

#8 - John 2:1-25

Need: To know the purpose for the Lord's House – For ministry not a business.

Aim: To bring boundaries to proper church conduct.

Title: “Defining Boundaries”

Prop: In Jn. 2:13-25, Jesus gave clear boundaries about worship behavior and used the Occasion to Announce His intentions.

Intro: I have been approached on several occasions concerning the use of the church facilities; for weddings, funerals, receptions and even an occasional birthday party. However, the use of these facilities are reserved for “members use only.” The Advisory Board and the Trustees have sole authority to control the use of these facilities. For the most part there was no charge but a suggested donation for janitorial services, wear and tear and utilities.

Some years ago as I stood at the entry way of the foyer at the end of the service, I found myself standing next to a couple of girl scouts trying to take orders for cookies as people went out the door. Every year at King Sooper's I buy a box or two of cookies; I just can't resist those puppy eyes nor the coconut chocolate crèmes. When I asked the girls what kind of cookies I should buy, more often than not, a mother would step in and begin a sales pitch.

When that happened I interrupted the mother and asked her to step aside, I wanted to hear the sale's pitch from the girls. In my book, moms are there only for moral support and safety concerns.

Anyway as these girls stood beside me at the doorway of the sanctuary this passage in John 2:13-25 came to mind. As I wrestled with this issue, my son Joel, then in high school, came to me with the same concern and with the identical passage in mind: **“Stop making My Father’s House a place of Business.”**

I know this opens a Pandora box of issues. I have visited mega churches on occasion and the foyers have coffee shops, cafes, books stores, gift shops, all sorts of merchandise for sale. All of which are good in the right context, but I feel it might blur the lines of worshipping God.

After pondering the cookie selling at the church door, I approached the moms of these girls, one of which was my wife, and voiced my concerns and the sales ceased. Sometimes my job forces me to do the right thing although, unintended, my actions cause hurt feelings.

Transition: I know this incident of cookie orders is miniscule in the greater scope of abuses of God's house. But in chapter 2:13-25 Jesus took on a much greater and infinitely evil practice, one which was purely for the benefit of the marketers, preying upon unsuspecting worshippers.

Prop: In Jn. 2:13-25, Jesus gave I. Clear Boundaries About Worship Behavior and used the occasion to II. Announce His Intentions. Both events should give the believer the proper perspective about church worship and its sole purpose.

I. Clear Boundaries About Worship – Jn. 2:13-22

A. Misuse of Church (Temple) Property (2:13-14)

1. Situation (13) – The first temple had been built by Solomon, which was considered by archeologists to be one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. However the building was stripped of all its wealth and finery and then razed to the ground and burned by the Babylonians. Upon return from seventy years of exile in Babylon, the Jews built a new temple, but it paled greatly to Solomon's grand structure. So great was the disparity between the two temples that those who had seen Solomon's temple and now this new building, wept bitterly over how far they had fallen from God's favor.

2. Using God's House and Religion for Personal Benefit (14) – In the days of Herod the king, 40 years were spent in temple upgrades and expansion. What had once been a hill now had been built up into a massive plateau through the addition of gigantic foundation stones. The temple complex was huge with allowed use by Jews from all over the world to come and worship and in this case celebrate the Passover.

When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, He went immediately to the temple. In one of the vast courtyards there tables overloaded with money, corrals holding oxen and sheep and cages full of doves, all for the purpose of providing sacrificial animals for worship.

Now here is where the girl scouts at the door of our church and what we see here differ. People would come from all over the region and the world with a sacrificial lamb, oxen or dove. Each animal had to be inspected by the Levites for blemishes and defects. Of course they would always find something wrong, take the **“blemished”** animal off your hands for a pittance of its true value and then sell you an acceptable animal for a greatly inflated price. The Levites would then quickly put the exchanged animal, deemed unacceptable, into the corral for resale to the next customer. People came to the temple to not only offer sacrifice, but to pay the yearly temple tax.

Of course only Jewish money was acceptable. But for a price, Roman money could be exchanged for acceptable currency.

When I was in Israel the rate was close to 15% but I imagine the exchange rate here was much higher. The thievery was clearly evident and that practice of fleecing the people had to be known and approved by the priests with Levitical involvement.

Let's get back to the Girl Scout issues. The girls' intent was to sell cookies to support their local troop and was of pure intent. But in John 2 there was nothing good about what these men did, all in the name of religion.

Transition: It is safe to say that Jesus was very upset in verse 15-16, both by His actions and words.

B. Jesus Rectifying the Problem (15-17)

1. Physical Anger (15) – In verse 15 Jesus made a scourge of cords and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. If you have ever worked with livestock you would have a greater understanding of the chaos; it only takes one bull or ram to cause the rest to panic as they would have milled around and finally broken through the barriers and rushed out into the mass of people in the courtyard, with their handlers in hot pursuit.

In the midst of this chaos, Jesus also flipped over the tables laden with money, sending the collectors and people scrambling to secure the loose coins. In verse 16, why He didn't set loose the doves was questionable, probably because they would be much harder to recover; instead Jesus commanded them to remove the birds from the premises.

2. Declaration of Law (16) – As the cattle rushed out, the owners and sellers were in hot pursuit, the money changers clamoring around on the ground, Jesus turned to the stunned sellers of livestock in verse 17 and quoted Isaiah the Old Testament prophet: **“ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME.”** It was a big deal, a huge issue, to use God's house for improper practices. In New Testament context any building becomes a church when God's people gather together. I have been in storefront churches, among Grange Hall congregations, just about any place one could imagine. The church is not a building but a place where God's people come together for worship. We here at Grace Brethren Church are richly blessed to have this wonderful facility. But as I understand the history of this church, it began in a grade school cafeteria. Others have started in homes and in just about any imaginable facility. Some meet in hotel banquet halls. But in the time of Jesus, the Temple was the center of worship. It was God's designated place for sacrifice.

We as New Testaments believers have become the temple of the Holy Spirit, who has made His home in each and every believer at the moment of salvation. We no longer have to offer animal sacrifice, but we claim the blood of Jesus which takes away all sin, stain, stench, and guilt.

Transition: As could be expected in verse 18, the authorities came to Jesus with a question concerning authority.

C. Who is in Charge? (18-22)

1. Question of Authority (18) – The question of verse 18 was one of discovery and in some sense I think the religious leaders knew what they were doing was wrong. Yet they questions Jesus’ action: **“Who gave You the right to do these things, who made You in charge?”** They wanted a sign though they clearly understood the error of their ways but as long as it was condoned by the religious leaders, they were just business men trying to make a buck for **“religious purposes.”** Jesus had cost them a lot of revenue!

2. Sign of Authority (19-20) – Jesus’ sign must have seemed somewhat puzzling in the context of the temple as the authorities misunderstood His prediction of tearing down the temple, and He raising it again in just three days. They didn’t understand that He had referred not to the temple structure but to His own body.

As God He could have most certainly raised a temple structure in an instant, it wasn't the point. Jesus spoke about His death, burial and resurrection.

They would crucify Him, bury Him and in three days He would come back to life.

3. Editorial Note (21-22) – To help his readers understand, John added an editorial note of explanation. Jesus' words were in reference to His death, burial and resurrection. They would kill Him and He would come back to life.

All of the acts and words of Jesus came to pass and were deemed authentic, thus remembered and written down, by the power of the Holy Spirit. God the Father put His stamp of approval upon the sacrifice made at the cross and thus raised Jesus from the dead. If He had been a fraud, or charlatan or even crazy, Jesus would still be in grave. The entire plan of God was verified, the work of Jesus was done by the resurrection. Without that event, the plan of redemption would have died with Jesus.

Transition: After the encounter at the temple, Jesus moved among the crowds which were increasing by the moment as He performed miracles, signs that verified who He was and many believed because of what they saw. It was evident from the following verses that the issue of "belief" was in question here, as to what they believed.

II. Announcing Intentions – Jn. 2:23-25

A. Belief As the Goal (23)

1. Sequence of Action – Each gospel written has its own agenda so the stories are not exactly sequentially written. Luke was concerned with the timeline, Matthew was written with Jews in mind, Mark for the common man and John wrote with the purpose of presenting Jesus as God, with the power and desire to save mankind.

2. Message + Signs = Belief (23) – In the matter of verse 23, after the confrontation in the Temple, Jesus took His message to the crowds. The time line was after the temple incident; He preached His message in verse 23 and performed many verifying signs. People heard the news, saw the signs and then believed.

B. Heart of Mankind (24-25)

1. Belief (24) – The message of salvation, the kingdom of God was presented in verse 24. It was a message of hope, promise and gladness. Jesus offered a message to people often without hope, with the promise of eternal life. He was well received in the context of Roman domination which made life increasingly hard. So does want and need make better soil for the implantation of the Gospel seed? Does it make people more receptive?

Here in America we have had the blessing of God, but often blessing becomes clouded because we lose sight of Who gave it. Where is the thirst for knowledge, wisdom and relationship with God? We perceive we have no need, thus we have no desire or hunger. People believe but verse 24 casts a rather bleak picture of the nature of faith here.

2. Man's Heart (24-25) – In verses 24-25 Jesus understood the lack and nature, of the faith of those who heard the message. The key word here was the negative form of “**entrusting.**” The signs of Jesus attracted the attention of the crowd and brought many to a stage of belief parallel to that of the disciples (2:11). They reasoned that since Jesus possessed such power, He must have favor with God—a line of reasoning followed later by the blind man in 9:30-33. Jesus however was not satisfied with superficial faith, even though it was genuine as far as it went. He did not trust Himself to those who had professed belief only on the basis of His miracles.

It kind of opens the Pandora's Box concerning health, wealth and happiness. Some believe in planting a seed (money) in a particular ministry with the expectation that God is going to heal, give financial success and thus bring happiness. Jesus knew their hearts; that they only believed in Jesus as having the favor of God and it created in them a lust for more from Jesus than He was willing to offer.

So are we in it for what we can get? Is our worship purely based upon perceived wonders and miracles? I think that it might possibly begin there, but does our faith go deeper? Do we have a deep abiding relationship with God, a relationship that changes the way we live?

Also we must guard against a mercenary mind set where we allow the world, to permeate our congregation by seeking to get what we **“want”** from God rather than receiving what we **“need.”** We come together to worship God, and to serve Him out of appreciation, to minister to one another and to encourage each other. Let us serve God by serving one another.

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