

Believe! 05

Do We Follow the Example of Jesus?

John 2:12-25 • October 23, 2011

We've talked a lot this past year about being followers of Christ. We've talked a lot about it because Jesus talks a lot about it and the writers of the New Testament talk a lot about it.

Following Jesus. Jesus calls all who believe in Him to follow Him. Learn to talk like He talked, love like He loved, live like He lived.

The New Testament repeatedly tells us that God's goal for every one of His children is to become like Jesus Christ. We get rid of our old selfish attitudes and desires and values and we replace them with the attitudes and desires and values Jesus had.

In today's text, we see a side of Jesus, a quality of His character, that we seldom think about, if ever.

When you picture Jesus in your mind, what do you see? What kind of person is He? (Responses)

Turn to John 2:12 and let's take a look at Jesus. As we do, let's also ask ourselves, are we following His example? Is His passion ours? Are His values ours?

John 2:12 After this He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples; and they did not stay there many days.

13 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

14 And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business.

15 When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables.

16 And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!"

17 Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."

18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"

19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

20 Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"

21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

22 Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

23 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did.

24 But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men,

25 and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

Amazing, isn't it? Chapter 2 begins with a compassionate Jesus turning water into wine in order to save a humble family from embarrassment. Now, a few days later, we see Jesus angry. More than angry — ENRAGED. We see Him swinging a whip, using it to drive people out of the Temple. What a contrast!

I think one reason the Holy Spirit prompted John to write His gospel with these two extremes back to back is because we need a BALANCED view of Jesus.

We need to see BOTH His tender love AND His powerful anger. We need to understand that God is LOVE, but God is also RIGHTEOUS HOLINESS. In other words, we need to understand that God is to be both loved AND feared.

We need to remember that the Lamb is also the LION! The Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world is also the LION of the tribe of Judah. Yes, we see qualities of a lamb in Jesus: His gentleness, His innocence – but we also see qualities of a lion: He is to be feared, respected, revered.

// We're going to cover a lot of history and geography this morning. More than we usually do. But I think it's important if we're really going to understand and appreciate the accuracy of our Bible. Let's re-read verses 12 & 13:

John 2:12 After this He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples; and they did not stay there many days.

13 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

So, after the wedding in Cana, John tells us that Jesus went from Cana DOWN to Capernaum and UP to Jerusalem. He went DOWN because Capernaum was at a lower elevation than Cana and then UP to Jerusalem because it had a higher elevation than Capernaum.

In fact, Galilee is BELOW sea level and Jerusalem is 2500 feet ABOVE sea level. Capernaum was an important town located on the northwestern shore of the sea of Galilee. After staying there a few days, Jesus left Capernaum and went UP to Jerusalem to observe the Passover Feast, which is held around the middle of April.

This is one of the places where John seems to be different from the other Gospel writers. Matthew, Mark and Luke write about Jesus going to Jerusalem only once, but John has Him there as many as four times (John 5:1, 6:4, and 11:55).

In his gospel John also shows Jesus doing a great deal of His ministry in and around Jerusalem. But please don't think the gospel writers contradict each other—because they don't. In fact, when we put the four of them together, they complement each other and give us a fuller picture of Jesus' ministry.

Remember, each writer is telling the same story from a different point of view. Matthew, Mark and Luke concentrate on the ministry of Jesus in GALILEE and John focuses on the ministry of Jesus in JERUSALEM.

And, even though the other three writers only write about ONE visit to Jerusalem, they do imply that Jesus was there more often than that. For example, Matthew writes about Jesus mourning over Jerusalem at the end of His ministry, just before His arrest and crucifixion:

Matthew 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!

Jesus wouldn't have said "HOW OFTEN" unless He'd asked Jerusalem repeatedly to turn to Him. So the

gospel writers don't disagree here. Put the four of them together and they give us a much more complete picture, which is why God inspired them in the way He did.

Let me show you something else about the accuracy of the Bible. The temple in our text wasn't the FIRST temple built by Solomon in 1st Kings 6-7, and it wasn't the SECOND temple rebuilt by the Jews returning from Babylonian captivity in Ezra 6:15.

This is actually the THIRD temple, and it was known as "Herod's Temple." Herod has built a lot of temples to the pagan gods for the Gentiles and he'd done so using Jewish tax money. So, as a smart politician, he decided that the temple to the Jews' God would be his biggest and grandest temple of all.

As we just read in verse 20, at this point it had been under construction for a total of 46 years. Herod had started construction in 19 B.C. which means the events in our text occurred in 27 AD. So, now, we're able to put a date on the events John is writing about.

Historians tell us that a thousand priests were trained to serve as brick layers and carpenters on Herod's temple and over 10,000 laborers were used to build it.

At the time of this incident, it still wasn't finished. In fact, it wouldn't be completed until 64 AD, just six years before it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

In Jesus' day this enormous structure was the pride of every Jew. Here's a picture of a model of Herod's temple. As you approached the temple from the east over the Mount of Olives, especially in the morning, its white marble structure overlaid with gold plates on the east looked like a sea of white coated with golden fire.

The temple area was made up of several walled courts:

- ♣ the Court of the Gentiles
- ♣ the Court of the Women
- ♣ the Court of Israel
- ♣ the Court of the Priests
- ♣ and last of all the porch, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies.

You may remember that the Holy of Holies was separated from the rest by a heavy curtain, and it's where God dwelt with His people. Only the high priest was allowed to enter there once a year.

And you may remember that when Jesus died on the cross, the curtain was ripped in two from top to bottom as Jesus opened access to God for everyone.

Most of Jesus' temple ministry took place in the outer court—the Court of the Gentiles. Each door BEYOND this area had slabs of stone with a warning written on them said Gentiles were not allowed to go any further.

Archeologists dug up one of these stone slabs and today it's in a museum in Istanbul. It says: "No foreigner may enter within the balustrade (barrier) and enclosure around the Sanctuary. Whoever is caught will render himself liable to the death penalty which will inevitably follow."

I know we're spending a lot of time on details, but I believe they're important in order for us to really understand the account we've read in chapter 2.

Of all the feasts throughout the year, Passover was by far the greatest and most important. In fact, the law said that every male Jew who lived within 20 miles of Jerusalem was REQUIRED to attend it and we see here that Jesus obeyed that law.

By this time Jews were scattered all over the world but every Jew, no matter where he lived on the planet, dreamed that he would be able to attend the Passover in Jerusalem at least once in his lifetime.

So, every year over 2 million Jews would make the journey to Jerusalem—and all those Jewish pilgrims were a potential source of great wealth.

Well, verse 14 tells us that when Jesus arrived at the temple and entered the outer court He found that the priests were doing all they could to get as much money as possible from the people. What we see is first century organized crime or cartel. But this one's not run by the Mafia or drug lords – it's run by the religious leaders of the Jews!

13 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

14 And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business.

Let me explain why this was going on. First, the money exchangers were there because every Jew over 19 had to pay a temple tax to cover expenses for all the temple sacrifices. And it wasn't a small tax, either. It was equivalent to two day's wages. AND you couldn't pay this tax with just any currency.

Remember, Jews came from all over the world, bringing their home country's currency with them. That meant they were coins with images of people on them, and the temple wouldn't accept any money with a graven image on the coin. They coins were considered idolatrous and unclean. So they had to exchange their money.

But the temple didn't provide this as a free service. Instead, the religious leaders used it to make even more money. You see, the exchange rate doubled the cost of the tax. So, to go to the temple during Passover cost FOUR day's wages.

And that wasn't the only cost you had to factor in when you calculated the price of your trip to Jerusalem for the Passover. Pilgrims were also required to make an animal sacrifice for their sins. And the temple was more than happy to provide oxen and sheep and doves for those sacrifices.

So, let's say you were a Jew living in Spain. You wouldn't want to have to take an ox or a sheep along for a sacrifice. Think of the hassle AND the cost involved!

So it was a good thing that the temple provided the animals. The problem was that, again, the religious leaders didn't do this out of the goodness of their hearts.

No, they did it to fill their wallets with even MORE money. So the price of an animal inside the temple was MUCH higher than you'd pay anywhere else. (Kind of like popcorn at the movies or hot dog at Cowboys stadium.)

Plus, even the animals brought by Jews who lived near Jerusalem were usually found "unacceptable" by the temple inspectors. They were so corrupt that they would charge a fee to inspect the animal and then disqualify it, saying it has an imperfection or blemish.

This forced all these people from out-of-town to purchase an "approved" animal at the temple at a price that was often ten to twenty times the fair market value.

You expect that kind of dishonesty out in the world—but not in God's temple where every Passover the people were being blackmailed.

By the way, historians tell us that when the Roman general Crassus captured Jerusalem and raided the Temple treasury in 54 B.C. he took from it our equivalent of about ten million dollars – and that was just a small portion of the money that was in there.

No wonder Jesus was angry! I mean, pilgrims to the Passover who could barely afford the trip in the first

place were being robbed in God's house! What had begun as a service had turned into a racket. And the religious leaders were actually PREVENTING people from worshipping God instead of helping them.

And because this had gone on for so long, people had come to DESPISE worship in the temple. Not only that, but Matthew tells us in Matthew 21:13 that all this robbery in the name of worship had led thieves to use the temple area as the place to gather in order to plot their crimes.

The 'hood around the temple was NOT the best part of Jerusalem – not a safe place to be.

Well, as Jesus entered the outer courts, the sights, sounds and smells must've been almost overwhelming. It was more like a livestock auction than a place of worship. Instead of the Court of the Gentiles being a place where the nation of Israel was a blessing to all peoples, it was a disgrace.

Think about it! The house of God, intended to be bring people TO God was robbing them and pushing people AWAY from God. The more Jesus saw and smelled and heard, the angrier He got. Remember, as a Jew, He'd been going there all His life, watching these men pollute the house of God and prevent people from coming to God.

He was furious at their disrespect and greed. This was His Father's house! So as His first "official" act as Messiah, He made a whip of cords (like a Roman cat of nine tails) and used it literally to clean house— HIS house.

And I've got to say, this is a great text to read when people claim Jesus was some kind of soft, fragile kind of guy. Think about it. He worked in a carpenter's shop all His life. Jesus was strong—muscular. I mean, you don't work in a carpenter's shop using hand tools everyday of your life and not develop some muscles.

And when He put that whip together and began swinging, people saw His muscles and they ran as fast as their feet could carry them. Notice the verb: Jesus DROVE them out with FORCE.

If you and I were there and heard Him speak and saw Him swinging that whip, WE would've run, too! Wow! What a scene!

The cleansing of the temple at this point in Jesus' ministry is a problem for some people. I say this because John has it at the BEGINNING, while the other gospel writers have it at the END, just before He was arrested.

I believe the answer is that there were TWO cleansings of the temple in Jesus' ministry. I mean, preachers often have to deal with the same subject from the pulpit more than once because people forget and all of us tend to drift back into sin.

Like Proverbs 26:11 says (and Peter repeats it in 2 Peter 2:22) Like a dog returns to its vomit, we return to the same sinful thoughts and actions. So, we NEED to hear the same sermons over and over.

I'm sure it wasn't long after Jesus cleansed the temple the first time that the money exchangers set their tables back up and everything went back to the way it had been. That meant it would need cleansing again at the end of Jesus' earthly ministry.

With all this in mind I want us to spend just a few minutes to try to better understand Jesus' anger. I mean, after all we are supposed to follow His example, aren't we? Be like Him? So, what does His righteous indignation in the temple that day tell us? What message does it communicate? What's the example we must follow?

1. First, understand – and yes, we better hear it loud and clear – Jesus gets mad, angry, enraged at those who prevent others from worshipping God.

Remember, Passover was a special time of worship—a time to remember the miraculous way God delivered His people from Egyptian bondage.

But the Jews of that day had changed this sacred time and place of worship into a noisy marketplace where crooked money changers took people's money from them. And it was all done "in the name of the Lord."

It was IMPOSSIBLE to worship God under those conditions. There was no reverence, no awe at Who God is and what He had done. This was especially true for Gentiles. They could only go to that their courtyard to worship and pray.

But it had been overtaken by the money changers. What they saw would've driven a Gentile FROM, not TO, the worship of the one TRUE GOD. This is why Jesus angrily said in Mark 11:17:

Mark 11:17 "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"

Later in John 4 Jesus tells a Samaritan woman that His Father has a deep, burning desire for people to worship Him. And it thrills God's heart when WE have that same burning desire to worship Him.

Jesus was upset because people longing to reach out to God couldn't. And it was God's own people who were stopping them.

You see, more than anything, God wants us to know Him—to fellowship with Him—and anything that gets in the way of that makes Him angry.

But Jesus' anger tells us something else.

2. It tells us that Jesus was fulfilling prophecy.

By doing this, Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah the world had been waiting for. You see, 400 years earlier the prophet Malachi had said this:

Malachi 3:1 Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts.

2 "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire And like launderers' soap.

3 He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver

The religious leaders in the temple knew this prophecy. That's why they asked Jesus:

18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"

In other words they were saying, "With your angry actions you say You're the Messiah. Well, prove it. Give us a SIGN!" Of course, what Jesus had just done WAS a sign—so He didn't owe them anything.

In fact, these leaders should've been ashamed of the corruption and greed that was going on inside the temple. They should've known that they needed purifying!

Instead of asking Jesus by what authority He had cleansed the Temple, they should've confessed their sin and thanked Him for what He did. But they didn't – because they were making too much money with it all.

Well, Jesus knew what was in their hearts. He knew they weren't looking for the Messiah. So He answered them with sort of a riddle.

This is a great truth to remember (and practice): Jesus didn't waste His words on people who didn't want to hear. So, (and I think He pointed to His chest as He said this) He said,

19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

Of course the Jews didn't understand Him because they didn't WANT to. All they could think about was their precious temple—and all the money they were making.

They remembered all the effort that had gone into building the temple. They thought of the huge stones and columns and they laughed at Jesus' claim.

20 Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"

21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

And 3 days after His crucifixion, Jesus did exactly what He said He would do.

In any case, Jesus' angry actions were the fulfillment of prophecy. It was His way of saying, "I am the Christ, the Messiah. You won't need these animal sacrifices anymore because I am the Lamb of God come to take away the sin of the world."

But they didn't listen to Him. They hardened their hearts and rejected Jesus. How sad. How tragic. God's very own people who had the responsibility, the privilege to bring others to God, instead kept people away.

It's easy for us to look at them and shake our heads, but we need to make sure WE'RE not guilty of the same horrible sin.

Do we push people away from God by how we act and what we say – on the job, in our home?
Do we obstruct the way of others to worship by gossiping or griping about what needs to be done?

Jesus got mad, angry, ENRAGED at His own people for doing that. What makes us any different? If we're truly following Jesus, we'll be enraged at ourselves also.

Maybe it's time for us to stop being so selfish, so petty, so hard-hearted. Maybe it's time for us to clean house – clean our hearts – before Jesus steps in and does it for us.

1 John 1:9 says, that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to CLEANSE us from all unrighteousness." Why not confess right now as we pray.