

His Authority Manifested – Cleansing the Temple
(John 2:12-25)

12 *After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples: and they continued there not many days.*

13 *And the Jews' Passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*

14 *And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting:*

15 *And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables;*

16 *And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise.*

17 *And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.*

18 *Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?*

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

20 *Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?*

21 *But he spake of the temple of his body.*

22 *When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.*

23 *Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did.*

24 *But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men,*

25 *And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.*

Jesus spent about 30 years in obscurity. But then he began to make himself known to the world. We saw last week that he manifested his glory by turning water into wine. This was his first public miracle which he performed at a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee.

Now even though we call this a public miracle, it was more private than public. Only a handful of people were aware of it. The servants who drew the wine out of the waterpots knew and the disciples knew. But other than that, this first miracle was not widely known.

Now after the wedding feast, Jesus, his mother, his brothers and his disciples went down to Capernaum where they stayed for a few days.

After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples: and they continued there not many days.

John 2:12

It seems that Jesus used Capernaum as a headquarters. In fact, the Scriptures even say that Jesus “dwelt” there.

And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum . . .

Matthew 4:13

But then, after a brief stay in Capernaum (John 2:12), Jesus went up to Jerusalem for the first Passover of his public ministry. And you will notice that the first thing he did was to enter the temple and assert his authority.

And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep and the oxen: and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables.

John 2:15

Now let me take a few minutes and give you some Old Testament “temple” history. Of course you remember that at first, God commanded the people to construct a tabernacle. This tabernacle was a mobile house of worship. When the people left one location, they took down the tabernacle. When they arrived at another location, they erected the tabernacle. And every time they set up camp for any length of time, they erected the tabernacle.

The question is, “What was the purpose of the tabernacle?” It was awfully inconvenient to take it down and put it back up. It required meticulous adherence to God’s blueprint. What was the essential purpose behind the tabernacle?

And the answer is that God taught them that He must be worshipped in a place. Not any old place would do, but all religious service had to be done in the tabernacle.

The priests only worked in the tabernacle. Sacrifices were only offered in the tabernacle. Incense burned in the tabernacle. The showbread was in the tabernacle. The tents of the various tribes were all stationed around the tabernacle by God's ordering. The tabernacle was the center of Jewish life in those early days.

The tabernacle was the place where God resided. And there was no other place on earth where God resided. The Shekinah Glory would rest upon the tabernacle and the cloud of God's Glory found its focus in that little room called the Holy of Holies. And everyone knew that the tabernacle was the place where God resided.

Israel worshipped in that tabernacle for 40 years while they wandered in the wilderness. And then they crossed the Jordan River and entered Canaan. And they erected the tabernacle at a place called Shiloh. And the people worshipped at the tabernacle in Shiloh for over 300 years during the time of the Judges.

In the days of King Solomon, the Jews built the first stationary temple. And Solomon built this temple in seven years. It was a grand project and resulted in a magnificent structure. And the Jews worshipped in this temple at Jerusalem until it was finally destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC.

Now when Solomon's temple was destroyed, the Jews had no temple. And they were without a temple for the seventy years of the Babylonian captivity. But then, some of the Jewish captives were allowed to return to Jerusalem and build another

temple. And Zerubbabel was in charge of building this second temple.

This second temple stood in Jerusalem until Pompey destroyed it in 63 BC. And again, there was no temple in Jerusalem.

But then, 20 years before Jesus was born, Herod built the third temple in Jerusalem. And this was the temple that was standing when Jesus was born.

Now let me tell you about Herod's temple.

It had an inner sanctuary which was roughly equivalent to the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle. And there was a veil that blocked the entrance into this inner sanctuary. And just outside of the Sanctuary was the place where the priests performed their work. And as you spread on out, there was a courtyard for the Jewish men and then a courtyard for Jewish women. And all of this was enclosed within a brick structure. But outside of the brick enclosure, there was another wall. It was really a fence or a partition. And Gentiles were not allowed to come within this fence. The New Testament calls this fence the wall of partition. And the courtyard outside of this fence was the courtyard of the Gentiles.

And outside of this partition, in the court of the Gentiles, was where moneychangers would set up their tables. And people would come to Jerusalem from everywhere. Now especially at Passover, every male was required by Law to come to Jerusalem to observe the Passover Feast. And when they would come into town, they would have all kinds of different

currencies. But the temple only accepted one kind of currency.

So, in order to pay the temple tax, the people had to exchange their currency for the kind that would be accepted by the temple authorities. And these moneychangers were actually quite necessary. And it was only right for the moneychangers to charge a fee for their services. And I am sure that some of the fees were reasonable and some were exorbitant.

Now this whole complex, including the outer courtyard of the Gentiles was called “The Temple.” And when Jesus walked into this outer courtyard, he came into the temple.

The Prophecy of Malachi

Now I want you to see that Malachi, prophesying about 400 years before Christ, foretold that the Messiah would suddenly come to the temple.

Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple . . .

Malachi 3:1

Now first of all, you will notice who it is that will come. This person that comes to the temple is “The Lord.” He is not the forerunner, but He is the Lord. Whoever it is that comes to the temple will be the Lord.

And then you notice how he comes. He shall suddenly come. This seems to imply that there will be a period of silence, people will not be expecting it, and

then all of a sudden, he comes. Now Malachi wrote about 400 years before Christ came. But then, Jesus suddenly comes.

And then you see where he comes. He comes to the temple. Now when Malachi prophesied, there was Zerubbabel's temple in Jerusalem. But this temple was destroyed by Pompey. And then in 20 BC, Herod built another temple in Jerusalem. And this is the temple that Jesus walked into in John chapter two.

Now notice also in Malachi's prophecy that the Lord would suddenly come to his temple. Now the people called it Herod's temple, but the Scriptures call it his temple. It didn't matter that Herod built it. It didn't matter that it was occupied by hooligans and profiteers. When Jesus suddenly came to the temple, he was coming to his own temple.

The Prophecy of Malachi Fulfilled

Now in our passage for this morning, you will find the glorious fulfillment of Malachi 3:1. Jesus suddenly came to the temple!

You will notice that Jesus went up to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. And he went into the temple. And the very first courtyard that you would enter if you entered the temple was the Gentile courtyard. This was the outermost concourse of the temple. And Gentiles who worshipped the God of Israel came to this outer concourse of the temple but could not go any further.

And when Jesus entered into the temple complex, in this outer courtyard, he found two groups of people. He found those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and he saw moneychangers sitting.

Now at this time Jerusalem was a town of about a half-a-million people. But at a major event like Passover, there would be a million or so people coming in from out of town. People would come from everywhere. And it was difficult or impossible to haul sheep and oxen and doves that far. So, people would come into town and buy their animals for sacrifice. And commercial entrepreneurs would set up shop in the outer courts of the temple and if someone needed a sheep, then they could buy one.

And of course, people would come into town with all kinds of different currency. And the money changers set up their tables and they would charge a fee for changing money.

Now it seems that these were legitimate businesses. There was a need for those who sold animals for sacrifice. And there was a need for money changers. And there is nothing in our text that suggests that selling sacrificial animals or changing money was corrupt.

What Jesus objected to was that these businesses were being conducted in the temple area.

And [Jesus] said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise.

John 2:16

He told them to take these things hence. In other words, take them out of here. Take them outside the gates of the temple. He doesn't tell them to stop selling but he tells them to stop selling in the temple.

Notice what Jesus told them.

Make not my Father's house a house of merchandise.

John 2:16

Now what Jesus might have liked to have found when he came to the temple was an atmosphere of quiet dignity and respect. Perhaps he would have enjoyed hearing the murmur of prayers being lifted up. Perhaps he would have rejoiced to find men and women with a sense of brokenness and contrition over sins. But instead, all he could hear was the bellowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep, the cooing of doves and the shouting of the auctioneers. He could barely hear himself think in the midst of all this noisy commerce.

Now all of this should teach us that the house of God is not a place for merchandise, but rather it is a place of worship. It is not a place for worldly distractions, but rather a place to focus on spiritual things. It is a place where we come to meet with one another and to meet with God. And so, we cultivate an atmosphere that puts all worldly distractions outside our gates and allows us to come with dignity and respect to the very throne of God.

Now Jesus had been in Bethany and in Galilee calling disciples and preparing to open his public

ministry. And he had been absent from his temple in Jerusalem for some time. And now he came back to his spiritual house and found it out of order.

Example: Now what if you came home from a vacation and you found strangers had taken up residence in your house. And they were partying and smoking illegal substances. And beer cans were scattered around the house and in general your house was wrecked. If you were big and bad enough, you would go get you a whip and drive them out of your house.

And when Jesus came to his temple, he found that it was inhabited by all kinds of rats and vermin. And his house was not a house of prayer. Rather, it was being used for merchandising. And he made him a whip.

And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them out of the temple, and the sheep and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables.

John 2:15

Now what we should note here is the great authority exercised by Jesus in his house. There was not a man in Jerusalem that would have dared to do such a thing. But Jesus, in full authority as the Son of God, walked into his house and kicked the strangers out. Jesus feared no man. This was his house and he would clean it out.

This was no mere prophet. This was not merely a strong man like Samson. But this was God

himself walking into his temple and casting out the merchandizers.

Now I want to point out here that Matthew, Mark and Luke all have accounts of Jesus cleansing the temple. But in each of the other gospels, Jesus cleanses the temple at his last Passover, just before he is crucified.

But here in John, it appears that the temple cleansing occurs at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

Some commentators claim that John pulls an event from the end of Jesus' ministry and inserts it here in the beginning of his gospel because it fits the organizational scheme of his message. In other words, John is not going strictly chronologically. Rather he is progressing topically. And so, they claim there is only one temple cleansing which Matthew, Mark and Luke place at the end of their gospel and John places at the beginning of his gospel.

But it seems to me that in the early part of John's gospel, John is very careful to lay out the days in order. For example, Jesus was manifested at his baptism in John 1:19-28. And then look at the chronological progression:

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him . . . (John 1:29)

Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples . . . (John 1:35)

The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee . . . (John 1:43)

And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee . . . (John 2:1)

After this he went down to Capernaum . . . (John 2:12)

It is very clear that John is laying out things by the day and so it seems that John reports on a cleansing of the temple which occurred at the very beginning of his ministry. It is a different cleansing than the one described by Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Also, remember that Malachi had said that Jesus would suddenly come to his temple. This wouldn't necessarily apply as well if the temple cleansing was at the end of his ministry when Jesus had been in and out of Jerusalem and the temple for three years. But it does seem to apply very well if Jesus marched unannounced into Jerusalem at the beginning of his ministry and cleaned house.

And so I conclude that Jesus cleansed the temple at the beginning and also at the end of his ministry. And John records the one at the beginning.

The Response of the Disciples

You will note here that this authoritative act by Jesus had an effect upon the disciples.

*And his disciples remembered that it was written: The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.
John 2:17*

I take it here that when they saw Jesus chasing the merchandisers out of the temple, they remembered the Scripture which said, *The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.* (Psalm 69:9)

Now David spoke these words in the Old Testament. And he spoke them because of his great passion for the things of God and specifically for the things of the tabernacle. And because of his great passion for the things of God, he was scorned and oppressed. But David was a type of a greater David who was to come! And these things which originally applied to David, apply even more fully to the “greater David” who is Jesus.

Notice the effect it had on the disciples when Jesus cleaned out the temple.

And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.
John 2:17

It is unclear whether the disciples immediately remembered this Old Testament prophecy, or whether they remembered it after the resurrection. (see v.22) Nevertheless, it made an impression on them because at some point they remembered what Jesus had done and they associated it with biblical prophecy.

The disciples must have been terribly excited at this point. They had seen water turned into wine and now they had seen Jesus suddenly come to the temple and exert his authority. And they began to thumb back through the Old Testament and see how

these very things were fulfilling prophecy. (Psalm 69:9 and Malachi 3:1)

The Response of the Jews

We have seen how the disciples reacted to the temple cleansing. They associated it with Old Testament prophecy. But now look at the reaction of the Jews. You will notice throughout the book of John that there is a chief opponent of Jesus. And this great adversary is the Jews. It is not so much the Roman political machine. The Romans were indifferent to Jesus. But the Jewish religious hierarchy was the one who despised him. And when Jesus came into the temple causing a disturbance, look at the reaction of the Jews.

*Then answered the Jews and said unto him,
What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou
doest these things?*

John 2:18

This was undoubtedly a delegation from the Sanhedrin who had come down from their high offices when they heard the commotion below. And they asked Jesus for a sign. Essentially they were asking Jesus for some identification. They were saying, "Show us your credentials. Show us by what authority you come in here overturning tables and regulating the rules of the temple.

Often in the ministry of Jesus, this was the response of unbelievers. "Show us a sign. Amaze us with a miracle and we will believe." But Jesus never sought believers on the basis of miracles. Jesus didn't want that kind of allegiance. They wanted Jesus to

pull a rabbit out of a hat, but Jesus would never indulge them in this kind of display.

Many times unbelievers will tempt God in this way. “Lord, if you send a check for a million dollars in the mail today, then I will believe in you.” Or, “Lord, if you will cause the couch to levitate right now, I will believe.” But you see - that kind of person is an unbeliever. He says, “If I see a sign then I will believe.” And this is exactly what the Jews wanted – a sign.

Now it doesn't appear that these Jews engaged in any reflection or self-examination over the condition of the temple worship, does it? Had their hearts been right, they might have seen that the temple had become a place of merchandise rather than a place of worship. They might have seen that the atmosphere in the temple was far from reverent. But their hearts were far from God and they were more concerned with precedent and tradition and authority than true worship.

Their attitude was, “What authority does this man have?”

The Answer of Jesus

Jesus answered them and essentially he said, “I'll show you what authority I have, if you destroy the temple of my body, I will raise it up in three days!”

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

John 2:19

Jesus is not averse to giving them a sign. He will give them a sign, but not immediately.

Jesus was toying with these unbelievers. He couched the truth in words that they completely misunderstood. They supposed that he was talking about this huge structure that was known as Herod's Temple. And of course, Herod began the building of this temple in about 20 BC and it took 46 years to complete.

This temple which Herod built was one of the wonders of the world at that time. It took all the resources of Rome, unlimited slave labor and 46 years to build this superstructure. And now they thought Jesus was saying that he could rebuild it in three days. Now let me point out what Jesus did not say. Jesus did not say, "I will destroy this temple." He said,

[You] Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

You might remember that when Jesus was on trial, some three years later, they called in false witnesses who testified that Jesus said, "I will destroy this temple."

Now all the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, and said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.

Matthew 26:59-61

But Jesus never said he was able to destroy the temple (though he was able). Jesus never said he would destroy the temple (although he did in AD 70). Jesus simply said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

This was a magnificent answer which Jesus gave them. He said, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.”

If they took this literally, in order to see the sign, they had to exercise faith, didn't they? They had to call his bluff if they wanted to see the sign. But, no one was likely to start dismantling the temple in order to see if Jesus could really rebuild it in three days.

Of course, Jesus' primary reference was to his own death and resurrection.

But he spake of the temple of his body.
John 2:21

Three years later the real temple (Jesus' body) was destroyed. Jesus was taken out and crucified. And in three days Jesus raised up the temple of his body. And when Jesus was raised from the grave, the disciples remembered what he had said that day when he first cleansed the temple.

Remember how I said that in the Old Testament religious service was always done in a certain place. Early in the history of Israel, all religious worship was in the portable tabernacle. Then, Solomon built a temple and all religious worship was performed there. Later Zerubbabel returned from Babylon and rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem. And God

established that all the sacrifices and all the priestly service and all formal religious service was to be done in a place. If you wanted to worship the God of Israel, it was necessary to come to Jerusalem. And the question is, why did God designate a certain place in a certain temple where He must be worshipped?

And the answer is that true worship of God must be done in a very specific temple. You see, the temple of Solomon and the temple of Zerubbabel and the temple of Herod were only typical temples. They were not the real place where God is worshipped. They were temporary places until Christ came. The true temple where God is worshipped is the Lord Jesus Christ. Anyone who wants to worship God must come to Jesus Christ.

Israel came to the typical temple in Jerusalem because God temporarily resided there. But when Jesus came into the world, God permanently resided in Jesus. The body of Jesus was the house in which God lived. And whoever would worship God must come to the true Temple of God.

The Insight of Jesus into the Hearts of Men

You will notice that while Jesus was in Jerusalem at this first Passover of his public ministry, he had a very profound effect on the people.

Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did.

John 2:23

Now John only records two events which occurred at this feast – the cleansing of the temple and the conversation with Nicodemus. However, we suppose that Jesus must have performed many great works at this time, because many believed when they saw the miracles which he did. (v.23) So, it appears that Jesus opened himself up for all to see. As John likes to put it, he manifested his glory to the people. And many believed in his name.

But Jesus had a very interesting response to those who believed because of his miracles.

But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.

John 2:24, 25

John says that Jesus did not commit himself unto them. This teaches us that faith based on miracles is a spurious kind of faith. Faith that says, “I believe this man is a miracle worker,” falls short of being saving faith.

Saving faith lays hold of Christ as the lover of your soul. Saving faith says, “I believe Jesus Christ died for my sins.” Saving faith says, “Whether or not I ever see a miracle, I cast myself in His hands.”

And many there in Jerusalem believed in Jesus as a great miracle worker, but Jesus did not commit himself to them.

When it says that he did not commit himself to them, it means that Jesus did not entrust himself to them. He did not commit to be their Savior. He didn't

enter into a binding covenant with them. And even though they believed in his miracles, their heart was not exercising saving faith.

Notice here the omniscience of Jesus over the hearts of men. It is absolutely impossible to fool him. It says,

He knew all men.

John 2:24

There is no place to hide from the eyes of God. And there was no place to hide from the eyes of Jesus. When Jesus deals with men he doesn't go around the neighborhood and solicit information about them, does he? Jesus doesn't say, "Your mother tells me you're a nice guy."

No, all things are open before him. He knows more about your heart than you do. And he knew the hearts of these people who believed in his name because of the signs. And he did not commit himself to them.