As we return to our journey through John’s gospel, we find ourselves in the city of Capernaum where Jesus has been spending a few days with his mother, his siblings, and his disciples. Let us now pick up the story as we stand and read John 2:13-25.

13 The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. 15 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. 16 And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade.” 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

18 So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” 19 Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” 20 The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple,[a] and will you raise it up in three days?” 21 But he was speaking about the temple of his body. 22 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.

23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. 24 But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people 25 and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

My message this morning will fall under five subheadings: 1) The Wrath of The Lion; 2) the Love of Son; 3) the Zeal of the Lord; 4) the Sign of The Messiah; and 5) the Whip and the Lamb.

Before I launch in, let me acknowledge the elephant in the room: John recalls Jesus clearing the temple as His first public act, and the other three gospels place the clearing of the temple as the final public act of Jesus. I don’t wish to burn up a lot of time on it this morning, so let me jump to the end. Though it is possible, and even reasonable, that John is telling us this story out of chronological order because he is more interested in making a theological point than giving a chronological account of Jesus’ life and ministry (a common view among several scholars), I am more inclined to believe that Jesus cleared the temple twice...once at the beginning of His ministry, and then again on the week of His crucifixion. I will give you a few reasons, but then I will invite you to do your own study on the topic.

1) All of the stories that John provides in the first five chapters of his gospel are unique including the wedding at Cana, Jesus’ visit with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman at the well, and so on. John rarely repeats events that we find in the synoptics until we get to the Passion, and that’s because we believe John had access to the synoptics and felt no need to repeat what had already been recorded. If all the other stories are new, and all of those stories happen earlier in Jesus’ ministry because they happen before the arrest of John the Baptist, then this may likely reveal that Jesus cleared the temple early. If he then travelled back to Galilee before He got arrested for causing a disruption, it leads to my second observation.
2) In reading the synoptics (see Luke 6:6-11) we observe that scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem travelled all the way up to Galilee to spy on Jesus. Why? Why would these aristocrats from Jerusalem come all the way up to Galilee with such hostility towards Jesus? An early clearing of the temple that disrupted their bottom-line and caused a stir in Jerusalem would answer that question, right? For these reasons and others NT scholar Leon Morris makes a strong argument for two separate temple events, and I’m inclined to agree with him.

1. The Wrath of the Lion
Following a short visit with his family in Capernaum, John reports in vs. 13 that Jesus and his disciples join countless pilgrims for the annual journey to Jerusalem to observe the much-anticipated Passover celebration. We really cannot overestimate how HUGE this event was each year in Jerusalem. Historians believe there could easily have been over 2 million people crammed into that city each spring for the Passover celebration! That was partly due to a law requiring every man within 15 miles of Jerusalem to attend the Passover, but thousands upon thousands of pilgrims would travel great distances to observe the Passover in Jerusalem. Now why? What was the Passover celebration?

Some of you probably remember the great story of Israel’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt as recorded in the book of Exodus. If you recall, after God sent nine plagues upon the Egyptians, Pharaoh still refused to release God’s people, so God promises to send the 10th and final plague upon all of Egypt. The Destroyer will soon pass over the land, and every first-born son will die. This will be the plague to end all plagues, but God will provide the means by which the Hebrews might be spared when the angel of death passes over. God tells Moses to order each family to kill an unblemished lamb. The blood of the lamb is to be painted on their doors, and when the Lord’s angel sees the blood of the lamb, their families will be spared. The lamb’s meat is to be cooked, unleavened bread was to be prepared and eaten, and the Hebrew slaves were to be ready at a moment’s notice to gather all they had and leave Egypt as soon as possible.

God then commands Moses and the people to remember this night for as long as they are a people. God provides very specific instructions in Exodus 12 for how the Israelites are to commemorate the Passover every year on the 14th day of the first month (April for us) until the 21st day of the first month. So that is what is now happening in Jerusalem as Jesus enters into the city.

John describes what Jesus encounters when He arrives at the temple in vs. 14: In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there.

Why would there be oxen, sheep, pigeons, and money-changers in the temple? Great question! The great temple in Jerusalem was the center for Jewish worship, and Jewish worship at that time involved a lot of “offerings.” The Jewish people understood God to say that He demanded sin offerings and trespass offerings, but that He delighted in voluntary offerings such as peace offerings, burnt offerings, and grain offerings. As we read about these offerings in the OT, we learn that the guilt offerings, the sin offerings, the trespass offerings, and the peace offerings all required the slaughter of an unblemished animal. The faithful Jews took these offerings very seriously, and particularly around the time of Passover. Now, given that tens of thousands of Jews were coming into the city from all over the ancient world, it was far more convenient for
the pilgrims to purchase an unblemished animal once in Jerusalem than having to haul one with them for several days on the road. Thus, vendors made a practice of selling “certified unblemished” animals to the visiting pilgrims there in the temple, in the outer court called The Court of the Gentiles.

In addition to purchasing “unblemished” animals for their sacrifices, the pilgrims would also be expected to pay their temple tax while they were in town. The temple tax was to be paid by every Jew over the age of 19 as a means of financing the ongoing work of temple worship. The temple tax was one half shekel (the equivalent of two days of wages); however, because the pilgrims were often toting Roman denarii, they would be required to exchange their pagan currency for the Tyrian shekel that was the only acceptable currency within the temple.

Now, everything I’ve told you so far is somewhat reasonable, right? If unblemished animals were required, it makes sense that they be bought near the Temple in Jerusalem. And if the temple tax had to be paid in shekels, money-changers would be needed. However, what Jesus observed was not reasonable, and we know this because He becomes VERY angry, creates a whip, and commences to kick some tail in the temple! Now, why did Jesus become so angry?

There are several reasons. First of all, instead of selling the animals just outside the temple, the vendors set up shop inside the temple court, as did the money-changers. It was a very large court, some 35 acres or so, designated for God-fearing Gentiles. So, if you just happened to be a Gentile pilgrim who came to honor God in this season of Passover, your journey to meet God in His temple would be met with nothing short of a three-ring circus! There would be the sound of animals neighing, the delightful smell of manure, the haggling of vendors and the money-changers! There would be no quiet place to pray, no semblance of reverence. In fact, there would be no distinguishing difference between this temple court and the marketplace across town.

Secondly, Jesus knew about the injustices that were taking place here in the temple courts. Jesus knew that the local “inspectors” would reject every animal that the pilgrims brought into the temple courts so as to force them to purchase their pre-approved animals at an inflated price. Jesus knew about the kickbacks that the inspectors got from the animal vendors and how much money the temple authorities were making on these animal sales. Jesus knew that, according to the Lev. 14:22, the pigeons were there for the poor people who could not afford to purchase an ox or a goat; and yet Jesus knew that the pigeons, usually sold for two-days-wage outside of Jerusalem, were being sold for as much as 3 weeks wages in the temple courts, thus taking advantage of the poor and making it all but impossible for the poor to bring an offering to the Lord.

Jesus knew that the though the temple offering was only a half-shekel (2 days wages), the pilgrims would be charged a day’s wage to simply exchange their currency into shekels.

And Jesus knew that the leaders of the temple were making HUGE amounts of money off the celebration of the Passover, the money-changers, and the selling of unblemished animals. And to make matters worse, all of this money was being made…all of these injustices were being practiced…in the name of His Father, the Lord God of Israel.
As NT scholar William Barclay writes: What enraged Jesus was that the pilgrims to the Passover who could ill afford it were being fleeced at an exorbitant rate...it was a rampant and shameless social injustice—and what was worse, it was being done in the name of religion.

Such is why, in vss. 15-16, we catch a glimpse of what John will later describe in Revelation 6 as “the wrath of the Lamb.” In vs. 15 we read: And making a whip of cords, he 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. And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.”

Jesus cleans house, and yes Church...he is ANGRY! Does it bother you that Jesus has the capacity to become so angry? Does that shatter your very safe, very docile version of Jesus as the non-confrontational, generally wimpy man who exists only to let us all off the hook? Very well...let that non-biblical version of Jesus be shattered to pieces—may that idolatrous fraud feel the sting of our Lord’s whip! Church, behold the Lamb! He is indeed meek and mild to those who are weary and heavy laden, but He is no other than the LION of JUDAH who roars in the face of injustice. Look upon the wrath of the Lion—see his eyes ablaze with the indignation of a holy and just God! “NO MORE,” he shouts, “STOP THIS NONSENSE! HAVE YOU NO FEAR OF GOD? HAVE YOU NO REVERENCE FOR THE GREAT I AM? WOULD YOU MAKE MY FATHER’S HOUSE INTO A MARKETPLACE? Look to this man who clears the Temple...but oh what a man he is! Church, I don’t know about you, but this moment in the court of the Gentiles makes me love Jesus all the more!

Christy and I were leading a discussion on this story a few weeks ago with our home group which, in addition to some very committed believers, also consists of a few people who are yet to accept Jesus as Lord. One of our neighbors who grew up knowing NOTHING at all about Jesus and identified himself as atheist just over a year ago, was quietly contemplating this story as we read it together. He is a big guy, a football coach and a great dad to his girls. He doesn’t often say much at our gatherings, but on this occasion, he said, “I like this story. I like the way Jesus cleans house...that seems like it’s the right thing to do where there is so much corruption.”

Exactly! My friend may not initially be drawn to Jesus the Lamb, but he is quite taken by Jesus the Lion! Church, please present Jesus as we find Him in the Gospel! Please do not present Jesus to the watching world as some wet noodle who gives the hall pass to whoever wants one. Present Jesus as we find Him in the Gospel...as the Lamb who has no problem acting as the LION when the situation calls for it!

We should have no love for a Lord who is not angered at injustice. We should not respect a God who yawns when the poor are being fleeced. We could never fear a King who cared little when corruption happened in his name! Ah...but that is not what we find here in the New Testament, is it? No, in fact, all four gospels present the Lamb whose anger blazes in the face of injustice, who drives off both man and beast. In the Gospel we find the One who applies the whip against those who would profane the sacred and victimize the weak. Do not underestimate this man, Jesus of Nazareth...he is not soft; he is not weak; he is not passive or apathetic to evil men who do evil things. Yes, He has tremendous grace...indeed He does. But grace is only grace in the
face of righteous and uncompromising justice! Here we see what angers our Savior, and we would be foolish to think this story applies only to first century Jews.

Church, should Jesus enter into the temple courts of our hearts, what would he find there? Would he find a heart devoted to making money at any cost? Would he find a willingness to appear religious to make the deal? Would he find a form of religion that lacks any kind of power or substance? What would Jesus find as He walks into the lobby of our churches? How long would it take Him to form the whip? Rest assured, wherever there is flippancy about the Father…wherever there is more concern about the organization’s flourishing than the glory of God…wherever there is an iota of compromise regarding the TRUTH of His Word…there we can expect to find the wrath of the Lamb and the sting of His rebuke! This is the real Jesus who HATES injustice, He HATES religion that corrupts and manipulates, He HATES evil and its effect on hurting souls.

And why? That brings me to my second heading:

II. The Love of the Son
Church, how many of you know that there is a thin line between love and hate? It is a thin line indeed. In fact, I would tell you this: if you don’t know what you hate, I suspect you don’t know what you love, either. What we hate reveals what we love; and what we love dictates what we hate! If you love people, you will hate everything that causes people to be crushed and oppressed. If you love the poor, you will hate economic injustice. If you love minorities, you will hate prejudice. If you love your children, you will hate every evil temptation that seeks to suck them into addiction. Jesus was angry…He hated what He saw in the temple that day…why? Because He so loved His Father! He so loved His Father’s house! He so loved these poor, weary pilgrims who had traveled far to come worship His Father! He so loved what could happen to a sin-sick soul who came to the house of the Lord seeking forgiveness from a merciful God! The love of the Son fueled the wrath of the Lion…you do see that, right? Let us now consider…

III. The Zeal of the Lord
As the disciples of Jesus later reflected upon this day, the Holy Spirit brought to mind Psalm 69: “For zeal for your house consumed me.” These words written by King David are set within a Psalm written a thousand years before Christ. Yet these words so revealed the heart of the Messiah, that the Apostle John and his friends remember this verse in the future tense, “Zeal for your house WILL consume me.” And of course, that is exactly what Jesus revealed here on this day in Jerusalem. Jesus had great ZEAL for the Father, and great ZEAL for the House of God…and His zeal was present in his love and his anger.

Church, may I ask you a question? Do you have great zeal for the Lord? Do you have great zeal for the House of the Lord? I have to ask, because to be quite honest, some of you do a masterful job of disguising your zeal! I mean, if I didn’t know any better, I might conclude you actually lack zeal!

Now, I see some in our church who worship the LORD with zeal! They sing with all their hearts; they raise their hands in adoration to the Risen Lamb of God; they give generously and
serve wherever they can to further the ministry of the Lord’s household. I see their tears when
the Lord convicts them of sin, and I see their joy when the tomb is found empty! I recognize
zeal in those souls who get fired up about the great pain in the world; and sometimes they get
fired up if we as church leaders are dropping the ball! I appreciate zeal…that is something that
the scripture commends in believers.

But I find that there are many, even here in our church, who lack zeal for the LORD, and zeal for
His house, and I wonder: why is that? Could it be that our love has grown cold? Could it be
that we care more for the trappings of religion than we care for God Himself? Could it be that
we do not fear or revere the LION of JUDAH because we are convinced that God is our
“buddy,” or “the man upstairs,” or “the big guy in the sky?” Listen to me Church: If you have
no reverence for God…if you have no fear of the Lord…if you have no ZEAL for His presence
and His household, it’s likely that your god is one of your own making…not the ONE we find
here in the Gospel! Sadly, so many of us were raised to believe in a fluffy, soft, irrelevant, lower
case “jesus” who doesn’t care what we do, nor should we care much what he has done.
Search your hearts church…what do you truly love? What are you willing to suffer for? Therein
is your zeal. I would pray that our ZEAL would be for the LORD, amen? Let us now consider
what comes next.

IV. The Sign of the Messiah
In vs. 18 “the Jews,” likely the Jewish authorities, ask: “What sign do you show us for doing
these things?”

This question reveals that the Jews are familiar with the Messianic prophecies. They recognize
that when Jesus clears the temple, He is fulfilling the Messianic prophecy, and in as much is
saying, “I am the Messiah.” So, naturally, they come to Jesus asking for a sign to prove that He
is the Messiah.

The Jews were always looking for signs, and we find this request in the other gospel accounts as
well. Ironically, Jesus performed many signs, but He did not appreciate people demanding a
sign as though He was some circus entertainer. Jesus knows that there are no signs that would
win the hearts of these people. Oh, they might become an adoring crowd for a few days, but
when the signs stop, they surely will fall away. This is, in essence, what John reflects upon in
vss. 23-25: Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name
when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them,
because he knew all people, and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew
what was in man.

Apparently, Jesus cleansing the temple won a lot of admirers in Jerusalem that day, but Jesus
knew they wouldn’t last. He didn’t accept their admiration, He did not count upon their
testimony, because He knew they would quickly fall away.

And then there were others, like the Jewish authorities before him now, who still demanded more
signs.
So Jesus answers the sign-seekers, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” To
which the Jews respond, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up
in three days?” At this point we can hear the crowds starting to chuckle; we can see them
shaking their heads and walking away. Perhaps the boldness and passion of Jesus impressed
them for a bit. Perhaps they were grateful that somebody finally stood up to the corruption of the
money-changers and the financial cash cow of Temple worship. But rebuild the temple in three
days? “The Nazarene is crazy” they say. And the conversation is over.

It was only much later, says John, that the disciples understood what Jesus was saying. In vs. 21
John writes, “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.

Church, the greatest validation, the ultimate sign of who Jesus was and is remains the empty
tomb…period. If Jesus be raised on the third day, then He is the Son of God. We must have
empathy and understanding for those who tried to understand Jesus prior to the resurrection. I’m
quite certain we would have also walked away that day scratching our heads at His words. So
Church, be grateful that, as those who believe and have receive the Holy Spirit, we now see what
those in temple courts could not see. And, as John observes, we continue to find validation after
validation in the scriptures that are always pointing to Jesus. Go back this afternoon and read
Psalm 69 that we quoted a moment ago, and there you will see how the scriptures written a
thousand years before Christ paint his picture so beautifully. Let us ask for no more signs…the
tomb is empty! Jesus is Lord! Alright…one last point to consider and we’re done.

V. The Whip and the Lamb
Let me close now with my final point: the whip and the Lamb. The story we read this morning is
graphic and even violent to some degree. The thought of Jesus swinging a whip, turning over
tables, driving out the merchants…that’s not typically the way we want to think of Jesus. But
listen: the way we WANT to think of Jesus is completely irrelevant. Coming to know Jesus as
He actually is found in the NT trumps the god we have made in our own image! So, let us
acknowledge who Jesus is: He is the Whip and the Lamb!

Can you feel that tension? Listen, Jesus is no less loving with a whip in his hand then when he
allowed Himself to be whipped on our behalf. The Lamb is no less loving when He tips over our
tables then when His cross is tipped into the hole and all of his joints are thrown out of place.
Jesus is no less loving when He is the LION of Judah then when He is the Lamb of God who
takes away the sins of the world.

Jesus is always perfect LOVE…but sometimes, (let us now be honest with ourselves), the perfect
love that we need the most is the beloved whip of our Savior. The Lord’s discipline tells us
where we have fallen away from our first love. The sting of His rebuke clears out the worldly
distractions and clutter. The Lion tips over those habits and tendencies that will lead us to
worship a different god and believe in a different gospel.

Church, be grateful for the One who loves us enough to make the whip and to clear His temple.
He is the One who can be trusted to tell us the truth. As the writer Hebrew reflects:
Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by Him. For the Lord disciplines every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whose father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, then you are illegitimate children and not sons…He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

I fear that far too many of us are apathetic and complacent in our faith. We do not fear the Lord; for the god we worship never tells us we are wrong. We never feel the sting of His loving whip; we can’t remember the last time our god disciplined us. But Church, that should not be! If you worship the living God; if you follow this Savior that we have found here in the Gospel, we can be certain He loves us too much to spare the whip in the court of our hearts where there is defilement and corruption. Yet His is the beloved whip! For though He lashes our sin with the anger of His holy wrath, though He loves us too much to leave us as He found us, He brings healing into our broken lives with His shed blood on a cross. He runs out the oxen and the sheep because we need only the LAMB! This is MY SAVIOR! He is the Lion and the Lamb! He is the TRUTH that hurts my feelings; and He is the GRACE that saves my soul! Heed this man with the whip…He is the same who will soon cry out from a criminal’s cross, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!” Behold this man…His name is Jesus! He is our Lord and our King! May we worship Him with all the zeal that He deserves, and may our zeal be famous in this city as we make Him known to a watching world. Let us pray.