

A House of Prayer for all sorts of people

John 2:13-22

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What do you think of our church? What's it like when we come and gather together? How would you describe it? Ever wonder what God thinks about our gatherings? "God, what do you think when we gather on Sunday morning? How do You see things?"

Sometimes, God tells us what He thinks when we gather in His house of worship.

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: "Stand in the gate of the Lord's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the Lord, all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.'

"For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.

"Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are delivered!' - only to go on doing all these abominations?

*Has this house, which is called by my name, become **a den of robbers** in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord. Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel.*

*And now, because you have done all these things, declares the Lord, and when **I spoke to you persistently** you did not listen, and when **I called you**, you did not answer, therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight*

So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You shall call to them, but they will not answer you." (Jeremiah 7)

What does God think when we gather in His house?

Just before Jesus entered the temple that day, we hear from God's heart. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! Behold, your house is forsaken." (Luke 13)

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

The Passover. The great celebration of God's gathering His children together under His care and delivering them from the hand of Pharaoh. Rescuing them. Freeing them. Saving them, by the blood of the lamb.

... the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight. "Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ... And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you "This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord." (Exodus 12)

A gathering to the Lord. A festival to the Lord. A festival of thanks. A celebration of deliverance and freedom and life, all given, by the Lord. All gift to them. ... *And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.*

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Passover. They still remembered, and celebrated. Every Jewish male twelve years and older was required to attend this festival at Jerusalem. And so, the entire city was overflowing with pilgrims from all over. Come to worship, and celebrate. God must have been pleased!

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

When you go to church, what do you expect to find? The same thing you would expect at the temple. Holiness. A place *set apart* from the rest of the world. Reverence. Prayer. Confession of sin. Worship of the One True God. Thanksgiving. Songs of praise.

But when Jesus arrived, what did He find? Chaos and confusion. Pushing and shoving. Bartering and bickering. We can only imagine the raucous scene around the moneychangers and sellers of animals. Animals brought in from the outlying regions, while far cheaper, were likely to be rejected as not meeting standards; and an animal purchased within the courts might go for many times its normal price. Then there were the fees charged from money exchange, since foreign coins were unclean and not permitted for Temple use. (Gaylan Mathiesen)

We could imagine stalls of oxen and sheep. Cages of doves. Tables of bankers. A regular market (with all the accompanying noise, haggling between buyers and sellers, lowing of cattle, bleating of sheep, clinking of coins) was conducted in the courts of the most solemn and revered place on earth. With a scene like that, who could think of God, not to mention, worship Him? Instead of the sweet smells of goodness and mercy, there was the stench of evil and selfishness. (William Cwirla)

When we gather to worship, what does God see - in our hearts? Is He pleased by what He sees? Or does He see a place of selfishness and greed, a mockery of Him and His holiness and His grace?

Jesus was appalled, speechless, when He entered His Father's house that day! Not only did it feel more like Walmart on a Saturday afternoon than the house of God, there was the hypocrisy of the entire sacrificial system itself. While there is no question that there were those who worshiped rightly, the sacrificial system too often became a substitute for true devotion. The Old Testament prophets repeatedly expressed God's displeasure with, and at times outright rejection of it.

Are there expressions of our faith today, that substitute for true and undefiled religion? Does our daily faith walk demonstrate a heart in tune with God's and express the kinds of things that truly matter to God? (Mathiesen)

And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade."

Everything about Jesus stood in stark contrast with the corrupted, irreverent system of Judaism. No wonder that Jewish leaders challenged the ministry of Jesus at every turn. He was a direct threat to their positions of social and political power, and to everything they taught about what it means to be acceptable to God. (Mathiesen)

Mark says in his account, "*Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer **for all nations**'?*" (from Isaiah 56) *But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'*" (from Jeremiah 7)

The temple divided itself into four courts: The Court of the Gentiles, The Court of the Women, The Court of the Israelites, and The Court of the Priests. The Court of the Gentiles was the location for extortion and all the corrupted money-changing practices. What would a devout Gentile witness when he or she came there to worship and pray? Only the worst expressions of a depraved religion. The conduct in the Temple court shut out the seeking Gentile from the presence of God, deeply offending the Savior of the world! (Cwirla)

His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." Words from the mouth of King David in Psalm 69 as he expresses his zeal for God in the midst of God's enemies. "For it is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that dishonor has covered my face. I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's sons. For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me."

Not only zeal for God's house, His place of mercy and forgiveness, Jesus is showing zeal for *us* and for *our* salvation; for God's house of prayer for all nations, all sorts of people! The place where God met and forgave people. Where He showed mercy. Where He healed those broken in sin; those coming in repentance and faith.

Matthew adds something the other gospels don't. Something so wonderful! So beautiful! *He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."* And the **blind and the lame came to him** in the temple, and he healed them.

The blind and the lame. The needy. Are you blind and lame? Are you needy? Then follow their lead and come to Jesus. Take your neediness to Him. Unlike those Jesus drove out – those who were more interested in *themselves* than in God - the blind and needy come to the temple to receive from God.

That's what the temple was for. The blind and lame, the needy, come to meet God - where He's come to meet them! At the place of sacrifice. The place where God provides mercy and grace. The place where He gives out His gifts. They come to meet the One who has come down, in the flesh, to meet them. And He healed them. He touched them. He gathered them together as a shepherd gathers his sheep. As a hen gathers her little ones. And He holds them close to his heart.

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea." (Mt 18)

When we gather to worship, what does God see? Are we ever like these merchants and moneychangers Jesus drove from the temple? More interested in ourselves than in God or others? Using God and others or loving and serving them?

On the mountain, God gave us the Ten Commandments. Why? Because He knows what we're like. He knows our tendency to worship other gods instead of Himself. So many other things are more important to us, than Him. Like the merchants and bankers in the temple that day, God knows our tendency to *use* Him, instead of *worship* Him. He knows how we treat others - the same way we treat Him.

God gives us the Ten Commandments because He care for us and wants what's best for us - and to show us how much we need Him, our Savior. To show us what we're *really* like on the inside, so that we realize how blind and lame we are. How needy we are of a *Savior*. To save us from ourselves.

The temple - where a holy God meets a sin-filled people. What happens when a holy God meets a guilty, sin-filled people? It's never pretty. There's always death. That's what the temple taught. That's what you always found at the temple. Death. But not just death. There was also *substitution*. A *substitute* to die in *our* place. On *our* behalf. In *our* place. You came with you guilt of sin ... and *another* payed the price.

Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. Into the holy of holies, the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. ...

*But when **Christ** appeared as a high priest ... he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ... For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. (Hebrews 9)*

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus ... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10)

So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." God's zeal to love you. Zeal to suffer and die for you. To rise for you. Zeal to save you. Zeal for God's house, the temple, God's dwelling place among men, in order to meet with us and forgive us by the blood of the Lamb and fellowship with us once

again! The temple is long gone; destroyed by the Romans not long after Jesus cleansed it that day. That's okay. God's earthly temple was always meant to be only *temporary* - until the coming of the TRUE dwelling place of God; the TRUE and better and lasting sacrifice, the *reality* of what the temple was only a temporary *shadow* pointing to the TRUE *Lamb of God* who takes away the sin of the world!

Where do we come when we gather for worship? What does God see when we gather? Hopefully, a house for the blind and lame. A place of prayer; not a house of trade or a den of robbers. A place, not to *use* God, but to *receive* God.

A house of prayer for all sorts of people. The good, the bad, and the ugly. Jesus said there is *no one* good, but God alone. So where does that leave us? The bad and the ugly ... made good as God ... ransomed, redeemed, saved, forgiven - by the blood of the Lamb! A place to be in true fellowship with God and with one another. Come to God's dwelling place. Come to *Jesus*, and receive all that you need and more! Come and worship!