

“A ‘Righteous’ Anger?”—John 2:13-17

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “A ‘Righteous’ Anger?”, is John 2:13-17 → *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, “Zeal for Your house will consume me.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Have you ever been in a conversation where you were so zealous about something you expressed your zeal in anger? Your teenage son or daughter keeps making choices which are detrimental and, in your love with a desire to protect him or her, you express your anger about such choices. You see your spouse making choices which are harmful to your relationship—be it an affair, over-indulging in alcohol or drugs, sexual immorality or intentionally taking part in activities to keep you apart—and you express your disapproval and hurt with anger. You

engage a fellow brother or sister in Christ who is making choices which place their salvation in jeopardy and, in your desire to be faithful to Christ and your love for this brother, you actually express your anger with their choices.

Such expressions of anger have been referred to by some as “righteous anger.” “Righteous anger” can be understood to be an expression of anger over a prevailing wrong with the intention of influencing a change to right behavior. It is considered by the individual to be based upon some standard which determines what is right or wrong and is even seen as a proper justification to “get mad.”

Could it be this is the situation with Jesus in our text as He encountered *those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting . . . in the temple of Yahweh?* (Verse 14) Interestingly all four Gospel accounts do not specifically say that Jesus was angry. (cf. Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46; John 2:13-17) It is usually inferred from His actions recorded in verse 15 of our text: *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.* Such actions would naturally be interpreted by those who witness them to convey anger. For some it becomes a conundrum to hear that their sinless Savior would display an emotion which is usually considered sin—anger. So, what is actually going on

here?

Old Testament law required Jewish males to appear before Yahweh *three times a year . . . at the place* Yahweh would *choose*—in Jesus' day considered the temple in Jerusalem. It also said, *They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.* (cf. Deuteronomy 16:16-17) Thus, for major religious festivals, Jerusalem was filled with pilgrims who needed the proper sacrifices and proper currency to present to the LORD in connection with their celebration of the Passover.

However, since many of these Jews were dispersed into other countries a considerable distance from Jerusalem it became difficult and even risky to transport their sacrifices and offerings to the festival. These pilgrims actually found it convenient to purchase them once they arrived in Jerusalem and . . . where there's a demand, there's always someone there to provide a supply . . . for a price, that is. Thus, King Herod and Judaism at that time allowed for providing this service for these pilgrims by selling the proper animals for their sacrifices and exchanging their money according to the "sanctuary half-shekel" for their offering and annual "temple tax."

According to verse 17 of our text, Jesus' disciples recalled Psalm 69:9 as they watched what took place. There it says: *Zeal for Your house will consume me.* While verse 16 of our text says that Jesus' *zeal for Yahweh's house* (i.e. the temple) is expressed by His disapproval of

making His *Father's house a house of trade*, His zeal involved much more. Mark's account gives us more information about Jesus' concern in Mark 11:17 → *And He was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."* This selling and exchanging was taking place in the court of the Gentiles, the place in Herod's temple where Gentiles who believed in Yahweh were allowed to gather for prayer to Him. Their activity was hindering the worship of *all the nations* and Jesus came to save every person of every nation! No wonder He was so zealous for His *Father's house*. He wants all peoples to dwell in His Father's presence . . . **forever!**

As with all of Jesus' actions, His action of coming to the temple was a fulfillment of the prophecy in the written Scriptures of the Old Testament. Here Malachi 3:1-4 finds it's fulfillment: *The Lord Whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple to purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.* Jesus "cleanses the temple" in a desire for God's house of worship to be open for all people to *worship Him . . . in spirit and truth.* (cf. John 4:23-24) Only by faith in Jesus, Who is *the way, and **the truth**, and the life*, is your worship acceptable and sanctified before the LORD!

God wants you to be zealous for following His ways as you stand up for the proper teaching and living of His Word. You may even feel you are displaying a “righteous anger” in the midst of it all. Remember: The Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day killed Him thinking they were functioning with a “righteous anger.” Yet, it was filled with sin and rejection of God’s will for their lives. The apostle Paul realized this after his own conversion. He was *convinced that he ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. He punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them he persecuted them even to foreign cities.* (cf. Acts 26:9,11) All because, he says, he was *zealous for God.* (cf. Acts 22:3) In his new life in Christ he discovered how sinful his “righteous anger” really had been.

According to Scripture, anger is not necessarily sin. Ephesians 4:26-27 tells you: *Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.* The question is: **How can sinful human beings get angry without sinning?** When zealous for a “just cause” it does not take long for personal emotions to surface where the devil gets a foothold. Before you know it, you may function out of contempt for others, using abrasive, even abusive words and behaviors, allowing the sun to go down while you harbor resentment for others in your heart on your bed. Psalms 4:4 says: *Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.* If you’re

honest with yourself, your “pondering” will bring you to the realization that your “righteous anger” was tainted and filled with sin.

So . . . how can sinful human beings get angry without sinning? It falls under Jesus’ statement: *With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.* (cf. Matthew 19:26) Jesus was the sinless Son of God. Thus, He can be righteously angry without sin in His zeal for your soul and the souls of all people. You, however, cannot. Thus, in order for you to continue being zealous for Christ and God’s Word, God has to make it possible in the Person & Work of His sinless Son. You come to Him, confessing your sins of “unrighteousness” in your relationships, conversations and vocations of life. By faith you cling to His absolution declaring you forgiven of your sins. Empowered by the Holy Spirit you continue to persevere in obedience to Him, being zealous for His Word and Will in Christ to be accomplished in your daily life!

Rather than defending your position with “righteous anger,” you will humbly express a confidence in the righteousness of Christ in the situation. You recognize your complete need for Jesus, His forgiveness and His righteousness in your daily life and interactions with others. As you stand up for God’s Word, keeping His purposes in Christ for all people in mind, strive to follow the command of God as written in James 1:19-20 → *Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not*

produce the righteousness of God. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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