

The Lion Roared

John 2:12-25

Introduction

The Chronicles of Narnia are a series of children's books by C. S. Lewis. The books portray the classic struggle of good versus evil in a fantasy world where animals talk and children are referred to as sons of Adam and daughters of Eve. If you have never read them, you should. The most famous of the series is the fantasy entitled, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The wardrobe is a closet in a home in England where some children are visiting relatives. Upon entering the wardrobe, they actually enter this fantasy world called Narnia. In one scene, some talking beavers are describing Aslan, the lion, to Lucy, Susan, and Peter, who have only recently stumbled through the wardrobe into Narnia. Aslan is C. S. Lewis' representation of Jesus Christ, and he, the lion, is engaged in combat with the witch – and we know who she represents.

As the Beavers describe Aslan to the children, Susan says, "Is he safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver, "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Course he isn't safe. But he's good . . . He's the King I tell you."

The Lion Roars

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to introduce to you, a different Jesus – a terrible lion who delivered a terrible roar for the sake of holiness and

for the sake of worship. This startling show of authority and power occurred in the city of Jerusalem, in the month of April.

This incident is recorded for us in the gospel by John, chapter 2. Look at verses 12 and 13.

After this He went down to Capernaum, He and His mother, and His brothers, and His disciples; and there they stayed a few days. And the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

The significance of the Passover celebration

The Passover was a seven-day feast which commemorated the freeing of the slaves in Egypt. If you remember the Old Testament story from the book of Exodus, the Egyptian Pharaoh, because he would not release the Israelites from slavery, had been given a number of plagues by the Lord. Finally, the death angel came, killing all of the first-born in Egypt, but passing over every Israelite home where the command of the Lord had been obeyed to place the blood of an unblemished lamb on the doorposts. After this, the Pharaoh released the slaves and this day became a national day of remembrance.

It was the dream of every Jew to someday celebrate Passover in Jerusalem. Josephus, the Jewish historian who lived in the first century, recorded that in AD 65, during Passover, 255,600 lambs were offered. If there were as many as ten worshippers per lamb, that would mean that nearly three million people were celebrating in Jerusalem.

Now get this! Jesus Christ's first public act would take place in the capital, in the temple itself. The one who was declared to be "the Lamb of God" would attend the feast where the death of the lamb

was celebrated, because it brought about life. So, the Lamb is attending the celebration of the sacrifice of lambs.

The corruption of the Passover system

But all is not well in Jerusalem. Look at verse 14.

And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers seated.

At first glance, this may not seem to us to be out of order, but in reality, it reveals unbelievable corruption in, of all places, the house of worship.

Annas was the vile, corrupt high priest during the lifetime of Jesus. He was the same man, who, along with his son in law Caiphas, instigated the crucifixion of Jesus. Annas had used his position as a means to gain personal power and wealth. In fact, the business enterprises in the temple court had become known as the “Bazaar of Annas”.

How was a non-profit temple system bringing in millions of dollars from relatively poor people? Every male who attended the Passover in Jerusalem, could not enter the temple campus until they had paid a “temple tax” of a half-shekel. Today, that would be the equivalent of about twenty-five dollars. In that day, a half-shekel equaled two days wages, so it was no light sacrifice.

The trouble was, in Palestine, all kinds of currency were used. Silver coins from Rome, Greece, Egypt, and Sidon were in circulation, and all were valid – except in the temple. These currencies were considered unclean and the temple would only accept tax paid in Galilean shekels or “shekels of the sanctuary”.

That is where the good old moneychangers came in. Look back at verse 14b,

... and the moneychangers seated..

These supposedly religious men charged all sorts of fees, which brought in lots of money.

This can be a little confusing, so let me give a modern day example. Would you take out your wallet, please?

For you to get into church, it is going to cost ten dollars. That was the standard temple tax. But, let us say that you do not have a ten dollar bill. Likewise, they did not have a half-shekel, because there was no such thing! It required change.

So, give me a twenty dollar bill. That means I owe you ten dollars. I will hand two five dollar bills to you. *But*, I have got to charge you five dollars for the exchange. So, I will only give you one five dollar bill, right? *Sorry*, I must also charge you on your change, because you have given unclean money to me and I am giving you, in exchange, sacred money. That will cost you. Can you guess how much? Of course, five dollars!

The historians record that it cost an average of twenty dollars to simply get into the temple on Passover day. Now, if you multiply twenty dollars by one million or more worshippers, you can only imagine why the religious leaders got excited. It was nothing less than extortion in the name of religion.

But there is more! God had originally instructed the people of Israel to bring from their own flocks the best animals for sacrifice, according to Deuteronomy, chapter 12. But the priests instituted a market for buying sacrificial animals. Undoubtedly, this made it more convenient, but what began as a convenience turned into religious blackmail.

The law required that any animal offered in sacrifice must be unblemished. Therefore, the temple had to inspect the animal before it would be admissible for sacrifice.

By the time of Christ, the temple had appointed inspectors, or “mumcheh,” who examined the animal. They charged a fee of five dollars. In addition, it was widely known that the “mumcheh” were dishonest and, as a practice, rejected the animals brought by the pilgrims. Why? So that the pilgrims would have to buy their sacrificial animal from the temple livestock. One major problem, however, was that outside the temple, a pair of doves would cost as little as twenty dollars, while inside the temple, in the court of the Gentiles, they were being sold for as much as three hundred seventy five dollars!

So the temple system, corrupt and vile, was practically blackmailing the poor pilgrims into buying their animals from the temple livestock. This again, was bold-faced extortion in the name of religion.

It is not a new thing for religion to charge, is it? Our own Protestant Reformation began when an incensed monk, Martin Luther, was pushed over the edge by a man named, Tetzel. Tetzel had begun the practice, with the stamp of approval of the organized church, of selling what was called, indulgences. For a little bit of money, you could buy a piece of paper that meant so many sins were forgiven. And, if you spent a lot more money, even that many more sins

were forgiven. Tetzel used to travel around the country getting money from the poor people. He even had a traveling choir that went with him, who would sing a little “ditty” that went something like this, “Every time a coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs.” Luther was incensed and would begin a series of debates with Tetzel.

Is it just that period of history? No. Today, you might be told to send in your prayer request with one hundred dollars, or that to be saved, or spiritual, you must join this church, do these deeds, sign that pledge . . . Religion creates an environment that, in essence, puts a price on access to God – but it is not for sale.

The Lion Reveals

One look at it all brought the righteous indignation out of Jesus Christ – the Lamb of God who now reveals that He is also the Lion of Judah. And His roar will reverberate around those massive corridors and pierce the hearts of the Jewish system that had corrupted worship in an unbelievably cruel and heartless fashion.

Continue in John, chapter 2, to verses 15 and 16.

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 moneychangers, and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, “Take these things away; stop making My Father’s house a house of merchandise.”

Philips translates this,

So He made a whip out of cords and drove the whole lot of them, sheep and cattle as well, out of the temple. He sent the coins of the moneychangers flying and turned their tables upside down. Then He said to the dove-sellers, “Take those things out of here. Don’t you dare turn My Father’s house into a market!”

Now you need to understand the deeper implications of Jesus’ actions. Let me give you several facts that the Lion of Judah is now revealing.

Jesus is revealing His authority over the religious headquarters

1. First, Jesus is revealing His authority over the religious headquarters.

He claimed that the temple, the headquarters of Jewish religion, was actually his Father’s house! Did you catch that in verse 16b?

. . . stop making My Father’s house a house of merchandise.

There is something interesting here though! During the Passover, it was the duty of each family to clean their homes. They were especially to rid their homes of leaven, which most believe was a biblical symbol of evil. They usually cleaned house in the month of April – this was spring cleaning.

Here was Jesus Christ going into the temple, which He called, “My Father’s house,” and what was He doing? He was cleaning house!

Jesus was declaring ownership and authority over the temple, which was nothing short of declaring Himself to be the Messiah!

Jesus is revealing His anger over religious harassment

2. Secondly, Jesus is revealing His anger over religious harassment.

This event reveals some interesting insights into organized (“man-made” or “hand-created”) religion.

Organized religion will . . .

Let me give you several things that organized religion will consistently do.

- Organized religion will view people for how they can give, rather than how they can grow.

In other words, what can this person contribute to the corporation, rather than how can they serve the King.

Church becomes a machine managed by tired people who often are used up. This little “ditty” summarizes this thought.

*Mary had a little lamb,
‘Twas given her to keep;
But then it joined the Baptist church,
And died for lack of sleep.*

Now make no mistake – I happen to believe that eighty percent of the work is accomplished by twenty percent of the people. If we had more people on the team, fewer players would collapse from exhaustion.

- Secondly, organized religion will consistently find its spreadsheet more interesting than its spiritual message and mission.

Money is often the bottom line and many organizations and churches find themselves in an all-

out effort to raise money. Unfortunately the church, like the temple, has become a bazaar, a flea market, a stockyard for bartering and deal making. It has become a place for anything but worship.

Our challenge is not to make money, but to make disciples. We have adopted a posture, in our church, that we will never enter into any debt that will cause us to restructure our ministry objectives; that will make us stop thinking about people.

- Thirdly, organized religion will consistently be more interested in form than substance.

Do you have your sacrifice? Good! Did you show up on the Sabbath? Good! Do you follow the Torah, read the *Mishna*, repeat the Shemah? Good!

The questions should be: Do you know God? Are you walking with Him? Are you developing spiritual fruit? Do you know Jesus Christ? Have you received His gift of eternal life? Have you been forgiven by the blood of the Lamb?

Every week I go out, and many times, like these past few weeks, I have had the thrill of hearing people bow their heads and pray to receive Christ as their personal Savior. Some of these people had been raised in the church – organized religion failed again. Why? Because it focuses on external ritual and works, rather than an internal relationship and trust.

- Finally, organized religion will consistently create a hindrance to worship, rather than a path for worship.

Now, in that day, only Jews were allowed access into the temple proper. If a Gentile wanted to come and pray and meditate, he had to do that in the court of the Gentiles. And, where was all of the marketing “hub bub” taking place? In the outer court – properly called the court of the Gentiles.

The temple authorities and Jewish traders were making the court of the Gentiles into a place of uproar where no one could ever pray. With the lowing of the oxen, the bleating of the sheep, the cooing of the doves, the shouts of the hucksters, the rattle of the coins, the smell of the manure, the voices of those arguing over bargaining disputes – the court of the Gentiles was the furthest place on earth from worship.

To have a time of worship and meditation in the court of the Gentiles would have been about as possible as having devotions while sitting four bleachers up on the fifty yard line during an exciting football game! There might be a lot of praying going on – but no worshiping of God.

One author defined worship,

To quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.

To summarize this, “Worship is pre-occupation with God.”

Jesus is revealing His answer to religious hunger

3. One final revelation of Jesus’ act in the temple, Jesus is revealing His answer to religious hunger.

Note verse 18.

The Jews therefore answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show to us, seeing that You do these things?”

When Jesus cleared the temple, revealing his authority, the Jewish leaders knew that the only person with that kind of authority was the Messiah. Jesus was, in effect, offering Himself to them as their Messiah. So, they demand proof of His claim.

Continue to verse 19.

Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

The gospel by Mark gives an additional clue, in chapter 14, verse 58.

. . . I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.

The Jews had been long-awaiting the Messiah. In fact, by the time of Christ, no less than a dozen Jews had stepped forward with the claim that they were the Messiah. After Christ had ascended, the nation still sought after false Messiahs.

Simon ben Koseva, of the second century, was a man who was declared Messiah by the famous Rabbi Akiva. He was given a title that, translated, meant, “star out of Jacob”. Simon was looked upon as a great warrior who would remove the Romans from the land of Israel. In fact, in the year 135 AD, he actually recaptured Jerusalem for a short time, but finally, was defeated by the Romans in battle and killed.

Then a man by the name of Zevi started the most organized and momentous messianic movement in Jewish history. He created an incredible messianic fervor and thousands of Jews followed him, believing

that he would lead them back to their promised land. In the year 1666, Zevi was captured and imprisoned by the sultan of Turkey. While in prison, this Messiah did the unthinkable – he converted to Islam.

Have the Jewish people stopped looking; stopped hoping? No!

Recently, a rabbi named Schneerson was being hailed by many as the true Messiah. He was said to have healed the sick, and many of his predictions about the future had come true. His followers said of him, “Moses was the first redeemer, the Rabbi is the last.” Elwood McQuaid, of the Friends of Israel, estimated that nearly 300,000 Jews believed that this rabbi was the Messiah. And what does Rabbi Schneerson have to say? Nothing, because he cannot – he recently died.

What makes Jesus’ claim valid? Look at verse 22.

When therefore 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.

No wonder His disciples were decimated when Jesus died – they thought He was just another false Messiah! No wonder they turned into crusaders – they soon knew that Jesus Christ indeed had risen from the dead!

This is why Jesus Christ did not come to planet earth to revitalize religion, but to re-invent it. It would not be a place – it would be a person! And He would not offer people a complicated system, He would offer them a crucified Savior. A Savior who

would be crucified and buried and then, three days later, would rise from the dead.

The Lessons Learned

Do you hinder worship, or help it to happen?

1. Do you hinder worship, or help it to happen?

In fact, if Jesus Christ physically visited the temple of your body; your lifestyle; your mind; your home today, would He need to do spring cleaning? What would He throw out? What would be left?

Do you inspire and encourage those who know you to walk with God, or do you stand in the way?

2. Do you inspire and encourage those who know you to walk with God, or do you stand in the way?

Do you fill your life with so much noise and activity that you do anything other than worship your Lord?

3. Do you fill your life with so much noise and activity that you do anything other than worship your Lord?

I could reword that, “In the past week, did God ever cross your mind? Did you think of Him? Did you talk with Him?”

Perhaps you need the Lord to clean some debris that is cluttering your path to pure and wonderful worship, so that you can become again, pre-occupied with the Messiah; the risen, coming Savior; the Lion of Judah.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/7/1993 by Stephen Davey.

© Copyright 1993 Stephen Davey

All rights reserved.