

Jesus Cleans House

What gets you worked up? What gets you excited? Some people get excited over ballgames. Some get worked up over political issues. Others are energized by work or church. Some are passionate about their gardens or their homes. Some get worked up over their families.

Anyone here passionate about cleaning house? Jesus was—when it came to His Father's house.

John 2:12-25

12 After this He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples; and they did not stay there many days.

13 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

14 And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business.

15 When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables.

16 And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!"

17 Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."

18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"

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

20 Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"

21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

22 Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

23 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did.

24 But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men,

25 and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

In our last study, the disciples got an initial glimpse of Jesus' glory when He turned the water into wine and they believed in Him (2:11). They had already

believed in Him, but when they saw more of who He really is, they believed in Him again, in a deeper way. After Jesus' resurrection when the disciples remembered this incident, the result was the same: "they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken" (2:22). John writes these things so that we might get a deeper understanding of who Jesus is so that we might believe in Him as the Christ, the Son of God, and through believing, we might have life in His name (20:30-31). John want us to behold the glory of Jesus and to receive His grace.

Before we look at the main event in our text, note that verse 12 is a transitional verse from the last incident: "**After this He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples; and they did not stay there many days.**" Why did John include this verse? John is not a man to waste time or space. His words are carefully selected. For one thing, I think John is still giving us a careful timeline. He wants us to know that these events followed one after another.

One thing this tells us is that John is not misplacing the timing of the cleansing of the temple. Most of you know that the other Gospels also record a cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem, but not here at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Rather their accounts show the cleansing of the temple during the last week of Jesus' ministry just prior to His crucifixion. This cleansing here in John is clearly different than the one in the other Gospels. And thus, there had to have been two cleansings, this one in John at the beginning and the other at the end as recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John is clear that he is relating a true historical event including where and when it happened.

Capernaum was on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, about two miles west of where the Jordan River flowed into the sea. It was the home of Peter and Andrew. Capernaum would become the home base for Jesus' Galilean ministry.

This is the last time that Jesus' mother is mentioned in this gospel until she is at the cross (19:26). We will encounter Jesus' brothers again in 7:3-10, where John informs us that they did not at that point believe in Jesus. From this point forward Jesus will be found with His true family, those who believe in Him (Mark 3:34).

1. The Cleansing of the Temple (2:13-17)

Verse 13 changes the setting from Galilee to Judea: "**Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.**" All Jewish males were required to go up to the temple in Jerusalem three times a year for the great feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. On this occasion, Jesus went up for Passover.

The Jewish Passover celebration commemorates the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, when the death angel passed over every home where the first Passover was observed and the blood of the Passover lamb was placed on the two door posts and the lintel (see Exodus 12 and 13). The celebration of the Passover also began the Feast of Unleavened bread.

Every Jewish household spent the day before the feast meticulously going through their house seeking out any kind of yeast or leaven and cleansing their home of these symbols of sin. That was an absolute necessity in order to properly celebrate the Passover. Yet in a city that was given over to cleansing every house, when Jesus came into the temple, the house of God, look what he found! Verse 14 gives us a picture of what Jesus saw at the temple: **“And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business.”** It was filled with clutter and noise, dirty-smelling animals, money-changers and merchandise, and no one seemed concerned about it. But our Lord was.

Within the temple compound was a spacious courtyard called “The Court of the Gentiles.” Gentile proselytes could worship in that area but were threatened with death if they went beyond the four and a half foot dividing wall (Paul refers to this in Eph. 2:14). It was in this area that the merchants and money changers had set up their operation. The High Priest Annas had sold rights to these concessions to the highest bidders and also received a cut of all the profits.

The pilgrims who walked great distances to Jerusalem to worship needed sacrificial animals—sheep, oxen, and doves. They could bring their own animals from home, although it would not be easy to do. But, the animals had to be without blemish and had to pass an official inspection, which cost money. So to avoid the hassle of bringing their own animals and the risk of having the animals rejected, a person could simply buy one of the already certified animals from a vendor at the temple. It was a profitable business for the high priest and the vendors. And, it provided a convenient service for the worshipers. Also, foreign money was not acceptable in the temple. To buy their animals or to pay the half-shekel temple tax, worshipers had to get their money changed into the proper coinage, again for a fee. Of course, the dealers in cattle and sheep would be tempted to charge exorbitant prices for such animals. They would exploit the worshippers. And those who sold pigeons would do likewise, charging, perhaps, \$4 for a pair of doves worth a nickel. At Jesus’ second cleansing of the temple He will denounce this practice calling them a **“den of thieves,”** (Mark 11:17).

In our text, however, John does not focus on the way in which these merchandisers go about their business, but rather on where they are conducting their business—in the temple courts.

What Jesus sees going on in the temple courts troubles Him a great deal! The place of prayer has become a place of profit-taking. It sounds more like the trading floor of the New York Stock Exchange than the outer courts of the temple of God. It smells more like a barnyard than the place where one would seek God’s presence.

So verse 15 tells us what Jesus does about it, **“When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers’ money and overturned the tables.”** Jesus causes no small commotion in the temple. He makes a whip. He drives them ALL out with their animals and overturns their tables. Jesus is not being nice. He

appears angry but in complete control. Verse 16 goes on to tell us **“And He said to those who sold doves, “Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!”**”

Here He made His point, which was clearly: do not turn a place which is devoted to the worship of God and the cleansing of people, into a flea market. The word John uses for “merchandise” is, literally, “emporium,” a place where people are concerned about making a fast buck. The temple rather was to be a place of prayer and worship, where God was honored.

The cleansing of the temple does not permanently eliminate the abuses described in our text. We know that conditions in the temple were the same at the time of the second cleansing (described in the Synoptic Gospels) as they were in the first cleansing (as described by John). I suspect that immediately after our Lord departed from Jerusalem all the temple businessmen set up shop again and went right on with their evil deeds. I believe our Lord’s purpose in this first cleansing is to “make a statement,” about Himself, the temple, and the Jewish religious system—not to permanently solve the problem He attacks.

The climax of His action comes in what the disciples learned from it. The immediate impression of the disciples comes in Verse 17: **“Then His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.”**”

The disciples see this as a fulfillment of Psalm 69. Psalm 69 is a psalm of David. It is a prayer for his deliverance, due to his piety. The psalm speaks of David’s imminent danger due to the enemies of God who hate him for his fervent devotion to God, and thus who seek his death. Later portions of this psalm depict events that occur at the crucifixion of our Lord (see Ps. 69:21). It seems clear in this psalm that there is a prophecy of our Lord’s sacrificial death, due to His zeal for pure worship. Psalm 69:8-9 says,

8 I have become a stranger to my brothers, And an alien to my mother’s children; 9 Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on Me
(Psalm 69:8-9).

Jesus fulfills the prophecy that our Lord’s zeal for His Father’s house will bring about His death. Jesus acts out of zeal for His Father’s house, laying claim to the temple and cleansing it in His Father’s name. Jesus calls the temple **“My Father’s house,”** (2:16). Jesus’ words are a claim to deity. As we learned in chapter 1, Jesus is the unique Son of God, and as such He is the rightful Lord of the temple. When He cleanses the temple, our Lord symbolically comes to possess what, as God, is His. As the Son of God, the temple is His Father’s house, and thus He has the right to correct temple abuses. He has the right to drive men and animals out of the temple courts.

God has the right to possess what is His. Here, Jesus claims the right to possess the temple because it is His. This incident may seem very distant and detached from us today. We live in a place very distant from Jerusalem, where no temple exists. How can this event possibly relate to us? It does, my friend; it really does.

Jesus came to possess what was His—His temple. Jesus had the right to define how men could use His temple, and the right to correct those who abused it. The church is now being built up as His temple. Listen to the following scriptures:

(Eph 2:19-22) 19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner[stone], 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (see also 1 Peter 2:4-10).

(1Co 3:16-17) 16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and [that] the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which [temple] you are.

(2Co 6:16) 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among [them]. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."

If the church collectively is the temple of our Lord, it is also true that we are individually “temples” of the Holy Spirit. Because this is true, our sins in the body are taken most seriously.

(1Co 6:19-20) 19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit [who is] in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

God owns us; He owns our body as His temple. In the context of 1 Corinthians 6, Paul tells us that sexual immorality, though taken very lightly by our society (see 6:13), is a most serious sin, especially for the Christian. If our body is the temple of God, then to defile it is to defile God’s temple. If Jesus took the defilement of Herod’s temple so seriously, how do you think He feels about the way you and I use our bodies?

I think that the Jews understood that Jesus was claiming authority over the temple because their reaction was to challenge His authority.

2. The Sign of Jesus’ Authority (2:18-22)

Verse 18: **“So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"”**

“The Jews” here are the Jewish religious leaders who were directly challenged by our Lord’s actions in cleansing the temple. They confront Jesus with a challenge. They demand a sign to demonstrate His authority to act as He has. The irony is that Jesus’ actions are the sign. In the last book of the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi writes:

1 “Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” Says the LORD of hosts. 2 “But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire And like launderer’s soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness” (Malachi 3:1-3).

They completely missed the fulfillment of that prophecy when it took place right before their eyes.

I find the words of the Jews most interesting. They do not argue with Jesus about the evil of making the temple courts an emporium. I suspect the Pharisees agree with Him on this point. The issue is not *what* has been done, but *who* has done it. They raise the issues of Jesus’ identity and authority. If Jesus is acting on God’s behalf (they cannot yet grasp that He is acting as God), then let Him establish His credentials by an exercise of divine power. If He is acting with God’s authority, let Him perform a sign to prove it.

Jesus does not give them an immediate sign. Instead, He speaks to them of the “ultimate sign,” His death and resurrection: **“Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”** (2:19). Typically, the Jews can think only in the most literal terms (see Nicodemus in chapter 3). They assume Jesus is referring to Herod’s temple, a temple which has been under construction for **“forty-six years,”** (2:20). Does Jesus think He can build a temple in three days that has already been under construction for forty-six years and is not yet complete?

John tells his readers what we already know, verse 21, **“But He was speaking of the temple of His body,”** Jesus is not speaking of that earthly temple; but He is speaking of Himself as the temple of God, and of His coming crucifixion. He is not just trying to persuade these Jews to believe in Him, but really to prophesy that they will not believe, and that they will put Him to death on Calvary. His triumph will be evident in three days, when He will be “raised up” from the dead. The sign Jesus gave to them was this: they would destroy the temple (His body, through the crucifixion), and He would raise it up (through the resurrection).

The Jews do not understand at all. They probably walk away, shaking their heads, but they never forgot what He claimed. In fact, Jesus’ words were deliberately misinterpreted and misrepresented as the basis of their charge against Him. He said that they would destroy this temple; but as He stood on trial, they said, **“This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days’”** (Matthew 26:61). He never said He would destroy it. Rather, He said that they would destroy it. Yet, as He hung on the cross, they mocked Him, saying, **“You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself!”** (Matthew 27:40).

The disciples don't understand either. Not until after our Lord's death and resurrection does this prophecy come to mind, and they see how He fulfilled it exactly as He said. Verse 22, **"Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said."** They came to believe in Jesus, and His words as the fulfillment of Scripture.

Also, as we've seen, faith in Christ is not a once-for-all decision in the past. Rather, the disciples believed in Christ when they first began to follow Him (John 1:50). They believed again when they saw His glory when He turned the water into wine (2:11). Now, after the resurrection they reflect back on Jesus' words here and "they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken." John puts Jesus' words on a par with Scripture. What Jesus said, God said. The point is, as we understand more and more from the Scriptures of who Jesus is, our faith in Him grows.

Note also that it takes time for spiritual truth to sink in. The disciples didn't connect all the dots at first. They couldn't understand Jesus' predictions about His death and resurrection (Luke 9:44-45; 24:45). But later they remembered what Jesus had said and it all made sense. So if you don't understand something in the Bible, don't give up. Keep asking, seeking, and knocking, and eventually the door will be opened for you.

So what did we learn about Jesus and His glory and grace in this passage?

1. Jesus is Lord over God's temple.
Just as Jesus was the owner and possessor of the temple in Jerusalem, He is now the owner and Lord over His body, the church today. The Lord will not take the abuse of His house lightly. He wants true worship, pure worship.
2. Jesus cleanses God's temple.
Just as Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem, He cleanses His temple, the church, today. He does that initially when we believe in Him, He redeems us from sin. And He continues to cleanse His church daily. He wants us to be holy.
3. Jesus is the temple of God.
Jesus is the Word made flesh. He came as the Son of God into this world and dwelt among us. He tabernacled in this world. He is the true dwelling place of God with men. And as the Son of God Jesus gave His body to be crucified for our sin. And God raised Him from the dead. He now lives in all who believe in Him. Do you believe that?