Jesus into the Temple, following Him in The Way of Worship.

The actions of Jesus may seem to be overreactions to us, but what Jesus observed in His Father's House was far more important than what I observed in my father's house. Jesus saw the worship life of His people decimated. His actions called His people ... and us ... back to worship.

#1: THE WAY OF WORSHIP REMOVES THE OBSTACLES TO WORSHIP

The way of worship removes the obstacles that keep people from having access to God.

The very design of the Temple kept people from access to God.

- Gentiles could only go so far.

- Women could go a little further, but not much.
- Men got close but still stood on the outside.
- The priests got in the door, but God remain separated even from them.
- Only the high priest – and only once a year – could be in the presence of God behind the curtain.

In today's text Jesus goes to work on one of those obstacles. That marketplace effectively said to any Gentile seeker "You are not welcome here today."

Eventually Jesus will address all those obstacles. In one of the more dramatic moments in all of human history, at the precise moment Jesus dies on the cross, that curtain in the Temple is torn in half – top to bottom. That means God tore it, not humans. God removed the last obstacle that kept people from having access to Him.

The writer of the book of Ephesians called those obstacles:

... the dividing wall of hostility... (Ephesians 2:14)

He continues to say that:

... through (Jesus) we all have access to the Father by one Spirit. (Ephesians 2:18)

From the very beginning of His ministry Jesus puts the world and the devil on notice that He has come to remove anything that stands between God and the people He created.

This is more than Jesus cancelling a bake sale. In this action Jesus says to you and to me, that if we follow Him:

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

Follow Me. I am the way ...

#2: THE WAY OF WORSHIP RESTORES THE PURPOSE OF WORSHIP

I am going to borrow a phrase from one of the other Gospels as I make this point. This story in the life of Jesus – clearing out the Temple – is found in all four Gospels:

"It is written," (Jesus) said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it 'a den of robbers.'" (Matthew 21:13)

Jesus quotes Isaiah 56 when He makes that statement.

Many of us grew up in an era when we heard such rules as “don't run in the sanctuary.” We had to wear special clothes and comb our hair and sit up straight. Remember? These rules were intended to remind us that this is no ordinary place.

I'm not a “rules” guy. I'll never tell you to comb your hair or sit up straight. But can I remind you that when we gather here in this place on Sunday morning, we do so in the expectation that God will be present with us? He is, you know. That's what He promises:

For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them. (Matthew 18:20)

And I begin every worship by saying:

We have gathered in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

There are more than three, so God is here. You are in the presence of God. The way of Jesus brings you into His presence so you can worship Him.

#3: THE WAY OF WORSHIP REVIVES THE ZEAL FOR WORSHIP

Look at verse 17:

His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.” (John 2:17)

That too is a quote from the Old Testament. By the time everyone paid their taxes and bought their sheep, they were ready to be done with it all.

- By the time you wrangle the kids, find their shoes, get them in the car. Right?
- In some churches, the thought of church raises thoughts of conflicts and personality clashes.
- Why is it that a warm bed feels so much better on a Sunday morning?

An elderly lady was amazed at how nice and polite the young man who lived next door to her was. Nearly every day he would do something to help her. He carried the groceries in from her car, mowed and raked her yard and shoveled her sidewalk in the winter.

One day she finally asked him, “Son, how did you become such a fine young man?”

The young man replied, “Well, when I was a boy, I had a drug problem.”

The old lady was shocked, “I can't believe that.”

The young man replied, “It's true, my parents drug me to church on Sunday morning, drug me to church on Sunday night, and they even drug me to church on Wednesday night.”

Zeal for God's house is sometimes a fleeting thing. Sometimes it just feels like you are being drugged, doesn't it? It's OK to be honest.

But as you follow the way of Jesus, you will find that your love for Him grows and the result of that will be a zeal for times of worship with others who share that same love. You will grow from ZERO to ZEAL with each step of the way. Soon you will be like the Psalmist who proclaimed:

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the Lord." (Psalm 122:1)

APPLICATION

A. W. Tozer, one of my favorite devotional writers, wrote these words:

We must never rest until everything inside us worships God. (A. W. Tozer)

Erwin Lutzer, pastor of Moody Bible Church in Chicago, adds:

If we haven't learned to be worshippers, it really doesn't matter how well we do anything else. Worship changes us or it hasn't been worship. To come into the presence of the Holy One of eternity is to be changed. Worship begins in Holy Expectancy; it ends in Holy Obedience. (Erwin Lutzer)

Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. His way leads us to place of worship. May this church and the people who come here always arrive expecting God to be here with us, to speak to us, to change us so that we are fit for His Kingdom.

Amen.