

# **BaptistWay Bible Series for December 19: Jesus's authority as the Son of God**

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Every holiday holds the potential for commercialization. Christmas is a prime example. It's the celebration of Jesus' birth, yet even among believers, the focus often is more about decorations, holiday foods and gifts than about Jesus.

Business owners understand this, of course, so they tap into the holiday spirit to build their profits. In this week's lesson, we can see American retailers didn't invent this strategy. The temple priests also took advantage of the holiday spirit to make more money.

## **Not what we do, but where and how**

The holiday was the Jewish Passover. Like Christmas, it's a religious holiday, one of the holiest events for the Jews. But unlike Christmas, it's tied to specific worship practices. "Three times a year all your men must appear before the Lord your God ..." (Deuteronomy 16:16).

The temple priests approved the selling of animals for sacrifice as a convenience to worshippers who traveled a great distance. For people traveling from foreign countries, money changers also were available to make sure they had the right currency. After time, the priests realized the money-making potential of this set-up and essentially turned the temple courts into a shopping mall.

That's what Jesus saw when he walked into the temple courts in our story. "So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both

sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables” (John 2:15).

Why does Jesus react so strongly? Because the Jews had lost focus. The holiday spirit and the desire to make profits had become more important than God. Notice Jesus never tore up a marketplace in any other context. It isn't commercialism that offends Jesus. It's that this mindset doesn't belong in God's house. “To those who sold doves he said, ‘Get out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!’” (John 2:16).

### **The holiness of God's house**

“His disciples remembered that it is written: ‘Zeal for your house will consume me’” (John 2:17). As God's son, Jesus understood the holiness of God and the importance of worship.

As the house of God, the Jewish temple represents God's presence. “Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8). God's presence is the greatest honor he could extend to us. It's also why we celebrate Christmas. The birth of Jesus is God becoming a man. It's Immanuel, or God with us, and it demonstrates God's love for us and his desire to be with us.

How do we experience God's presence? Through worship and prayer. “For my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Isaiah 56:7). This is God's desire because he made us to enjoy his presence. When we bring secular attitudes and behaviors into God's house, we imply he isn't everything we want or need.

When Jesus clears the temple, he's telling us how important it is not to water down the presence of God. His presence is enough. We don't need to add festivities or special programs or anything else.

### **Authority of Jesus**

Part of the problem is we don't like being told we're doing things wrong. Even by Jesus. We like our traditions, and we enjoy the festivities of the holidays.

The Jews felt the same way. "Then the Jews demanded of him, 'What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?'" (John 2:18). In typical Jesus fashion, he answered cryptically. "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19).

Jesus is saying he has the authority to tell them how to behave in his Father's house. Unfortunately for them, they didn't have the Bible to tell them the end of the story. We do.

We know Jesus established his authority time after time. Last week, we read about how he turned water into wine. Later he'll turn a boy's lunch into enough food to feed 5,000. He'll tell the winds to die down, and the sky will obey. He'll heal peoples' deformities and infirmities, drive out demons and even bring people back from the dead.

Jesus' authority extends from the physical creation to the spirit world and life itself. But like the Jews in our story, we get sidetracked by details. The Jews want to argue about Jesus' ability to rebuild the temple, but Jesus is talking about the temple of his body. When man destroys it on the cross, Jesus even has authority over his own life.

Here's how the writer of Hebrews describes it: "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs" (Hebrews 1:3-4).

Now that's authority. And that's what we celebrate at Christmas.

## **Food for thought**

Celebrating Jesus' birth is a worship experience that every church should enjoy. But we must be careful to celebrate Jesus, not Christmas. What's the difference? Does your church celebrate in ways that put more focus on the holiday itself than on Jesus?