

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.

- 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.
- 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.

Make It Personal: Ask yourself these questions...

1. How does my concept of Jesus need to change?
2. How does my response to Jesus need to change?

Every heard of Camp Quest? A week ago *The Columbus Dispatch* ran a feature on this summer camp which is located in Clarksville, just northeast of Cincinnati. Let's listen to the first part of the article and then a few excerpts:

The camp director's housekeeping lecture met the usual disinterest from the dining hall full of sweaty, bug-bitten kids. Messy cabins are a staple of summer camp. Who wants to tidy up when you can swim, play games and goof around with your friends? But August Brunsman finished his cleaning directive with a so-subtle-the-kids-probably-missed-it pun that made clear that Camp Quest is not the usual summer offering.

"Remember," he said, a slight grin crossing his face, "cleanliness is next to godlessness."

He said that because Camp Quest is a camp for the children of atheists, agnostics, humanists and other nonbelievers. What's it like at Camp Quest? The article continues:

Most of the time, the kids do normal camp stuff such as hike, compete in relay races, sit around campfires. But the overarching philosophy is that life without religion is a perfectly healthy, viable option.

Started in 1996, Camp Quest emphasizes critical thinking and the scientific method. Counselors lead philosophical discussions about topics such as the nature of happiness. Consideration for others is a key component of the "Rational Rules for Living," posted on the wall of the dining hall at the 4-H camp where Camp Quest Ohio rented space.

Rule No. 1: "Remember that everybody is here to have a good time. Respect all people, whatever their beliefs, which you encounter while you are here."

The weeklong Ohio camp in Clarksville, northeast of Cincinnati, is the largest with 78 campers, but other sessions are offered in Michigan, Minnesota, Tennessee, California, Texas, Ontario and the United Kingdom. An Irish woman is in Clarksville this week learning the model so she can take it to her country.

The 30 or so counselors, many of them former campers, are unpaid volunteers who undergo state and federal

criminal-background checks, said Amanda Metskas, executive director of Camp Quest Inc.

Katie Hladky, an atheist pursuing a doctorate in American religious history, teaches daily lessons about world religions and their belief systems.

Hladky won't bad-mouth faith or tell the kids what to think, she said.

"I feel really strongly these kids shouldn't be indoctrinated," she said. Many of the campers, who range in age from 8 to 17, "don't know what they are" yet when it comes to beliefs...

Despite the emphasis on open-mindedness, poking fun at faith isn't forbidden. Each day, the kids split into teams for competitions such as the human-knot race, where teams form a circle and grab hands at random in a tangle. They race up and down a field, then have to unwind the knot without releasing hands.

The team names included the Flaming Messiahs, a nod to the incinerated "Touchdown Jesus" sculpture north of Cincinnati struck by lightning last week, and the Dinosaur Jesus Riders, whose cheer goes like this: "Yeehaw, ride that Jesus!"^[1]

What do you think about a camp that in the name of "open-mindedness" is teaching children to cheer, "Yeehaw, ride that Jesus!"? A more pertinent question might be, "What does Jesus think?"

You say, "I'd say it makes Him angry. It sure does me."

Without question, it's unthinkable to demean the One who so loved people that He was willing to die in their place to rescue them from eternal destruction and give them eternal life. But isn't that what we all have done? We too have demeaned the One who gave Himself for us, and would still be doing the same had He not opened our eyes to the truth about His love for us.

Here's the question of the hour. *What makes Jesus angry?* This morning we're going to look at a scene from Jesus' life where He got angry, and I mean *incensed*. What caused it? Atheists? No. Religious people did, and it happened, of all places, in their place or worship. Why did the Lord of love become angry? And what does that teach us about Him? Let's find out.

I want you to know the truth about Jesus, the whole truth about Him. So let's examine carefully the intriguing account in John 2:12-25. There are actually three surprises in the story (Jesus' anger in the temple, Jesus' answer to the religious authorities, and Jesus' actions when people apparently believed in Him), and each one reveals something important to us about Jesus. We'll examine the first today and the other two next time, as the Lord allows.

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

Verse 12 gives the setting: "After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days."

After this. After Jesus went to a wedding in Cana and performed His first miracle by turning water into wine. After the wedding Jesus made the twenty mile trek from Cana to Capernaum with His mother, His brothers (actually half-brothers, the children of Joseph and Mary), and His disciples.

Why Capernaum? Jesus grew up in Nazareth, right? It's possible He moved to Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. Or perhaps He's scoping things out for future ministry opportunities (later He'll spend a lot of time ministering in Capernaum). It's worth noting that James and John are from Capernaum.

The visit lasted only a few days. Verse 13 says, "When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem." He went up literally, for although He headed south, since Capernaum is 680 feet below sea level and Jerusalem is 2,500 feet above sea level, He *went up*.

Every Jewish man was supposed to go to Jerusalem for three annual feasts: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Deut. 16:16). According to Barclay, over two million Jews would at times show up in Jerusalem for Passover. Please notice that Jesus kept the requirements of God's law, every one of them. Here He went to Passover as God's Word commanded. But Jesus did not obey the laws that men like the Pharisees added to God's law, and that infuriated them and ultimately brought about His death.

Passover took place on the fourteenth day of Nisan (Ex. 12:23-27). That's March/April on our calendar. That means the story we're about to investigate took place around March or April of AD 27.

The first words of verse 14 set the stage for our story. It happened "in the temple courts." Jesus went to the temple. What temple? The Jews' first temple was built by Solomon around 950 BC, but after some 350 years of use the Babylonians destroyed it. Then after the exile, Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Haggai, and Zechariah led the efforts in building a second temple (Ezra 1-6). After nearly 500 years of use, Herod the Great began an extensive renovation of that second temple (beginning around 20 B.C.).

That's where Jesus went on this early Spring day, and what He saw there infuriated Him. Here's what happened

according to 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.’”

Whoa! Jesus doesn’t seem very Christlike here, does He? Of course, He does. The problem is we have such a narrow and watered down view of what Jesus is like.

Did you realize that all four gospel accounts show Jesus getting angry in the temple courts? What’s that tell us about Jesus? It tells us a ton, and chiefly what He thinks about cheap religion.

By the way, there’s a textual problem here we must face. Turn back to Luke 19:45 which states, “Then he entered the temple area and began driving out those who were selling.” Sound familiar? When did Luke say that happened? Look at verse 35. After the triumphal entry which happened on Palm Sunday, right? That’s also when Matthew and Mark put the account, during the last week of Jesus’ ministry (probably on Tuesday of passion week).

Where does John put it? At the beginning, right? Jesus is baptized in chapter one, performs His first miracle at the beginning of chapter two, and then turns over tables in the temple. Somebody got it wrong, didn’t they? Did it happen at the beginning or at the end? It’s one of those “contradictions in the Bible,” isn’t it?

That’s what some say. Others just ignore the time indicators in the text. The reasoning goes like this. The synoptic gospels (written by Matthew, Mark, and Luke) all put the temple cleansing scene at the end of Jesus’ public ministry, not the beginning. Neither Matthew, Mark, nor Luke even mention Jesus doing this at the beginning of His ministry. Since there’s three of them, they must be right. John got it wrong. John is describing the same event, but he doesn’t care about the chronology of it, only the theology of it, so he stuck it in at the beginning of his book because it fits his theology.

Not so fast. Just because Matthew, Mark, and Luke don’t mention a temple cleansing at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry *doesn’t* mean it didn’t happen. Other than the account of John the Baptist, you won’t find *any* of the events recorded in the first five chapters of John in the other three gospels. The wedding at Cana. The conversation with Nicodemus. The conversion of the woman at the well. They’re not in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They’re only in John’s account.

The point? I’m convinced that Jesus cleansed the temple *twice*. It’s not a contradiction. Jesus flipped tables in the temple both at the beginning *and* at the end of His public ministry.

Let me take this a step further. The fact is, the accounts of Jesus’ life written by Matthew, Mark, and Luke do look similar in a lot of ways (that’s why they’re called the “synoptic” gospels, from the Greek adjective *synoptikos* meaning “to see with or together”). John’s account does look different. But different doesn’t mean wrong. It’s just a matter of perspective.^[2]

For instance, in the synoptics we read about Jesus going to Jerusalem only once (for the Passover when He was crucified). But in John we find Him going to at least three Passovers in Jerusalem (this one in John 2, another in John 6:4, and another in John 11:55). What’s more, John’s account shows that Jesus was in Jerusalem for an unnamed feast in John 5:1, the Feast of Tabernacles in John 7:2, 10, and the Feast of Dedication in John 10:22.

So did Jesus go to Jerusalem for only one Passover or three? Who’s right? The synoptics or John? They’re all right, of course. The differences are due to perspective and purpose. The focus in the synoptic gospels is on what Jesus did in Galilee, with very little mention of what He did in Jerusalem until the last week. But in John’s account we see very little of what He did in Galilee but a lot about His ministry in Jerusalem.

Now, back to the question. So Jesus got angry in the temple, twice in fact. *What does this tell us about Jesus?* I think it shows us how He assesses worship, in two ways.

A. We learn the kind of worship that the Lord despises. What caught Jesus’ eye that day that grieved His soul? Verse 14 mentions *animal sellers* and *money changers*

We need some background information, and I’m indebted to William Barclay for it. For starters, every Jew over the age of 19 had to pay a temple tax that cost one-half shekel (that was the equivalent of two days’ wages for the average man). But they had to pay it with either a Galilean shekel or a special sanctuary shekel. Other currencies were considered unclean (sorry, American Express).

So enter *the money changer*. To make it possible for worshippers to give their gifts with the accepted currency, money changers would facilitate the exchange...with fees, of course. There would be a flat fee simply to change the money, and then another fee based on the size of the currency submitted. Barclay says it might cost a man the equivalent of a day’s wages just to get the proper currency to pay his temple tax.

Once you left the money changer you met the *animal sellers*. They were there to sell you an animal that was

acceptable to offer to God in worship. Originally, of course, God commanded His people to bring their own animal, one without blemish. But that was so much work, to haul a several hundred pound animal fifty miles or so. So for convenience sake, many chose to buy an animal upon arrival.

In fact, even if you wanted to bring your own animal, chances are it wouldn't pass inspection. The temple authorities made that decision for you. And even if your animal passed, you still had to pay an inspection fee (a quarter of a day's wages).

It's kind of like going to Kings Island. You'll probably pay double the price for your food inside the gate, right? Barclay says that a pair of doves could cost a Jew nearly twenty times the price inside the temple than paid outside.^[3] It was (as Barclay puts it) "bare-faced extortion at the expense of poor and humble pilgrims, who were practically blackmailed into buying their victims from the Temple booths."^[4]

Kent Hughes calls the whole thing a "religious circus." He points out that the high priest actually sold franchises for money-changing booths and animal sales. And to reiterate, the rates were so exorbitant that it would take an entire day's wages for a working man just to exchange his money.^[5]

No wonder Jesus made a whip and shut down the temple market that day! Let's talk about four things that are true of the kind of worship that Jesus despises.

1. He hates mere ritual. God gave the Jews the sacrificial system out of His grace, not to punish them. Bring your best animal, He said. When I see the blood, I'll pardon your sins.

But what God gave as a wonderful provision of His grace, the people turned into meaningless religious ritual. A checklist. Take out the trash—got it. Pick up Johnny from his ballgame—got it. Buy a lamb for sacrifice at the temple—got it.

Why did you come to church today, and drop your money in the plate, and sing your songs? My friend, God hates mere ritual, then and now. Listen to what He said in Isaiah 1:11-13, "'The multitude of your sacrifices— what are they to me?' says the LORD. 'I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings!'"

2. He hates when we look for stingy shortcuts. "God doesn't care if you bring your own animal. Just buy one." A shortcut. "God doesn't care if you go to church when you're on vacation. Just listen to a CD in the car." A shortcut. "Spend time in the Word before you go to work? How about a quick prayer over breakfast? He'll understand." A shortcut.

3. He hates when we merchandize His worship. I read that a few years before Jesus cleansed the temple a man came to the same place, went into the temple treasury and stole close to \$20 million, and didn't come close to depleting the supply.^[6] We're talking big bucks, my friend. In the name of God's worship, greedy men were making tons of money. And it infuriated the Lord.

He hates it when we use Him to make this life good for us. I wonder what He thinks about television preachers who use the teaching of His Word to fund their extravagant lifestyles, or about musicians who do the same thing with their "worship" concerts and CDs, or authors with their books, or bookstore owners with their Christian tee-shirts and trinkets, and those of us who pay the money God has entrusted to us for it all? I'm not saying it's wrong to sell and buy music CDs and sermons and tee-shirts, but it's not my assessment that matters anyway. I'm just asking, *what does Jesus think about it?* When I read this story He seems to be saying something pretty relevant in a day when His name is being used in the exchange of millions (even billions?) of dollars. Hear Him... "How dare you turn my Father's house into a market?"

4. He hates when we use Him to get more of this world for ourselves.

I want you to notice where Jesus found these shops, not in the temple per se, but in the "temple courts," also known as "the court of the Gentiles." The Jews did not permit Gentiles to enter into the temple itself, but they let them into this outer court.

Just think of it. This was the place established for the Jews to talk with seeking Gentiles about their need for the one true God. But if there was a seeking Gentile in town that day, he surely wouldn't find the Lord in this "what I'm seeing is so loud I can't hear what you're saying" place.

John MacArthur hits the nail on the head, "What should have been a place of sacred reverence and adoration had become a place of abusive commerce and excessive overpricing. The sound of heartfelt praise and fervent prayers had been drowned out by the bawling of oxen, the bleating of sheep, the cooing of doves, and the loud haggling of vendors and their customers."^[7]

And we in the church today wonder why the world isn't listening to us. Maybe they can't hear what we're saying because our actions are speaking so loudly.

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.”^[8]

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

1. *He wants worship that exalts the Father.* That’s what the temple was. It’s “my Father’s house,” said Jesus. Jesus later said in John 4:23, “True worshipers will worship *the Father* in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.”

The Father deserves our worship. Indeed, He’s seeking it. But herein lies a problem. We enter the world not giving it to Him. We don’t want to make much of Him. We want Him to make much of us.

That’s why Jesus came. To bring people back to the Father. And what is it that the Father wants from a person who’s coming back home to Him? A store-bought offering? No. Here’s what He wants, and it’s where true worship begins...

2. *He wants to hear the admission of our sin and need.* That’s what the temple was supposed to be all about. In the synoptic accounts Jesus said, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations (Mark 11:17).” That’s what God wanted to hear in this temple, as from this church building today. He wanted to hear sinners do something that “good people” won’t do, and that’s cry out to Him in prayer, confess their sin, and admit their desperate need for Him to do something about their sin, something that they couldn’t do for themselves.

3. *He wants to see our heartfelt dependence upon the sacrifice of another.* Prayer is good, but it isn’t enough. You didn’t go to the temple just to pray. You went to the temple to bring an animal, and you called out to God for forgiveness on the basis of the death of that animal. And He forgave you, not because you deserved it, but because the blood of that substitute made an atonement for your sin (Lev. 17:11).

Do we bring blood sacrifices today? No. Why not? Listen to Hebrews 10:10, “We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

Why in our church services do we sing so many songs about the blood and cross-work of Jesus? Why do I encourage you to sing a song about the cross in your home every day? It’s because that’s at the heart of the kind of worship that pleases our Father. He loves to hear our heartfelt dependence upon the sacrifice His Son made for us.

4. *He wants to see our gratitude for His grace.* When a Jew walked away from that temple and looked back at the smoke of a dead animal still rising in the sky, he was supposed to leave behind his guilt and take with him gratitude for grace.

I have another Drew story for you. Drew, who’s five years old, walked into the room last week to see his dad reading his Bible. His dad told me that Drew started talking to him, but could tell his dad’s focus was on the Bible, not him.

“Dad, you sure read the Bible a lot.”

“Yes, Drew,” his dad replied. “It’s because it’s the greatest book there is.”

“I know,” Drew replied with frustration in his voice. “It tells us about Jesus and stuff.” And then Drew added, “But sometimes He gets in the way.”

Out of the mouth of babes. Isn’t that the way we treat Jesus far too often? Oh, it’s nice to know Him. I mean, after all, we get to go to heaven because of Him. But sometimes He just gets in the way of what’s really important to us, doesn’t He?

My friend, ten thousand offerings won’t compensate for a heart that lacks gratitude for grace. That’s what infuriated Jesus that day. In the very place God established for people to leave behind their guilt and walk away thrilled with His grace, what He saw was the greed of man-centered religion. And He didn’t hide His displeasure.

He took a whip and sent the animals and their owners running. No, He wasn’t out of control, and He didn’t destroy anything, including beast or man.^[9] But He made it clear what He thought about the travesty He saw, and at least for a few moments on that day He exercised His right as God the Father’s only begotten Son to shut down the charade.^[10]

He did speak to one group, the dove sellers. “Get these out of here!” He said. Why did He specifically address the dove sellers? I’m not sure, but I have a hunch. Who offered doves? Mary did in Luke 2:24. Why? Because she was too poor to afford a lamb. The poor offered doves (Lev. 12:8). But at these rates, the poor couldn’t even afford a dove. Which meant, no sacrifice. And no sacrifice meant no forgiveness.

“Get these out of here!” said Jesus to the men who were keeping the poor from obtaining what their sin-laden

souls desperately needed.

What angers you? Does it anger you to see manmade religious systems that keep people from God's forgiveness?

I must confess, I'm way too passive. I see things that grieve God and ought to grieve me, and do nothing about it. But Jesus did something about it.

We talk about Jesus' love, and so we should for He is love personified. But as Kent Hughes remarks, "Love presupposes hatred. A love for the downtrodden, the poor, and the oppressed also brings about a hatred for the conditions that caused their suffering....Men and women of great love have also been people of great hatred. In fact, you can tell as much about a person by his hatreds as by his loves."^[11]

This convicts me. Jesus' actions teach me that if I really love sinners, then I will hate the sin that enslaves them, and I'll love them enough to do something about it. Yet far too often when I see a person who's enslaved in sin, I do nothing, not because I love that person but because I love myself and don't want to risk the consequences of getting involved.

"Zeal for your house will consume me." That's Psalm 69:9, and that's the verse that came to the disciples' minds as they pondered the actions of their Savior.^[12]

What do we learn about Jesus from scene one? His anger speaks loudly, doesn't it? It tells us exactly what He thinks of those who keep people from worshiping the Father and experiencing the forgiveness He offers them. That includes the irreligious like those at Camp Quest who mock Jesus with their agnostic jokes. That also includes the pseudo religious like those who call themselves "Christian," yet mock Jesus with their agnostic lives.

As you can imagine Jesus' anger produced quite a stir that day. How the people responded we'll see next time, the Lord willing, as we explore two more surprises that followed. One was the answer He gave to His critics in verses 18-22. The other was the action He demonstrated towards those who supposedly believed in Him in verses 23-25.

For now, let's make it personal by pondering two questions...

Make It Personal: Ask yourself these questions...

1. *How does my concept of Jesus need to change?* Is the Jesus you've just seen today the Jesus in whom you are trusting for eternal life? He's not a Genie in a bottle, is He? He's the perfect Son who always sought His Father's honor. He's the sovereign Lord who took action when He confronted hypocrisy. He's the worthy King who deserves our absolute loyalty and obedience. He's the just deliverer who removes barriers so the poor can experience forgiveness too. He's the loving Savior who three years later died to rescue the very people He was willing to offend that day in the temple courts. Do you know this Jesus?

2. *How does my response to Jesus need to change?* Have you put your trust in Him for the salvation of your soul? If so, are you living for His honor? Are you cherishing His cross-work, and letting others know about what He did?

^{**}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] "Kids wrestle with religion at Camp Quest," Meredith Heagney, June 25, 2010, *The Columbus Dispatch.com*

^[2] There are other differences. In John's account Jesus uses His own words to support His actions. In the synoptics He quotes the Old Testament for justification. In Mark's account Jesus confronts using the temple as a shortcut (Mark 11:16). John's doesn't. Nor does John's include this warning found in Matthew 23:38, "Look, your house is left to you desolate."

^[3] Years ago Edersheim observed they were charging \$4 for a pair of doves worth a nickel. Observation by W. Hendriksen, p. 122.

^[4] William Barclay, pp. 109-110.

^[5] Kent Hughes, p. 66.

^[6] Kent Hughes, p. 67.

^[7] John MacArthur, p. 90.

^[8] Quote taken from Kent Hughes, p. 69.

^[9] The text specifies that He didn't release the doves but told the sellers to remove them.

^[10] Observation by W. Hendriksen, p. 123.

^[11] Kent Hughes, p. 68.

^[12] Psalm 69 is a messianic psalm that is quoted several times in the New Testament (Psalm 69:4 in John 15:25; Psalm 69:8 in John 7:3-5; Psalm 69:9 in John 2:17 & Rom 15:3; Psalm 69:21 in Matt 27:34, 48; and Psalm 69:22 in Rom 11:9-10).