

Mayhem of the Message

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You plead my cause, you right my wrongs. What a statement declaring that whatever is happening in our lives, whatever is a struggle in our lives, whatever is a malfunction in our life, that God is able to address. Today we're going to be challenged by the word of God, that whatever our wrong is, he can right. Whatever our cause is, he can plead.

Would you pray with me as we prepared to be challenged by the word of God.

Lord, today as we prepare to open your word, when we make this statement that you are able to right our wrongs, Lord, we confess that the list oftentimes is longer than we care to admit, the actions, the words, the thoughts but, Lord, today we believe that whatever those wrongs are, you can right them. Lord, whatever the problems are you can solve them. Lord, whatever the sin is you can forgive them. So I pray that as we come and we read and we study your word it wouldn't just be a story of two millennia ago but it would be our story today. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the Gospel of John 2. As you are turning to John 2, today we pick it up in verse 13. We have one of those stories in Scripture that as you are reading through the Gospel accounts, it kind of just takes you back. You hear all these stories, you read all these stories about the healing of Jesus, the teaching of Jesus, the love, the grace, the mercy of Jesus and then all of a sudden here in John 2 beginning in verse 13, we have this temple experience.

You know, some years ago there was somewhat of a marketing fad in American Christianity. They were bracelets that were made, T-shirts that were manufactured, there were bumper stickers put on cars with this little acronym: WWJD, what would Jesus do? When we hear that phrase, we think about loving the unlovable, caring for the down and out, providing for those who are unfortunate. As it has been joked about when we say what would Jesus do, we read this story today and we need to realize that breaking out whips and turning over tables is technically a possibility because that's what happens in John 2. Jesus comes into what we know as the temple area on one of the greatest feasts of Jewish tradition known as Passover and what we see is what the Bible calls righteous indignation. What we see is Jesus expressing his frustration and, yes, even his anger with what is taking place on the temple mount.

Today as we turn to John 2, we're going to answer this question: why did Jesus get so angry? Why is he so upset about what is happening? We pick up the story in verse 13, it says,

13 And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, 14 And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: 15 And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; 16 And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. 17 And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up. 18 Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign do you show unto us, seeing that you do these things? 19 Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. 20 Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and you will rear it up in three days? 21 But he spoke of the temple of his body. 22 When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had told them. 23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. 24 But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, 25 And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.

Here is this story of the frustration, the righteous indignation of Jesus Christ. In fact, later in Ephesians 4, the Bible teaches us, "be angry and sin not." This is the case or the biblical example for an illustration. Jesus is at the temple. He's at this time known as Passover when Jewish people from all over the world would have been gathered. Some would have traveled in excess of hundreds of miles. This was the one celebration, this was the one time when everybody wanted to be in Jerusalem. In fact, if you've ever been to a traditional Jewish celebration of a Passover meal whether in somebody's home or in a community center or maybe even in a synagogue setting, when they close that Passover celebration, the last statement is, "Next year in Jerusalem." It is the goal, it is the desire of every Jewish person when they celebrate when God delivered them out of the Egyptian slavery, that they want to celebrate in Jerusalem.

So you would have had a large crowd of people, you would have had a mass of humanity and here is Jesus at the beginning of what we know as earthly ministry, he comes into that temple which should have been a day of celebration, this should have been a day of worship and all of a sudden we have this melee take place. Why was Jesus so angry? Well, I think the first thing we have to deal with is what is the infraction? What was happening in the temple that would cause such a response? What was the crime? What was happening that Jesus would do as he responded here in John 2? I think what we see is manipulation. Manipulation by definition is taking something and altering it for an ulterior, selfish, self-gratifying purpose. Some of the greatest illustrations that we have of

manipulation is when we put a puppet on a string, that we want something or somebody to be what we want them to be and so rather than allowing the scenario to dictate our behavior, we force what we want on the scenario and that was what was happening in the temple. These religious elites, these masters of the temple, had gathered around and turned the temple into something it was never meant to be.

This was a place of worship. This was a place that King David dreamed to have. This was a place that Solomon exhausted the coffers of gold and silver and merchandise in order to pay for. This was the place where all the Jewish people gathered together. This was the place worship took place. This was the place a connection with God was established. This was a place of relationship. This was the place that when Solomon dedicated the building in 1 Kings 8, the Spirit of God was so thick the smoke filled the room and they had to depart the premises. Rather than the Spirit of God dwell in this place, we see that we have manipulation dwelling. We have people after their own gain. We have people who are desiring their own success.

In fact, the illustration I'm about to use is very crass in nature but it's the best picture that we can give. What you see happening in the temple is that the religious elites were prostituting the temple. They were selling it for their own personal gain and satisfaction. They were using and abusing and selling that which should have been holy and righteous and making it very unholy and unrighteous. And how were they doing it? Through mammon. Now, mammon is one of those biblical words that oftentimes we don't hear a whole lot nowadays but mammon is more than money. Mammon is the things of this earth. Mammon is the things of the here and now, the earthly, the temporal. What were they doing? They were selling the doves, they were changing the money, but it wasn't just about money and it wasn't just about the doves because what we need to understand is this was Passover and some of these people had traveled hundreds of miles and bringing a perfect Passover lamb would have been a physical impossibility, bringing the necessary items for a sacrifice would have been difficult at best, and just like often many things in life, that which started out as good and godly turns very sour quickly and what they did is they took that which was to provide a sacrifice for somebody and they made personal gain. What they did is they took the art of convenience and they did what the Bible calls filthy lucre.

The best way that I can give an illustration humorously in our context is if you've ever gone to a professional sporting event and gone to the concession stand. It costs for one hot dog at a concession stand what you can buy a whole pack for the grocery store. In fact, when you go to the concession stand and you're like me and you're at a ballgame and you've got three boys, you're like, "Boys, we're all sharing today because I can't buy four of them." Because you've seen the prices, they are extreme and every time, you have done this and so have I, you go to the concession stand at a ballgame and what do you do when you walk away? 1. You're broke. 2. You're mad. "How could they do this to me? I've already spent so much money getting here and now..." That's what was happening in Jerusalem. They had taken off time from work, they had spent their money to get there and now people were taking advantage of them. Do you want to know why Jesus was so

upset? It's because they had taken that which was meant to be a place of worship, a place of holiness, and they had taken advantage of other people.

You know, it's hard for us to understand what this looked like. After all, it was 2,000 years ago in a setting that many of us have never had access to view but this year we actually celebrate the 500th anniversary of a very similar event. In October of 1517, there was a man by the name of Martin Luther who helped establish what many of us call historically the Reformation. It was a call to the church to get back to what the church is to be about; that the church isn't supposed to be about the exterior, that it's not supposed to be about the finances and the glitz and glamour, it's about a relationship with God. As you study the life and the history of one known as Martin Luther, there is a trip that he takes to Rome. He goes into the big city and he goes into the biggest of the churches and he discovers that relationship was nowhere to be found. He discovers that worship was nowhere to be found. In fact, what he discovers is those that were in power were manipulating and taking advantage of those who may have come with a sincere heart but were being taken advantage of. I want to show you a brief clip today of a movie rendition of this scene in Martin Luther's life and I think it will help us to understand the magnitude of the manipulation.

[inaudible]

Two thousand years ago a group of people gathered in Jerusalem with what we can assume are pure hearts and the intent of worship, what happened? People took advantage of them, took them for financial gain. Five hundred years ago we saw the same story in Europe as we saw those who put a price on a relationship with God and dictated what could, should and ought to be done in order for that to occur.

I know what some of you are thinking, "Well, aren't we grateful that that doesn't happen today." I've got bad news for you. You see, John 2 does not happen in an historical vacuum, in fact, it's not just 500 years ago, it still takes place today. There are still times even in what we know as the 21st century where we find ourselves guilty of the same infraction, manipulating the things of God, taking advantage of mammon rather than ministering unto men. In fact, I'm going to share with you some of the ways that I have observed this occur over the last 2+ decades of ministry. I want you to know that I do not have any one single person singled out in these illustrations and if you find yourself somewhat connected or remotely involved in some of the professions that I'm going to allude to, understand because we all want to go to lunch today, I'm not going to give 100 examples, I'm only going to give a couple. But I think we've all seen what I'm about to describe take place.

There is the individual who at some level for their business needs a client base. Sometimes it's for a service, sometimes it's for a good, sometimes it's for a product, and they are active and involved in a local church and so they have exhausted that client base. Then all of a sudden they get upset with the preacher, angry with somebody and they move on to a different church and what they do is they go from church to church to church, not so that they can increase or value the relationship with God but so that they

can go to a new field of clients. Oh, it probably started off sincerely, "I just want to help people," but over the process of time church doesn't become about worshiping God, it becomes how can I expand my pocket.

Then there is another group of people if not then that I know I'll get some amen's and how about politicians? Oh, I got a few chuckles there. Y'all are the worst, politicians. You are. You say, "Why are you singling me out?" Because you are the ones who call me. Oh, every election cycle. You haven't been in church in years but all of a sudden you want to go to every church in your voting district. You call the pastor, that would be me, and here is what the conversation goes a little something like. "Pastor, as you know, I'm running for a certain office in a certain district, would it be okay if I came to church this Sunday?" Well, of course, we want anybody to come to church. You are welcome to come to church. Here's the second question, "Pastor, where do I sit?" My response is: anywhere you want. We've got lots of seats and none of them are reserved which brings up the third question, "Well, where do I need to sit so that I can be recognized from the platform?" And when I respond to them that there will be no recognition from the platform, there will be no stump speech, there will be no applause, amazingly, many of them never come to church that Sunday.

You see, whether it's for financial gain or one more vote or fill in the blank of your life, we can fall into the same trap as John 2 when the church does not become a place where we meet with God but a place to benefit our own personal gain. And that's what was happening in John 2. They were coming and so what does Jesus do? He responds very clearly. The first thing is with a pronouncement. He makes this pronouncement that, "You are making my Father's house a place of merchandise." Now, later three years later at the Passover right before his crucifixion, Jesus would say, "You have made my house a den of thieves." But he says, "This is my Father's house, this is a place that was set aside for worship, this was a place that was set aside for reverence and you have made it a place of profit, you have made it a place for recognition, you have made it a place for your own personal gain." You know, even the sports apparel industry has a very specific company that has a series of commercials that when they are in the football locker room, basketball locker room or baseball locker room, the chant of the players is, "We must protect this house." And that's exactly what Jesus was pronouncing. He said, "I must protect this house because you have made it into something it was never meant to be."

And then there is this process. Have you ever wondered why did Jesus overturn the tables? I mean, of all the responses, why would he take these guys, why would he take a scourge, why would he crack the whip, why would he take the money and toss it? I mean, when you think about it, if he was that upset, there are lots of different ways he could have responded but why such a drastic measure? I am fully and absolutely convinced that his process or his response was exactly what was dictated by Scripture. In fact, if you go back to Exodus 12, we find the Lord giving the instructions to the Israelites of how to prepare for the Passover. Look at the first statement we read in verse 13 of John 2, what is this? It's Passover. This is the time to celebrate redemption. This is the time to celebrate forgiveness. This is the time they're supposed to celebrate when God delivered them from the hands of the Egyptians.

In Exodus 12, God gives instructions of how to celebrate the Passover and there are all kinds of different ways and means and such but in verse 15 of Exodus 12 coinciding with the feast of unleavened bread, the Israelites, in fact, today even in the 21st century, Jewish families who come together and celebrate the Passover will practice this, they are to remove all of the leaven from their house. Now, this is where you and I get the idea of spring cleaning because Passover takes place in the spring and when you are removing all the leavened bread from the corner of your cabinets, you also remove the dust and the dirt, etc. And in today's context, what happens is that the lady of the home will take a piece of leavened bread and will hide it in the home and the husband of the home, the father of the home and the children of the home, make a game of it and they go into all the nooks and crannies and all the corners of the house to remove that piece of leaven. Why is it so important? Because in verse 15 of Exodus 12 it says that if there is leaven in one's home when they celebrate the Passover, they will be defiled and they will not have a proper standing before God.

Later in the Gospels, Jesus walks across the water, he feeds the 5,000 and he makes this statement to his disciples, he said, "I am warning you of the leaven of the Pharisees' teaching." Every time you come across the word "leaven" in Scripture, it is a picture of, it's an image of sin. So in Exodus 12:15 when God said get rid of all the leavened bread, what he was saying is make sure that your house is clean. Make sure there is no sin in the house. Make sure that it has all been removed. What was Jesus doing? Why did he overturn the tables? Why did he take the money and throw it across the room? He was doing Exodus 12:15, he was removing the leaven from the temple. He was removing the sin from the house of God.

What was their crime? What was the indictment? They had manipulated the things of God. They had sold out to the mammon of this world. How did Jesus respond? A very clear pronouncement in a very specific process. But then there is an investigation and when I say investigation, the people that are in the temple, the people that are observing, begin to investigate who this Jesus is and what is he up to. Notice what they do, they say, "What sign will you give us?" Now, you need to understand this is very much a statement of manipulation. Remember, the definition of manipulation is to take something and utilize it for a selfish gain or an ulterior purpose. "Show us a sign." Now, why is this significant? Because as you walk through your Old Testament, the concept of a sign is 1. supernatural and 2. it's rare. When God gives us a rainbow after Noah's flood, it's called a sign. When Gideon goes out and the fleece is dry and the ground is wet, it's called a sign. In Isaiah 7 when a woman who is yet to know a man gives birth to a child, it is called a sign. Do you know what the manipulation was? "All right, Jesus, you turned over a few tables, you threw some coins across the room, now let's see you do something really worth talking about." What were they trying to do? I'm going to tell you what they were doing: they were trying to make God into who they wanted him to be versus God forming them into who they should be. Later on in Matthew 12, the same group of people came and said, "Jesus, show us a sign," and he made this comment, "An adulterous generation seeks after a sign."

They were manipulative and I'm also convinced that their investigation was full of mammon. In fact, I remember the story in Acts 8, maybe you are familiar with it, it's in the early days of the church. There is a man by the name of Philip. He goes down into Samaria and he begins to share the Gospel and there is a man there by the name of Simon. Now Simon according to the Bible is called a sorcerer. He used the supernatural. He used what we would call today trickery and manipulation and magic to do all kinds of wonders for the people, so much so that in Acts 8 people believed he was of the gods. Here is Simon the sorcerer, here's the message of Jesus Christ and according to Acts 8, he responds positively. He is interested in the things of Jesus. He's curious about the things of Jesus and then the apostles show up and Peter and John arrive and they begin to lay hands on people and they receive the Holy Spirit, they receive a transformed life. Do you remember what Simon does? He comes to the apostles and says, "Hey, that Holy Spirit thing y'all just did, how much does it cost? What do I have to pay to have that same trick?" What did they say? "Oh, the gall of bitterness is in you. Pray to God that he would be willing to forgive you." It's the same scenario. Why is there a parallel? Because Simon heard the message and turned around real quickly and tried to buy it.

These individuals see Jesus do what he did and they heard the statement that he made and real quickly they were trying to buy it. What you see is then investigating and saying, "Jesus, would you dance for us? Would you do what we want you to do for our own personal gain?" And what is his response? Here is a very clear pronouncement, he says, "Destroy this place and I'll build it in three days." Now, think about it, this is the same building that even after Nebuchadnezzar had come through and the Babylonians and they had torn it to the ground, for 46 years they had rebuilt it, for 46 years they had labored, they had invested and they had built a place that everybody was proud of. They had built a place that on the outside was meticulous and majestic but on the inside as we see it had become corrupt and depraved.

Jesus says, "Destroy it and I will build it back in three days." They could only imagine that it would be a few years later that the Romans would come in and do exactly as he said. But this pronouncement was more than just about 46 years of a building and three days in a resurrected body, what Jesus was saying to them that we need to hear today is that a relationship with God is not dictated about the building of which you reside in. A relationship with God is not dictated by the specific geography or GPS position you find yourself in. What Jesus was saying is, "You don't have to be in this building, at this place, at this time to know God because I am here." It was a pronouncement. He was stating that just as he would say later in chapter 14, that he was the way, he was the truth and he was the life.

What is this "process" that happens? The Bible makes it very clear in 1 Corinthians 6:19 and 20, that when a person understands that they have sins, when a person realizes that they have gone against the things of God, when somebody understands that they have rebelled against the person of God and they call out to the Lord to save them, to forgive them, the Bible makes it very clear according to 1 Corinthians 6, it says you now are the temple of the Holy Spirit. You have been bought with a price therefore glorify God with your body. The process that Jesus is pronouncing is that this room that had a veil and had

a place of sacrifice would now be replaced by our bodies; that this flesh would encompass the Holy Spirit; that no longer was the presence of God just limited to a specific geographical position but it would be inside of all who would call on the name of the Lord. The process according to Colossians 2:11 is that when that happens, that we are spiritually circumcised, that our flesh is supernaturally removed from our soul. That's why 1 Corinthians 15 says that one day those who are dead in Christ, those who are alive in Christ, will meet the Lord in the air and that which is mortal, your body, will receive immortality. That which is corruptible, your body, will receive incorruption. And you and I one day will receive a new flesh, a new body, a – listen – new temple. You see, Jesus when he said, "Destroy this and I will raise it in three days," he was saying that our relationship with God is not determined by sticks and bricks, it's not determined by a certain day, a certain time or a certain place, but a relationship with him alone.

So how do we interpret this? How do we take this story of 2,000 years ago and apply it to our lives today? How do we wake up tomorrow when the alarm clock goes off, how does this impact us as an employer, an employee, a mom, a dad, a student? How does this change us? Well, I think the first thing we need to realize is what is our infraction. It's an infraction of the heart. It doesn't matter how you have made the outside appear, it doesn't matter how or what you've done to dress up the exterior, the Bible makes it very clear that each and every one of us has a heart problem. We are depraved, in fact, our heart according to the word of God is rotten in everything and in every aspect. No matter what words we use, no matter how we present ourselves, no matter what the environment may be on the exterior, the Bible makes it very clear that our hearts are rotten. You and I all have a heart problem. That's the infraction. It's not about being in a certain place or at the wrong place or at the right time or at the wrong time, it doesn't matter where you find yourself, all of us have a heart problem. That's the infraction. You see, all of us are just like these guys in the temple, we have a heart problem. That's the infraction.

So what's the investigation? God knows your heart. Now, in Hebrews 4:13 it says that when we stand before God, we stand before him as if naked. There is a picture going back to the book of Genesis where Adam and Eve partake of the forbidden fruit. You know the story. The fruit is eaten, the Bible says they realized that they were naked, they hid themselves from the Lord. And then God shows up and God asked a very interesting question to Adam, he says, "Where are you?" Now, God didn't lose his GPS, he didn't lose his iPhone, I mean, he knew where Adam was physically. He wanted Adam to admit where he was spiritually. In Hebrews 4:13 when it says that we stand before him in that position, understand you can't hide anything from God.

Remember in Mark 2, there is a story of four men who take their friend, they take him to the roof of a house where Jesus is teaching and preaching in and it's so crowded they can't get him in and this friend of theirs is lame, he can't walk, he can't run, he can't move. So they cut a hole in the roof and they lower the young man down and you remember that Jesus begins by forgiving him of his sins and then he heals him, and the Bible says that those that were there, the same individuals that were in John 2, they doubted, they questioned, and though they did not say it out loud, the Bible says that Jesus knew what was in their heart. I want you to notice the very last statement of verse 25, "for he," Jesus,

"knew what was in man." This is where the rubber meets the road, church. It doesn't matter how you have presented yourself, it doesn't matter the package that you've wrapped your life in, God knows your heart and God has investigated your heart and God knows what's really inside of you. You see, that's how we interpret this, that we've all got a heart disease called sin and God knows everything we've done, everything we've said and, yes, he even knows everything that we've thought.

So what is Jesus' response? Here's the good news: the tomb is still empty. The tomb is still empty. Notice in this passage that the disciples didn't quite get it, those that were in the temple didn't quite get it until it says, "but when he was risen," when he rose from the dead they got it. Here is the good news: in the midst of a message that is mostly bad news, no matter where you find yourself, what condition you're in, how you have run from God or pictured yourself falsely to a world, the tomb is still empty. Forgiveness is still available and salvation can still be attained. You see, what Jesus is sharing with us today is it doesn't matter where you've been, what you've done or who you did it with, that when we come to him under the right pretense, when we desire a relationship with him and not just to use him, when we desire to know him and not just to take advantage of him, he is willing to forgive, he is willing to save, he is willing to change and to transform us. You see, when we ask the question, "Why did Jesus get so angry?" really when you think about it, it's because he wants you to be what you were designed to be and not what you are designing yourself to be.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe today as we come to our time of invitation, maybe you realize that you're not real different than these guys in John 2. Maybe you realize that it has been in your own energy and your own effort. Maybe today the proverbial lightbulb turned on and you understood your desperate need for Jesus in your life. I've got great news for you. You don't have to go through a set of religious rituals, you don't have to check off a bunch of boxes, you just need to have a real conversation with God. Technically we call it prayer. You don't have to say anything out loud, you don't even have to say the same words I would say but maybe your conversation would go a little something like this, "God, I realize today that you know me better than I even know myself. God, I confess I have tried to present a certain image. I have tried to dress up the outside but I know the inside is depraved and corrupt. God, I admit today that I have rebelled against you and I have sinned but I believe and I understand that Jesus Christ loves me enough that he was willing to come on my behalf. He was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. He was willing to go to a cruel cross on my behalf. And he was able to raise from the dead on my behalf so I could be forgiven and I could be saved and I could be transformed from the inside out. God, today I don't know all the answers to all the problems of life but I do know that Jesus is the only answer to my sin problem so I am asking you to forgive me. I'm asking you to save me not based on what I have done or what I hope to one day do but based on what Jesus Christ alone has done in my stead. Lord, I believe. In the best way I know how, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, in just a moment we're going to have a time of invitation and we would love the opportunity to have a conversation, we'd love

the opportunity to have a dialogue with you so that we might celebrate what God is doing in your life.

Lord, as we come to this time of invitation, how grateful we are that you are a God of second chances, you are a God of third chances, in fact, some of us, Lord, today would testify you appear to be a God of infinite chances. Thank you that no matter what the inside really looks like, that you are able to clean it up, that you are able to transform it and you are able to breathe life into that which is only death. You are able to turn that which is darkness into light, that which is crooked, you are able to make it straight. So, Lord, as we come to this time of response, Lord, I just pray that whatever it is you have impressed on our hearts would be lived out in our lives. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as our team leads. Any and all decisions, we'll be here at front.