
John 2:13-25 *Cleansing the Temple*

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study www.intothyword.org

General Idea: During the Passover, Jesus and His Disciples went to Jerusalem to celebrate and visit the Temple. Jesus saw shame and deception in the Temple as merchants were selling the wares for worship—even the animals needed for the sacrifice. This was an abomination. Jesus got mad and justly so; He fashioned a whip out of some rope and chased the deceptive merchants and their animals out of the Temple area. He overturned the tables and proclaimed, *get these things out of here because you turned my Father's House into a den of thieves and trade*. Later, His Disciples remembered the prophecy from Scripture that, “passion for God's house consumes me.” The Jewish leaders confronted Jesus and asked Him, *by what sign does He do this and what authority do you have?* Jesus responded, *Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up*. They were perplexed; *it has been in construction for over forty years and you can rebuild it entirely in three days?* But Jesus was referring to His Body as the Temple of God, and when He would be raised from the dead. This was a very important point for the Disciples, for when Jesus was killed and then He came back, this event helped cement in their minds and hearts who and what Jesus was; fully God, as revealed by the prophecy of Scripture and by Jesus' words too. Jesus did many miracles. Many people started to believe that He was indeed the Promised Messiah!

Contexts and Background:

The Old Testament is filled with types and shadows of the coming LORD. Here we find convergences of Old Testament prophecy and Jesus' prophecy that later helps motivate and rally His Disciples after Jesus' Crucifixion and Resurrection.

A contradiction here? Matthew, Mark, and Luke record that Jesus cleansed the Temple during the week that led up to Jesus' betrayal and Crucifixion. John seems to indicate that Jesus did this right after the Cana wedding. Only John records Jesus' statement and challenge that if they would destroy this temple He would raise it up. Also, Matthew indicates that this event was the basis of the false charges for Jesus' arrest and mock trial, and taunting at the cross from the mob. The significant differences and timeline indicate that Jesus cleared out the Temple at least twice (Matt. 21: 1-17; 26:61; 27:40; Mark 11:15; 14:58; 15:15-19, 29; Acts 16:14).

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Jewish Passover*. Also called “The Feast of Unleavened Bread,” it is celebrated because of God's mercy in saving them when the Angel of death took out the entire firstborn of Egypt, humans as well as animals, while he *passed over* the obedient Hebrews. This was and is the biggest holiday and festival, as it celebrated God's saving mercy from oppression into the promise land shown through the Exodus. All Jews, if they could, would travel to the Temple for this as Jesus demonstrated here; Jesus' home town of Galilee was not too far away. This was and still is celebrated on the fourteenth day of the first month of the Jewish calendar, the month of *Nisan* (March/April) (Ex. 12: 14-20, 43-49; Lev. 23:5-8; Num. 28:16-25; Duet. 16:1-8; John 11:55; 12:1; 13:1).
- *Jerusalem*. The City of David, also the capital of the nation and center for Judaism because this is where the Temple was (Hag. 2:3).
- *Temple courts*. Herod's Temple was grander than the previous ones built by Solomon, ones rebuilt by Ezra and Nehemiah, and many more times since. This is one of the grandest buildings of the ancient world and the prime symbol for Judaism. This is the Gentile outer court in the building's outer enclosure where people who were not Jewish could gather. The purpose was so people could see the One True God—a way God used to evangelize the pre-Christian world.

- *Selling cattle, sheep and doves.* It was required that the people bring an animal sacrifice to the temple. This was a necessary business because many people lived in the city and did not have animals; however, it was the location that was wrong. Buying and selling what is needed for worship in the center for worship demeans God and dishonors our worship of Him (Lev. 1:3-9; 4:1-21; 8:2).
- *Whip.* This is a fulfillment of prophecy from Malachi; Jesus purifying the Temple as the Levites had been called to do but had forsaken their call. Jesus' just anger was also a demonstration for the love and zeal to God and His Holy Place. God is just in His anger against sin and unrighteousness as well as deception and profiteering in worship rather than worshiping the One True Holy God. A warning here that God's judgment often begins in His own house, His Church (Mal. 3:1-4; 1 Pet .4:17).
- *Drove...Scattered.* We have to remember the Holiness of God and respect and reverence Him, especially in His House. Here, Jesus was forceful but not cruel. What we may rationalize as a convenience can be a detriment and an abuse to true God-honoring worship (Zach. 14:20-21)!
- *Money changers.* These guys operated just as money exchangers do at international airports. Because Jerusalem was in the midst of a major trade route, people visiting the Temple could only use the correct local coinage for the temple tax and these people exchanged the money for them. The problem? Corruption! They were corrupting the people and debasing the Worship because they were doing it in the Temple area and probably also cheating the people too, distracting them from real worship and what the Temple was instituted to be (Luke 19:45-46).
- *Get these out of here.* Jesus is challenging them with physical force about what True Worship is. The activity of the Temple must center on being all about glorifying God. These people were opportunists who were taking advantage of the people and situation and demeaning the Temple and its true function, which was to point to God. The challenge for us here is *what is our true priority in how we do our church? Where is our focus, rationale, and purpose? Is it about God's glory or ours? Is it about what we want or what He requires?* The purpose of the Church is to proclaim and worship who and what Christ has done for us. It is all about His glory and the production of His work through us. The Church exists for us to be in Christ our Lord, to be His people, His hands and feet. Don't wait for the whip; get on your knees now and turn your heart and your church to Christ and His purpose for it (Mal. 3:1-6; Rom. 12:4-8; Eph. 1:21-23; 3:10; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:15-23)!
- *My Father's house.* Jesus, being God in His role as the second person of the Trinity, points to His Godhood and His Father's glory. The purpose of any church is to glorify God and worship Him as LORD. When we do that, we serve Him well. When we do not, we are invaders in a place we do not belong and we are the ones who must be cast out. The Church—your church—belongs to Christ, not to the pastor or elders or powerbrokers, who gives the most, or serves the most. The local and Universal Church is all about Christ, His work that we remember, His sacrifice we bow to, His salvation we are grateful for, and His life we worship (Jer. 7:11; Matt. 21:13)
- *Zeal for your house.* Quoting Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11, "zeal" means *passion that consumes and that will bring His death for the world.* Pointing to when Jesus was going to be betrayed and martyred (Psalm 69:9; Isa. 56:7; Jer. 7:1-14; 26:2-6).
- *The Jews.* Referring to the leaders of the Temple, not the priests, as it was supposed to be, but the aristocrats who were profiting by dishonoring God. It is interesting to note that the Romans would put them all to death in 70 AD and destroy the Temple; this was perhaps their final warning!
- *Prove your authority.* This was the request of the pious fraud, the prim and proper hypocrites who were only concerned with themselves and not with Christ as Lord (1 Cor. 1:22)

- *This temple.* Meaning God is present in me or in Jesus' case, I am the I AM; God. The human-made temple could easily be destroyed and the Romans did so in 70 AD, but Jesus can't be destroyed. His body can be killed but He will come back and He did (Isa. 25:6-9; Heb. 10:1; Rev. 21:22)
- *Forty-six years.* According to Josephus, the temple was still under construction (in 18 BC; finished in 63 AD and destroyed in 70 AD) and it has been determined that this takes place around 27 AD because of its current building that was in full use.
- *Raise it in three days.* Many pious religious groups in Jesus' time predicted that the Temple must be transformed to be of real, effectual function. It was being rebuilt using money defrauded from the people for the glory of a pagan governor and the pious fraud aristocracy who controlled it in Jesus' time. They were uncaring and unconcerned with the One True God. Thus, the temple needed to be transformed which was done by the sending of the Spirit, and Jesus' ultimate and continual sacrificial death that made the temple obsolete. Jesus statement was ambiguous and so the Disciples and Jewish leaders misunderstood; it was Jesus' intent to get them thinking, because only those who receive Jesus Christ as Lord will understand the fullness of His teachings (John 1:5-12; 3:4; 6:52).
- *Disciples recalled/remembered.* Jesus' Disciples recalled Psalm 69, which states a righteous man will suffer for others and that also alludes to the Cross. He told His Disciples that the Holy Spirit will come and help them with what was taught so they can go on teaching (Psalm 69: 9,21; Isa. 52:12-53:12; Luke 24:25-27; John 6:51; 19:29; 14:25-26; 1 Cor. 2:6-16).
- *Believed in his name.* "Name" is the summary of the character and persona of a person; here, people began to understand who Christ was and to put their faith in Him. An exciting message can draw a crowd and even draw people to profess the Gospel, but this may not be real conviction and trust as illustrated by Jesus' *Parable of the Sower*. This is a contrast between trust and faith that leads to obedience and worship and emotional zeal without discipleship that leads to being shallow and fruitless and faithless. Also, many prophecies were unheeded or ignored and only remembered in retrospect (2 Kings 9:36-37; Matt. 13:1-23).
- *Miraculous signs.* Meaning that a supernatural event that can't be duplicated is seen as a means to prove one was sent from God. But, it seems the people were just interested in a show and were not motivated by the conviction from a Holy, loving God (John 1:48; Matt. 9:4; 17:27; Mark 11:2-4; 14:13-16; 1 Cor. 1:22).
- *Would not entrust himself to them.* Meaning Jesus knows our thinking, motivations, will, and heart; this is something only God can know. Jesus had supernatural knowledge and saw through many of the people as shallow and only concerned with the fad and excitement, not so much in growing in faith. Thus, Jesus did not trust the people who were so eager because He knew they would be just as fleeting (1 Sam 16:7; Psalm 139; John 4:29; Acts 1:24).

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

One of the deficiencies and fickleness of character that humans have is the propensity of being *shallow*. We like a charismatic speaker over being told the truth, a flashy dresser over something practical, and a celebrity over an intellectual or even a friend. We want a religion that does not convict or teach because we want to indulge ourselves with what we want and to feel good. We want our ears tickled and our problems solved; we want to feel good but we do not want to grow in faith or learn from adversity. We want comfort and not have to bother with the time and work that true spiritual formation takes. Jesus walked away from and condescended to these people who were flocking to Him. The question we must ask, is *how shallow am I? Where do I need conviction; in what areas do I need to grow?* And then, we need to get up and follow Him who comforts and assists us to do it.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. How do you prepare for worship? Why do we need to prepare? What happens when we do not?
2. If you were one of the merchants then, how would you feel about Jesus' actions? How does this compare today to people who run a church with selfish motives?
3. Have you ever seen shame and deception in your church or in another church? How did you feel about it?
4. What are some things people do in church today that Jesus might consider to be an abomination? What would He whip out of some churches today? How do we rationalize that what we want is better than what He has called us to do?
5. What events have you experienced that helped cement to you who and what Jesus is?
6. What helps you to be motivated and rally to a cause? What about being motivated for worship? What is the difference between just emotional zeal and a true, pious heart that is excited?
7. How and why was Jesus just in His anger? What would He be mad at today? How do you feel about having a God who exercises emotions too?
8. If a friend or relative asked you what is Worship all about, what would you say? What distracts you from real worship?
9. What are the challenges indicated in this passage for us here today? What is our true priority in how we do our church? Where is our focus, rational, and purpose? Is it about God's glory or ours? Is it about what we want or what He requires? What is the purpose of your church?
10. Why do many people have the tendency to be shallow? What about you? In what ways are you shallow? What can be done to deepen one's faith and life?
11. What does it take for you to remember the Holiness of God and to respect and reverence Him? How can you be better at preparing for worship so you can focus more on Christ and not be distracted?
12. How does bad or misdirected worship demean and dishonor God? What are the things we tend to do wrong? What can you, your church, and your leadership do to do it right?