

**John 2:13-22**

If you were a Jew coming to worship and this was the temple in Jerusalem in Jesus' day, you would have with you your animals to sacrifice. But since many of you would come from miles away, it would be much easier for you to buy your sacrificial animals here rather than bring them all the way from home. You would also be bringing from home the money you normally use every day—Roman currency. But before coming into the temple you would need to exchange your Roman money for Jewish coins which you could then place into the offering.

So it was not wrong to buy cattle, sheep, and doves at the temple. It was not wrong to have money exchanging tables at the temple. What, then, happened to our gentle Savior? To that meek and mild Child who was perfectly content, while sleeping in His manger, to be in the presence of cattle, sheep, and doves? For now we see Him inciting a riot; causing a stampede of those same animals with a whip He fashioned out of cords. We see Him overturning money tables sending coins flying in every direction.

Can it be that Jesus disapproved of bringing animals into the temple? But His own mother brought in a pair of turtledoves to perform the required sacrifice after His birth. Can it be that Jesus disapproved of bringing money into the temple? But He praised the poor widow who dropped her mites into the temple treasury. So what's going on here? Why all the fuss? Why create such a ruckus?

That's what the people wanted to know. "Hey! What do you think you're doing?" they demanded. "What gives you the right to come in here and destroy everything?" We wonder a little, too, don't we? We know that Jesus used His words to put His enemies in their place, but here in the temple He uses force...brute force.

He seems so out of character. It's just not like Him to become physically angry and create such a disturbance—or is it? Have we been painting the wrong picture of Jesus in our mind?

We've all seen paintings of Jesus. Many of us have one hanging on a wall in our home. Most of them show Jesus looking relaxed, somewhat serious. I've seen a picture that shows Jesus laughing. I'll bet you could not find a picture of Jesus looking the way that our text describes Him—with an angry expression, eyes piercing, voice yelling, His hand raised high holding a whip. No Christian bookstore or art gallery would carry such a painting of Christ. It wouldn't sell. We like a kinder, gentler Jesus. We'll even look at Him dying on the cross in agony; we just don't want to see Him mad. And yet, that is the picture our text paints for us. Why did He become so angry? Why did He create this chaos in the temple?

Jesus became angry because the men in charge of selling animals and exchanging money at the temple were robbing the people. They were selling cattle, sheep, and doves at an unfair price. They were charging a tax on the people when they exchanged their Roman currency. And they had brought this money-making business right inside God's House—within the temple courts—so that they were not just robbing the people of their money, but also of God's grace!

God's temple is not a market. It's the place where God dwells to bless His people with His presence. What makes God angry? Disobeying His Ten Commandments? Rejecting His love? Those things do not please God, but what Jesus became angry about was that His people were being hurt...hurt by those who would turn God's grace into something that can be bought and sold. Jesus didn't destroy the temple, the Jews did. They might not have torn down the walls, but they corrupted God's House by making a profit off of the mercy of God.

Do you think God is pleased when, still today, there are churches that offer God's forgiveness at a price? That's exactly what makes Him angry! That sinners for whom Christ died are told that to be forgiven and gain a place in heaven they need to buy it with their money, or with their works of charity, or they need to make a decision and say the "sinner's prayer" in order for God to forgive them and accept them. But all of this is attempting to buy and sell the grace of God! Friend, God's grace cannot be bought. It is a free gift in Jesus Christ.

Does this text make you a little uneasy? Does the picture of Jesus becoming mad create some nervousness within you? It shouldn't. Rather, it should comfort you. Jesus became angry because He loves you. He is not angry at you, but at any who would try to keep you away from Him and His mercy toward you.

He wants you to believe that you are forgiven not because of anything you do, or give to Him, but because He died and rose for you; because, as He said would happen, His body would be destroyed but would also be raised on the third day. The money you put into the offering plate does not buy God's favor. God is already favorable toward you in Jesus Christ, for you are baptized into Him.

This story in John 2 is a picture that resembles what happened when you were baptized. Jesus drove out of your heart, Satan, and all his evil plans for you. He would not allow Satan to rob you of God's grace and forgiveness. He, Christ Himself, bought you at a great price. He shed His precious blood for you, and because He purchased you for Himself you belong completely to Christ. Everything that He has is already yours. You cannot buy His grace and mercy—it's already yours in Holy Baptism. You cannot cause Him to love you and forgive you—He already does, for He died and rose for you, and He claimed you within the cleansing waters of Baptism.

As passionate as Jesus was for cleansing the temple, so passionate is He for you. He is consumed by His love for you. His anger is not ever toward you, but toward Satan and those the devil uses to try and keep you away from Him. For you, friend, He extends only mercy. No anger, only love. No whip of cords, only His blood-bought forgiveness.

Christ is the Temple of God, for in Him God dwells with His people. He dwells with you to bless you with forgiveness, life, and salvation. As you come up to God's altar to eat His sacred meal, you come to receive that which is far better than all the cattle, sheep, and doves in the world. Jesus is the true Passover Lamb sacrificed on the cross for you, and now given to you through water and Word, bread and wine. This House of God is no market. God's grace cannot be bought here. It is only and always given—given freely for you in Jesus Christ. Amen.

