



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 2: 12-25

Winter 2021-22

"The Severity Of God"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. Good to be with all of you. We are continuing our studies in the Gospel of John and we're in chapter 2. We began it last week with the wedding feast at Cana, where the Lord delivered a young couple from the shame of not having enough wine to complete the marriage feast.

And now we move to another scene, another city, Jerusalem, where the Lord delivers the temple of a great scandal. We begin in verse 12, and we'll read through the entire chapter to verse 25,

¹² After this He went down to Capernaum, He and His mother and *His* brothers and His disciples; and they stayed there a few days.

¹³ The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated *at their tables*. ¹⁵ And He made a scourge of cords, and drove *them* all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; ¹⁶ and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business." ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house will consume me." ¹⁸ The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in

three days I will raise it up." ²⁰The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" ²¹But He was speaking of the temple of His body. ²²So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.

²³Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. ²⁴But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, ²⁵and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.

John 2: 12-25

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together.

(Message) Charles Wesley helped produce a popular image of our Lord when he composed the familiar verse, "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, Look upon a little child". Our Lord is gentle, "A bruised reed He will not break. A smoldering wick He will not quench." (Isa 44:3). He was gentle when He took children "in His arms...and blessed them." (Mar 10:16).

But there was a time when He took a whip in His hand and drove a bunch of businessmen and cows out of the temple. There was nothing gentle about it; it was wrath. It's in stark contrast to Cana where He turned water to wine and He rescued a young couple from social humiliation, (He showed Himself as Savior). Here He showed Himself as judge.

It calls to mind the words of the apostle in Romans 11, verse 22, "Behold then, the kindness and severity of God." Both are true of the Lord Jesus, God's Son. He is both Savior and judge. Dr. Johnson said, a few years ago, (in the previous century, so maybe more than a few years ago), "One of the great mistakes of the 20th century is to fail to

see that He is to be worshiped in both of these aspects. Both aspects of Savior and judge." We're not far removed from that time when he made that statement, for nothing really has changed in this 21st century. So in John 2, we behold the severity of God which is as true and necessary as His kindness and gentleness.

It happened when Jesus entered the temple and cleansed it. The other Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, each have an account of the Lord cleansing the temple. But the event they described occurred at the end of the Lord's ministry and resulted in a conspiracy by the authorities to have Him arrested and put to death. The cleansing occurred, in this case, in John chapter 2, at a different time—at the beginning of His ministry, three years earlier. So how do we explain that?

Well, some have interpreted John as taking the story out of its historical context, its historical sequence; moving it from the end of the Lord's ministry to the beginning for theological reasons.

Others explain it as the first of two cleansings. In support of that is there is a significant difference between the two. As you would read the two, you'll see that there are differences in the two accounts. Leon Morris, in his excellent commentary, lists a number of those differences. And he makes the astute, and I think the accurate, observation that the evil in question was one which was likely to recur.

And that's true. The temple had been turned into a marketplace. It was a very profitable enterprise; money was made and lots of it. So it's not surprising, that three years later, the people were back in business. It is greed; it's the love of money. This passage not only reveals a lot about our Lord's character, but a lot about human character as well.

It happened at the time of the Passover. Jesus, His family, and His disciples had moved down to Capernaum, which is located on the Sea of Galilee. Then after a few days, they went up to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast. Passover is in the spring, either at the end of March or the beginning of April. Some have put this at the year AD 28.

It celebrates Passover, the deliverance of Israel from slavery—after the tenth plague in which the first born of the Egyptians was killed. But those of Israel were spared because they had the blood of the lamb on the door posts and the lintels of their doors; their homes.

It was an especially important feast. The Passover was one of the three occasions, or *feasts*, in which the Israelites, the men of Israel, were required to appear before the Lord—wherever that tabernacle or the temple was. So in obedience, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Traveling to Jerusalem is usually described in those words '*going up*' because it was up in the Judean mountains. But more, I think to the point, it's described in that elevated sense because of its sacred place. It was God's chosen city where He had put His name; and where He had put His temple. It was the place where God and believers met through the blood shed on the altar of sacrifice.

In all of the world there was no place like Jerusalem and the temple. It was God's house and it was the center of true worship in the world. But when the Lord entered it He found that it had been turned into something very common—into a bank and a supermarket, (and worse), with all of the sights and sounds of a stock yard. There were those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves—and the money changers seated at their tables. The cattle, sheep, and doves were animals of sacrifice for worship at the temple.

The money changers were at their tables for the payment of the temple tax, which was a half shekel. But it was to be paid in Tyrian coins because Tyrian currency was of purer silver than the other coins. And so people came from all over the Roman empire and beyond to pay their tax—right there in the temple. It was an arrangement of convenience for the pilgrims who came from all over the world for it would have been impossible, as you can well imagine, to bring a goat or an ox from Rome or from Persia. So for convenience a market was set up in Jerusalem—which in principle was a good arrangement.

Originally it was across the Kidron Valley on the Mount of Olives. But at some point it had been moved into the temple—into the outer courtyard; the court of the Gentiles. And it was there because it was a very lucrative business for the men who ran the temple—the family of the high priest. In fact, the rabbis called the temple market, “The bazaars of the sons of Annas”, and that's the bazaar Jesus entered.

If you've ever walked the narrow, crowded streets of the Old City of Jerusalem, you've probably gotten a sense of what Jesus experienced when He entered the temple. He didn't hear the prayers and Psalms of worshipers. He heard the sounds of an oriental market; bleating sheep and noise of commerce. To a righteous man it was appalling.

But He knew what to do. He made a scourge of cords and drove them all out: the sheep and cows and the merchants selling them. He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables and it was done in real anger; controlled, disciplined, and righteous anger.

F. F. Bruce commented on how some preachers are surprised at Jesus' actions—and how He used such force on animals—so there was nothing moral involved in this and yet He drove them out. But as Bruce pointed out, most of those preachers probably have had little experience trying to move cattle in the street—that it takes a degree of force to do that.

But this wasn't excessive force. It certainly wasn't cruel. In fact, you'll notice in verse 16, the way He dealt with the doves and the merchants who sold them. He drove out the sheep and oxen and He turned over tables with coins, but He told the dove merchants, "Take these things away." He didn't overturn or break their cages, which would have resulted in the merchants losing their birds.

In fact, none of the merchants lost any of their merchandise. The money changers could collect the coins off the floor of the temple. The others could find their animals wandering around not very far away. His actions were very controlled and they were purposeful. And the point of it all, and the purpose of it all which He accomplished, was to clean out the temple.

At the same time He fulfilled prophecy in doing it. He fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi 3, "The Lord will suddenly come to His temple." (vs1). "He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver." (vs3). He came *suddenly to His temple*: He found it full of materialism and He purified it. Then He said, in verse 16b, "Stop making My Father's house a place of business."

Now to understand the shame of this, the scandal of it, it's necessary to understand the structure of the temple and its function. It was composed of a series of courtyards that led to the central sanctuary, where the temple proper was. The outer court was called the court of the Gentiles. It was the only place within the temple precinct in which people of other nations, Gentiles, could come. In fact it was open to all the nations, the only place where they could be and where they could worship.

But when it was filled with merchants and animals, where would these people find a place to worship, or the atmosphere, conducive to worship? And what impression would the passing and the exchange of money, this merchandising of religion, leave on them—leave on these Gentiles? The same impression it leaves on people today when they watch a religious program that ends with a plea for money; or an offer to sell a preacher's latest book: 'Religion is business. It's about money.' Jesus thought the merchandising of religion was a disgraceful message. It was a denial of the truth.

What was there, in all of this that was taking place in the temple, that would attract a pagan to the Lord? What was the difference between what they saw in the temple and the world itself? So He drove them out and He commanded them in verse 16, "...stop making My Father's house a place of business." The Lord is fervent for purity in worship and life. He's not indifferent; it matters to Him. It was a bold act on His part. And I say it matters to Him; you see that in the actions that He took.

But what an amazing thing that He did: This carpenter from Nazareth came in and He shut down this entire business establishment, (which was a major business at the time), and brought everything to a stop.

And I can imagine that there was a *sense* about Him. They'd never seen Him before; yet there was this *sense* about Him, this air of authority about them. And as they looked at Him and they saw His eyes blazing, they responded just as we see—they were scattered.

It was especially bold to do all of this in the name of His Father. In doing that He claimed to have a special relationship to the temple; it was His Father's house. That was a special claim of deity on His part. And that, of course, is the subject of the fourth Gospel, the deity of Christ; that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing on Him you may have life in His name.

And so because He is the eternal Son of God, He retakes His Father's house and He restores it to order. He cleans it up. It was a brave, bold act. And the disciples recognized it as that. John commented in verse 17 that "His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for Your house will consume me.' "

Now that's taken from Psalm 69, verse 9, where David was crying to God because of opposition against him due to his 'zeal for the LORD's house.' They, (those who were opposed to him), were not sympathetic with David and his devotion to the tabernacle. 'His zeal for God's house' stirred up animosity in many people who were God's enemies.

The disciples recognized that David wrote about more than himself—that he was writing about his greater descendant, the Lord Jesus. And they recognized this was prophecy. The Lord's zeal for His Father's house stirred up the same animosity in people toward Him as it did in the opposition that David experienced. And opposition and hatred toward Him would lead to the crucifixion itself. Where there is zeal for the LORD there will be opposition.

Now zeal is not fanaticism. The Lord was cool and deliberate in this act of cleansing the temple—not frenzied and chaotic. He was devoted to the LORD. But devotion to God results often in hostility from the world. And it wasn't long before the opposition responded.

In verse 18, John said, "The Jews" came out. John used the term "Jews" a lot. You find this throughout the fourth Gospel and some have taken that as a kind of antisemitic reference to them. It's not at all; John was a Jew. He wasn't antisemitic in any way. And it wasn't a disparaging term; he's not using it in that sense.

But you see it all through this Gospel. And often, it's used specifically of the Jewish authorities and these were probably officials of the temple or members of the Sanhedrin, the high court. They were wanting to know 'What was going on' and asked Jesus to produce a sign, a miracle, to prove that He had authority to do what He had done and take over the temple—(because that's what He'd done; He'd take possession of the temple.)

In his commentary on this passage, Don Carson pointed out that the authorities had the right to do that. They had the right to question someone who had taken such bold action. But their request for 'a sign' was misguided. The cleansing of the temple was, itself, sign enough—and a powerful one. What kind of man can come in and take over that way—and do so suddenly? And if they had had a sense of it, they would have understood that it was a fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy, 'He came *suddenly* to the temple.'

But they didn't think in those terms. They didn't think in terms of the Old Testament Scripture for they were really too dull spiritually to have recognized the corrupt condition of the temple and its need to be purified. So, they demanded a sign from the Lord. And he responded in verse 19 with a promise, a promise of the greatest sign ever given; "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." In the next verses, John explains that Jesus was speaking of His body and its resurrection. But it appeared to the authorities that He was urging them to pull down Herod's temple and then He would rebuild it in three days.

Now, actually rebuilding the temple would have been an easier task than raising the dead, but they couldn't even believe that. And if they couldn't believe the easier, they certainly wouldn't believe the more difficult. So they rejected the statement.

And they ridiculed it; 'It took 46 years to build this temple and you will raise it up in three days?!' It was the response of materialistic minded, spiritually dull men who wouldn't have believed any sign that He could have given them anyway. And we see that throughout their history: They asked for a sign—but they aren't going to believe any sign that He gives.

John then explains the meaning of the Lord's statement in verse 21—that He was referring to the crucifixion and His resurrection, "He was speaking of the temple of His body"; the body which earlier John spoke of when he said, "the Word became flesh", an actual body. He was a genuine man. The Son of God dwelt in that body; which fulfilled all that the temple stood for; all that the temple meant.

The temple was where God, symbolically, dwelt among men and where the altar of sacrifice stood—which gave the sinner cleansing and access to God. But that was only a picture, (this temple, this great temple, as well as the tabernacle); only a picture of what would come. It would be in the temple of Christ's body, (that the final sacrifice occurred in the crucifixion), which God showed His acceptance of the forgiveness of sinners three days later when He raised Christ from the dead.

One thing we must understand about the resurrection: It's God's 'amen' to Christ's "It is finished." It's God's approval, His demonstration historically of His approval of the sacrifice that Christ offered. All of this is a foreshadowing of that; a prophecy of that. It's all implied in the statement that the Lord made.

But the disciples didn't understand any of this at the time. It wasn't until after the resurrection, John said, that they "remembered" this, (Jn 2:22), and that they understood it. And unlike the Jewish authorities, he said, "They believed", (ibid.). And they came to understand it; they believed. It all fell into place for them. And that would happen again at the end of the Lord's ministry when, after He cleansed the temple a second time, they understood all these things as well. They understood it after the resurrection.

Well, the second cleansing of the temple, which we read of in the other Gospels, was too much for the authorities and they carried out their plot to have Him crucified. And true to their unbelieving nature, when the sign that they asked for occurred, the resurrection, they rejected it. They even conspired to cover it up. That tells us a great deal about faith.

It tells us a great deal about miracles. Signs, wonders, miracles are objective proof of the truth. —But they don't produce faith. And those religious leaders who demanded a sign, (and got that sign in the obvious event that took place, the resurrection), they still didn't believe. That's the human heart. That tells us a great deal about the human condition because the human condition is so destroyed by sin, and so enslaved to sin, that only the grace of God can change it; and it occurs through the inner work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of people to open eyes and open the heart to receive the truth; and to see the truth to believe it. God must enlighten individuals in order for them to see; in order for them to understand; in order for them to believe. We are saved by God's sovereign grace.

Well I think that's seen when we compare the demand that these men make, and then later at the end, when they get the sign that they've asked for, and their response—which is to still disbelieve it.

But we see it further in the final verses of the chapter. Jesus remained in Jerusalem and He did miracles. And John wrote that because of what the people saw, "many believed in His name." (vs23). Unfortunately it wasn't genuine faith and Jesus knew that. John wrote, "But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men... and He Himself knew what was in man." (vs24-25).

He knew that these people were attracted to the signs and wonders, not to the One who did them. And that they would fall away as He began to teach, and as He carried on His ministry, they would learn that He was not the kind of Messiah that they wanted. He knew their hearts. He knows the inner reality of everyone. He knows their nature. He knows their spiritual condition. He knows all of us. He knows our secrets. He

knows everything. And He knew how deceitful the human heart is because He knew the Word of God.

Jeremiah said it best, "The heart is more deceitful than all else, and desperately sick. *Who* can understand it?" (Jer 17:9). *Who*? No one but the Lord whose heart is pure and *Who* is God and *Who* knows all.

So for a second time the Lord renders judgment. He is the perfect judge. He knows all things. He knew the meaning of the market in the temple—which was secularism, and He knew the reality of people's hearts—which was unbelief.

It is all more evidence of the great subject of this Gospel, and really of all four Gospels, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And this passage shows that the Savior is also the judge. His judgment is serious. "Behold then," Paul said, "...the severity of God." (Rom 11:22). His judgment is severe; but it is fair because it is righteous. And He knows all things perfectly and completely. And as judge, He corrected conditions in the temple. He cared about the integrity, He cared about the purity of the temple, and He cared about the ministry and the testimony of the temple. —And so He cleansed it.

And all that has direct application to us today, to the church and to the Christian individually, because while Herod's temple is gone, (the Romans pulled it down, stone by stone in AD 70), we are now the temple. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, verses 16 and 17, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are."

Paul here, in that text in 1 Corinthians 3, is speaking of the local church. Not the building in which the saints meet but the saints themselves—the people of God. We are the church and the temple of God because the Spirit of God dwells within us. The third Person of the Trinity literally dwells within you. And so Paul said, "we are holy." Therefore our conduct is to be holy. Be what you are. You're a saint, and a saint means 'a separated one', 'a holy one'.

So that's to be seen in our conduct—and it's to be a reality in our minds. We are to conduct the church and we are to construct the church, (build it), according to God's plan—not our own. We're to follow God's pattern as laid out in Scripture; where we are to preach the Word of God, because as Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 3, verse 15, "The church ...is the pillar and support of the truth." We are to observe the Lord's supper because the Lord has asked us to remember Him often. That honors Him—and it blesses us. It's pure worship.

We're to sing praises to Him. Music is an important part of worshiping the Lord; we see that in Ephesians chapter 5, verse 19. The Lord's temple, His church, the local church, Believer's Chapel is important to Him. It is holy and He deals severely with those who defile it, those who disrupt it, those who would, as Paul put it, "destroy it.", (Gal 1:13).

And not only is the church the Lord's temple, so are we as individual believers who are the spiritual stones of the spiritual temple. A few chapters later, in 1 Corinthians 6, (verses 19-20), Paul wrote, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." You don't own yourself; you don't own your body—He does. He owns it because He's your creator—and that applies to everyone.

But this is a special, special relationship: He redeemed you as a believer in Jesus Christ. He bought you through the precious blood of His cross; that's what He did on the cross. Christians, individually, are a temple. Our body is, just as Christ told the Jewish authorities His body was, the temple. Now, different I think in a greater degree, but we too, our body, is God's temple—and so we are to be holy. We are to glorify God in it; in our daily life and in our church life. When we gather as a church, we are the temple of God and we are to be holy. Herod's temple wasn't. The priests turned it into a place of buying and selling; a market for making money.

Well; What do we bring into the church on a Sunday morning? What's in our minds? How do we approach this very important moment during the week? Do we come with a pure heart? Do we come to learn of the LORD and to worship Him with thanksgiving? Or do we come because, well, it's the habit of life; we've done it all our life; or we know it's the right thing to do so we do it? I think sometimes that's reason enough because you know it's the right thing to do, but certainly there are higher motives than that. So, how do we come into this place? The Lord cares about that. He cares about His temple; meaning us and what is in us.

And He deals with us. We see that very colorfully in the Book of Revelation in chapters 1 through 3, where John had a vision of Christ. That's in chapter 1 and one of the most notable features of that vision, (if you go back and read it), is His eyes. John wrote that, "His eyes were like a flame of fire." (Rev 1:14). Now that's symbolism but what do you think it represents? —It represents judgment. Fire is pure and His judgment is pure. And I think they must have seen, those merchants in the temple, the fire in His eyes. He sees clearly. His vision penetrates the soul. He knows what is in us—and judges.

And we see that in the next two chapters of the Book of Revelation where He speaks to the churches, the seven churches of Asia minor. Some are doing well, others, most, aren't. They're not pure. One works for Christ vigilantly—but lacks love for Him. Another tolerates false teaching. Another one tolerates immorality. Another is rich, but materialistic. And so throughout the two chapters, the Lord tells them to repent or, He said, "I am coming to you quickly," or "I will come like a thief," —just like He came to the temple there in Jerusalem. He will come and He will judge and He will purify.

He cares that we be holy as individuals and as a church. We're His temple and we're to worship Him with purity. And we're to be a witness to the world around us; the world is watching, Just like the world was watching those that were there in that great court of the Gentiles—they weren't seeing what the Lord wanted them to see. And the world is watching us.

Last January I read an opinion piece in the newspaper by football hall of famer, Tony Dungy, and former tight end, Benjamin Watson, giving Christian counsel after a year of pandemic and lock down. The article is titled, "A call for Christian revival in 2021." Well it was a little over a year ago now, and it's just as applicable to 2022. In the article it recognized the hardships people have experienced and the toll that it has taken on many lives. With all the lock down and all that we've experienced with sickness, that has presented to the church great opportunity for ministry. But toward the end of the article, they ask the question, "If we live like the world, why should non-believers listen to us?" More importantly, 'Why would they listen to God?' That was the scandal of the temple—and it's repeated today in the church, the LORD's temple.

So, much like the Lord in Revelation 2 and 3, they offered counsel for correction. The first suggestion was to 'Read the entire Bible'. Well that's the place to begin of course. The Word of God, the inerrant revelation of the LORD God, which in reading, (as the Lord will say later in chapter 17), (*vs17*), 'sanctifies' us—changes us. So that's where we begin.

Now they were also suggesting we read the Bible daily. We do that by reading it all in a year; it takes some discipline but it's not all that difficult. And it's not too late to start since it's just the middle of January now.

And second they said, 'Pray'. Then third, 'Repent'; and that's what the Lord told the churches to do—and we need to do that.

"Behold then the kindness and severity of God." (Rom 11:22). There is severity; we need to know that. But also among the Lord's warnings to the churches, we see His kindness. He stood at the door of the materialistic church of Laodicea, knocking, desiring to be invited in; to dine with them, to fellowship with them.

That's what He wants with us. That's what He wants with you: To come in and dine and fellowship so that you might know Him better; and that you might be blessed because that's the consequence of knowing the Lord. —It is spiritual blessing and life.

Jesus is the judge; but He's also the Savior. While He, 'did not entrust Himself to all men' we see at the end of chapter 2, (because, "He knew" them), He does promise to entrust Himself to all who truly trust in Him. He saves all who do. He rescues them from His judgment. He rescues them from the wrath to come. He gives forgiveness. He gives eternal life.

So if you have not come to Him, if you've not believed in Him, I exhort you: Come, trust in Him, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. He receives all who do.

And then, by God's grace, may we live for Him daily, live the life that is of service to Him and to others. Let's pray,

Father, we thank You for those wounded hands. And then we thank You that they are always stretched out to a rebellious world, inviting the sinner to come to Him. He is the Savior. He's the judge, but fortunately, He is the Savior. And by Your grace You've saved us. You brought us to a saving understanding of Him and a trust in Him.

And I pray, LORD, that You would give us a great desire to know Him better and to pursue the life that He has set forth for us—that we be a great witness to those around us. So we look to You to bless, LORD. We thank You for this time together.

Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)