

John 2:12-25 "What Makes Jesus Angry?"—part 2^{**}

Main Idea: In John 2:12-25 we discover what makes Jesus angry in an event that teaches us much about who He really is and what He's really like. There are actually three surprises in the account, and each reveals something to us about Jesus.

Review: From last week...

I. Jesus' anger reveals His assessment of religion (12-17).

- A. We learn the kind of worship that the Lord despises.
 - 1. He hates mere ritual.
 - 2. He hates when we look for stingy shortcuts.
 - 3. He hates when we merchandize His worship.
 - 4. He hates when we use Him to get more of this world for ourselves.

- B. We learn the kind of worship that the Lord desires.

- 1. He wants worship that exalts the Father.
 - 2. He wants to hear the admission of our sin and need.
 - 3. He wants to see our heartfelt dependence upon the sacrifice of another.
 - 4. He wants to see our gratitude for His grace.

Breaking new ground...

II. Jesus' answer reveals His purpose for coming (18-22).

- A. He didn't come to patch up a religious system.
- B. He came to do what the religious system failed to do.
 - 1. He became a temple.
 - 2. He predicted He was going to die.
 - 3. He predicted He was going to rise again.

III. Jesus' actions reveal His unique identity (23-25).

- A. He did miracles to prove His deity.
- B. He didn't settle for deficient faith.
 - 1. He's not fooled by outward appearances.
 - 2. He knows what is in us.
 - 3. He sees when we're trying to use Him for a twisted end.

Take Inventory: Suppose that Jesus came to WBC today...

1. What does Jesus think of my worship?
2. What does Jesus think of my faith?
3. What does Jesus want to change most in my life?

Let me give you a scenario that will prepare us for what we're about to see in God's Word today. Suppose Mother's Day is coming, men, and you want your wife's day to be special. Your kids are fifteen and seventeen years old, and a week before the big day you begin putting a bug in their ear about how important their mother is and how meaningful this day could be. "Yea, yea, dad," they respond. "We won't forget."

Three days before Sunday you ask them, "How are the plans coming?" To which you hear, "No problem, dad. Got it covered. Uh...what do you think mom would like?"

And you respond, "Well, I think she'd like something that shows she's special to you, something that comes *from you*, something personal. How about making her a card and expressing what she means to you. And maybe bake her that special cake she likes. I'll help you, if you want."

"Oh, okay, got it. No, we don't need your help. And dad, would you stop bugging us about it. We'll take care of it."

"Okay," you reply. "The ball's in your court."

On Saturday the kids sleep in, then watch television in the morning, spend time with their friends in the afternoon, and finally get home around 9:00.

Then Sunday morning comes, *Mother's Day* Sunday morning. You get up first in the house and have a hunch, so you head for your kids' room and wake them up. "Good morning. Remember what today is? Do you have something special prepared for your mother?"

The reply is, "Uh, sort of." And they point to the desk on the other side of the room where you see a store-bought cake in a cardboard box with a day-old sticker on it. On the outside of the box you see some scribbling and recognize the handwriting of your two teens. It simply says, "Thanks for everything Mom. Have a great day."

"Think that's good enough?" they ask. "We got it at the Dollar Store last night on our way home from the movie. And oh, by the way, can we have \$5? We had to use up the money you gave us for tomorrow's lunch at school to buy that cake."

That's sort of what we often do with God, isn't it? The difference between heartfelt worship and ritualistic church going is sort of like the difference between a homemade cake and a store bought cake. They both look the same, kind of. But not really.

With that picture in mind let's return to John 2. In John 2 Jesus went to the temple in Jerusalem and saw people bringing God offerings, sort of. They weren't really bringing offerings. They were buying them. And that infuriated Jesus, and He didn't hide His displeasure.

I asked the question last week, *What makes Jesus angry?* There's the answer. When Jesus sees God's kids bringing store-bought offerings to His Father's house, He gets angry.

His anger speaks loudly, doesn't it? It tells us this isn't what God wants to see in His house. One of the main reasons God gave the Jews the temple in the first place was to provide them an opportunity to

show Him how much He mean to them. They were supposed to invest their time, energy, and money into raising an animal, and then bringing that animal to Him as an offering and an expression of their worship of Him.

God wants His people to worship Him, not because they have to, but because they love Him. And those who are gripped by His grace do just that.

Read the Psalms and you'll hear what I'm talking about...

Psalm 26:8 "I love the house where you live, O LORD, the place where your glory dwells."

Psalm 27:4 "One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: *that I may dwell in the house of the LORD* all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple."

Psalm 52:8-9 "But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever. I will praise you forever for what you have done; in your name I will hope, for your name is good. *I will praise you in the presence of your saints.*"

Psalm 92:12-15 "The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, 'The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.'

Psalm 116:12-14 "How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people."

There's what God wants from His people. He loves to see people come to His house because they want to, and they want to because they love *Him*. Is that why you came to church today?

There are three surprises in the intriguing account in John 2:12-25. There's Jesus' anger in the temple, Jesus' answer to the religious authorities, and Jesus' actions when people apparently believed in Him. Each of those surprises reveals to us something significant about Jesus. We looked at the first last time, which we'll now review briefly, and then break new ground.

Review: *From last week...*

I. Jesus' anger reveals His assessment of religion (12-17).

Verses 14-17 "In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, 'Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!' His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'"

Most people are a little surprised when they first read this. Jesus got angry? We're surprised because most of the expressions of anger we ever exhibit or see are sinful. And we need exhortations like James 1:19-20, "My dear brothers...everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires."

But anger itself isn't bad. Did you realize that the words "anger" and "Lord" appear in the same verse 103 times in the Bible? Listen to some examples...

Numbers 11:1 "Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the **LORD**, and when he heard them his **anger** was aroused. Then fire from the LORD burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp."

After Aaron and Miriam challenged Moses, we're told in Numbers 12:9, "The **anger** of the **LORD** burned against them, and he left them."

Judges 3:8 "The **anger** of the **LORD** burned against Israel so that he sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram Naharaim..."

1 Kings 14:22 "Judah did evil in the eyes of the **LORD**. By the sins they committed they stirred up his jealous **anger** more than their fathers had done."

Isaiah 66:15 "See, the **LORD** is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his **anger** with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire."

Jeremiah 30:24 "The fierce **anger** of the **LORD** will not turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart. In days to come you will understand this."

We can be thankful, as Psalm 103:8 reminds us, that "The **LORD** is compassionate and gracious, **slow to anger...**" But nonetheless, there are things that anger the Lord, and He wants us to know it.[\[1\]](#)

Now, back to the question. *What does Jesus' anger in the temple teach us about Jesus?* It shows us how He assesses worship, in two ways.

A. We learn the kind of worship that the Lord despises. Verse 14 says He saw the *animal sellers* and *money changers*, and what He saw prompted Him to make a whip and shut down the temple market that day! What's that tell us about how Jesus assesses worship? It makes it pretty clear He's not pleased with four things.

1. *He hates mere ritual.*
2. *He hates when we look for stingy shortcuts.*
3. *He hates when we merchandize His worship.*
4. *He hates when we use Him to get more of this world for ourselves.* That's what Jesus in God's house that day. Ritual. Shortcuts. Merchandizing. Using God. The sellers were using God to make money. The buyers were getting God off their back with their store-bought offerings. "Get out of here!" commanded Jesus.

B. We learn the kind of worship that the Lord desires. I see four things here.

1. *He wants worship that exalts the Father.* It's "My Father's House."
2. *He wants to hear the admission of our sin and need.* In Luke 19:45 He calls His Father's House "a house of prayer." That's what He wanted to see there, people praying and confessing their sin and admitting their need of Him.
3. *He wants to see our heartfelt dependence upon the sacrifice of another.* That's why you brought your own animal to the temple. God didn't need the animal. You needed it, and you needed it because God said if a substitute shed blood in your place, He would pardon you.
4. *He wants to see our gratitude for His grace.*

We're so prone to lose that, aren't we? And when we lose that we cheapen worship.

In his preface to *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A. W. Tozer explains why he wrote his book: "With our loss of the sense of majesty has come the further loss of religious awe and consciousness of the divine presence. We have lost our spirit of worship and our ability to withdraw inwardly to meet God in adoring silence. Modern Christianity is simply not producing the kind of Christian who can appreciate or experience

the life in the Spirit. The words, 'Be still, and know that I am God,' mean next to nothing to the self-confident, bustling worshiper in this middle period of the twentieth century."[\[2\]](#)

Breaking new ground...

As you can imagine, Jesus' table-turning produced quite a stir. Notice verse 18, "Then the Jews demanded of him, 'What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?'"

Give them a sign? He just had. What was the temple cleansing, if not a sign? He just did what Malachi the prophet predicted Messiah would do (in Malachi 3:1-3). "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple... But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver..."

They said they wanted a sign, but that's a smokescreen to avoid the obvious. It's as old as time. If you don't like the message, do your best to discredit the messenger.

William Hendriksen is right, "The authorities should have been ashamed of all this graft and greed within the temple court. Instead of asking Jesus by what right he had cleansed the temple, they should have confessed their sins and thanked him."[\[3\]](#)

But they didn't. It's not that they missed the point of Jesus' actions. They got it alright, but they refused to heed it. They don't want to face the obvious, and they're unwilling to admit their sin and guilt and need to change. So they changed the subject.

I love what Jesus does in verse 19. "Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.'" Okay, two can play this game. You want to change the subject. I'll do the same. I want to talk about worship, but you want to talk about signs. I don't want to talk about signs because that's not what you need. You want to talk about why I did what I just did, but what you need to know is what I'm going to do.

So there's the second surprise in this story. First, Jesus' anger. Second, Jesus' answer. Why did Jesus give that answer to the Jews' request? What does it reveal?

II. Jesus' answer reveals His purpose for coming (18-22).

Why did the Son of God come to earth? His answer makes it clear that...

A. He didn't come to patch up a religious system. That's what the Jews had, and loved. Just like a lot of people today who love their religion. In this case it was a good religion, a God-ordained religious system. But the purpose of the system was to point sinners to a person, namely to Jesus the Christ.

I find it interesting that later Jesus did give His critics signs, a bunch of them. And how did they respond? Look at John 11:47, "Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. 'What are we accomplishing?' they asked. 'Here is this man performing many miraculous signs.'" So He gave them what they asked for, signs. And how did they respond to the signs? Did they take heed to them and repent? No, they chose to eliminate the sign-giver. Why? They tell us in verse 48, "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

What are they afraid of losing? *Our place*. What if the Romans take away our *place*? What are they talking about? What place? The temple.

When a good thing becomes a God-thing, that's a bad thing. Driscoll is right. *When a good thing—like a temple, or a church building, or your church ministry, or your family, or your job...becomes a God-thing*—which means you can't imagine life without it and you'll do everything in your power to prevent life without it...*that's a bad thing*—an idolatrous, God-offending, soul-destroying thing.

He didn't come to patch up the system. Rather...

B. He came to do what the religious system failed to do. How?

1. *He became a temple.* "Destroy this temple," He said. They thought He was talking about the building, right? Notice verse 20, "The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?'"

Herod started remodeling the temple forty-six years earlier (and it ended up taking another twenty years to finish it, ironically just a few years before it was demolished by the Romans in AD 70). Was He talking about that building? No.

What then? Verse 21 tells us, "But the temple he had spoken of was his body."

Jesus often spoke in riddles and parables, particularly to those who refused to believe Him. Why? He told His disciples in Luke 8:10, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, "'though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.'"

Why did Jesus say His body was a temple? What is a temple? It's a place where you meet God, right? If you want to meet God, here's where you must come. No longer to a building in Jerusalem, for that temple fulfilled its purpose. You must come to Jesus.

And what did Jesus say about this temple? Hear Him, "Destroy this temple." Grammatically, His words are a command, but I think the sense is predictive. He's telling them what's going to happen to Him, "*You will* destroy this temple."

Remember, this is year one of Jesus' public ministry. He's just getting started. But He made it clear from the very beginning what's coming.

2. *He predicted He was going to die.* Some treat Jesus' death as a sort of accident, a "plan B." But Jesus makes it clear that His death was "plan A" all the way. It's why He came. "I lay down my life for the sheep (John 10:15)." "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord (John 10:18)."

That's why He came, my friend. He came to do what a religious system can never do, and that is, provide lasting pardon for sinners. The truth is, you are a sinner and so am I, and our sins put us in bankruptcy before a holy God. No amount of religion can remove our sin debt. But Jesus can. That's because Jesus came to pay our sin debt. How? By dying in the place of every sinner who would ever put their faith in Him.

But not only was His death "plan A." So was His resurrection. "Destroy this temple, and *I will raise it again in three days.*" A dead Savior couldn't help us, but...

3. *He predicted He was going to rise again.* And He did!

Of course, the prediction went right over their heads. Even the disciples missed it until later, according to verse 22, "After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken."

Do you see the irony in this? The Jews wanted a sign, right? The irony is that the Jews themselves brought about the sign they asked Jesus to give.^[4]

But there's yet another surprise. First, Jesus' anger. Then Jesus' answer. In verses 23-25 we see Jesus' surprising actions.

III. Jesus' actions reveal His unique identity (23-25).

Notice how the chapter ends in verses 23-25, "Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man."

I see two surprising actions here. One...

A. He did miracles to prove His deity. The Jews asked for a sign. Jesus gave them a prediction. Now He gives signs, many of them seen by many people. What were the miracles? John doesn't tell us. Why not? He gives the answer in the last verse of the book in John 21:25, "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." (see also 20:30).

What effect did Jesus' miracles produce? John says that many people "believed in his name." That means they were saved, right? John 1:12 says, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." And John 3:36 says, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life." These people believed in His name, so they were children of God, right?

Hold on. Take a close look at verse 24, "But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men." Whoa! Why did Jesus not entrust Himself to people who believed in His name? Here's why...

B. He didn't settle for deficient faith. Is that what these people had, *deficient* faith? That's what verse 25 seems to imply. "He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man."

That's interesting. Another surprise, and it's quite revealing. What do we learn about Jesus from this? Three things.

1. *He's not fooled by outward appearances.*
2. *He knows what is in us.*
3. *He sees when we're trying to use Him for a twisted end.*

There's actually a play on words in the Greek text. The verb "believed" in verse 23 and "entrust" in verse 24 come from the same Greek word *pisteuo*. People believed in Jesus, but He didn't believe in them. As MacArthur surmises, "He had no faith in their faith."^[5]

Wiersbe puts it this way, "Jesus did not accept their profession. No matter what the people themselves said, or others said about them, He did not accept human testimony... These people believed in Jesus, but He did not believe in them! They were 'unsaved believers'! It was one thing to respond to a miracle but quite something else to commit oneself to Jesus Christ and continue in His Word."^[6]

It's not the last time Jesus faced the challenge of dealing with "unsaved believers." Take a look at John 8:30-31, "Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him. To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.'"

My friend, there's a difference between believing in Jesus' miracles and believing in Jesus. Let's bring it closer to home. I've watched a lot of people over the years walk into this church building, with burdens weighing them down. And we told them about the burden bearer, Jesus the Christ. And they believed in Him—they said so by word and by action in believer's baptism. And for awhile they seemed to live for Him. And then they walked away from Him right back into the world.

How do you explain that? Some say such people lost their salvation. By His actions Jesus says they never had it to begin with. You say, "But they believed." Yes, but there's a difference between believing that Jesus put your family back together, or saved your business, or healed your body, and truly believing in Jesus as your Savior.

Listen to MacArthur again, this time quoting Tasker, "Jesus regarded all belief in Him as superficial which does not have as its most essential elements the consciousness of the need for forgiveness and the conviction that He alone is the Mediator of that forgiveness."^[7]

Beloved, don't miss this. Jesus' reluctance shows just how severe our problem is. I don't know the true nature of a person's faith, nor do you. I can see the fruit of it, but not the root of it. But Jesus sees the root.

John 1:42 indicates He knew the character of Simon. John 1:46 shows that He knew what Nathanael was like. John 4:29 indicates He told the Samaritan woman "all things" she had ever done. John 5:42 indicates that He knew the religious leaders did not have God's love in their hearts,^[8] while John 8:10-11 reveals that He saw the repentance in the heart of an adulteress. Conversely, according to John 8:40ff He saw the murder that lurked in the hearts of His enemies.

Yes, He knows. Jesus knows what we tend to forget, that there are different kinds of faith, that not all faith is saving faith, and that those who lack genuine saving faith need, not more religion, but to be *born again*. It's not coincidental that the very next event in John's gospel is a most interesting conversation between Jesus and a Pharisee named Nicodemus in chapter 3. It was to this upstanding religious leader, this man of faith who thought he was right with God that Jesus said, "You must be born again (3:7)."

Let's take inventory. Let's suppose that Jesus came, not to Jerusalem, but to Wheelersburg this morning. And let's suppose He came, not to the temple, but to the church house of Wheelersburg Baptist Church. I wonder what He who knows all men would do in our presence. Let's ask ourselves three questions.

Take Inventory: Suppose that Jesus came to WBC today...

1. *What does Jesus think of my worship?* What words describe your worship? Ritual? Stingy shortcuts? Merchandizing? Using God to get more of this world? He despises that. He died to save us from that. He wants to see worshipers who exalt His Father, who admit their sin and need openly, who put their trust solely in Him and in the sacrifice He made for them as their substitute. He wants to see gratitude for His grace. Has He seen that in your worship today?

2. *What does Jesus think of my faith?* You say, "I believe in Jesus. I have faith in Him." Okay, but does He believe in you? Does He have faith in your faith?

You say, "How can I be sure my faith is valid?" I think Tasker's words help us. Let me read them again, "Jesus regarded all belief in Him as superficial which does not have as its most essential elements the consciousness of the need for forgiveness and the conviction that He alone is the Mediator of that forgiveness."

Have you acknowledged your need for forgiveness? Not just for Him to give you a job, or heal your body, or fix your family, or take away your fear of people. Have you acknowledged your need for *forgiveness*?

And have you acknowledged that He alone is the Mediator of that forgiveness, meaning He is the only person who can save you from your sins and reconcile you to your Maker?

3. *What does Jesus want to change most in my life?* What's He putting His finger on? Are you willing to be changed?

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] A couple more examples... He demonstrated His anger towards Israel after Achan's sin in Joshua 7:26, and toward Uzzah after he touched the ark (1 Chr 13:10).

[2] Quote taken from Kent Hughes, p. 69.

[3] William Hendriksen, p. 124.

[4] Leon Morris, p. 199.

[5] John MacArthur, p. 95.

[6] Warren Wiersbe, p. 293.

[7] John MacArthur, p. 95.

[8] Observation by Wiersbe, p. 294.