

John 2:12-17

Throughout the Bible we are instructed how to approach God in worship. The Old Testament speaks clearly about the way we are to approach God. When King David brought the Ark of the Covenant back into Jerusalem after a long absence, he contemplated the seriousness of the worship of God when he wrote, ***“Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and has not sworn deceitfully. He shall receive a blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation.” (Psalm 24:3-5)***

Somehow the Jews forgot how to follow David’s attitude of humility and self-evaluation. They didn’t remember how to approach God in authentic worship. Before the Babylonian captivity, the Lord had a stern rebuke for worship that was void of authentic humility and reverence. (cf. Isaiah 1:11-17)

If that were not bad enough, God said to Israel through the prophet Amos: ***“I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; and I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fattings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps.” (Amos 5:21-23)***

What was missing in terms of authentic worship among the Jews in the days of Isaiah and Amos had become worse in Jesus’ day. His rebuke and judgment on the Jewish religious system was a consistent message He preached throughout His ministry.

The 21st Century church would do well to pay close attention to this story in John. God’s heart for authentic worship from those who claim to love Him remains the same. God is seeking genuine worshipers. Jesus Himself said, ***“But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.” (John 4:23)***

There are two important realities we learn about Jesus from John 2:12-25: 1) *Jesus’ passion for authentic worship* 2) *Jesus’ perception of human authenticity*. Understanding these realities will help us not make the same mistake the Jews made in their approach to God in worship.

Jesus’ passion for authentic worship. (John 2:12-17)

After performing His first miracle in Cana during a wedding celebration, Jesus along with His family and His five disciples traveled down to Capernaum, which lies on the north-west shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus and His disciples stayed in Capernaum a few days as they were making their way up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. Passover commemorated Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12). It was celebrated annually on the fourteenth day of Nisan (*March/April*). On that day, between 3:00pm and 6:00pm, lambs were slaughtered and the Passover meal was eaten.

The first miracle Jesus performed was private. It was for those who were attending the wedding in Cana. His second miracle would be very public. It was for thousands who would be on the Temple Mount and in Jerusalem. The cleansing of the Temple is no less miraculous than the water being turned into wine.

The age-old problem of inappropriate worship was quite present. Jesus walked on the Temple complex, and He saw a market: the selling of oxen, sheep, and doves. People traveled great distances to come to Jerusalem for the Passover; they did not bring animals with them for the sacrifice. They would have to buy the sacrificial animal at the Temple. Tables were busy with the exchanging of currency, so men could also pay the Temple tax with the proper coinage. The travelers were being scammed: the exchange rate would increase as high as 12%, and a racket existed between the priests and those selling overpriced animals. It was nothing more than a religious bizarre — anything other than authentic worship.

Jesus does what only God has the authority to do. Realizing the purity of worship at the temple was a matter of honor to God, Jesus took swift and decisive action. He made a whip, drove off the animals, flipped over the tables, and ran everyone out! All this was done while He was under the watchful eye of the Romans and the Temple police. These men didn't move a muscle to stop Him. Everyone evacuated the area! No one attempted to forcibly stop Jesus; no one laid a hand on Him. That is miraculous.

The miracles of Scripture are matter of fact. There was no lightning, no thunder, no angelic fanfare, and no trumpets blown. He just drove them all out. It was an unimaginable act of power. What was Jesus making clear to them by His actions? He said to them ***"...stop making My Father's house a place of business."*** The intensity of His righteous anger was unmistakable. Christ would not tolerate any mockery of the spirit of true worship. His indignant words applied to all who were polluting the Temple and corrupting its intended purpose.

Watching in amazement as their Teacher dispersed the Temple merchants, ***"His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume Me.'"*** We have to remember the five disciples were really Old Testament believers. They were followers of John the Baptist, preparing for the Messiah. And John the Baptist told them to follow Jesus. These guys know their Old Testament. When they see Jesus do this, they recall what David wrote in ***Psalms 69:9, "For zeal for Your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me."***

David was calling people to true worship; what he was getting back was resistance, hatred, and hostility. The people were in the same condition during David's time that they are now in Jesus' time. In Psalm 69, David is doing his best to call them back to faithfulness. David states the people are mistreating him and they hate him for reminding them of their responsibility of authentic worship. David feels the pain as he observed people dishonor the Lord in inappropriate worship. Spiritually mature people will always feel the pain of inappropriate worship. When God is dishonored you feel the pain. The reproach that falls on Him falls on you.

The application for us is obvious. What is our worship like today? What is in the way and needs to be driven out or overturned? What needs to be "cleansed" so we can approach God in spirit and truth?

In much of the Church, our contemporary worship tries to imitate the entertainment industry for the sake of "appealing to unbelievers." Too many songs are written that appeal to felt needs based on human wisdom as opposed to songs based on the Word of God that are written that glorify the holiness of Christ. Congregations sing about their needs, as if to sing about themselves, as opposed to singing to Christ and about His grace, love, and majesty.

Many church services are manufactured to please people rather than to please God. May we resist the temptation to be like the world when we approach the Almighty God in worship.

The worship of God is for the church, not for those outside the church. Our meeting together on the Lord's day is to focus on Him, not on us. From the songs we sing; to the Scriptures we read; to the prayers we say; to the Word we teach — it is all to God and for His glory.

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