

## Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ 4-15-18

April 15 we will study John 2:12-21. Discussion questions are:

1. Most people have an area in their lives where they have a “low boiling point.” What makes you angry?
2. How would you compare the motivation for your anger with the motivation for Jesus’ anger in John 2?
3. Are there times in your life when your journey with God is unpleasant and uncomfortable?
  - a. Is discomfort in your spiritual journey a good thing or a bad thing?
4. Many people think of being holy as being really, really good. The definition of “holy” given in the sermon was, “*You are holy when you say, ‘Lord, use me any way you want.’*”
  - a. By that definition, when was the last time you felt holy?
  - b. By that definition, what will you have to do if you are to feel holy?
5. How can a piece of furniture be holy?
6. What is the significance of Malachi describing the Messiah as a refiner?
7. Agree/disagree: “*The closer to God you get, the smaller you feel.*”
8. Describe a time in your life when your love for some other thing and your love for God no longer could live together.
9. Why does Jesus put us in the furnace?
10. If Jesus owns your body, what rights does that give him?

*Sermon: Passion for God’s House*

*VIDEO:*

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=Jesus+Cleansing+of+the+Third+Temple&&view=detail&mid=B512448F6E7FDEF016C7B512448F6E7FDEF016C7&&FORM=VRDGAR>

Jesus describes himself as “*meek and lowly*”. The prophets saw him as passive a lamb before his shearers. He coined the phrase, “*Turn the other cheek.*” But here we see Jesus terrible in his wrath, literally cracking the whip over people. It doesn't take much imagination to hear the thunder in his voice and see the lightning in his eyes as he drives everyone from the Temple. So, which is he - meek and gentle or fierce and driving? Some folks try and pick one or the other and let that be the only way they see Jesus. Truth is, he is both.

I was floating Blue River a while back. It had been years since I had been on that stretch of water. I remembered it as gentle and serene and parts of it were. But part of it was blocked with fallen trees that had to be crossed and parts of it were shallow rapids that had to be crossed and parts of it so rapid you had to struggle to not get washed into the bank. So was the river calm and serene or raging and full of obstacles? Truth is, it was both. That's the way life is - some of it is peaceful and calm while some of it is difficult

and challenging. The way you want life to be has nothing to do with the way it is. So it is with God. The way you want him to be, the God you prefer, has nothing to do with the way He is.

The text we are looking at today tells us several things about Jesus. Some of them are disturbing. Some of them challenge our biases. Some of them make us uncomfortable. But we have to submit to the reality of how Jesus really is. Like a river, he is at times calm and serene and at times fierce and raging. So today we will look at:

### What Jesus is doing

### Why he is doing it

### What he teaches us by doing it

First, what is Jesus doing? He is cleansing the Temple. On festival days throngs of Jews came to the Temple. On those days the population of Jerusalem increased from 80,000 people to 300,000 - 500,000 people. That's like Ada increasing from our normal population to 100,000 on special weekends of the year. Because people came from all over the world to offer sacrifices and typically could not bring their oxen or sheep or cattle with them to sacrifice they purchased them near the Temple, often at exorbitant prices. Since they were from foreign lands they had to have their currency changed and were easily cheated in the process. Over time those activities moved from the street corner into the middle of the Temple itself. In Jesus' view they had turned worship into a market place. It would be a little like everybody who wants to have a garage sale bringing their items to worship and lining them up on the pews and selling them before, during and after worship. Over here is a guy trying to start up an old lawn mower for an interested purchaser. Over there is a child crying and pleading with his mother to buy him that set of toy drums he is banging on. And over in the corner is a retired couple who've brought their charcoal grill and are selling burgers to supplement their retirement. While all that is going on the song leader is trying to get us to sing, "Earthly wealth and fame may never come to me..." In that kind of setting Jesus rids the Temple of everything that distracts from focusing on God. But why does he do it?

He does it because of the holiness of God. Notice what the Jewish leaders say in vs. 18. They don't say, "This is illegal." They say, "Prove to us that you have the authority to do this." They are telegraphing that they know when the Messiah comes he will have a passion for holiness. They knew the prophecy in Malachi 3 that when the Messiah comes he will do something radical. Listen to Malachi's words in the first 3 verses of chapter 3, "Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. "But who will be able to endure it when he comes? Who will be able to stand and face him when he appears? For he will be like a blazing fire that refines metal, or like a strong soap that bleaches clothes. He will sit like a refiner of silver, burning away the dross. He will purify the Levites, refining them like gold and silver, so that they may once

again offer acceptable sacrifices to the Lord. - Malachi 3:1-3 Did you pick up on both of Malachi's similes? Strong soap that takes out stains! A refiner's fire that melts impurities out of metal!

Holiness means your stains have been scrubbed away with the strongest of bleaching soaps and your inconsistent efforts to serve God have been melted away so that you are pure. Why all this emphasis on holiness? What do you think of when you think of a holy person? Typically we think of someone who is rigid and stern and humorless. That is not at all the Biblical definition of holy. In the Bible some furniture is holy. Some utensils are holy. Furniture and utensils are not rigid or stern or humorless. Any piece of furniture or utensil that was separated from common use and was used exclusively in the Temple was holy. In other words anything or anyone who is exclusively for God's use is holy. You are holy when you say, "Lord, use me any way you want." The Bible says that zeal for the holiness of God's house consumed Jesus. As a refiner wants to see his gold purified of everything in it that is not gold, so Jesus wants to see his Father's house absolutely pure and dedicated to God. He also feels that way about your life. He wants it absolutely pure. He wants all the impurities removed. He wants to see you be as loving and courageous and kind and generous as God himself. To be holy means to be a man or a woman of one thing. A holy person is streamlined. Most of us have lots of things in our hearts that we are for. We are for having our pride reinforced. We are for getting credit for our good deeds. We are for getting ahead of those of whom we are jealous. We are for doing what makes us feel good. Becoming holy is a process of getting rid of all those other goals. The writer of Hebrews says this is critical for believers. *"Be holy, for without holiness no one will see the Lord."* Jesus cleanses the Temple because he knows the Father is holy and everybody has to approach him in holiness. That's what he did and that's why he did it. But what is he trying to teach us?

Jesus never did any public action without trying to teach us something about ourselves or the world or God. When the Jews demanded a sign he said, *"I'll give you a sign. Destroy this Temple and I will raise it again in 3 days."* He is saying, "You believe you can get into the presence of God through this Temple but I am the Temple. You believe you can get into the presence of God by carrying bloody sacrifices as a way of atoning for your sins but I am the sacrifice. I am the Temple. I am the priest. I am the sacrifice. I am the altar. I am the bread on the right and the light on the left. Only through me can you approach a holy God."

Let me let you in on a little spiritual truth that will sneak up on you. The closer to God you get, the smaller you feel. The closer you get to the holiness of God, the more unholy you feel. When I was in school my favorite educational concept was the curve. I rejoiced when I found a teacher who graded on the curve. In college, that meant if there were any married students in that class - change classes because those married people studied and messed up the curve. They are called "curve busters". What does it mean to say God is holy? It means he is transcendent, set apart from everyone else. God is the original curve buster.

It doesn't take much church stuff to make us start to feel unholy. Just read a simple scripture or sing one verse of a hymn or listen to the introduction to a prayer that begins "Holy be thy name." You sit down to have your daily devotional and read, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind.*" The next thought you have is, "Well that lets me out because I don't love Him that much. I should, but I don't." What Jesus is saying makes sense only to those who have enough honesty to admit that when they try to get close to God they feel unholy. What do you think the Jews felt when they entered the Temple and suddenly came to a curtain which they could not go beyond because it covered a place called the "holy of holies" and that certainly disqualified them? What was God telling us at the cross when at the very moment Jesus died that curtain was torn in half? Jesus' death said, "I cleared the way. You can come in." Like a soldier who leads his buddies through a minefield, if we follow in his steps we can approach God.

How do we apply that to our lives? We do it in 2 ways:

First, since Jesus is like a refiner our task is to stay in the furnace while he rids us of our impurities. The furnace is any situation where your love for some other thing and your love for God no longer can live together. It is a situation in which you are forced to choose. When you choose love for God you become more holy, more perfect, wiser, more courageous. You become more like Jesus. You have a really good job with the promise of rising rapidly in the company but your boss is demanding that you do things that compromise your conscience. Up to now your love of God and your love of money and comfort have lived together but now you must choose. Welcome to the furnace! You are in a relationship with somebody that looks like they would be a good spouse for you but they are asking you to compromise on some very key issues. If you obey God it will put the entire relationship in jeopardy. Choose! Welcome to the furnace! Or there is something you have wanted all your life and it looks like it is not going to happen. Are you going to be bitter or trust that God knows what is best for you? Choose! Welcome to the furnace!

Hear me on this. Jesus is not putting you in the furnace to cook you. He is putting you in the furnace to refine you – to make you better. You are not a goose who is about to be cooked! You are gold. You are silver. You have a noble and magnificent calling and God wants to get you there as rapidly as possible. He wants you to be all you can be. What a day it will be when you come out of the furnace bright and shining, cut and in your setting. Then you can really shine like a star in the universe.

The second application of this story is, Jesus is also your owner. Earlier in John 2 when we watched Jesus accommodate people by turning their water into wine, he was a guest in someone's house. In this text, Jesus is in his own house, the Temple. If you are a guest in someone's house and they say, "Is there anything I can get you?" You don't say, "Yes, would you re-carpet the living room and knock out that wall over there. I'd like to open the place up a bit." But if you own the house you make whatever changes you choose. You move things around. You remodel. How do you know whether Jesus is living in your life as owner of your body, which is the Temple of the Holy Spirit or if he

is merely a guest invited to stay briefly? Jesus refuses to be anybody's guest. He either owns you or has no relationship with you. The way you know if he is your owner is if he puts his finger on things and says, "I want that removed." The only way you know he is Lord of your life is if you can point to things he has removed from your life.

Here are your choices. You can say, "Here I am God, use me." Or you can say, "God, I want to use you." Which sounds most like the way you've been living? Have you been living so God can use you or have you been living trying to use God? I'll let you in on a shocking truism about life: You are going to die the same way you live! If you live complaining, you will die complaining. If you live in fear you will die in fear. If you live selfishly, you will die selfishly. On the other hand, if you live with gratitude you will die with gratitude. If you live with hope, you will die with hope. If you live saying, "God use me.", you will die saying, "God use my death." Do you want to die the way you are living?