



No Payment Made, No Payment Received – TouchPoint for March 3, 2021

John 2:13-22 NRSV Jesus Cleanses the Temple

¹³ The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵ Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!”

¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” ¹⁸ The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” ²⁰ The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?”

²¹ But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²² After 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.

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“Stop making my Father's house a marketplace.”

I was online the other day and a headline popped up on the side of the page, “The Wealthiest Pastors in America” it said. So I clicked on it and read and looked at pictures of how the richest pastors in America live. WOW!!! Impressive!!! One of those pastors lives in Houston. You may have heard about him during the hurricane there a few years back. When he didn’t open his church to those in need. Apparently, being a pastor can be an extremely lucrative profession...WHO KNEW!!!

“Stop making my Father's house a marketplace.”

I suppose it would be too easy of a target to talk about religion and money and profit in relationship to this passage we read today.

“Stop making my Father's house a marketplace.”

But that isn't where I want to go. Because it would make the problem seem out there...with those people...and those types.

No, I want to talk about the marketplace that happens inside our sanctuaries. Inside our worship space, inside our relationship with God. I want to talk about the marketplace mentality that we have brought into our relationship with God.

What is the central symbol of the church? What is the central symbol of our faith? What is it we hang on chains around our necks and put on top of the steeples of our buildings?

It is the cross!

And if you were to ask most people what Jesus was doing on the cross, they would say, “He was **paying**

the price for our sins.”... “He was **PAYING** the price for our sins.”

“Stop making my Father's house a **marketplace**.”... “He was **paying** the price for our sins.”

Houston, we have a problem. But let's face it, it's not just limited to Houston, and a pastor there. The truth is, we can't stop making our Father's house a marketplace. Why, we even make the cross subject to our marketplace machinations and language. “He was **paying** the price for our sins.”

Yet, even the command to “*Stop making my Father's house a marketplace*” will not save us. It is simply more law. Because even if we sought to make it less of a marketplace, thinking that God would love us more if we did, well, that is just more of the marketplace mentality at work. No, we are incapable of following the command to “*Stop making my Father's house a marketplace*.”

And so it is left up to God. God stops God's house from being a marketplace by simply being a God of grace. God stops being a God of the marketplace by simply refusing to play that game...being that kind of God.

Jesus hangs on a cross and simply declares forgiveness. Forgiveness on those who just beat him, whipped him, tortured him, spat on him and hammered nails into his hands and feet and stuck a spear in his side.

Now correct me if I am wrong, but in none of the gospels I have read, and that includes the four we have in the Bible and some of those really crazy ones we didn't let in, but in none of those gospels, are the people asking for forgiveness. In none of them are they confessing that what they are doing is wrong. Nowhere do I read of them crying out, “Forgive us Jesus. Forgive us Lord. Forgive us God” as Jesus hangs from the cross.

But here is Jesus, pronouncing forgiveness.

Now that's not the marketplace of forgiveness. No, the marketplace of forgiveness says I must first repent, confess, feel sorry, own up.

You know, I have to do something first...SOMETHING...ANYTHING!!!

I mean really, what kind of God just up and forgives people who don't asks to be forgiven. What kind of God just up and heals people who don't ask to be healed. What kind of God touches lepers who don't ask to be touched and speaks to women who don't ask to be spoken to?

I will tell you what kind of God: a God who puts to death our marketplace of faith, a God who will tear down our marketplace temple of faith and raise up one of grace. We really do need to look at this phrase, “He was paying the price for our sins.” Because if what this means is some kind of metaphysical, spiritual, mystical transaction, then we have just turned our Father's house into a marketplace.

But that isn't just the only problem. A whole host of others pop up. Who is God paying? God's self or the devil? And if a price is being paid, then how can it be forgiveness. How can we call God a God of mercy if God requires payment? And besides, do we want a God who can be bought off? Well, as long as it's on the cheap, and doesn't require something like our life – I suppose so.

But seriously, do we want a God who can be bought off? On the one hand it sounds so cheap and tawdry, yet on the other hand, **I really would like a receipt for my saintliness** that I can present at the pearly gates.

But God simply won't be that kind of God.

On the cross, the marketplace of faith dies.

There is no transaction going on. Simply death, and a very painful one at that.

There is no transaction going on. Simply forgiveness. Complete and total. Forgiveness, spoken and done. Once and for all.

In other words, God's forgiveness cannot be bought. It cannot be sold. It cannot be paid for... by us... or by Jesus. It is free. No payment made, no payment received.

Let me repeat that, **“God’s forgiveness cannot be bought, not even by Jesus.”**

If the bottom line is that we believe Jesus had to pay for God's forgiveness, then how can we not believe that we must do something as well to pay for God's grace and love. One way or another, we will end up believing God needs to be paid in order to be a gracious, loving and forgiving God, whether it be with our obedience, discipleship or acceptance.

But then, God is not a god of love and grace, but rather God is a god of payment and owing and bartering. God is a god of the marketplace. Reward and punishment. Tit for tat.

Now, if taking away the concept of payment, of reward and punishment, reduces the importance of your god and church, then you need to have some spiritual tables overturned in your life.

So, if we are going to speak of Jesus as 'paying the price for our sins' at all then we need to see it in a different light. Not as a transaction, but as a consequence of our sin.

Let me give you an example. 7 years and 361 days ago, not that I'm counting, I was sitting at a red light on an on-ramp to a freeway at rush hour. I was hit from behind by a car going 60-70 mph by best guess estimates. Almost 8 years later, I am still 'paying the price' from that day with neck, back, leg and hip pain.

Now, it's not that I'm paying anybody, there is no transaction going on. Though I suppose you could say that I and my insurance company paid some price for it, to doctors and therapists. But that is not what is happening today. To say “I am paying the price” is just another way to say, “I am suffering the consequences” of that day.

That is how we need to understand the statement that Jesus is 'paying the price' for our sins on the cross.

Jesus is suffering the consequences of our sin. Not on some metaphysical, mystical, spiritual level, but in the physical, in reality, in the flesh, with wood and hammer and nails

Jesus is suffering the consequences of a world that cannot stand a gracious God. Jesus is suffering the consequences of a world that wants a transactional God, a marketplace God, a God who can be bought off with a little offering or a little repentance or a little belief or faith...

Jesus is paying the price, suffering the consequences of a world that simply won't let God be a gracious and merciful God. A world that would rather torture, maim and kill that kind of God.

Now if God were the kind of God we seek, a transactional God, a marketplace God, a God who can be paid off, then Easter Sunday would not be a celebration Sunday but a 'Payback Sunday'. If you want a God of the marketplace, a God of payments, then Easter Sunday would be the beginning of God's 'Payback' for killing The Son.

But it isn't. In the cross and resurrection of Jesus, the marketplace of faith meets its death. It is swallowed up in the grace and forgiveness of God. Jesus returns on Easter Sunday, not with a vengeance...not with a payback...but with the words, "Peace be with you."

In one respect we could say that the cross is a black-hole. It is that place where all human bartering with God, all transactions and payments we think God is owed or requires, are swallowed up, never to see the light of day again.

On the cross, forgiveness is pronounced to us and over us and our sin is swallowed up in the black-hole of God's forgiveness.

And so, in this meal, even as we swallow down the presence of the Christ, we are swallowed up in forgiveness.

Our marketplace faith is dead. The market is forever closed.

"IT IS FINISHED."

And there are no close out sales. No 70, 80, 90% off, discounts.

Because God's forgiveness is free. Totally and completely free... unearned and without cost... no payment made...no payment received.

No receipt needed.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

Create in Me

(The Concordia Choir)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not the holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

See Him

(Keith Duke)

See him: 1) silent and lifeless. 2) alone and forlorn 3) broken and helpless...Crowned with a garland of thorns 4) as son and as brother 5) related to all 6) through the grief of a mother...hurting the most of all 7) as healer and teacher 8) as helper and friend 9) as prophet and preacher...

Ignore Him??? I doubt if you can.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Our Father 3, Choirs of Annunciation Byzantine Church)

Benediction

Gaelic Blessing/Deep Peace

(John Rutter, The Cambridge Singers)

Deep peace of the running wave to you. Deep peace of the flowing air to you.

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you. Deep peace of the shining stars to you.

Deep peace of the gentle night to you. Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.

Deep peace of Christ, of Christ the light of the world to you.

Deep peace of Christ to you.

