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## **When Jesus Goes to Church**

**John 2:12-22**

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How many of you used to watch Cheers? How many of you used to fantasize about leaving your business and going to Cheers so you could hang out with Cliff, Norm, Sam and Woody? I did. And I do... and I'm a pastor. I work in a church. My business is church.

Reverend Pastor Chuck Swindoll wrote the following:

The neighborhood bar is possibly the best counterfeit there is to the fellowship Christ wants to give His church. It's an imitation, dispensing liquor instead of grace, but it is a permissive, accepting, and inclusive fellowship. It is unshockable. It is democratic. You can tell people secrets and they usually don't tell others or even want to. The bar flourishes not because most people are alcoholics, but because God has put into the human heart the desire to know and be known, to love and be loved, and so many seek a counterfeit at the price of a few beers.

Well you know the very best counterfeits are those closest to what they counterfeit. And if you know they're not the thing they counterfeit, then they're not counterfeits but signs.

As we discovered, the Gospel of John refers to a miraculous wet bar produced by Jesus as a sign – the first of the Lord's signs. Scripture warns that wine is a “mockery” and yet Jesus turns it into a sacrament, saying “take and drink. Do it in remembrance of me.”

For the last two sermons we've been preaching on John 2:1-11, and the fact that Jesus' first sign in the Gospel of John is taking bath water used for cleaning folks according to Law, and turning that water into 180 gallons of wine in order to keep a party going at a wedding where it appears that some folks had already had too much to drink. John makes it clear that the wedding party is on the 7<sup>th</sup> day. It's a sign of the kingdom. The wedding supper of the lamb, where the Bride of Christ becomes one with her groom forever... the wedding party is a sign of the kingdom, and the fact that Jesus makes the wine is the manifestation of His glory. And His glory is the mercy that flows from His cross.

In the Revelation, Jesus' cross is revealed to be a winepress. At the cross we surrender our old judgmental, self-centered selves; we surrender our sin. Jesus takes our sin and crushes it in himself, bleeding new wine and His mercy.

People serve wine at parties because it helps people forget themselves and their business, stop judging and keeping score. The thing that wrecks a party is people stuck on themselves and their business, people judging and keeping score, trading favors and jockeying for position. But a great party is love in freedom, like a great marriage is love in freedom.

Well alcohol helps for a few hours, but if you rely on it, it mocks you. It points to freedom but then enslaves you to itself. It's the sign, not the substance. The substance is grace, the blood of Christ. Remember? It neutralizes those "My Life Scorecards." It's the judgment of grace that judges all judgments. It cancels out our "Certificate of Debt." Jesus, the "Lamb that takes away the sins of the world with His blood." So Scripture says, "Don't be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit." When the Spirit fell on the disciples in Acts 2, they forgot themselves, praised God in ecstasy, and the bystanders thought they were drunk. And that's what they said of Jesus: "He's a glutton and a drunkard," "a friend of tax collectors and sinners." Well Jesus was never drunk with wine, and yet his blood is 100% wine – new wine – grace – the life of the party.

So last week I said, "If we were really following Jesus, maybe we'd look a little less like legislators and policemen, and a little more like Sam and Woody on Cheers." The kingdom of Heaven is a party, and church is to anticipate that party.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> Day, Jesus goes to a wedding party and turns water into 180 gallons of high quality wine. If Jesus is that sweet when He goes to a secular party, where some folks are drinking too much already, imagine how sweet He'll be when He shows up in church! In John 2 He goes to a party and now He goes to church, and I mean church (the Baptist General Conference, Presbyterian General Assembly, The Vatican – Church). Ekklesia – the congregation in its best building, the Temple in Jerusalem.

This is a model of the Temple (Picture)

And this is where it was situated. It was immense (Picture) At Passover there was literally a river of lamb's blood that flowed from this mountain and into this valley – the Kidron Valley.

Well Jesus goes to the party and makes wine.

John 2:12

After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. 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. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade."

His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" 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.

Wow! So what's the moral of that story? It seems clear to me: Don't invite Jesus to church, because he'll mess up your business. Don't invite Jesus to church unless you're fixin' to get your temple cleaned.

But dang that's quite a contrast to the wedding party. In all three of the other Gospels, Jesus cleanses the temple just before they crucify Him (which makes some sense), but in John's Gospel He does it here at the start. Some scholars postulate that Jesus did it twice. But most argue that He did it once. And even though John knew that Jesus did it at the end of His ministry, He tells the story here to make a theological point. (John's not big on chronologies and never claims that his Gospel is one.)

Well no matter when or how many times Jesus cleansed the temple, I do think John is very intentional about telling the story here. Maybe wine at the wedding feast and wrath in the temple are like two sides of one reality, one judgment. These two stories at the end of 6 days in the Gospel of John are like two stories at the end of time in John's Revelation. And the one other place in all of Scripture where Jesus is pictured with such fury, divides those two stories. In Revelation 19 and 20, the Word of God with the eyes of fire (Jesus) tramples the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God. He is the Passover Lamb and He sits on the throne of judgment.

At Passover time there may have been over 2 million people that passed through those temple courts. Courts the size of a few football fields. This thing happened at Passover, so cleansing the temple was no small event. And Jesus must have been an awesome sight.

Why is He so angry? Consumed with zeal?

In one of the other Gospels, Jesus says “My father’s house shall be a house of prayer for all nations.” The merchants and money-changers had moved their tables into the Court of the Gentiles, so in the name of business, they kept the nations from prayer – bad business practices. But John doesn’t mention that here.

In two of the other Gospels, Jesus calls the merchants “thieves.” According to historians the temple rulers were running a racket. They collected a temple tax to pay for the building, but would only accept a certain kind of currency. So folks were forced to go to money-changers, working for the temple, who then took an exorbitant cut. Worshipers were also to sacrifice certain animals, but the animals had to be inspected by temple inspectors. Unless you purchased your animal at the temple, odds were slim to none it would pass inspection. And animals sold in the temple could cost almost 20 times as much as those sold outside. They were running a racket in the name of God – using God.

Four hundred years ago the Roman Catholic Church sold indulgences to pay for St. Peter’s Basilica. An indulgence was a ticket out of Purgatory. They were running a racket in the name of God.

A few weeks ago I was working out in the basement watching TV and feeling kind of low. This TV evangelist said he’d send me an anointed Green Prosperity Prayer Handkerchief if I just emailed him my address. So between sets, I did. And he sent me my Green Prosperity Prayer Handkerchief, along with a letter telling me it hadn’t been anointed yet. I just needed to touch it to my forehead, place it on my billfold overnight, write how much cash I needed, then send it back with an offering. Because “the more I give to God, the more He’ll give to me,” the letter said.

There is a story about miracle handkerchiefs in the book of Acts, and God will use just about anything, especially stuff accompanied by faith. But I didn’t send my Miracle Prayer Handkerchief back because I was starting to think it might be a racket. This is my Green Miracle Prayer Handkerchief. Wanna touch it? You can... for 5 bucks. And why not? You put money in the offering plate. What’s the difference? If you’re fixin’ to get something back, what’s the difference?

The famous missionary and martyr Jim Elliot used to say, “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” And that’s true. But is that substantially different than Green Miracle Prayer Handkerchiefs? It may be smarter; it may be shrewder, but is it really any different? Is that what makes a Christian? Better business sense?

We preachers say: “Who wants to go to Heaven? Who wants their debts forgiven? Then just come forward, say this prayer, sign up for this class.” If it’s true that no preachers can get you into Heaven, it’s only good business sense to agree with whatever we ask. And if we need to raise money for our salaries or building, it’s easy for us to tack that on to the deal like a dividend or sales commission: you get God, and God gets you. And I make a commission like a stockbroker... or a pimp.

I think most Americans think the problem in the temple that day was bad business, but Jesus doesn't say "bad business," just "business." He says, "You shall not make my Father's house a house of business." *Emperion* in Greek. It's where we get our word "emporium." "You shall not make my Father's house a house of trade." Trade... here's an interesting question: what would we have to trade?

God prescribed that the Jews give sacrifices and offerings, kind of like I used to prescribe that my kids give kisses and Christmas gifts. But the kiss didn't pay for anything, and I paid for all the gifts. The Jews offered stuff like wine and lambs, but it's not a trade, only God can make a lamb. Paul writes, "Who has given a gift to God that he might be repaid? From him and through him and to him are all things."

What could you ever trade with God? For that matter, what could you ever trade with anyone? Anything you think you own is stolen property. You say, "Hey, I bought my house from the builder." Where'd the builder get the wood? "He bought it from the lumber mill." Where'd the lumber mill get the trees? No man can make a tree. They stole it from the forest and who owned the forest? God. And you say, "Well ok, but I paid for their effort" (to steal trees). Well who made their effort? And who made your effort with which you trade for their effort? And maybe you say, "My money represents my choices!" Well who made your chooser that chose your choices? Who made you?

In all seriousness, what do you have to trade that does not belong to God? Everything, everything is grace. It's all gift, and that means our entire economy is nothing but fraudulent sales commissions on grace – God's grace. See? It's not just TV evangelists and preachers using God and making a profit on grace. It's anyone and everyone that thinks they own anything. And thus could trade anything for anything. I have no credit, only debt. Maybe in a very deep and profound way all our business is bad business, for our business assumes we made ourselves and own ourselves. And that's believing the lie from the mouth of the snake. "Eve-woman, take from the tree and make yourself in the image of God." "That's your business."

Maybe all business is bad business unless of course you're doing business for another, the owner of all in which case you are what the Bible calls a steward. Then you don't spend your money on your business, but God's money on God's business.

Well, to think we could trade anything to get anything for ourselves is fraudulent business, bad business. And to think we could trade anything to get anything from God is just stupid business, which is also bad business. But to think we could trade anything to get God Himself – that's something far worse. See it's not just bad business that gets Jesus so steamed. He pals around with tax collectors and thieves and never gets worked up. And it's not just trade, but trade in His Father's house.

"Zeal, jealousy and passion for your house has consumed me," says Scripture. "Zeal for the house" or "zeal of the house." What's His Father's house? (I mean is Jesus

really that into real estate?) Well that temple wasn't just stone, it represented and actually was the heart of God in the midst of His people. It was the place where God communed with His Bride.

Christ reveals that the true temple is His body, and His body is His people, and His people are His Bride. So when He makes the whip and yells at those men saying, "You shall not make my Father's house a house of trade," He is also saying "you shall not make my bride a house of trade, or my body a house of trade." You see the temple is the sanctuary where bride and broom are one body, celebrate communion, the sacrament of their covenant. But as soon as one of them mentions "business" or "trade" it's no longer The Sanctuary. It has become a brothel.

See why Jesus is so jealous, passionate and full of zeal? He goes to a wedding party in Cana, loves it and makes wine. He goes to His own wedding party in Jerusalem and finds that His bride has become a harlot. Humanity is a harlot, ever since Eve bought the lie and started doing business. Listen to Ezekiel's, prophecy to Israel, the people of God:

I passed by you, and saw you flailing about in your blood. As you lay in your blood, I said to you, "Live! And grow up like a plant of the field." You grew up and became tall and arrived at full womanhood; your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare. I passed by you again and looked on you; you were at the age for love. I spread the edge of my cloak over you, and covered your nakedness; I pledged myself to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord God, and you became mine. Then I bathed you with water and washed off the blood from you, and anointed you with oil. I clothed you with embroidered cloth and with sandals of fine leather... But you trusted in your beauty, and played the whore because of your fame, and lavished your whorings on any passer-by... How sick is your heart, says the Lord God, that you did all these things, the deeds of a brazen whore...

He's talking to His people, all His people. Whenever we sin, we prostitute ourselves, selling ourselves, and enslaving ourselves to an evil master. Whenever we sin, we prostitute ourselves. And whenever we think we can pay for our sins, we prostitute God. We act like we can purchase His love, and His love is His very self.

Jesus seemed to get along quite well with prostitutes. But scribes, Pharisees, pastors and priests just set Him off. See its religious leaders like me that are in danger of the most vile prostitution, buying and selling God. Pimps for God, teaching folks they can pay for His love with good deeds, good choices or the proper confession. Pay for His love and His love is His very self.

"I spread the edge of my cloak over you," says God, "and covered your nakedness." "I pledged my self to you." And we say, "So how much does that cost?" "If I give 10%

is that enough? And how much prayer do you require? Twenty minutes?" "Pastor, what do I have to do to get into heaven?"

As I told you, 26 ½ years ago, on May 28, 1983, Susan Coleman pledged herself to me. She gave me everything and herself, unconditionally and free. That night after the wedding party, we consummated our covenant with communion – the sacrament of our covenant in the sanctuary of our marriage. We made love. Want to understand the passion of the Christ? Image the passion and pain in Susan if at that moment, immediately following that communion, I got up, crossed the room, found my billfold, pulled out \$250, walked back to Susan, handed it to her and said, "That ought to cover it."

Do you understand?

Jesus gives Himself to you and we ask, "How much do I owe?" And you may say, "He the Israelites were required to give sacrifices and offerings." Yeah, but not as payment.

Here's a fascinating thought. I've handed Susan far more than \$250. I've handed her every paycheck I've received, and not once was she hurt or offended. But I don't hand it to her in the bedroom as payment for her body and soul. If I did, I would desecrate our covenant, and Susan would go from bride to harlot; temple to brothel; person to commodity; living lover to body broken and blood shed.

You do remember that it was the religious leaders that had Jesus crucified. They tried to trade Him for power and control. It was to them He said, "destroy this house." And they destroyed the stone temple with trade. And they destroyed the temple of Christ's body with their business. And they destroyed the bride, the people, by teaching her that God could be bought. But Jesus said, "Destroy this house and in three days I'll raise it up." Do you understand?

Jesus goes to the wedding party in Cana and makes wine. It is a sign and it manifests His glory. Then Jesus goes to His own wedding party in Jerusalem. "The Lord whom you seek suddenly comes to His temple." He comes to His bride and she is a harlot. And yet He still makes wine, not the sign, the substance. It doesn't just manifest His glory, it is His glory. With that blood-wine that flows from the wine-press that is His cross, He washes, redeems and sanctifies the harlot, who is and always was His bride. "Destroy this temple with harlotry, and I will raise her from the dead, my bride."

Ezekiel continues (16:60, 63)

... yet I will remember my covenant with you (brazen harlot, people of God, Jerusalem) in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant... when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord God.

The Revelation ends, time ends, the series of sixes end, with the stories of two women: the Great Harlot being destroyed, and the Bride being revealed. The people of God are in the harlot, participating in her prostitution for Christ calls to them, "Come out of her my people." And get this.: His people turn out to be the New Jerusalem, the temple, His bride.

The harlot is of the earth; the bride comes down from Heaven.

The harlot is decked with jewels; the bride is a jewel.

The harlot is the abode of demons; the bride is the dwelling place of God.

The harlot is an economy of trade; the bride is an economy of grace;

The harlot is old Jerusalem and old Rome; the Bride is New Jerusalem and a new creation.

So how is that temple, the old harlot, transformed into the Bride? Well in chapters 19 & 20, between those two pictures, the Word rides out with eyes of fire and a sword in His mouth. He "tramples the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God." Zeal for His house (His bride) consumes Him. On the cross, the wrath of God consumes God, on behalf of His bride. There He turns our sins into His mercy. In chapters 19 & 20, the Word rides out and the Passover Lamb is the judge on the throne. With His blood He takes away the sin of the world, He takes away the sin of Eve – prostitution. He transforms us from the harlot into the bride.

Apart from His blood, we're all prostitutes, but just won't admit it. And that's too bad, for God has this astounding love for prostitutes. Jesus almost seems to like them best. I think they probably understand Him most: what it is to be used and rejected. And so they come to His cross first and His resurrection first, like Mary the Magdalene did.

We're all prostitutes (religious types are usually the worst). The truth is we're all prostitutes, but those that this world calls prostitute are often first to know it, see it, and confess it. When we confess it, the truth, we see Him, the truth, Jesus. And He washes us, redeems us, sanctifies us, and fills us with His blood, His glory. Rev 21:11 The bride has His glory. There is no created thing more beautiful or glorious than the harlot washed in the blood of the Lamb, His bride.

I have a friend, and many years ago she was sold to a man who sold her to others. Sometimes he made her feel wanted and she thought it was love. On many occasions, Jesus has appeared to her and shown her, "You're not a harlot, you're my bride, stunning bride."

One day, several years ago, praying for her, we encountered a demon. The demon was attached to that evil covenant, the sale to that man, and the demon took his name. (I know the idea is weird for some of you, so I hope you won't let it bug you or throw you off.) But the demon manifested in her body and wouldn't leave. I took authority and demanded it tell me what right it had to be there. It responded, "I bought her." I said, "How much?" It told me... and then I had a thought. I took the



cup of communion wine that was sitting on the table. I held it up before her face. The demon was terrorized. I said, "What's worth more? The money? (I said the amount.) Or the blood of the only begotten Son of God, crucified from the foundation of the world for the love of her?" The demon screamed in terror, "The blood!" Then I watched Jesus Christ cleanse His temple as my friend took the cup and drank the wine of the kingdom, the fiery eternal judgment of God.

He's the owner of all and yet He chose to pay everything for her. He's the owner of all, and yet He chose to pay everything for you. Perhaps it's so you would see there's nothing left to buy. Surrender your heart, drink His grace, and love Him in freedom. "As you wish."

Once you see God, who is love, you'll no longer try to buy God, who is love. You'll no longer live like a harlot, but love like the bride. No business sense whatsoever, you'll give all, just as He gave all. You'll drink till drunk by love. Once you truly see God... Jesus Christ from the bosom of the father, He has made Him known.

So close your eyes. In this world, you are surrounded by lies:

"You get what you pay for." Believing that lie is Hell.

"You get what you pay for."

"There is no free lunch."

"You don't get something for nothing."

All lies. You get everything for nothing. And every lunch is free. It's all grace.

But here's the greatest lie: "God is not grace, so you must make yourself in His image and earn His favor." That is the lie.

Now don't move a muscle. Do not promise one thing. Don't you dare make a deal. Do not intend anything, conclude anything, say anything. Listen to what God is saying. I believe it is this:

"You cannot make me love you more."

"You cannot earn one drop of my grace."

"I love you right now, as you are, with all I am, and all I have."

"I want you to believe my love."

And so He took bread, and broke it, saying "This is my body which is given to you. Take and eat, and do it in remembrance of me." And in the same way after the supper he took the cup, saying "This is the new covenant in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it all of you and do it in remembrances of me."

And so I ask you... What's worth more? Your sin? Your shame? Your fear? Your judgments and your calculations with which you measure yourself against others?

What's worth more? Your judgment or the blood of the only begotten son of God, who was crucified on your behalf from the foundation of the world. What's worth more?

The blood.

And so, if with just a mustard seed of faith, something in you says the blood... well, come to the table. Scripture said, "Zeal for your house will consume me." Come consume Him. Drink till drunk by love. Amen.

Benediction:

By way of benediction, I want to read a quote that I've been thinking about for weeks. This is kind of 'benedicting' the last couple months of sermons. It's from an Episcopal priest named Robert Capone. I've really scoured the Scripture and I think this is actually what it's saying.

Bookkeeping is the only punishable offense in the kingdom of heaven. For in that happy state, the *books* are ignored forever, and there is only the *Book* of life. And in that book, nothing stands against you. There are no debit entries that can keep you out of the clutches of the Love that will not let you go.

*Nobody is kicked out who wasn't already in;* the only bruised backsides belong to those who insist on butting themselves into outer darkness. For if the world could have been saved by bookkeeping, it would have been saved by Moses, not Jesus.

Heaven is Miller Time. Heaven is the party in the streaming sunlight of the world's final afternoon. Heaven is when all the rednecks, and all the wood-butchers, and all the plumbers who never showed up – all the losers who never got anything right and all the winners who just gave up on winning – simply waltz up to the bar of judgment with full pay envelopes and get down to the serious drinking that makes the new creation go round. It is a bash that has happened, that insists upon happening, and that is happening now – and by the sweetness of its cessation it drowns out all the party poopers in the world.

Heaven, in short, is fun. And if you don't like that, Buster, you can just go to ... well, you'll have to use your imagination.

You'll need it: this is the only bar in town.

So may you drink till drunk by Love. Believe the Gospel. Live the Gospel. Amen.