

Message #8

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John

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## JESUS CLEANS HOUSE

JOHN 2:12-22

I.

In an earlier church we had a family whose members liked to collect a lot of stuff. The mom died suddenly one day. I did the funeral for her. A few years later the husband died. I did the funeral for him. The daughter, who still lived in the family home, indicated that she was overwhelmed by conditions in the family house. She and her dad had hinted in the past that there was a lot of stuff around their house. The surviving daughter was reluctant to explain the situation in detail, and she was hesitant to let us into the house.

After encouragement and gentle assurances, she did let Suzy and I into the house. It was indeed the house of hoarders. It was almost impossible to move around in the place. So we set about helping to clean it out. Over time it mostly got cleaned out.

The unfortunate thing about the situation, as we first found it, was that the house, in a sense, had lost its original purpose. It was meant to be lived in. But because of the family's penchant for collecting and hoarding stuff, the house had become very difficult to live in.

That is the situation that we find in the story from the life of Jesus this morning. The temple in Jerusalem had lost something of its original purpose. It was intended as a place of worship for Jews and Gentiles, but it had become cluttered with stuff that made true worship difficult.

*USA Today* reported this week that a Marist poll finds that the number one resolution that American adults are making for the new year is to be a better person. Perhaps there are lessons from our passage today that will help us to be a better person. Perhaps we will find lessons here that will also help us collectively to be a better church.

On the last couple of Sundays our focus has been upon the Christmas message. Before that we were looking at John's Gospel. We found that the Apostle John was writing his biography of Jesus a couple of decades after the other Gospel writers. So most of his material is not contained in the other Gospels.

John also makes the purpose of his writing very clear. In #20 vv. 30 & 31 (PROJECTOR ON--- JOHN 20:30) he writes, "**Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; (JOHN 20:31) but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**"

John has arranged his material around seven signs, which are miracles that Jesus did. In #1 the author provides an introduction to Jesus in which he describes Him as the Word and as the Light. He also presents John the Baptist as a witness to the proposition that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God. At the beginning of #2 we saw Jesus perform the first sign, as he changed water into wine at a wedding in Cana. Only the servants and the disciples realized what happened. Jesus used waterpots connected with the Old Testament system of purification to do this miracle. In this there is a hint that something is about to change in God's way of dealing with sin. We will see what happened next.

II.

In v. 12 we find that JESUS MOVES HIS BASE TO CAPERNAUM. (II. JESUS MOVES HIS BASE TO CAPERNAUM) According to v. 12 of #2, "**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 water-into-wine miracle had happened at Cana. (CAPERNAUM MAP) Cana is right in the center of this map. Jesus and his family were from Nazareth. Perhaps they all went to Nazareth first, which is just to the south of Cana. Perhaps they went directly to Capernaum. Whether Jesus' family made a permanent move to Capernaum is uncertain. But it becomes clear that Jesus makes Capernaum his base of operations for the three years of His public ministry.

Capernaum was also home base of the fishing operations of disciples James and John and Peter and Andrew. (CAPERNAUM AERIAL) The scholars estimate that there were a thousand people living in Capernaum in the early first century AD. Archaeologists have uncovered the synagogue from that time in the foreground. Under the octagonal roof behind it, the remains of an early church were found. Some archaeologists suspect that the remains of the house of Peter lie under that. Capernaum was a center for agriculture as well as fishing in the first century. (PROJECTOR OFF)

In the second century some Christians began to float the idea that Mary, the mother of Jesus, remained a virgin throughout her life. It is clear from v. 12 that Jesus had brothers. So these brothers have to be explained away as being sons of Joseph from a previous relationship. Then also Catholics who hold to the perpetual virginity of Mary have to confront Matthew #1 v. 25. (PROJECTOR ON--- MATTHEW 1:25) There the writer says, "**...but [Joseph] knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.**" The natural reading of the text is that Mary "knew" Joseph after she gave birth to Jesus.

III.

Verse 12 implies that after a few days in Capernaum, this contingent went somewhere else. Thus we come to vv. 13-17, where JESUS STRESSES THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING A HOLY TEMPLE. (III. JESUS STRESSES THE IMPORTANCE...) Verse 13 says, "**The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.**"

The fact that Passover is called "the Passover of the Jews" suggests to many that John is writing largely for a Gentile audience. It also implies that Christians in his audience, at least Gentile Christians, are probably not observing it.

The Passover, according to the Old Testament, was to be observed at the place of meeting with God, which was the temple in Jerusalem. This meant a three day trip for those coming from Galilee. The Old Testament required all Jewish men to make this trek to observe this feast and two others every year.

John's Gospel describes three different Passovers, which points to the conclusion that Jesus had a public ministry that lasted for about three years. Unlike the other three Gospels, John also focuses upon ministry in Judea, especially events that were connected with the feasts in Jerusalem.

The natural reading of our text would incline us to believe that this incident happened at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. The other three Gospels describe a cleansing of the temple by Jesus also. That cleansing, however, happens at the end of His public ministry and is part of what precipitates a clash with the religious leaders that leads to His crucifixion. So many commentators argue that John is describing the same incident. For theological purposes he puts it at the beginning of his biography rather than at the end.

I find this hard to believe. The Apostle John here seems to be laying out in chronological order the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus. There are also differences in details between the two cleansings. With the exception of the mention of John the Baptist, all of John's information in the first five chapters of his Gospel is unique to John. He does not repeat most of the stories that the other Gospel writers describe. Then also the corruption that we will look at did not end with Jesus. So it is entirely possible that he confronted the religious leaders and the defilement of the temple on a couple of occasions.

This incident before us would be the initial presentation by Jesus of Himself to the religious establishment. He does it in a confrontational way. Before they can accept the true Messiah, the

religious leaders have to be aware of their sin and their need for a Messiah. Thus it was that John the Baptist before Him called upon these leaders to repent.

Look then at v. 14: **"In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there."** (HEROD'S TEMPLE) Several decades earlier Herod the Great had undertaken a major renovation and expansion of the temple compound. This is a view of the reconstructed temple from the east. Herod had expanded the temple compound to the left, which is the south. The open space in the courtyard was large enough to fit several football fields inside of it. The area on the left and right sides of the courtyard was called the Court of the Gentiles. Anyone was allowed into this space.

At the three annual feasts Jews brought animal sacrifices to fulfill their Biblical obligations in regard to various offerings. At the Passover they were required to bring a lamb to be sacrificed for their family. The animals provided had to be without blemish. They could bring their own animals for sacrifice. But for Jews who lived at a considerable distance from Jerusalem, it would be a pain to bring animals all of the way to the city. It was easier to buy them in Jerusalem.

There is indication in Jewish writings called the Talmud that the system involved in Jerusalem had become corrupt. People who did bring their own animals for sacrifice at times encountered priests who did not approve them, thus forcing the religious pilgrims to buy them from authorized sellers. There are hints that the priests got a cut of the action. There was a monopoly situation where probably the price for animal sacrifices was inflated.

At first, animals for sacrifice were sold outside of the temple, especially on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. But by this time, some of the business had been brought into the temple compound itself. It was more convenient for everyone involved. We humans tend to want our worship to be convenient. But it was also an opportunity for the Sanhedrin, the high council of Judaism, and the priests who supervised the temple, to control the sales of these animals and to make money.

Jews from many places throughout the Roman Empire and outside of the Roman Empire came to Jerusalem for these feasts. The practical issue is similar for us who have traveled outside of the country. Typically we need to exchange our money for that of the local currency. We always want to find a good exchange rate. In Jerusalem and in the temple the accepted local currency was the Tyrian shekel. (TYRIAN SHEKEL) It was used because it was made of real silver and had a consistent level of purity.

Besides needing money to buy animal sacrifices, religious pilgrims had to pay an annual tax for the upkeep of the temple. According to the Old Testament every Jewish male over twenty years old was required to pay a half shekel tax every year. So visiting Jews had to exchange money to pay this in the

Tyrian shekel. The full shekel was the smallest amount available in this currency. So often two men would go in together to pay the tax for the two of them.

Thus we have the need for money-changers. (PROJECTOR OFF) Thus we find them in the temple compound. We find hints in the Talmud that they had a monopoly on this service and tended to overcharge for the service. The Talmud quotes a rabbi at one point who says that the high priestly family of Annas had his sons appointed as treasurers in the temple and his sons-in-law as assistant treasurers. The Jewish historian Josephus calls Annas "a great hoarder up of money." In the temple cleansing that Jesus undertook at the end of His public ministry he called these merchants and money-changers "a den of robbers."

Probably the corruption was present at this time also. But the focus of Jesus in v. 14 is simply that this commercial business is going on in the temple at all. (PROJECTOR ON--- COURT OF THE GENTILES) It took place in the Court of the Gentiles, pictured here. This was the only part of the temple in which Gentiles could worship the true God.

In v. 15 we read, "**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.**" It is too bad that no one recorded this scene with their cell phone. This would have been something to actually see, wouldn't it? One man forcing all of these merchants out of the temple.

According to v. 16, "**And he told those who sold the pigeons, 'Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade.'**" There are two things to notice here. First, Jesus calls the temple His Father's house. He claims authority over the temple because He is the Son of God. The temple is the special meeting place between God and man. Jesus, the Son of God, is now on the scene.

Second, the problem Jesus sees is that the temple has become a place of trade. It is supposed to be a place of worship. The Court of the Gentiles is the only part of the temple in which Gentiles may worship God. But what do Gentiles find? Their eyes see money-changers, animal sellers, animals and Jewish people involved in buying these things. Their ears hear not the sounds of Levites praising God or prayers of worshipers, but rather merchants hawking their wares. They hear animals bleating and mooing and cooing. They hear coins being exchanged. Their noses smell animals and animal excrement, not incense related to worship. Business and commerce have taken priority over worship.

So Jesus acts in accordance with Old Testament prophecy. (ZECHARIAH 14:21) In the last verse of the prophet Zechariah the author proclaims, "**And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day.**" The context deals with the establishment of God's temple in the Millennium. But

Jesus' actions are a foretaste of that future fulfillment and are in agreement with God's desires for His holy temple.

The cleansing of the temple also fits the prophecy of Malachi. (MALACHI 3:1) In #3 v. 1 the prophet quotes the Lord as saying, "**And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.**" Then in v. 3 He adds (MALACHI 3:3), "**He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi [the priests belong to this tribe] and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord.**" The learned priests and scribes should have recognized the possible fulfillment of these prophecies in the actions of Jesus, but they did not.

In the first sign Jesus performed a miracle that only some noticed. (PROJECTOR OFF) It was a gracious act that met a practical need. There is no sign miracle in this incident. But Jesus is making the initial presentation of Himself to the religious establishment. He appears not as a sweet and nice character. Rather He comes as a judge. He criticizes the behavior of the religious establishment, and He knocks stuff over. He drives people out of the temple. In our understanding of Jesus we have to include not only the aspect of His character that is kind and gracious and loving but also the side of Him that is righteous and holy. He is the Judge who holds people accountable.

In v. 17 of our passage we read, "**His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'**" The quotation is from Psalm 69. Perhaps the disciples thought of this verse at the time. I suspect that it is more likely that they thought about this passage much later.

Psalm 69 is a Psalm of David. In v. 8 of that Psalm (PSALM 69:8) David writes, "**I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's sons.**" Such is the reception that Jesus receives from his fellow Jews in this situation. It is evidence of the statement of the Apostle John in # 1 v. 11: "**He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.**"

In v. 9 of Psalm 69 (PSALM 69:9) David also says, "**For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.**" This zeal would indeed consume Jesus. In the end it would result in His death. As a result, Jesus would become the ultimate temple. For he would be the meeting place between God and man. His death would provide the final and ultimate sacrifice for sin. The physical temple would become unnecessary. We can find forgiveness for our sins in Jesus. We can come to God and have a relationship with Him, if we put our trust in Jesus and His sacrifice for us. (PROJECTOR OFF)

So why was Jesus not arrested and tried for what He did here? I suspect that part of it was the shock and awe of what He did. He caught people off guard and displayed a righteous zeal to which people were not

prepared to respond. I knew a young man in Boston who was a zealous evangelist. We had him speak once at a youth banquet in our church. This guy would go into bars in Boston, stand up on a table and present the gospel. Workers and managers were so caught off guard that it usually took them a while to respond to what was happening and escort him out of the place of business.

Later on when soldiers came to arrest Jesus in Gethsemane, they were so caught off guard by His presence and His words that the Apostle John says that they fell to the ground. So shock and awe may have been part of the reason that Jesus was not apprehended. I suspect also that there was support from the religious pilgrims who were in the temple. They were not happy about being gouged and abused by a corrupt system. Some of them may have cheered to see these guys driven out of the temple. Then also these vendors may have felt some guilt for what they were doing. They may have recognized truth in the charge of this religious zealot about what they were doing on these holy grounds.

A.

(PROJECTOR ON--- III. A. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH) Consider then IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH from this passage. On at least a couple of occasions the Apostle Paul calls the New Testament church a temple. In 1 Corinthians #3 v. 16 (1 CORINTHIANS 3:16) he writes about the Christians in Corinth, **"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you."**

It would seem that we as a church need to be on guard against allowing commerce in its various forms from interfering with our worship. We are to teach about financial giving to the Lord's work. But if we convey the image that we are primarily concerned about money, if we push the selling of books or music or whatever to make money, then perhaps we may have a problem. If we become too much like a business rather than the family of God, then we may be interfering with a proper priority on worship.

Too many of the evangelists and preachers on TV seem to be about the business of selling things and making money rather than worshipping God. We find out that some of them have private jets and multiple mansions and luxurious lifestyles. As with the religious leaders in the temple, religion can be used as a cover for greed.

B.

(III. A. B. IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS) Consider also from this part of the passage the IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS. The apostle Paul also compares individual Christians to temples. In 1 Corinthians #6 vv. 19 & 20 (1 CORINTHIANS 6:19) he writes, **"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, (1 CORINTHIANS 6:20) for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."**

In the context Paul is talking about the importance of personal holiness in the sexual arena. He is urging the Christians in Corinth to keep their moral lives clean. The broader implication is that our devotion to God should be our first priority. We need to guard against other things interfering with that, even good things. Because God is a perfect Father, he will discipline us. He will help us to clean up our temple.

IV.

Then in vv. 18-22 we find that JESUS STRESSES THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH IN HIM. (IV. JESUS STRESSES THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH IN HIM) We read in v. 18: "**So the Jews said to him, 'What sign do you show us for doing these things?'**" The term "Jews" refers to members of the religious establishment. They are priests or representatives of the Sanhedrin. Jesus does get a reaction from these people. They do not argue about the merits of His case. They ask about His authority. Perhaps the question is asked in front of a crowd of worshipers. Perhaps they are being careful not to stir up popular anger.

These leaders may be wondering if this guy is a prophet or just a troublemaker. If he is a prophet, they want to see a miracle like many of the Old Testament prophets performed. The irony is that His action in cleansing the temple is a sign. It is at least a partial fulfillment of the prophecies in Zechariah and Malachi about the sudden coming of the Lord to His temple and ridding it of traders. The religious leaders don't get it.

According to v. 19, "**Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'**" The destruction of any kind of temple in the Roman Empire was a capital offense. Jesus is referring to His body. But the religious leaders take him literally. There is a pattern that we see developed in John's Gospel where Jesus makes certain statements that are taken literally, when there is a deeper meaning behind them. In the next chapter we will see Nicodemus be told that he must be born again. He doesn't get it that Jesus is speaking in spiritual terms.

There is a theological detail to notice here in v. 19. In most New Testament passages about the resurrection, God the Father is credited with taking the initiative in raising Jesus from the dead, indicating His approval of Jesus' sacrifice. But here there is an indication that Jesus is Himself actively involved in His resurrection.

We also need to notice that Jesus' body by virtue of His crucifixion will become a temple in the sense that He will become the meeting place between God and man. Furthermore, the Jewish leaders will be responsible for the death of Jesus, who is the ultimate temple. As a result of their evil, the judgment of God will fall on them and their physical temple. It will be destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. It has yet to be rebuilt. Jesus' death would provide the final sacrifice for sin and make the need for the temple as a place of sacrifice obsolete.



Verse 20: **"The Jews then said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?'"** There is a chronological indicator here that may help us to put these events on a timeline. The Jewish historian Josephus says that Herod the Great began renovation of the temple in 20 or 19 BC. Forty-six years from that starting point would bring us to AD 27 or 28.

However, I had a Greek professor who argued that Jesus used the term for the temple here that referred to the temple proper, to the sanctuary building in the center of the compound. The renovation of that part of the compound was completed in 17 or 18 BC. Forty-six years after that brings us to 29 or 30 AD. This professor also argued that the text means that the sanctuary has stood the test of time. It has been standing for 46 years. How do you think that you can rebuild it in three days? Whatever the exact meaning, the point is that the Jewish leaders do not understand that Jesus is talking about His death and resurrection.

Verses 21 & 22: **"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."** The word "Scripture" is singular here. It is unclear what particular Scripture John had in mind. Perhaps he was referring to Old Testament prophecy that included various references to the death and resurrection of the Messiah.

Ultimately this was a problem of unbelief. The corruption of the religious leaders had put them in a situation where they were unwilling and unable to recognize the truth--- that Jesus was their Messiah. We will see in John and in the other Gospels that Jesus fulfills the prophecies concerning the coming Messiah in the Jewish Scriptures. But the religious leaders were content with their system. They liked the money that they made from it. So they became opponents of their own Messiah. They developed into hardened critics. They became opponents of the God who was really there.

That likewise can be the case with us. We can be content with our own life and our own resources. We have an innate resistance to change. We don't like someone else to be in charge. So we can become resistant and blind to our own sin and our own need to change and to be accountable to the God who is really there. He has provided us with the solution to our need to address sin. He has provided us with a Savior. We need to trust in Jesus, who offers us forgiveness and eternal life. If we need our own house to be cleaned up, He will help us to do it.