



“God Bond: Power & Wisdom”

Third Sunday in Lent
Saturday and Sunday, March 3–4, 2018

All Services

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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

I saw a commercial the other night. It starts off with several different people, each one looking into the camera and saying “I promise,” until the last one says “To never Compromise” while she holds up a phone. The other people come back on the screen, one at a time, each saying, “To Never Compromise” and showing them doing something with the phone, while words come on the screen to say some accolade or short word review. All the while, we hear the background song:

I won't compromise (I won't) I won't say goodbye (I won't) Dreams I had since I was five You can never break me I won't compromise

It's a real catchy tune. I found it on **YouTube**, so I could hear the entire thing. Reading the lyrics, it appears the author, Molly Kate Kestner, is singing to those who put her down for attempting to achieve her dreams, those who tried to change her into a different type of artist than what she saw for herself.

But in the commercial, all we hear are the lyrics “*I won't compromise.*” Which I think is what many of us feel Jesus is doing in our gospel lesson.

In our gospel reading we have Jesus, in Jerusalem, at the beginning of his ministry (at least, in John's gospel). Jesus is there, apparently, to celebrate the Passover, which is, of course, one of the big High Holy Festivals in Judaism. In Passover, the Jewish people are celebrating their departure from Egypt, and being under the thumb of the pharaoh. One of the requisites for the Festival is to perform the sacrifices at the Temple.

And you want a symbol of power? The Temple of the Lord is THE symbol for the Jewish people of the first century. The original was built by Solomon around 950BC. That one was razed by the Babylonians around 586BC, then rebuilt about 80 years later by the prophets Ezra & Nehemiah, with funding from their Persian overlords. But that reconstruction was a poor copy of the original, *especially* after it was desecrated by the Greeks around 250BC, when one of the ruling Greeks ordered a pig to be sacrificed on the altar.

So, by the time Herod came to power near the end of the first century BC, and due in large part to his huge ego, Herod began a massive overhaul of the existing structure, and that is what Jesus walked into, a temple under construction for forty-six years.

The temple is important to the people because, from their point of view, **that** is where the Lord God Almighty lives (These folks tended to get hung up on the idea that God needed a physical residence on earth). A faithful Jewish person was required to go to the temple to do the sacrifices.

Originally, you brought your own sacrifices: doves; lambs; goats; grain. But as time went on, and businesses grew, and human beings kept acting as human beings - that is, acting more in their own self-interest - fewer and fewer "home grown" sacrificial animals were being accepted. The merchants sold animals that could be used as sacrifices ("pre-approved"), but of course you couldn't purchase those animal with Roman coins, because they have the emperors image on them, and there was that whole "graven images" part of the commandments. So, they would have to exchange their Roman coins for money that did not have a human likeness on it. And of course. There was markup in everything. Priests were getting kickbacks, seller were making in all likelihood, *enormous* markup profits. and so, the *worship* of the Lord God Almighty had become . . . a business. This is what Jesus walked into.

About that cell phone commercial? When you heard "I promise to never compromise" Did you think

*"yeah, that's what Jesus did: he **didn't** compromise"?*

Because that is sort of what our lesson sounds like, right? Jesus walked into the temple, saw all the garbage that was going on, the selling of critters, the exchange of coinage, and the extreme profit being mad, and maybe he thought:

No More! I've had it, I'm done, I'm through putting up with these ya-hoo's and this excrement they call faith

Jesus drove them right out: He overturned the tables; Disrupts the Status quo. And I can imagine the people, the ones getting abused and misused by the system, going "YES!" We get the picture of Action Hero Jesus, merchants cowering in along the side of the screen, while here comes Jesus, doing that slow-motion walk through the dust, whip in one hand, the breeze blowing his hair back and out of his face, fire glinting in his eyes. And we think *that's right: never compromise.*

But is that *really* what Jesus meant?

No, I don't think so. I think rather than "not compromising", Jesus rather **wisely** *restored* the balance of **power**. Jesus saw how out of balance things were - the poor who barely had enough, were being drained by the merchants and the priests, the wealthy, who had more than enough. Jesus made Paul's words from Corinthians relevant even before Paul wrote them:

the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Cor 1:18)

Jesus was being *foolish*, because disrupting the money-making transactions of the temple didn't endear him to those who profit monetarily. But there is power in that foolishness, there is wisdom in doing what appears unwise.

The very first time I heard that cell phone slogan: “I promise to never compromise” I thought,

What an arrogant thing to promise.

How can anyone ever agree about anything if *neither* of us is willing to compromise? And what *kind* of an agreement can we come to if only **One** of us is willing to compromise? That’s an imbalance of power, and it is definitely *not* wise.

Now, before I get in trouble: I have no idea how good of a phone it is. I’m not in the market for a new phone, I’m not going to check it out. What I *am* interested in, and what I *am* concerned about, is that, as brothers and sisters in Christ, we *listen* to one another, we *pray* for one another, we *help* those in need, and when we *ourselves* need help, we do *not* be too proud to ask for help.

Allow Jesus to drive out the pride and envy and anger and whatever we have in our own hearts that keep us from worshiping God, and permit Christ to restore the balance of God’s grace and love and forgiveness and strength into us, once again.

Amen.

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