

clean sweep

john 2.13-17

If you have a Bible, find your way to John chapter 2.

On the last Wednesday night of the month we usually pause from our regular studies to share in communion together and on those nights we've been turning over to the Gospels to hang out with Jesus. Because communion is all about us and Jesus.

When He was giving the Lord's Supper to us Jesus said, "as often as you do this, do it in remembrance of Me."

And here at Calvary we're fond of talking about 3 things to remember when taking communion. They are 3 things that Paul talked about. First, we remember what has happened. Christ's death on the cross means our sins are once for all purged and washed away. Second, we remember what is still coming. As we look forward into the future that God has revealed to us in the Bible, we know that the Lord is coming back for us. He's going to take us home to heaven where we will be forever free from sin and the effects of sin. No more sorrow. No more pain. No more disappointment. We will be complete and relieved and in fullness of joy.

But third, when we take communion, we are to look within our own hearts and evaluate our relationship with this God who has saved us and is coming to get us. This is the tougher one. Because we're more of a veneer culture, aren't we? When something's rotten, we like to cover it up with something shiny. I know that's my approach to home maintenance.

But self evaluation is absolutely essential in the life of a Christian. *Especially* when we gather to take communion. Here's what Paul said in 1 Corinthians chapter 11:

1 Corinthians 11.27-28 - So anyone who eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily is guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking the cup.

Tonight we get this chance to remember what Jesus did for us and what He's still planning to do and that should stir us up and excite us and motivate us to pursue Him. But tonight is also a chance for us to evaluate ourselves and make sure that we're properly walking with God, keeping pace with Him and staying in submission to His word. It's a chance to look inward and make sure we're drinking deep of His living water.

Because if we don't stay connected to the Lord, if we're not drinking deep of His living water, then our love will decline and our fruit will wither and our spiritual lives will start having dry rot crop up.

As you've noticed, we're doing a bunch of work around the trailer bathroom outside. The project was originally going to be just replacing the deck, but as the guys pulled things back they found dry rot on the trailer itself and now we're addressing that problem. The answer isn't

to simply cover it up and pretend it's not happening. That would be foolish and irresponsible. The answer is to deal with the problem, replacing or repairing what has been damaged.

Our text tonight shows us how damaging spiritual dry rot, spiritual leaven can be, but also how to deal with it if we happen to find it in our own lives.

Put in at verse 13 of John chapter 2. There we read:

John 2.13 - It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration, so Jesus went to Jerusalem.

Passover time was the start of the Jewish religious calendar. And, like what we've got tonight, it was a time of remembrance and examination for the Jews. They remembered the deliverance from Egypt and they would look for and remove all leaven from their homes as prescribed by God as a sign of holiness. It was also a time of celebration.

Any religion or tradition that strips away joy and celebration from a relationship with Jesus Christ is not in line with what God has presented to us in His word. Communion reminds us of death, it reminds us of sin, but it is to be a celebration as well. God wants us to be people filled with joy and anticipation and excitement and celebrations that are centered around Him and His work in our lives.

John 2.14 - In the Temple area he saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices; he also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money.

The temple here referenced was the one constructed by Herod the Great. It was divided into a number of courts. This scene plays out in what was known as the court of the Gentiles. Anyone could come into that part of the temple. Jews, Gentiles, men or women.

Now, people would travel from all over the world to come and worship in the temple, especially during Passover. There would, undoubtedly, be some who did not have the resources to travel with their sacrificial animals. There would be some who did not use the shekel back home, so there was a need for people to have access to animals and the acceptable currency for worshiping according to the Levitical law.

But there were at least 2 major problems here as we see these economic activities happening.

The first is that this sort of commerce should not be done inside of the temple. Nehemiah had dealt with this problem many centuries before. So the location of the business was wrong.

But the second major problem is that the priests controlled these assets and they would lie and extort in order to bleed people for as much money as possible. They'd disqualify the animals that travelers brought and say that they could buy 'pre-approved' animals there in the temple at wildly high rates. Some say that they were charging upwards of 10 times the value for some of these transactions.

The priests in the temple at some point started allowing the leaven of greed, the leaven of convenience, the leaven of prejudice to shape their behavior and their methods. This was out and out sin, but on the physical level it was a convenient, financially beneficial sin. And the

corruption expanded and grew to the incredible levels that we see on the pages of the Gospels.

What we find is that the Jewish leaders were living out their religion how they saw fit. They had abandoned the simple surrender to God's word and God's methods and they were trying to remodel God's structures in their own image.

Here's the thing: We are all about personal freedom, personal liberty, personal wealth. It's true of all mankind, but it's especially true of our culture. We have to come to grips with the fact that those attitudes are dangerous in the spiritual life. Because the life of a Christian is all about submission and sacrifice. We don't get to live the Christian life however we want. Instead we are commanded to obey God according to His plan for our lives.

When we became believers the Bible says that Jesus Christ put a new heart inside of us. It's a heart of love and submission. Now, all around us there are all these rotten pressures that want to get into the temple and a lot of them seem convenient or they seem lucrative, but Christ would say to us, "A little leaven leavens the lump."

That's what He would say and here's what He *did*:

John 2.15 - Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep and cattle, scattered the money changers' coins over the floor, and turned over their tables.

This is hardcore. Jesus is not messing around. He means business.

Here's what I thought was interesting: Jesus doesn't use a whip to do this kind of work anymore. No, now He uses a sword. We're told in the Bible that He sticks a sword right into our hearts.

Hebrews 4.12 - For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Why? Why did the Lord fashion a whip and why does He plunge a sword into the very heart of us? Look at verse 16:

John 2.16 - Then, going over to the people who sold doves, he told them, "Get these things out of here. Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!"

Now, on one hand I'm thinking, "Jesus, what do You care about what's going down in Herod's temple? In a couple of years the veil is going to be torn and this whole system is going to be set aside, so why bother dealing with this?"

But Jesus doesn't want anyone to have the impression that God is not accessible. See, a marketplace is all about barriers. It's all about you having to buy, having to wait, having to bring enough in order to get something in return. And Jesus Christ didn't want there to be any barrier between God and the people who were seeking after Him.

Geno is right at that age where he likes things explained to him. And when we're at the store, from time to time there will be an item in the cart that he's excited about and he'll carry it around and be excited about bringing it home. When we get to the checkout, he still usually tries to keep walking, so we explain to him that, "No buddy, first we have to put it on the little belt and then we have to pay for it, *THEN* it's ours to have." That's how it goes in the market.

That kind of transaction is unacceptable to the Lord concerning His house and His desire to draw all of mankind to Himself. He does not want people to think that they can or have to earn His grace or buy His forgiveness. The price of salvation has been paid. So freely we receive, therefore freely we should give. And when the Lord saw people putting up barriers between men and God in order to profit financially, He was assuredly going to put a stop to it.

In our own lives, in our own hearts, the Lord sticks His sword in so that He might warn us when we've brought something in that will introduce a barrier or distance between us and Him. Some habit. Some relationship. Some attitude. Some prodigal turn that we're about to take. The Lord comes and He warns us and He pierces our hearts with His word and says, "Don't do this. Don't take that step. Don't click send. Don't let this leaven into your life."

He does it by His Spirit and His word. As we read the Bible, as we hear it taught, God speaks and we must listen and when we feel as though God is speaking to our heart, that's God working to speak to us and cleanse us.

Now, notice what Jesus said there after He had driven some of the merchants out, He said: "[**YOU**] get these things out of here!"

The cleansing work of Christ is something we're to partner in. We're to sweep the house clean. We're to guard our hearts. We're to get that stuff out as the Lord reveals it and as He drive it out as well. It's like what He did with the Children of Israel as they went into Canaan. He told them, "Listen, I've gone before you, I've sent hornets, I've sent fear to their hearts, one of you will chase a thousand, but *YOU'VE* got to conquer this land. *YOU'VE* got to drive out these enemies." There's an ongoing partnership between us and the Lord in this regard.

This is why we need to invite the Lord regularly to inspect us. To search us. And it's why we need to go to the word and inspect ourselves. Putting ourselves in the text to evaluate how we measure up according to God's commands and His explanations.

If we see warnings in Scripture, say about leaving our first love, and our first thought is, "That's not me." Then we've got to stop and soften our hearts and humble ourselves and instead say, "Lord, is it me? Have I allowed some corrupt thing into the outer court of my life? Have I taken some turn that is leading me toward a different destination than what You want for my life?" And the Lord is faithful to answer and to guide and to *restore*. He didn't see the corruption in the temple and decide to burn it down. He cleansed it.

There's going to be wear and tear in our spiritual lives. That's just the nature of things. The Bible says that he who says he has no sin is a liar. But how wonderful it is that we have something like communion to give us an opportunity to look within as often as we want and evaluate our relationship with God, while remembering that He is the God who gave all to save

us. There's no shame in the inspection. But there is great opportunity for the Lord to help and restore.

John 2.17 - Then his disciples remembered this prophecy from the Scriptures: "Passion for God's house will consume me."

This is such an interesting statement. "Passion for God's house will consume Me."

The word there where we see 'passion' (or yours might say 'zeal') is actually the word 'jealousy.' The *Dictionary Of Bible Languages* renders it as 'extreme jealousy.'

Why did extreme jealousy for God's house consume the Lord?

Because that's where people met with God. He was jealous for the communion and interaction between God and people. The Lord will fiercely rage at anything which tries to separate people from Him. He says pretty serious things about it. Things like, "If you make someone stumble, it would be better for you to have a millstone hung around your neck and thrown into the ocean compared to what I will do to you."

A fierce, passionate, loving jealousy for the House of God consumes our Savior.

This means a couple of things for us.

First, if our King has a passion for the Church, then we should cultivate a passion for the Church, locally and globally. Our gathering as a congregation matters and we should develop more and more of a passion for it.

Second, we should be very excited to remember that Christ's death ushered in a new covenant where now we are the temple of the Lord. We are the objects of His fierce, jealous passion. There is nothing apathetic or passive about God's love for you. He is consumed with His love for you. And He's coming for you. That should change our lives.

Now, having seen Jesus, let's turn this principle inward for a moment. Let's turn this sword onto ourselves.

What are we jealous for? What passions consume us? What do we fiercely fight against with our time and our energy and our thoughts?

Because, end of the day, the priests were responsible for what was happening in the temple. Their focus had at some point shifted to wealth and convenience and power, rather than the God who had revealed Himself to them.

And in the end, they didn't deal with this leaven that they had let in. As we compare the Gospels it seems that there were 2 cleansings like this. The first here in 28 AD and a second either in 30 or 33 AD that we read about in Matthew chapter 21.

Here Jesus said, "You've made my Father's house a house of merchandise." But a few years later He said, "This is a den of thieves." The corruption spread. It worsened. It decayed.

There's a rare condition called CIP: Congenital Insensitivity to Pain where where a person cannot feel (and has never felt) physical pain. It may seem almost comical to us, but it is, in fact, an incredibly dangerous condition.

Pain is useful to signal a problem. And using the analogy God gives us in the Scriptures, it's important that we do not harden our hearts so that we feel when He pierces us with the sword of His word.

If we don't sweep out leaven from our lives, it will cause changes and reactions that introduce distance between us and the Lord. We will develop a spiritual insensitivity to the pierce of God's word. That piercing where He desires to prune or to true our lives. Our hearts can grow dull. Our hearing can become hard. And that's not what the Lord wants for us. He's jealous for us. He wants communion with us. He wants what the New Testament calls koinania, which is 'the act of sharing in the activities or privileges of an intimate association, especially used of marriage and churches.'

So now, as we take this communion together, let's remember what God has done and remember that He's coming. Let's remind ourselves that God is near and that He has a passionate, jealous love for us. And let's sweep clean any leaven we might find as we examine ourselves and allow God to cleanse our hearts. There's nothing for us to be ashamed of, because our God loves us and knows us and desires to repair and restore any area that may need it. We just need to allow Him to do so and partner with Him in the work.