

John 2:12-25 / Gulf Gate Church, 04.19.09

2* script; whip; rolls of pennies; table; supersoaker; t-shirt; Greek and Hebrew books

Introduction Before Worship

- † I think I know what some of you are thinking! You are remembering that when I first came here to preach, almost four years ago, I was wearing a jacket and a tie; today, I have come wearing a t-shirt. Some of you are thinking that over the years you have had a profound effect on me! Well, maybe you have.
- The t-shirt has a significance which I will explain later in the sermon, but – since it is as far as I can get from that jacket and a tie I wore on my first visit – this t-shirt also might symbolically mark that this could be my last visit. LeeAnn and I plan to leave in August, so I may continue my education at Dallas Theological Seminary.
 - For those of you who are sitting here thinking, “who is this guy?” let me tell you that my name is Will Groben, and I have preached here at Gulf Gate Church several times before. I do have a Masters of Arts degree in biblical studies, but as I work toward the higher level Masters of Theology degree, the seminary hopes to teach me both Greek and Hebrew, so I can interpret scripture better.
 - And – in what might be welcome news to some of you – the seminary intends to give me some lessons in preaching. Now, you know what will be the first thing they are going to teach me, right? That I need to wear a jacket and a tie! We’ll see...
- † Your pastor, Scott Rich, is in Indiana this weekend, running a church retreat, to fulfill his last commitment from his former ministry. He’ll be back this coming week, but for today he asked me to call you to worship. Allow me to do so...
- John 4:23 in the NIV quotes Jesus as saying, “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.” Let us be worshippers of that kind – authentic and passionate – as we begin our worship in song!

Historical Background After Announcements

- † Let me tell you a true story. Long before Christ was born, when the Jews were allowed to return to Israel after their exile, they had great expectations of being in communion with God and receiving the promised Messiah [or Christ], who would deliver them spiritually from their sins and politically from their oppressors.
 - However, the people quickly slipped back into sin, while the land continued to be dominated by first one foreign power, then another, and another, each more powerful than the one before. After Malachi, hundreds of years passed in which they heard nothing from God: no more prophets, and no Messiah.

- † At one point the Jews gained political independence for a while, but a few decades before Jesus was born, the Romans crushed them, even destroying the Temple.
 - During Jesus' life, the Jews not only had no political independence, they had lost some religious independence as well: the Romans had changed the High Priest four times, even though this was supposed to be a life-long post and they were supposed to have religious autonomy. The High Priest in Jesus' day was a puppet of the Roman political leadership.
 - The only good thing was that the Roman government had rebuilt the Temple. One religious group, the Sadducees, usually controlled the Temple practices, while another religious group, the Pharisees, taught in the synagogues, which were like local churches.

Purpose Statement

- † Because of all these things, the atmosphere in Israel was very religious but not very spiritual. They had a lot of religious form but not a lot of sincere, heart-felt worship.

- † Are we like that? [Pause] Did you come here this morning expectant of experiencing God? with great delight in your heart to praise the name of Jesus Christ? [Reaction?] Maybe you came for a different reason... maybe you are just checking this out or it's your routine on Sunday mornings.
 - If you are honest with yourself and you find little passion for worship in your heart, I won't criticize you. Sometimes, I find myself just going through the motions, coming to church because it is our form; it's what we do as believers, and I'm glad to be here, but sometimes I'm without any great passion in my heart for worship. So, I will not criticize you.

- † But let's commit to changing our attitude! Let us be passionate! Let us be devoted and dependent! crying out our praises and our needs to the only one who deserves the praise and can answer our pleas.
 - Let us not come late anymore to worship, but come early to pray and encourage each other and prepare our hearts and minds! Let us not sit with folded hands and listen to the music, but sing and raise our hands high! Let us not dwell in our own thoughts, but embrace the scriptures as they are explained to us!
 - This is why we come here, to worship the almighty God! That is our theme for this morning. Join us now, with passion and focus, as we continue to worship in song!

Transition After Worship

- † **[Slide 1: Blank]** [Dontae's prayer]
- † **[Slide 2: Starting Verse]** Some of my professors developed the New English Translation, which is available free at bible.org, and I will be reading from that today. You can follow along in your own Bible, whatever translation it is, or in the NIV bibles on the tables. We will begin with John 2:12.
- † We are going to be talking about some heart issues today. Let me make clear at the beginning that I do not want anyone to leave here feeling guilty today. Guilt is not from God.
 - What I do want is for us collectively to feel a conviction that we can have and must have a better attitude toward our time of worship together. We must repent! as John the Baptist shouted, Repent! which means, let us change our ways! for the kingdom of God is at hand!

Historical Background

- † **[Slide 3: Jordan River]** When Jesus was about thirty, John the Baptist came out of the wild lands dressed like a wild man, and started confronting people to repent of their sins and be baptized in the Jordan River.
 - John created a buzz... crowds of people came from Jerusalem and elsewhere to see him, hear him, and get baptized by him. These were people with great hope, who believed the promised Messiah would come if the nation would repent.
 - John's message – that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand, that the Messiah, the promised savior from God, was coming – spread far and wide through these people.
 - John baptized Jesus and testified that Jesus was the promised Messiah, as did both God the Father, who spoke from Heaven, and the Holy Spirit, who descended from Heaven onto Jesus. Up to this time, Jesus had not done anything to attract attention to himself.
- † **[Slide 4: Cana]** After the apostle John has explained to us that Jesus is the Son of God, who came from Heaven to be born in the flesh, he picks up the story at about this point. John the baptizer was still baptizing people in the Jordan River and calling them to repent. He handed off some of his disciples to Jesus, and these men encouraged brothers and friends to join them.
 - His new disciples went off with Jesus to a wedding in the hills of Cana, up in the northern part of the state, and it was then that Jesus did his first miracle, turning water into wine at the wedding feast, which had prophetic significance and so strengthened the faith of the disciples. We pick up the story in v.12...

Exposition

[Slide 5: Capernaum] *2:12 After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there a few days.*

- † Now remember, Jesus has done one miracle, and it was in front of only a few people at a wedding in a remote little village. However, people's expectations are high, whipped to a frenzy perhaps by what John the Baptist is saying and doing. False Messiahs have been appearing in public only to fall short of prophesied expectations. The buzz John has created is growing.

2:13 Now the Jewish feast of Passover was near, so Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

- † **[Slide 6: Jerusalem Map]** Passover is the celebration of God's deliverance of the Jewish people when they were in Egypt. When they acted in faith and obedience to God's instructions, the angel of

death passed over their houses while striking dead the firstborn of all the Egyptian houses. This facilitated the escape of the Jews from Egypt.

- † Attendance in Jerusalem by Jewish men was mandatory for this feast, which was followed by a week-long celebration called the Festival of Unleavened Bread. Jerusalem at Passover would have been like New Orleans during Marti Gras Carnival, except maybe a little less carnal. The city would be bursting with visitors: worse even than our tourist season.
 - Think of what Sarasota would be like right now, if we tripled the population! Would we ever get through the light at Bee Ridge and Beneva? Think of the traffic, the crowds, people camping out everywhere because there is no place to stay, a celebratory party atmosphere everywhere you go.
 - The Temple even would be immersed in this chaos, because this is where all these visitors want to go to celebrate in worship.
- † There would have been an even more expectant mood than usual this Passover, because of what John the Baptist is saying and doing.
 - There were 456 Old Testament passages considered Messianic – about the coming Christ – so people were discussing what to expect if John was really a prophet from God. They would be hopeful, but also confused.
 - John’s message, that they needed to personally repent of their sins to get ready for the Messiah, was consistent with the words of Moses and the prophets about how the nation would need to repent to be blessed, but the religious leaders – the Sadducees and Pharisees – maintained that they had no need to repent, that they were acceptable to the Messiah by being descendents of Abraham, circumcised according to the covenant with God.
 - Now Jesus comes into this atmosphere to Jerusalem, and he goes to the Temple.

Distractions and Irreverence

[Slide 7: Blank] 2:14-16 He found in the temple courts those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers sitting at tables. So he made a whip of cords and drove them all out of the temple courts, with the sheep and the oxen. He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold the doves he said, “Take these things away from here! Do not make my Father’s house a marketplace!”

- † Is that how you would read it? The narrative parts of the New Testament tend to be a little understated sometimes. We read quickly through and we see, “He said,” and then “They said,” and it makes little impact on our imagination.
 - However, watch the same scenes on videos like *The Passion of the Christ* or *The Gospel of John*, and it will have a bigger impact on you because in the drama they show you the emotion, the passion, that was involved in these scenes.
- † Jesus is angry! It is worthwhile to ask why he is angry. Jesus is not angry that people use the money changers and animal merchants. These were necessary services.
 - People who traveled great distances to Jerusalem could not bring animals with them for the sacrifice, so they had to buy the animals in Jerusalem.
 - The Temple tax that every Jewish male had to pay was accepted only in one form of currency, so people with other types of money had to exchange currencies.
 - These activities were not what angered Jesus. John enlightens us in the next verse:

2:17 His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will devour me.”

† **[Slide 8: Temple]** This is a quote from Psalm 69:9.

- The Old Testament was clear that the Messiah was to be not only the savior but also a king in the line of David. David wrote Psalm 69 about himself, but like many of David’s psalms, portions of this one were considered to be Messianic in that they not only represented David, but also the future Messiah, the future ultimate Davidic King.
- Jesus had a passion, a zeal for his father’s house, and he was angry because he found these commercial activities taking place within the Temple compound itself.

Distractions

† Jesus was angry about this for two reasons. One has to do with the fact that this outer court was the only place in the Temple compound where Gentiles could worship.

- A Gentile was anyone who was not born a Jew. Many Gentiles had realized true faith in the true God – the Jewish God – and so they too would venture to Jerusalem to honor God in his temple.
- But they were limited to this one part of the Temple compound, and now they could not find any peaceful spot in which to worship and pray. Instead, they were immersed in a marketplace, with baying animals, the shouts and other noises of commerce, even more crowded conditions than otherwise because of the animals and booths, and the smells of a barnyard.
- If we filled our sanctuary here this morning with lots of random noise and the smells of manure and dirty, wet, wool, would you find that conducive to prayer and worship? [Response?] Jesus was angry because these activities within the temple distracted people from their worship.

† **[Slide 9: Blank]** Do we do that? Do we distract each other from worship? I don’t want to get close to anyone with this whip, but since Jesus wanted to startle, not harm, I think an equivalent is for me to use a supersoaker. This thing has good range, so those of you in the back row are not safe...

† What do you say we identify a few ways that we distract each other from worship? We’ll stand up a few of the people who talk through the music or the sermon [blast!] ... then the people who leave their cell phones on during the service [blast!] ... then anyone who comes late for worship [blast!]. [laugh!] It could get ugly in here fast, couldn’t it?

† I know sometimes there are reasons these things happen. I have done them all myself. I confess, there are times during other people’s sermons that I whisper to LeeAnn what I consider to be essential biblical insight. But when I give in to this whim, I try to be quiet enough that nobody else hears me.

- I know, there are days when you cannot help but come late. I come late sometimes, especially if I have been counseling or praying with someone before church. Honest, we would rather have you come late than not at all, but if you do arrive late, maybe you could slip into the first seat near the back door, so you don’t disturb the rest of us. And if you find you are coming late often, maybe you need to make an adjustment to start getting ready earlier.
- I am sure all of us with cell phones have been embarrassed at one time or another by having them go off when we should have turned them off. What’s wrong with us? We’re here to commune with the Almighty God! He communicates through his Word and Holy Spirit, not cell phones.

† In 1 Corinthians 14, in talking about our times of gathering together to worship, Paul said that God is not characterized by disorder, but by peace, and so what we do in church should be not disruptive but

for the strengthening of each other. Let us ask ourselves, are these behaviors of ours inconsiderate to our fellow worshippers? Are they perhaps less than what Jesus expects from us?

Irreverence

- † Let's also ask ourselves if these behaviors are irreverent. The second reason Jesus was angry was that having these activities within the Temple did not show the proper respect to God. There is nothing wrong with doing business, but doing business in the Temple was wrong, it was not in keeping with the purpose of the Temple.
 - That people were even thinking of such things while in the Temple instead of focusing on worship was evidence of the decadence and hollowness of their religious practices.
- † Likewise, we don't come here to find business leads or a date; we don't come here to socialize with our friends. We come here to worship our glorious God in fellowship with other believers. When we divert from this singular purpose, we not only damage the spiritual experience for ourselves and others, we also send a big message of irreverence to God.
- † I want to make clear that I am not talking about the superficial. This is not a legalistic church. We call you to worship as you are, to be genuine even though you are flawed, even to come in with your coffee and your comfortable clothes.
 - That's why I deliberately wore a t-shirt to preach in today, so you would know that what I am after, what I think God is after, is our hearts, not artificial or superficial behaviors. Mind you, I did wear a Jesus themed t-shirt... if you are sporting something that says Black Sabbath or the like, maybe you will want to visit the clothes pantry at Angel's Attic.
 - I want to say again, especially for those of you who are new to this church: we are not about being fake pretty people, we are not about making up rules, and I am not trying to put pressure on you to conform to any outward behavior. I'm just saying, God desires your focus; God desires your passion; God desires true worship, not just going through the motions, as in the Temple.

Focus on Worship

- † The religious leaders of the Temple probably allowed these activities within the Temple because they were able to raise funds through kickbacks. They were running the Temple like a business, but Jesus knew that was both a distraction and an irreverence.
- † Churches today are vulnerable to fall into this wrong thinking too. We must remember that we cannot run the church like a business.
 - We do not pay our offering based on what we consume by attending the church; instead we contribute our offering as a partner in the church based on how much God has blessed us in life.
 - We do not make our ministries profitable; instead we give away the blessings God gave us. LeeAnn and I are pleased to be here today, in a church that is servant-hearted, that does not charge fees for its ministries. This church is about worship, not making money.
- † Jesus chased out the animals and the money changers. Let us see what excitement this caused.

Jesus' Authority

2:18-20 So then the Jewish leaders responded, "What sign can you show us, since you are doing these things?" Jesus replied, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again." Then the Jewish leaders said to him, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and are you going to raise it up in three days?"

- † On the one hand, the religious leaders had a right to be angry: after all, they were the authorities in the Temple. On the other hand, they react a bit out of guilt: their reaction is not to question the righteousness of what Jesus did, but whether he had the right to do it.
 - Those of you who are parents, have you ever had a child ask you why you are doing something wrong? Not many have a first reaction of “Oh, you are right, Honey, Mommy should stop doing that.” Instead, the human reaction is to reassert parental authority: “Don’t question your mother!” That’s what we see here. The religious leaders allowed these activities in the Temple, so when Jesus challenged that, they reacted by saying who are you to challenge us?
- † It is interesting to consider why they did not have Jesus arrested. Maybe they had no idea who he was, and so were not concerned about him. Still, if he caused that much ruckus, you would think they would want him punished. Perhaps after John the Baptist identified Jesus, son of Joseph of Nazareth, as the Messiah, they did some research. Temple records would show the birth of Jesus, to Joseph and Mary, who both happened to be direct descendants of King David, making Jesus a rightful heir to the throne! Bet that was a shocker! That might be why they held back.
- † In any case, they demand a sign, a miracle. He thinks he is the Messiah, let him prove it. From Old Testament prophecy, they would be expecting the Messiah to do marvelous things. But Jesus says, **“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again.”** They mock him for this claim, not understanding it. So that we will understand it, John explains...

[Slide 10: Crucifixion] *2:21 But Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body.*

- † Jesus is now the center of our worship and his death was the sacrifice that rendered the Temple obsolete, for it was in his death that he ushered in the New Covenant between God and mankind, a new way of doing things.
 - The Greek word for “temple” in this verse means the inner shrine, the dwelling place of God: Jesus was the true inner shrine, the dwelling place of God. Now, after him, we believers are called the temple of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 6:19, because when we become Christians the Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside us.
- † **[Slide 11: Resurrection]** When Jesus said this to the religious leaders, he was predicting his crucifixion and his resurrection. The religious leaders indeed would destroy this temple by crucifying Jesus on a cross. He in turn would raise it up again in three days by resurrecting his body back to life, the two most significant events in history! and the evidence that Jesus was who he said he was: the Son of God, the Christ or Messiah, in the flesh. This is what we celebrated last week, at Easter.

2:22 So after he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the saying that Jesus had spoken.

- † Remembering what Jesus said in light of what he did built their faith. It should build ours too. Let’s talk about faith for a moment and then we will close.

Real Faith

[Slide 12: Blank] *2:23-25 Now while Jesus was in Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover, many people believed in his name because they saw the miraculous signs he was doing. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people. He did not need anyone to testify about man, for he knew what was in man.*

- † Jesus did some miracles [probably healings] and so people began to believe, but Jesus – who knew their hearts – knew that they still needed to grow in their faith.
- Many times, people come to faith because they experience Jesus in some way. For the people in Jerusalem, it was experiencing or witnessing miracles. For other people I know, it is sensing God’s presence for the first time, having God prompt their heart, being inspired by the Holy Spirit during worship, or some other thrilling new experience.
 - This experience brings about the realization that God and Jesus are real, and often the result is a proclamation of faith. But what happens when that awesome feeling dies down? Jesus knew the people in Jerusalem were having an emotional reaction to their experiences – a good first step! – but that this was not enough faith for them to become true followers.
- † Jesus calls us to a deep faith, one that is based on trust, not experiences. We trust he is who he said he was, the Son of God and Christ, who came in the flesh as man. We also trust that he accomplished what he said he would: he paid the penalty for our sins in his death on the cross, mitigating God’s anger about our sin, so God the Father would declare us righteous and we could be reconciled to him. And indeed, after a perfectly holy life and an atoning death, Jesus was resurrected on what we call Easter morning, and after walking the earth for another forty days, he ascended to Heaven where he sits at the right hand of God.
- This deeper faith remains in us, even when the good feelings are gone, even when we struggle in life and do not hear from God for a while.
- † If you are here this morning unsure about God and faith, I am glad you are with us. I encourage you to seek out the truth. Read this book of John and consider the testimonies of the eye-witnesses and of the fulfilled prophecies. Ask us your questions. If you seek out the true God, you will find him.
- Our witness to those of you who are still searching for the truth should be that these times of collective worship are special and holy moments. If we have a casual attitude toward worship it will lead to casual behavior in church, behavior that is both distracting and irreverent. Casual clothes are ok, casual hearts are not. If we cultivate a passion for praising God and an expectation of experiencing his presence when we gather here, then we will choose to behave in ways that will be a blessing for everyone.
- † I mentioned earlier the idea of coming early to pray and encourage each other, to prepare our hearts and minds for worship. Sometimes even if I get here on time, it still takes until the third song before I let go of my cares and begin to truly worship God. Consider, if we were going to a football game, we would put on our special jerseys, pack food for the tailgate party, take enough money for the vendors, grab our seat cushions, invite our friends, and play our favorite music, all to ensure that we got in the right mood to get the most out of the game. If we approach our times of gathering for worship this way, we will show proper reverence to God and we will get a lot more out of the experience.
- † God encourages us to gather for worship, to show reverence to him in our collective praises. We also gather because Jesus promised to be among us when we gathered in his name. We need these encounters with God. We are servant-hearted and we try to apply what we learn to our lives. But if we neglect our need to deeply understand God’s Word and to experience God’s intimate presence, then we will burn out and drift away.
- † As the praise team comes up, one last thought. When we gather here, this sanctuary is not special as was the Temple in Jerusalem. There is no special anointing on this building. But when we – who are the temples of the Holy Spirit – gather – as the body of Christ – to worship the almighty God, if we do so in an attitude of reverence and passionate worship, we will be blessed and so will be God!

Benediction After last song

- † Hebrews 12:28-29 in the NIV says, “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire.’”
 - This week, dwell on the awesomeness of our God, and how much he deserves our reverence, our respect. That will make all the more wonderful to you his choice to show us grace and love.
 - Go now in peace with the Lord Almighty.