

The Wine and the Whip

Part Two

First reading: Hebrews 8: 1-13

Sermon Text: John 2:13-25

It is not man-made rules and regulations that we look to for our salvation but to the spotless Lamb of God who offered himself for our redemption.

Last week we looked at the symbolism connected to the events at the wedding at Cana.

We saw how the six ceremonial purification pots filled with water and turned to wine showed that Jesus had come to supersede the old covenant based on animal sacrifices for the new covenant based on his sacrifice.

Now, let's look at the temple clearing in John 2:13-25

The question has been asked; why do Matthew, Mark and Luke place this event at the end of their gospel accounts while John places it at the beginning?

Perhaps there were two cleansings of the temple, one at the beginning and one at the end of Jesus ministry.

In all likelihood the real answer is quite simple.

We need to constantly bear in mind that John's goal is not to write an orderly chronological account.

John is concerned with theology not chronology, with the mystery not the history. John is interested in showing that Jesus is the Messiah.

In his account of the wine and the whip John would have us understand that Jesus had come in part to restore right worship that is in spirit and truth.

He had come to bring an end to the Jewish man-made ways of getting right with God.

He had come to establish the Messianic age based on his death and resurrection.

As a sign he clears the temple of everything that was defiling it and stopping the worship especially in the court of the gentiles where non-Jews could worship the one true God.

Read what God says in Isaiah 1:11-20

Who washes our sins away? Certainly not the temple rituals. Jesus washes our sins away. He comes to restore right worship centred on himself.

When asked about his actions Jesus alludes to the fact that he would himself become the temple of God.

The glory of God would no longer abide in a place but in a person.

His life, death and resurrection would be the new way to God's mercy seat where believers would find grace and mercy.

Jesus In Revelation 21:22 we read "I saw no temple in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple."

Not only has the old wine run out at the wedding at Cana but the glory had departed from the temple. God's glory is now seen in his son Jesus.

It is to him that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that he is Lord and God.

In Matthew 12:6 we read, "One greater than the temple is here."

When Jesus clears the temple and turns the water into wine he is in effect saying, "Your temple worship, you elaborate rituals and you lavish annual sacrificial system are redundant."

The old is gone. The new has come.

Historians tells us that the temple had taken half a century to build, then, only a few years after that it was completely destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

In that year the Jewish sacrificial system – Josephus the Jewish historian suggests that as many as 250,000 animals were sacrificed at Passover each year - ceased and it has never been re-established.

John reminds us in chapter one that Jesus is the "lamb of God" sacrificed for the forgiveness of sins.

In the letter to the Hebrews the author reminds us that Jesus is both High Priest and the acceptable Sacrifice, given once, with no further need of any other sacrifice.

It is not man-made rules and regulations that we look to for our salvation but to the spotless Lamb of God who offered himself for our redemption.

Let's consider what precipitated the actions of Jesus that day.

God's house is being desecrated. The temple had become a money making machine. No better than a tourist attraction.

I remember visiting Westminster Abbey. There must have been a thousand people inside the Abbey at any given time.

Not as worshippers but as photo snapping tourist who had paid 25 pounds to get inside.

Needless to say the experience of the sacred was somewhat lost under those conditions.

It raises the question.

What would Jesus find in our church if he came here today?

Maybe not a market place, but what else might sadden him or even make him angry? The truth is, he is here today.

Maybe we have been treating God like an ATM machine.

Perhaps we sit with arrogant aloofness without truly realizing in whose presence we gather.

Or we offer our good deeds and expect a return for our sacrifice.

The condition of the temple was a vivid indication of the spiritual condition of the nation of Israel.

Perhaps John's account is also pointing to our spiritual condition.

Like John the Baptist he is pointing to our need to repent and renew our first love for Jesus.

In the cleansing of the temple the Jewish leaders knew that in that very act Jesus was laying claim to be Messiah.

Hence the reason they requested a sign. In effect they were saying, "Your action is prophesied as the actions of the Messiah.

"If that is who you are work a miracle as proof".

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It reminds me of the words sung by Herod in the Rock Musical Jesus Christ Superstar.

"Prove to me that your no fool, walk across my swimming pool. Prove to me that you're divine, turn the water into wine."

Interestingly verse 23 tells us that Jesus did work some miracles in the city at that time.

"Because of the miraculous signs Jesus did in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration, many began to trust in him."

But miracles are not always a guarantee that faith will follow.

Our own experience should tell us that is true.

In the end most people are like the merchants in the temple courts that day.

We can be more interested in the acquisition of things than worshipping the one who is both our Lord and their God.

It reminds me of the parable of the rich fool.

God says, "You fool, tonight your soul is required of you."

May it be that we never succumb to that temptation. May it be that we live as fully devoted followers of Jesus.

In the end Jesus tells the Jewish leaders that no sign would be given to them except the sign of Jonah, a sign that referred to Jesus death and resurrection.

Finally point. What are we to make of Jesus' words in John 2:19?

"All right," Jesus replied. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

Jesus was not talking about destroying Herod's temple. He was talking about his own death and resurrection. He was telling them that he would become the focus of right worship.

Jesus tells us that he will establish a new covenant, a better covenant sealed by the blood he would shed on that first Good Friday.

You and I have access to God through that new covenant.

That's why God tore the temple curtain in two from the top to the bottom.

For those who trust in Jesus and follow him the way is now open never to be closed because of the finished work of Jesus.

The Old has gone the New and better way has come.

Embrace this new way of life. To all who follow him, Jesus promises abundant life.