

Have you ever done something that bothered someone you love, thinking it was all fun and games only to find out later that it was actually hurting them? Maybe they told you to stop right away, but they did it with a smile and a laugh because they were trying to be nice about it. So you misread the signs and figured it was playful and teasing. You did it again and pushed a little bit harder and finally they get serious with you: "Seriously! That's not funny! Stop it!" I wish I could say it's never happened to me! It's a wretched feeling knowing that you pushed something too far or teased too much. You took a relationship for granted and took advantage. The only thing to do now is apologize and ask for forgiveness.

We just heard a story about some people who might have had reason to feel that way. Jewish culture in Jesus' time had a bit of a self-confidence problem. You can see it in a lot of Jesus' teaching, and you'll see it just as much in the epistles too. The idea is that since they had the temple, the Torah, and the sacrifices, and because they were God's chosen people, they were almost untouchable. They figured, "We have all this, and we follow all the rules, so God must be pleased with us." While we might laugh at that attitude today from our understanding of the Bible, it really must have seemed that way to them. I'm not sure it was illogical for them to think that way. After all, God had never come down and scolded them for anything they were doing. They easily could have interpreted that as his approval, or if not approval, at least he was ok with how they lived.

And then God did come down and scold them for what they were doing. In fact, when Jesus came to Jerusalem for the Passover and saw how they had taken license to do whatever they wanted, even setting up shops in the temple, he didn't simply scold them, he made a whip and drove the sheep and cattle out of the courtyard, and flipped all the vendors' tables, scattering their money everywhere! What a shock it must have been to them! Here they were, feeling confident that God didn't mind what they were doing, and then suddenly God's Son is there telling them, "Shame on you! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market?!" The disciples immediately thought of Psalm 69, which looks forward to the Savior saying, "for zeal for your house consumes me and the insults of those who insult you fall on me." They were recognizing something very important about Jesus – Jesus is serious about God's dwelling place on earth.

What does that mean for us today in God's house? I don't see anyone here selling cattle or sheep or doves... What about those cards in the fellowship hall? Or what about the teen group doing fundraisers though? Are we in trouble? Is that the kind of stuff that Jesus would be upset about? Look again at what Jesus said to the vendors in the temple: "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" The problem wasn't necessarily that they were selling things in the temple, in fact, that may have started from a godly desire to make temple worship

more accessible to more people. The problem was that they were distracting from what the temple was meant to be. They had turned it from a place of worship to a retail space.

Jesus was zealous about purging the temple in Jerusalem of everything that distracted from its purpose of showing who the Savior would be and what he would do. Jesus is still zealous about his church today which continues to reveal him to the world. Jesus is incredibly serious about you too. He dwells in your heart and calls you his temple as well. Your purpose is to glorify him. What have you set up in your heart that he would drive out of you today? The Old Testament lesson tells us. Those ten commandments we read are commandments, not suggestions or wishes of our Lord and God. They all fit together to show us how God expects us to love him with all our heart, soul, and mind, and how we are to love our fellow humans as much as we love ourselves.

Let's not be mistaken and think that Jesus has lost any of his zeal. It's an easy mistake to make if we look in the wrong places. Have you ever seen someone do something wrong and get away with it? Do you ever see people claiming that sinful things are right? What about you? What kind of things do you get away with? What seems like it's just not that big of a deal? After all, we're Christian, right? We know that Jesus forgives us all our sins, so we're ok. We know that we don't have to add all sorts of extra rules. We know that we don't have to live by all the strict Old Testament ceremonial laws that the ancient Israelites were required to follow. Sometimes we might feel like God isn't all that serious about everything we do. Watch out! This kind of thinking is exactly the kind of thinking that got the Jews into so much trouble! Don't take advantage of God's patience! Don't allow yourself to become anything but a temple of God, dedicated to obedience and glorifying him!

The Jews who had set up that market in the Temple must have felt awful, realizing they had gone too far and taken advantage of God's patience! That's why they reacted the way they did and apologized, right?

Unfortunately, no. They didn't. They completely missed the point. Instead of asking Jesus for forgiveness, or even just acknowledging that, "ooh, yeah, you're right, Jesus. God intended the temple and the sacrifices here to be a mirror to what the Savior would be and do. God probably didn't have a market in mind when he described how temple worship should look," they challenged his authority! "Who are you to be the boss of the temple courts? What sign can you give that will show that you have this authority?" they asked. The sign he cryptically promised probably disappointed them, but it's our greatest joy. "Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days."

We've talked a lot about how serious Jesus is about his temple and about holding us to his standards today. We haven't talked about why. Here's the big *why*: it's because Jesus seriously loves you. The reason it was so important to him that the temple clearly point people to him as

Savior instead of being full of distractions, is that he wanted people to know him. The reason he's serious about our church today clearly pointing people to him is the same. People have no less need for a savior today than they ever have. Sin abounds and the only way to heaven is faith in Jesus. The church has God's Word which proclaims to the world how seriously Jesus loves every single person on the planet. He's serious about getting that message to everyone.

That message is a message of serious love. You know how much Jesus loves you. He doesn't need us. He's God, after all. He could've made new people who wouldn't disappoint him, but he didn't. He doesn't even really need our obedience. He chooses to take it personally when we hurt each other because we need each other to be obedient to him. It's all because he loves us! He loves you so seriously that he kept all his ancient promises. He loves you so seriously that he came to earth and gave himself over to be destroyed by the very people he loves. He loves you so seriously that he lived a perfect life in your place and kept all his commandments perfectly for you. He loves you so seriously that he suffered all the punishment for your sins and died on the cross so you wouldn't have to. When he rose again after three days, it proved that all our sins have been paid for and that death has no more power. (Remember the wages of sin is death. If Jesus paid the whole debt of sin, death could no longer hold him. There's our proof!) Jesus is serious about you! He loves you so very much!

One last thought: The other Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all record a story of Jesus cleansing the temple too, but they record it at the end of his ministry, unlike John who records the account we read at the beginning. Not all the books are necessarily arranged chronologically, but it seems likely that Jesus might have cleansed the temple more than once. After he cleaned out all the distractions and corrected the people, they might have gone back to their old ways. Does that sound familiar? Isn't that what being a believer who is still also a sinner feels like? Every time Jesus comes to us in his Word and reminds us what needs to be driven out of our hearts, we have that temptation to go back to it again! But again, Jesus will remind us of how serious he is about his commands. And every time we realize our guilt and every time we realize how we've taken advantage of God's gracious patience, he will be there with his love. Just as seriously as always.

Friends, Jesus is serious about us living according to his will. He expects perfection from us every day, even when we feel like he's just overlooking what we do wrong. He doesn't overlook a thing! That would be a scary thought for anyone, but not for us, because we know he is just as serious about his love for us. It's his love behind his law in the first place, It's in his love that he calls us back when we fail to remain faithful to him. It's his love that provides for us every day. And it's his love that led him to the cross so we can be with him forever.

Dear believers: live out God's will, follow his commandments, but not in fear. Do it in happiness and peace, because your Savior, Jesus, is serious about you! Amen.