

## **JESUS: THE CLEANSING & JEALOUS GOD** **(John 2:13-17)**

I once heard about two jersey cows that were out grazing in the field. They looked up in time to see a milk truck go down the road just beyond the fence. On the side of the dairy truck were painted the words, “Pasteurized, Homogenized, Standardized, Vitamin A added.”

One cow looked at the other and sighed, “Makes you feel sort of inadequate, doesn’t it?”

Do your life experiences ever make you feel inadequate?

- You may feel **financially inadequate** if you lack the money to go where others go, do what others do, and have what others have.
- You may feel **athletically inadequate** if you can’t run as fast, jump as high, and throw as far as others do.
- You may feel **academically inadequate** if you fail to make the grades or get the scholarships that others get.
- You may feel **socially inadequate** if you lack the confidence to initiate and carry on conversations with ease, as some are able to do.

The truth is that all of us feel inadequate in some area of life. Some of us may do better a job of hiding those feelings of inadequacy, but we all have them. There is nothing sinful about that. Paul himself took comfort in the truth that God’s grace was sufficient for him and that God’s power was made perfect in weakness. It is the very inadequacies of our lives that provide room for God to work in and through our lives for our good and for His glory.

The danger that we face is that we might allow our feelings of inadequacy to degenerate into feelings of jealousy and envy. It is not a sin to feel inadequate, but it is a sin to be jealous of the person who has more money, who gets the headlines or applause, who drives the newer vehicle, who lives in the bigger house, or who has a higher social standing.

Jealousy is a dangerous thing, and when it is seen for what it is, jealousy is never pretty. That is why we get extremely uncomfortable when we read verses in the Bible in which God describes Himself as a jealous God. In the second of the Ten Commandments God gives justification for prohibiting us from making idols by declaring, “For I, YHWH, your God, am a jealous God.” As God speaks with Moses after giving the Ten Commandments, He cautions His servant, “Do not worship any other god, for YHWH, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God” (Exodus 34:14).

Is God’s jealousy like our jealousy? Does God feel threatened? Is He petty? We are going to learn in today’s message that when correctly understood, God’s jealousy is something that should evoke our praise and thanksgiving of Him. How then are we to understand the jealousy of God as a positive attribute and not a negative one?

It is helpful to understand that God is never jealous because of any perceived

inadequacy on His part. Rather, God is jealous when we rely on something or someone that He knows is inadequate to provide for us. It is not so much that God is jealous of those who are His would-be rivals. Instead, He is jealous for us. He is jealous that we have what is best for us, and He knows that only He can provide that which we need. His jealousy is an outgrowth of His love.

The Hebrew word for *jealousy* teaches us that God desires an exclusive relationship with His people. The Greek word for *jealousy* throws even greater light on the nature of God's jealousy. That word is *zalos*. That is also where we get the word *zeal*. That means *zalos* has both a negative and a positive translation. Negatively, it is translated as *jealous*. Positively, it is rendered as *zeal*. The verb form of that word means *to have a warmth of feeling* or *to have affection for*. God is jealous for us because He zealously loves us.

We are going to look at one instance that word is used in the NT, and it shows up early in the ministry of Jesus. Last Sunday we began a new series of messages. We will be preaching one message from each chapter in the Gospel of John. There are 21 chapters in John; so, this series will consist of 21 sermons. Last week we were in John 1. Today, we will be in John 2. We will discover that our God is a jealous God. More than that, we will learn that His jealousy is a cause for praise and thanksgiving. Look with me at John 2:13-17.

One of my favorite authors is a man named Ken Gire, and one of my favorite books is his volume *Moments with the Savior*. He uses words the way an artist brushes paint upon a canvas. He uses word pictures so that we can see that about which he writes. I am unable to show you this scene in John 2 better than Gire has already done so. For that reason, let me use his words to recreate this story:

Jesus' nostrils flare. His jaws clench. Draped across a table is a handful of tethers. He snatches them up and ties them together. His face flushes. The veins in his neck protrude. His heart is a pounding fist. He pulls the knot tight.

When he cracks the whip a circle of men recoil, confusion mapped in every wrinkle and contour of their faces. Jesus kicks over a table, sending two of them tumbling backward, their money skipping along the marble floor. He pulls down a makeshift fence, and another smack of his whip sends a dozen lambs bleating for cover. He goes down the row, picking up the ends of tables and heaving them over.

He whirls his whip overhead, then strikes with a crack of leather. Men scatter like leaves before this whirlwind of man as the wrath of heaven funnels down to earth, upending everything in its path.

Jesus storms through a tenement slum of birdcages with a hail of words for the man guarding them. "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!

. . . The bite of leather on the backs of merchants brings yelps of protest. But nobody stops him, nobody stands in his way.

Table by table, the religious flea market is overturned. People are slipping on fresh manure and sent sprawling, stumbling into each other and over animals. The

wings of doves are flapping against the bars of their wicker prisons. The eyes of lambs are darting nervously for an opening in the stampede. The hooves of oxen are chattering over marble tiles in a frantic race for freedom.

Meanwhile, the more religious are standing back, cursing like Canaanites. And for good reason. Religion had become big business. The priests lived well. And they grew to love living well . . .

And maybe, in the end, that was their undoing.

For at some point the good life became more important than a good heart.

Which is why reaching into the pockets of the people became more important than reaching out to the world. Which is how prayer got pushed out of the courtyard. Which is why Jesus got so angry.

That Passover when Jesus came to the temple, he came to clean house. From the slender candle of his life flamed a zeal so intense it exposed the yeasty greed that was doughing up every corner of the courtyard.

His whip was merely the washrag that removed it.

Today zeal for his Father's house consumed him. One day it would kill him. Today the religious cursed him. One day they would crucify him. All because he lit a candle. And because of where he dared to shine it.

This event in the life of Jesus is known as the cleansing of the temple. A careful reading of the NT reveals that Jesus did this on two different occasions—the first was here at the beginning of His ministry. The second cleansing of the temple was at the end of His earthly ministry (on the Monday of Passion Week). That event is found in Matthew 21.

Some have wrongly concluded that either John was mistaken or for editorial reasons, he put the cleansing of the temple at the beginning of Jesus' ministry instead of at the end of His ministry. I say, "No. The Bible says Jesus did it twice because He did it twice—once early in His ministry and once at the conclusion of His ministry.

Why would He do it twice? Ladies, when you clean the house, does it stay clean? Once you dust the furniture, do you never need to dust again? Once you vacuum the carpet, should you sell your vacuum cleaner because you'll never need to do that again? Men, once you take out the trash, should you call the city and ask them to pick up your dumpster because you won't have any use for it anymore?

Jesus cleansed the temple, but it didn't stay cleansed. The same is true in my life and yours. As we walk through this world, we are apt to get dirty. Sometimes we fall down, and sometimes we dive headfirst like a runner trying to steal second. We can stand up and brush the dust off, but we need to be cleansed.

There is a difference between justification and cleansing. Justification is a one-time event. At the very moment we trust Jesus, we are declared righteous before God, and we never lose that standing. Our sin nature, however, stays with us, and at times we make bad choices. We succumb to temptation. When we do that, the Spirit of God will be faithful to convict us of our sin. We are to confess that sin and ask God to cleanse us, to wash us, and to restore us to a close fellowship with the Lord. Once God graciously saves

us, we never lose our relationship with God, but we can lose that close fellowship with Him that He wants us to experience.

Let's think back on the story we are told in John 2. Jesus shows up in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover Feast. Knowing what we know about how the Passover was celebrated, we can say that most of the homes in Jerusalem were about to undergo a cleansing of their own. The Passover celebration was quickly approaching, and according to Jewish law, every Jewish household was required to cleanse their house of one particular thing—yeast. When the Passover feast is observed there must be absolutely no yeast in the home.

The Passover was a means by which the Jews could remember what God had done for them in freeing them from their bondage to the Egyptians in the days of Moses. At the time of their release by Pharaoh, the Jews did not have time to use yeast in baking their bread. It would take too long for the bread to rise. Instead, they baked bread without yeast. In memory of that, during the feast of Passover the Jews were to not only bake bread without yeast, they were also to remove completely any yeast that was in the house. Each room was to be ceremonially searched and swept.

When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem the homes of the faithful Jews were soon to be cleansed, but the house of God—the Temple—was cluttered with noise, smelly animals, and greedy merchants. His Father's house needed a good cleaning, and that is exactly what Jesus gave it. Jesus provided that cleaning because He was zealous and jealous for His Father's house.

How about the house of your heart—does it need to be cleansed?

God's word clearly teaches that God does not dwell in a house built by human hands. God is not jealous for a physical building; He is jealous for His people. Throughout Scripture the words *house* and *building* are often used to describe God's people. In Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus he refers to the church as a building in which Jesus is the chief cornerstone (2:19-22). We read in 1 Corinthians 6:19, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" You are the temple of God; He is in you, and He deserves a clean house. Because Jesus is jealous for His Father's house, He wants to do His work of cleansing.

With the time remaining, I want us to consider, "Jesus: The Cleansing and Jealous God."

### **Jesus Cleanses Because He Is Jealous for the Purity of His People**

God wants you to be clean. David asked in Psalm 24:3, "Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in His holy place?" He answered his question in the next verse, "He who has clean hands and a pure heart." When David sinned, he knew that He needed to be cleansed by YHWH. He prayed in Psalm 51:2, "Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." He went on to pray, "Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow" (v.7).

Consider what Paul wrote of Jesus in Ephesians 5:25-27. "Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water

through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” The first four words of that statement tell us Christ’s motivation for cleansing us—*Christ loves the church*. It is His jealous affection for the church that impels Christ to bring about our purity.

In his little book *Secrets of the Vine*, Bruce Wilkinson deals with John 15:2 which reads, “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away.” Some versions render that phrase “takes away” as “He cuts off.” Wilkinson claims that is an inaccurate translation. He said the same Greek word is rendered as “take up” or “lift up” in other places in the Bible.

He told the story as to how he came to learn what the verse means. One day he had a conversation with a man who owned a large vineyard in northern California. The vineyard owner explained, “New branches have a natural tendency to trail down and grow along the ground. But they don’t bear fruit down there. When branches grow along the ground, the leaves get coated with dust. When it rains, they get muddy and mildewed. The branch becomes sick and useless.”

Wilkinson asked, “What do you do? Cut it off and throw it away?” “Oh, no!” the man answered. “The branch is much too valuable for that. We go through the vineyard with a bucket of water looking for those branches. We lift them up and wash them off. Then we wrap them around the trellis or tie them up. Pretty soon they’re thriving.”

God wants us, as believers, to be fruitful, but neither you nor I can be fruitful if our lives are dirtied by sin. Have you allowed the dirt of sin to rob you of fruitfulness? By His Spirit, God wants to come along, pick you up and clean you up. Will you let Him? Jesus is jealous for the purity of His people.

### **Jesus Cleanses Because He Is Jealous for the Protection of His People**

The people who came to the temple during Passover week were being harmed by unscrupulous men. Jewish males were required by law to pay a temple tax of one-half shekel every year. The tax, however, could not be paid with Roman coins or any other coinage of neighboring lands. It had to be paid with a special temple coin. As a matter of convenience, it just so happened that a person who was visiting in Jerusalem could exchange his currency for the proper temple coins at the temple. The exchange rate was based on the character of the moneychanger. If he had poor character, he would charge an exorbitant price to exchange the money. The money-changers were making quite a profit.

In addition to paying a temple tax, the Jews were also required to bring an animal sacrifice to the temple. The sacrifice was for their sin and the sin of their family members. If they had the means to do so, they were to bring a lamb. If they were poor, they could bring a dove or a pigeon. The animal to be sacrificed, however, had to be without blemish. A person could bring his own animal, but it was common knowledge that the priests who inspected the animals would find something wrong with the animal if you brought your own. The temple authorities, however, would sell you an animal or a bird that was suitable to be sacrificed. Of course, price-gouging was the order of the day.

If you have ever bought popcorn and pop at a movie theater or a hot dog at

professional sport's stadium or arena, you know about price-gouging.

Jewish historian Alfred Eidershem, in his book *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* wrote that doves which were worth a nickel would be sold for \$4. The religious authorities were more interested in reaching into the pockets of the people than reaching out to the peoples of the world.

Ken Gire wrote, "A wave of nausea washes over Jesus as He takes this all in, but it is not the stench of animals that sickens Him. It is the stench of religion gone bad."

Jesus saw what was going on, and He wasn't going to stand for it; so, He stood up against it. He expelled the crooks from the temple confines.

Max Lucado wrote that when religion is used for profit two things happen. First, people are exploited, and second, God is infuriated.

The place in the temple that was being used as a livestock auction was the Court of the Gentiles. It was the place that was to be set aside for the non-Jewish world to connect with the God who made them and loved them.

Lucado also wrote, "Want to anger God? Get in the way of people who want to see Him. Want to feel His fury? Exploit people in the name of God. Mark it down. Religious hucksters poke the fire of divine wrath."

May we never do anything to get in the way of people who are trying to find God! May we never care more about money than we do about souls!

It is said that when Mohandas Gandhi was a student, he was very interested in the Christian faith. He had been deeply touched by reading the gospels. He decided to go to church one Sunday and possibly talk to the minister about the way of salvation. When he entered the church, however, he was met by an usher who refused to seat him. He was told that he should go and worship with his own people. Gandhi left and never came back. He thought to himself, "If Christians have caste differences also, I might as well remain a Hindu."

We can either ask God to cleanse us of any vestiges of prejudice or wrongful attitudes and actions that will present an obstacle in the way of those who are trying to make their way to Him, or we can let Him judge us. God is jealous for His people. He does not want them to be abused by those who pretend to know Him.

### **Jesus Cleanses Because He Is Jealous for the Prayers of His People**

God wants His house to be a house of prayer. When Jesus cleansed the temple the second time He voiced His complaint, "My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers" (Matthew 21:13). The Court of the Gentiles was supposed to be a place of meditation and prayer, but it became nothing more than a flea market. Jesus was not happy.

What about our church? Is it a house of prayer? We do many good things at this church building. We study the Bible in Sunday School classes. We have fellowships and committee meetings and worship services that open and close with prayer, but is this place a house of prayer?

Church, however, is much more than a building. This building could burn down or

blow away, and Liberty Southern would still be alive and well. So, let me ask you, is your heart a house of prayer? Some hearts are so full of stuff and so busy with things that there is no room and there is no time for prayer. Is that true of you? Is your home a house of prayer?

In his book *Moments with the Savior*, Ken Gire ended one chapter with this prayer: “Come, Lord Jesus. Come to the temple of my heart. Overturn the tables. Drive out the moneychangers. And do what you have to do to make it a place of prayer . . .”

I am convinced that Jesus would be willing to answer such a prayer if we were willing to pray such a prayer. Would you dare to pray such a prayer? Would you do it now? Lord, make my church, make my heart, and make my home a house of prayer. Jesus would zealously answer that prayer because He is jealous for your attention, your love, and your well-being.