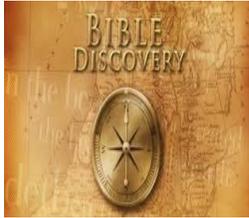


1 June 14
John 2:13-22

Zeroing in on the Consuming Zeal of Jesus



We pause to meditate on the words of the Apostle John who recorded a moment when Jesus seemingly lost control, went wild, turning tables over in the outer court of the temple, screaming at those transacting business. Though in retrospect John (and presumably the other apostles) sees Jesus' identity revealed in this event, he indicates that originally they did not have such insight.

Today may we be given insight so that our focus can be in comparing *the zeal of Jesus* to do the Father's will against the misled zeal of those who conduct business in God's house – the very act of which kept seekers to God – those of gentile background - from approaching God. May our insight keep us from forgetting that God has called them, & us, to Himself.

Some have used this text to teach that as Christians, we should be extremely zealous because Jesus was "*consumed with zeal.*" This I believe ignores the intended message of the text. The reference to zeal in this passage is taken from David's Psalm 69:9 where he writes, "*zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me.*" While it's true zeal brought the author scorn, insults & destruction, this passage points much more to what our Saviour would endure do to His zeal for carrying out the Father's will – coming as Messiah to redeem the creation for the Creator.

Yet Jesus' Messiahship was not based upon the control or domination which many assumed the Messiah would have, but rather Jesus came demonstrating solely His commitment towards God even in the face of great opposition; even to the point of His own destruction. In our hearts, then, we're left begging the question, "Why did Jesus have to die?" Matthew Henry wrote,

*"By the satisfaction Christ made to God for our sin by his blood, he restored that which he took not away; he paid our debt, suffered for our offences. Even when we can plead **not** guilty to men's unjust accusations, yet before God we must acknowledge ourselves deserving all that is brought upon us. David complains of the unkindness of friends and relations which were fulfilled in Christ, whose own brothers did not believe in him, and who was forsaken by his disciples; and for a season – US! Yet Christ made satisfaction for us, not only by putting off the honours due to Him as God, but by submitting to the greatest of dishonours that could be done to any man."*

In short, John 2:17 does not so much suggest Jesus was consumed with zeal, as it indicates that Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God would be consumed by – indeed destroyed by - the zeal of man.

This text isn't about zeal itself but rather a demonstration of the faithfulness, the single-mindedness of a righteous Lord who came to do His Father's will. The Greek word for zeal can mean either zeal for something good something bad. To pursue with zeal something that is good, zeal must be founded on knowledge, lest it lead us to establishing our own ways instead of following God's ways. Paul writes, "*For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God,*

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but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness." [Romans 10:2-3] Zeal must be directed to God and goodness, not towards partisan spiritual divisions, not toward selfish ambition, not toward destruction of others.

Zeal must be directed to God not toward selfish ambition!

Furthermore, scriptural zeal doesn't consist of artificially-induced, mindless, peppy enthusiasm much like the pop-cultured response to the latest craze, but it is pursued by a deliberate lifestyle, through well-defined thought out actions at critical times, and is always grounded on



God's truth. In fact, the zeal of Jesus here places him in *defiance* of those in authority who erroneously thought they knew God's ways. In this regard, zeal is more likely to be in opposition to the status quo than in submission to it. If we would therefore follow the example of Jesus, we must make sure our zeal is based upon the knowledge of God's Word and is well-directed by our Lord's Spirit. Zeal about something ought to be proportionate to its certainty, lest it blind us to truth.

Godly zeal may place us in opposition to those who think they know God's ways, and it could lead to hardships and even some form of destruction as it did Jesus, but it will always lead us to deeper fellowship with our Lord and Saviour – and that's good for all eternity!

Observations with respect to this passage's application for our lives include, most importantly, never using our zealousness for our own benefit at the expense of others; guarding against it by asking ourselves constantly two questions:

1. What's our motivation?

Why are we doing what we're doing? What do we hope to achieve – is it for our own benefit or truly for the benefit of others – meeting their needs; reaching out to them with the love of Christ. For instance, the Law of Moses allowed travellers to purchase animals for sacrifice at the temple. Yet it's evident this practice had been corrupted in the time of Christ. It was the act of the temple leaders to move this business into the outer court which was reserved for the gentile seeking God; placing commerce ahead of evangelism. The Gentiles came to the Court of the Gentiles – this outer court - to worship the living God. But what did the Jews of Jesus' day do? They transformed, under the leadership of Caiaphas, the part of the temple meant to be a house of worship for those seeking God into a house of trade to fatten the pockets of the leaders. They show disdain, derision and contempt for the Gentiles. Jesus contrasts "*my Father's House*" to the market while Matthew's quote from Jesus that they had made temple "*a den of robbers*" suggests that ripping off worshipers was in view through self-centred motivation.

**Access to God denied to Gentile seeker!
Court becomes market place!**

2. Are we honouring the will of our Heavenly Father?

The whole enterprise at the temple had become secularized; unspiritual to the point where those involved didn't honour God anymore. By chasing these merchants out of the temple, Jesus sought to restore hearts to what God intended. In doing so, He also incurred the wrath of those who profited from a corrupt system-- something He experienced time and time again during His earthly ministry - this vengeful wrath led to His crucifixion. What is our position honouring the Father's will? Again Matthew Henry points us in the direction we should go encouraging, "*We need not be discouraged if our zeal for the truths, precepts, and worship of God, should provoke some, and cause others to mock our godly sorrow and deadness to the world.*" The key is in remaining connected to the Father in our zeal!

Christians today ought to take note of Jesus objecting to man-made additions to the commands of God. Contemporary church culture today often seems to care more about what works, what is trendy, or what appeals to a target demographic instead of what God has called

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us to do. For instance, we're called to love our neighbour, yet many of us couldn't give the name of our neighbour, let alone love them. But beware, just as Jesus' hearers were angry about Him confronting them at the temple, so too those invested in corrupted additions might also be angry, or at least confused, when confronted today.

In C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*, Wormwood, a senior devil says to his junior correspondent his greatest ally in the war against the church is religion itself! Our enemy wants us to think "*that a moderated religion is as good for us as no religion at all.*" In other words, he's talking of a religion which calls you to commit only half-way; a religion that doesn't rock the boat; a religion which fits comfortably with cultural norms of the day. This devilish advice seems to have borne much fruit in the Church today. However generations of such churches have led to empty church buildings and a gospel-less Christianity and it is time to reclaim Christ in our hearts and in our churches! It also follows that as Christians we ought to hold very loosely to our own traditions. We should examine them lest we too corrupt God's will. What Christ is zealous for is what we should be zealous about. If Christ cares about the agenda of the Father, we too should care about the agenda of the Father.

How then shall we live?

We're told in John 2:17, "*Zeal for your house will consume me*". So too, we're to embrace zeal for the church of Christ. We're to understand Jesus is the temple. The old has passed, the new has come. Do we worship in this temple as the people of God; do we erect barriers to keep others at a distance? Do we reach out to others or do we act as the leaders in the outer court and invent excuses not to fellowship with them? Do we look down upon those who have not reached our self-diagnosed level of Christian maturity? ***Say it isn't so!***

Finally, as Christians we're called to go out into this new world. We're called to bring newness of life to a plagued world. We're not called to hide in our Christian caves, but to bring a new reformation to the world. We do so knowing they will mock us as they mocked our Lord; but we must obey and go forward in Christ carrying the message; the Gospel which will renew

**Called to
go out into
world!**

this world, just as Christ's resurrection has brought us renewal and joy.

In the end this passage is about Jesus our Messiah; Jesus' death is central for it is the destruction of the temple of Jesus' body to which our Lord refers. In this image of the temple Jesus' Sonship and his death are set side by side. The center of John's thought is the revelation of God, and the center of his theology is God's love. God is love; a righteous, pure and holy love; and a love given through the laying down of His own life. It's precisely through the incarnate Son's death that God Himself is fully revealed. It's about how his body became the new temple, how that temple was destroyed and raised in three days as part of His plan for our redemption.



The confrontation in the temple culminates in Jesus' demonstration to us to follow as faithful followers of our Heavenly Father, to learn from Him and to remain faithful in all we do and say. Our passage in John 2 flows from a context of great joy in the ministry of our Lord. Is that where your zeal lies today? Our hope is that you know such joy; if you do not then give us a call or send an email to talk about it.



Blessings!