

Let Nothing Hinder Your Passion for God's Word.

13 When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. 15 So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" 17 His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

18 The Jews then responded to him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"

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

20 They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" 21 But the temple he had spoken of was his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. (NIV 2011)

You just had a bad day. You are exhausted. All you want to do is go home, change into some comfortable clothing, have some peace and quiet and go to bed early. But the moment you walk through the door, you find your kids arguing. Then the toilet backs up. Your Aunt Mabel calls up and complains about something. The dog throws up on the carpet. The neighbor decides it is time to take an air hammer and work on the dents on his car. A telemarketer calls asking for money. And the kids are still arguing. There is no peace, and there certainly is no quiet.

Now you know how Jesus felt when he went to the temple in our text. He went there for one purpose: to find peace and quiet in the Lord. Instead he got commotion, smelly animals, greed, arguing, no peace, no quiet. So he did something about it. Friends, what should you get out of church and the worship service? Like Jesus, let's make sure nothing gets between us and the peace of God's Word.

It is time for the Passover. This is the highlight of the Jewish calendar. It is like Christmas and Easter combined. You were expected to travel to the temple to celebrate the Passover even if you lived hundreds of miles away. Often you traveled in groups as pilgrims. As you walked there, you would sing Psalms, in particular, Psalms 120-134. Imagine that, a group of twenty or fifty or a hundred walking to church singing these psalms. Did you sing hymns on your way to church today?

Jesus was excited to celebrate Passover. In fact, he needed to celebrate it. Yes, Jesus is true God. If you regard him as anything less than that, then you commit idolatry. But don't forget, Jesus is also true man, and he needs time with God and his Word. As God, Jesus doesn't need the Bible. As true man he craved God's Word. You may recall how at age twelve so he sat in the temple and learned more of God's Word. He never missed a weekly worship service. Jesus needed to go to Jerusalem for the Passover. He needed, as true man, to sing those psalms with other believers on the way to church. As true man, he needed to hear again how God saved his people from the Egyptians.

And what did he find in Jerusalem? ***"In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money."*** Please understand. It was necessary for merchants to sell animals and exchange currency. Remember, people traveled from all over the world for the Passover. Try carrying a lamb for a thousand miles! Buy it in Jerusalem instead. Each male paid a half shekel temple tax at the Passover. You couldn't bring a Roman or Greek coin into the temple. It would desecrate it. So you needed to exchange it for proper coins. Besides, you needed to exchange your foreign currency to buy the animals. Some commentators estimate that the Passover was a 170 million dollar industry. It was needed to have the Passover.

But there was something wrong here, in fact sinful. It distracted from church and what the Passover was all about. That room most of you entered this morning between the outside doors and the church section is called the Narthex. The temple courts were like one big narthex, but it was more of an overflow for worship than a place to hang your coats. Many Gentiles became believers and they wanted to worship at the temple. Because they didn't go all the way and become Jews and lived under all the Old Testament laws, they had to worship in the temple courts and not the temple itself. How easy do you think it was to listen to the priest and watch the sacrifice when this courtyard was used as a marketplace? Imagine hundreds of animals making animal noises and many people arguing over the exchange rate of a Roman coin. Imagine if we showed ESPN on our screen during church? Who could pay attention? They were wrong in conducting this business inside church where people were trying to listen.

So what did Jesus do? He took some rope, made a whip out of it and drove all those animals and people out of the temple courts. He overturned the moneychanger tables. Can you hear hundreds and thousands of coins falling on the floor? ***"Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!"***

Friends, all of Scripture is God-breathed and useful for training, rebuking and correcting, and this text is no exception. There are a couple lessons we would do well to learn here. No, this doesn't mean it is a sin to advertise things in our narthex or even sell things. So go ahead and sign up for the Porky's supper on March 20th. But the first lesson we learn is how much we need to hear God's Word. If anyone thinks they need the Word less than Jesus is saying they are better than Jesus. If anyone thinks they don't need to pray as much as Jesus are saying they are better than Jesus. Jesus needed God's Word. In his temptations in the wilderness he fought the devil by quoting God's word. If the devil tempts you to say something bad about

another person, what part of God's Word can you quote against the devil? If a passage doesn't come to mind, maybe we need to spend more time with God's Word.

And has church become anything but a place to come and hear God's Word? If someone comes only on Christmas just to hear the kids sing, what has church become? What if a church spends three hours discussing the color to paint the women's restroom, and not a word on how to reach the unchurched?

So Jesus drove the animals and moneylenders out of church. Yes, it shows how much he loved God's house. But more than that. Now people can pay attention and get the most out of the worship. Like a tired worker who can't wait to get home and find some rest and quiet, we come here at Jesus' invitation. Come, he says, and find rest for our souls. And that rest is the forgiveness of our sins. King David tried to hide his sins. Yet, he was tormented. He confessed in his psalms he couldn't sleep at night. He lost weight, became stressed. Then God brought his sins to the surface through the prophet Nathan. And what did Nathan first say to David? "Your sins are forgiven. You will not die." Friends, like Jesus we face the devil's temptations all week. Unlike Jesus, we often have failed and stumbled and succumbed to do what the devil wants and not what your Father wants. We need to come here, humble, sheepish, stressed out, heavy laden. We need to come and confess our sins and hear the Lord promise, "Your sins are forgiven. You will not die."

And we will not die. One day we will breath a last breath here on earth, but only to breath again in eternal life. At church we are to hear how we will live eternally with the Lord. The folks at the temple were a bit upset at what Jesus just did. ***"The Jews then responded to him, 'What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.' They replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?' But the temple he had spoken of was his body.*** They destroyed Jesus on the cross. He died. But three days later he rebuilt that temple. He rose from the dead. With sins paid for, and with the power of death broken, we know that we, too, will rise.

But the cares of the world weigh us down. We get distracted by other things. We need the Lord to refocus us with his Word. Jesus spent hours meditating on God's Word and praying. We need that, too. We need to come and hear what Jesus told Jairus who grieved for his dead daughter, "She is not dead, but asleep." We need to hear Jesus tell us nothing will separate us from his love. We need to raise our voices in song and praise of God. We need each other's company and encouragement.

The narthex is that room between the outside and church. The narthex has been a very important part of church architecture. It is fine to use it to advertise, store things, have mailboxes, even to visit. But the original intent of the narthex is a transition from the outside world to God's house. You hang your coats up in the narthex, but we are to hang up anything from the outside that may distract us from God and his Word. Stop thinking about the bills, the news, sports, car repairs, everything so they do not distract us. I know. We don't have coat racks out there due to COVID. Carry your coats in, but leave everything else out there so you can get the most out of worship and God's Word. And if you are at home watching, don't let anything distract you. Maybe put that coffee cup down. Turn off the phone. If it helps, maybe change into church clothes, anything.

Does your house need dusting? Cleaning? Is there a mess or two that needs to be straightened out? Jesus cleansed the temple. We could use regular cleaning. Remember how the Bible calls each believer a temple of God. Friends, this temple, our bodies, can become cluttered and messy. What needs to be swept out of your life? What keeps you from listening to the Word? What sins or guilt lurk within you? Come to the Lord. Listen to his Word.

Maybe a piece of God's Word doesn't hit you today. But one day it will. The disciples were confused in our text. ***"After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken."*** Store up God's Word so it is there when you need it.

Does this mean we should arm our ushers with whips so that the next time someone's cell phone goes off, they drive them out of church? No. Rather, have the same zeal Jesus had for his Father's house. Drive out any and all distractions. Listen again to your God who so loved you that he gave up his son for you. Jesus needed to hear that. So do we. Amen.