

John 12 – Zeal for the LORD

04/28/2024

Scripture 1: (Jn. 2:12-17 ESV)

After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade."

His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal¹ for your house will consume me."

Scripture 2: (Ps. 69:1-36 ESV)

To the choirmaster: according to Lilies. Of David.

Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with my crying out; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God. More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause; mighty are those who would destroy me, those who attack me with lies. What I did not steal must I now restore?

O God, you know my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you. Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me, O Lord GOD of hosts; let not those who seek you be brought to dishonor through me, O God of Israel. For it is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that dishonor has covered my face. I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's sons. **For zeal² for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.** When I wept and humbled my soul with fasting, it became my reproach. When I made sackcloth my clothing, I became a byword to them. I am the talk of those who sit in the gate, and the drunkards make songs about me.

But as for me, my prayer is to you, O LORD. At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of your steadfast love answer me in your saving faithfulness. Deliver me from sinking in the mire; let me be delivered from my

¹Friberg, *Analytical Greek Lexicon*

[Fri] ζήλος, ου, ὁ and ζήλος, ους, τό strictly *ferment of spirit*; (1) in a good sense, as a human emotion expressing active enthusiasm, ardent affection, keen interest *zeal, ardor, jealousy* (2C 7.7); (2) of the intensity of divine action *extremity* πυρός ζ. *fiery indignation, fierceness of fire* (HE 10.27); (3) in a bad sense *jealousy, envy* (GA 5.20)

²Holladay, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the OT (HOL) Hol7552*

הַנְּאִיִּץ: cs. תַּנְּאִיִּץ, sf. יְתַנְּאִיִּץ; pl. 1 — :תַּנְּאִיִּץ. **passion, ardor**: (of man for God) 2K 10₁₆, (of God for Isr.) Is 26₁₁; **passion** (of sexual attraction) SS 8₆; w. min, **envy** of Ec 4₄; qin'at yhwh = Y.'s jealous love 2K 19₃₁; — 2. **jealousy** Is 11₁₃, rūḥ qin'â Nu 5₁₄; pl. minḥat qin'ôt 'offering of jealousy,' offering for case of suspected adultery Nu 5_{15•18•25}. (pg 320)

enemies and from the deep waters. Let not the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up, or the pit close its mouth over me. Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me. Hide not your face from your servant, for I am in distress; make haste to answer me. Draw near to my soul, redeem me; ransom me because of my enemies!

You know my reproach, and my shame and my dishonor; my foes are all known to you. Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink. Let their own table before them become a snare; and when they are at peace, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see, and make their loins tremble continually. Pour out your indignation upon them, and let your burning anger overtake them. May their camp be a desolation; let no one dwell in their tents. For they persecute him whom you have struck down, and they recount the pain of those you have wounded. Add to them punishment upon punishment; may they have no acquittal from you. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous. {imprecation}

But I am afflicted and in pain; let your salvation, O God, set me on high! I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving. This will please the LORD more than an ox or a bull with horns and hoofs. When the humble see it they will be glad; you who seek God, let your hearts revive. For the LORD hears the needy and does not despise his own people who are prisoners. Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and everything that moves in them. For God will save Zion and build up the cities of Judah, and people shall dwell there and possess it; the offspring of his servants shall inherit it, and those who love his name shall dwell in it.

Sermon:

Have you ever met someone whom you could honestly describe as being “on fire for the LORD”?

Have you ever felt “on fire for God”, yourself?

Have you ever honestly felt offended on God's behalf? So appalled, sickened, and disgusted by something that goes against all that is holy and good; or might you have only been offended for yourself?

This past December (12/14/2023) a Mississippi man, named Michael Cassidy, admitted to destroying a statue and holiday display of the goat-headed demon Baphomet (often used as a depiction for Satan) located in the Iowa Capital building, allegedly on account of his Christian conviction and beliefs. He has since been criminally charged, including with a hate crime due to the professed religious motivation³ for his activity. To be fair, although I generally agree with his alleged sentiment and the offense he took (I do not want to have that in our public spaces, but if I want and am willing to have our faith displayed and promoted in public, then I must also be willing to allow them the opportunity to be publicly **wrong**); what he did was criminal: destruction of private property and vandalism in a government building. Despite it not being the original intention of the framers, the Constitutional “Right” to “freedom of religion” has been interpreted and applied to all claims to religious faith {when originally it most concerned a prohibition upon the Federal government from establishing a single dominant faith for the American nation like most of Europe}, thus reasonably making this man destructive activity a religious “hate crime”, an act of violent discrimination, and a clear violation of this satanic group's “Right”.

While I do not and cannot affirm his actions, I understand and appreciate how he felt; he felt the need to act in a proactive defense of the LORD God.

I also recognize that he may have believed that what he did was good and justifiable by Scripture, but I wholeheartedly disagree that it was.

- Remember, while the why we do things as Christians is very important, the way we do them is just as important; it is an important part of our Christian witness in this ungodly world because through our way we should be demonstrating the better ways of Jesus.

Regardless, some people may try and say, “But isn't that somewhat like what Jesus did at the Temple? Didn't Jesus get mad and then flip over tables, beating people with a whip because of their offensive irreligious behavior?”.

No, that is not like what Jesus did and no, that was not why He did what he did. Reacting and acting as Michael Cassidy allegedly did {although he admitted to the action, he has denied the criminality of it, thus I will still refer to it as being “alleged” unless he is convicted.} is not what Scripture teaches us to do; we cannot simply ask, “What Would Jesus Do?” and assume that since He cleared the Temple, then we can and should do the same. What Jesus did in the Temple was very different, very special, and unique for Him. It was not an example for us to follow. Although it was not a miracle, it was still a prophetic sign {much like those done by Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or Hosea}, because its meaning went deeper than what the immediate response to His actions might suggest.

- Christians are not called and commanded to violently tear down the modern “high places” of false and idolatrous worship, but we can lead others away from them: from the darkness into the light.

3 <https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/crime-and-courts/2024/01/30/iowa-capitol-satanic-statue-vandalism-hate-crime-michael-cassidy-mississippi/72413585007/>

- Christians are not commanded to force all the world to convert and impose a Christian government upon the earth, but we can influence worldly governments to exert their God-given authority justly, morally, and with all righteousness.
- Christians are not commanded to oppress and marginalize the adherents of false religion beneath the rightness of our faith; instead we must love them because although they trust in the demonic, they still share in the same Image of God with us and it is through the difference of our loving in the Name of Christ that we may lead them to Jesus.
- Christians are called and commanded to preach the Gospel (Mark 16:15); to baptize in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and make disciples of Christ (Matt 28:18-20); to pray for our persecutors and to love our enemies (Matt 5:44); and also to love all our neighbors, in Jesus' Name (1 John 4).

Presently, we live in a world that is dominated by false religion, just as the 1st century was. If we want to see the Church of Jesus Christ grow once more; if we want to experience a Holy Spirit driven revival, and witness the active expansion of the breadth and depth of Christian faith in the world again, then we must go back to basics and follow the example and methods of those who lived through similar earlier times, like the early Church.

- Please correct me if I am wrong, but I do not recall the Apostle Paul ever going to Ephesus to destroy the great idol of Artemis, and burn down her temple. Paul simply preached the Good News about Jesus and instead it was the people who opposed him: who opposed other people being saved and coming to faith in Christ; who were the ones that caused a riot (Acts 19).

Our God does not change, nor do His means and methods. How He worked things then, is how He will work things now. Therefore, that which is old, is new again!

The first century Church did not grow through violence and force, but through faithfully preaching the truth; by sharing “Christ crucified” (1 Cor 1:23) as the better alternative to the world's appealing glitz and glamour of sin. So, we must look beyond the superficial elements of this story, as they did, to understand what it signified for them then, and for what it means to us today. However, we must first remove a few elephants from the room.

The first elephant appears because while this should be a familiar story for most of us, we rarely hear it in this context; at this point within the story of Jesus' life. The Synoptics tell us Jesus went up to the Temple after His “Triumphal Entry” (Matt 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48) and drove out those who were selling things, which prompted the Jewish leaders to fear Jesus and begin looking to kill Him (Mark 11:18), yet John recorded it at the start of Jesus' ministry. So, how do we reconcile this difference in timing or narrative placement?

The simplest answer (the one which is often best) and the most commonly accepted understanding is that these are two separate, but parallel events: one at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, before He developed a wide following, and a second at the end of His ministry, as a final broken straw to push the authorities to act as the LORD had ordained and intended from all eternity, thereby facilitating God's great work of redemption.

John's recounting is similar to the other three but there are certain differences.

1. The Synoptics records the Authorities' conspiracy of murder as being a consequence of Jesus' activity, whereas John records many people coming to faith because of His signs as the consequence(v. 23).
2. The Synoptics record Jesus quoting Isaiah 56:7 “...for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” (Isa. 56:7 ESV) as justification for His actions, accusing them of transforming it into a “den of

robbers”, but John merely exhorts them to *"Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade."* without any accusation or condemnation.

3. By interpreting the Synoptics' account through Isaiah, Jesus conveyed an important message about the openness and welcoming nature of faith in the LORD by having a two-fold purpose in driving out the money-changers and animal sellers:
 - to stop the sinful exploitation of those who earnestly desired to worship Him, and
 - to make space for more worshipers to come in, because these vendors were set up within the “Court of the Gentiles” and reduced the space available for “God-fearing” Gentiles and proselytes to come near to the LORD;
4. But Jesus' purpose in John's Gospel was more to restore and preserve the purity of God's Temple, the holiness of His House.

So, book ending Jesus' ministry with two similar events: where He does the same action but for different purposes; is a reasonable explanation. The different responses are also reasonable because Jesus was just a “nobody”, at the first and what He did could have been more easily dismissed and ignored by those with power and authority, yet the second time, after Jesus had such a broad following among the ordinary people, and after performing His prophetic and overtly political sign by entering the city like a king, a more extreme response was required. After the second time they must either affirm Him as the Messianic King in rebellion against Roman authority, or they must permanently remove Him and His dangerous social-political influence.

The second elephant concerns the activity of those whom Jesus drove from the Temple: the money-changers and the sacrifice sellers; what was the problem with them? Both activities were reasonable, acceptable, and necessary for the Jewish religion to effectively function.

1. Roman coins were impressed with images of the Emperor and/or included other idolatrous iconography (there are some examples printed in your bulletin), which were offensive to strict Jewish religious sensibilities {considered as violations of the Second Commandment; although it is uncertain whether they objected, at this time and upon these grounds, to all human images or if their objection was confine to that of the Emperor, who was considered as divine}. These conventional coins had to be exchanged for currency that was not impressed with pagan imagery so that it could be accepted by the Temple, because the LORD's House should not house idols.
2. It was impractical and unsafe to bring animals to Jerusalem for sacrifice, when you consider that people were coming from all across Judea. The animal could be lost or, even worse, get injured on the way and become “blemished” and unacceptable as a sacrifice. There was also the cost and hassle of providing food for the animal during travel to consider. However, by purchasing animals locally, they ensured that they were acceptable to sacrifice and it still satisfied the personal, costly element which made something into a “sacrifice”. This practice also helped people whose vocations were not involved with keeping animals: like carpenters and fishermen or other such workers; by providing what they needed.

Jesus did not drive them out **and** condemn their practice. His anger was not because of what they were doing, but because of where and how they were doing it. There must have been other locations available. Jesus disrupted their trade because by doing it there, they were not honoring God the way He commanded. They were not worshiping the LORD the way He wanted to be worshiped.

Remember, not all worship is created equal and not everything we do as worship is acceptable in God's sight. Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons, were killed for offering “*unauthorized fire*” (Lev 10:1) before the LORD. They died because they tried to worship God the way they wanted. While offering incense was ordinary and a commanded form of worship, they somehow offered it wrongly (whether it was at the wrong time or the wrong incense, the text does not elaborate, only describing it as “unauthorized fire”).

The Apostle Paul also reminds us, “*Do not be deceived: **God is not mocked**, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.*” (Gal. 6:7-8 ESV) So, as Nadab and Abihu sowed, and as the money-changers and sellers sowed, through their human preference rather than divine command, they thus reaped. We too must be careful to avoid similar errors, and that is why everything within our worship service is sourced and justified by Scripture because as the Reformed Baptist Pastor Keith Foskey⁴ often says regarding our attitude, “It's the Lord's Day, the Lord's way!” (#Superior Theology).

So, this story is about two things: worshiping the LORD rightly and the consequence for worshiping rightly.

Now, let us look back at the story and see what it tells us about worship.

“*After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.*” After the wedding in Cana, Jesus and family went to His new home of Capernaum. This shows that, even though they did not yet have faith in Him (John 7:5), perhaps they supported Him in His relocation (Matt 4:13), but what seems most likely is that this was a practical visit because Capernaum had access to the easy route to travel to Jerusalem since, “*The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*” and it was expected for the family to travel together and attend the Feast.

Please note that while the Synoptic Gospels do not record multiple Passovers during Jesus' ministry, and John records three, there is no assumed contradiction or discrepancy since providing a detailed chronology of Jesus' life was not the purpose of any Gospel. However, unlike the Synoptics, John considers the time and place a more important detail to include.

This was the first trip by Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover (2:13, 6:4, 11:55), adding affirmative story support for the historian Eusebius' assertion that John wrote more about Jesus' early ministry. Furthermore, a three year period of ministry seems to be a more reasonable time frame in accommodating the public rise and fall of Jesus rather than assuming it was only a single year as the Synoptics might suggest.

“*In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there.*” These were trades-folk just minding their own business, doing their job; doing whatever they were told to do by those in authority without thinking for themselves about what they were doing. They did not consider the spiritual implications of their activity.

Then, Jesus came on scene and saw everything that was going on. People were buying and selling stuff in the Temple courts: stuff that they needed for worship. This would be like us selling our bulletins, hymnals, communion elements, or offering envelopes to people in the Narthex before they walk into the sanctuary.

“*And making a whip of cords, [probably just a loose bundle of knotted ropes; nothing like a bull whip or a Roman “scourge”, but something which would hurt when hit, but without leaving any lasting damage] he [Jesus] drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.*”. He drove them out, removing them from where they did not belong; at

4 www.youtube.com/@ConversationswithaCalvinist

least, where they did not belong in their present capacity and function. "... *And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade."* Jesus did not condemn them for what they were doing; He drove them out despite them doing a "right thing", because they were in the wrong place and at the wrong time. This was not so very different from Nadab and Abihu offering their "unauthorized fire", so they should have been thanking God that they were not themselves consumed.

Sometime later, "*His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."*". Unlike the Synoptics, Jesus rarely explains the meaning of His actions and parables to His disciples in John's Gospel. So, when John gives us anecdotal notes like this, they are best understood as coming from his perspective after the resurrection; after the Holy Spirit illuminated his mind, expanding his memory and improving his comprehension. Thus John interjects his later understanding into the narrative to help explain the story for our understanding.

So far, the elements of worship mentioned in this story have been in the negative: as in what one ought **not** to do at church, like buying and selling and using it as an opportunity to turn a profit; except for Jesus. Jesus' actions were also a form of worship; not in specifics that we should emulate, but a spiritual attitude that we should.

Jesus was "zealous" for God's house. He wanted God to be worshiped in the way that the LORD wants to be worshiped. Jesus was standing up for the right worship of God, as opposed to the clever devisings and innovations of men; devisings with which they enriched themselves and offended against God's glory.

They were sinning against God under the guise of worshiping Him (something we charitably hope was unintentional) and that sin was what Jesus insisted they stop. They were given a second chance unlike Uzzah. Uzzah died immediately for his offense after he tried to stop the Ark of the Covenant from falling off of a cart and touch the ground. Not only did Uzzah wrongly believe that his sinful hands were more "clean" than the dirty ground (2 Samuel 6); but he was also transporting the Ark in a non-sanctioned manner (Exodus 25:10-15). So, we see that even in the midst of His just wrath, Jesus is merciful.

Now, let me say this again. This was not an example of Jesus for us to follow. Although we try to follow what are called the "Regulative Principles of Worship" (RPW), only worshiping as Scripture commands, we do not go and disrupt other church worship services that may not worship how we think they ought to. Instead, Jesus is reminding us that we need to guard all aspects of our worship because of Who we are worshiping: the Sovereign over all the universe; and that He must also be obeyed in how we worship, not merely that we worship Him. If God is truly Sovereign, then the worship He approves is the worship which He commands. He has no desire for our best intended contrivances; therefore, if we love Him, then we will obey Him and worship Him how He wants (John 14:15).

John gives us the key to understand what Jesus was trying to teach us by doing this through his explanatory note. John interpreted this, and wants us to interpret it and understand it, through the lens of the Psalms; particularly the psalm he quotes, Psalm 69.

This psalm is a "Psalm of David" but, like most psalms attributed to him, there are no details given to connect us with any one particular motivating circumstance in his life. This psalm covers a broad range of prayerful emotions: lament, confession, pleadings for mercy, trust in the LORD's deliverance, imprecation against enemies, praise, and thanksgiving; and John focuses especially upon verse 9, but also draws our attention to the context of verses 6 through 18.

"For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me."

- Just as David's zeal for the LORD: for the Tabernacle; for his right worship of God; earned him reproach and hatred from people such as Michal, his wife, the daughter of Saul, (as just one example) so too did Jesus' zeal for the LORD; for the Temple; for the right worship of God; earn Him the reproach, condemnation, hatred, and fear of those hypocritical Jewish leaders who were more concerned with their own worldly wealth, power, authority, and glory than with God's.
- Just as hatred for David, the LORD's anointed christ and king, grew and festered among the enemies of God's righteousness, so too did hatred for Jesus, the Christ, fester and grow among the enemies of God.
- Because of this, just as David was plagued by betrayal, tragedy, and strife within his family, so was Jesus betrayed by one of His twelve closest companions and murdered by those who should have known and loved Him best.

Their reproach fell upon David and Jesus because they did not love God; for if they had loved God, then they would have also loved His Christ.

So, on a base level, John identified, connected, and related the “effect” of Jesus' murder to the “cause” of His zeal. Yet, by considering the story through the lens of Psalm 69, we begin to see that it also meant something more.

“Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me, O Lord GOD of hosts; let not those who seek you be brought to dishonor through me, O God of Israel. For it is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that dishonor has covered my face. I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's sons. For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.” This was a prayer for their covenant community; the communities of which David and Jesus were the federal heads. This is a prayer by Jesus for us; for Christians because.

- We are those who “hope” in the LORD, in Jesus Christ.
- We are now those who “seek” God, because we have answered the Holy Spirit's effectual call.

Jesus prays that we do not come to “shame” or “dishonor” in and through Him. Even though the world condemned Jesus and condemns us because of our faith, our *pisteo* in Him, we are honored and glorified with Christ as our sin and shame is washed away and we are clothed and justified dressed in Jesus' righteous robes.

- Jesus bore the reproach that we are due.
- It was our dishonor that covered His Holy face.
- The reproaches of those who hate God, those who belong to the “prince of this world”, fell upon Him.
- Jesus became as a “stranger” to the people of God: exiled from the Jewish covenant community and condemned to die a cursed death upon a Roman cross; because of His zeal for the LORD.

This was all for the LORD's sake and God's glory. Jesus's zeal for the LORD, our Father in heaven, caused Him to be “consumed” because He was working for God's glory through it all even as He, God the Son, suffered the extreme opposite of Glory. He was working out our redemption through it all: accomplishing the salvation of God's chosen people and earning the gift of eternal life for us, through His death.

Through it all, for us and for our sake, to save us from shame and dishonor, His hope and trust for salvation remained in the LORD. *“But as for me, my prayer is to you, O LORD. At an acceptable time, O God, in the*

abundance of your steadfast love answer me in your saving faithfulness. Deliver me from sinking in the mire; let me be delivered from my enemies and from the deep waters. Let not the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up, or the pit close its mouth over me. Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.” (Ps. 69:13-16 ESV)

So, while John and the disciples later remembered that Jesus' zeal for the LORD led to His death, in part, they also saw how His zealous works were for our salvation. They understood that as our covenant head, His zealous and righteous works were accounted to us, as our own, and that so too His salvation from the grave, His resurrection, would also be established for us and that we will also be raised like Him.

Jesus did what He did for us, all of it, because we could not do it for ourselves.

While the disciples surely recognized a connection between Jesus' zeal for the LORD and the negative response of the Jewish leaders, they could not and we cannot get away with the same things because we are not Jesus. They and we are called to express our zeal in other ways: by loving others, by discipling others in the way of Christ, by evangelizing and telling people to “Come and see.”. We must be zealous for the LORD through our faith and in our worship, but lawlessness and disorder against the worldly authorities are never an appropriate means for us to do so. Consider Michael Cassidy again:

- He could have protested.
- He could have written a letter to the government or to the Editor.
- He could have even appealed to the satanic atheists who installed the statue: installed for the express purpose of offending Christian sensibilities through their mockery of the Christmas season; and politely asked them to remove it.
- Instead he broke the law. He made himself an offense to people. He tarnished, damaged, and even ruined his Christian witness: the positive message which he surely intended to send; by doing what he did because our God is a God of Law and of Order (1 Cor 14:40) and so by acting as he did, he brought shame and dishonor to the name of Jesus Christ (unintentionally and unwittingly).

We all need to be more zealous for Jesus. We all need to be more “on fire for the LORD”. But, we need to do so in ways that bring Him honor and glory instead of shame and reproach. Do things decently and in good order so that they may be approved of by the world, then they might hear your testimony and receive your witness about what Jesus has done for you. Then, if you are forced to bear shame and dishonor on account of the Name of Christ, you may gladly bear their reproach because Jesus has already borne the brunt for you and because you know that in their reproaches, you get to rejoice at sharing in His suffering (1 Peter 4:13) being confident and sure that you shall also share in His glory.

So let your zeal for the LORD consume you as it did Jesus, but do not let it destroy you. Let us worship Jesus as He commands, and let us remain confident and sure that the reproach He has borne, He bore so that we would not need to.

AMEN