

Sunday Night, April 1, 2007 Notes: [John 2:12-25 – Jesus Cleanses the Temple](#)

Order of events:

1. Opening prayer.
2. Praise God with song.
3. Praise God with corporate prayer.
4. Praise God with study of His Word.
5. Close with blessing and reminder of the Gospel.

Read John 2:12-25 and summarize the scene: short stay at Capernaum, journey from Capernaum to Jerusalem (another 75-mile, 3-day hike), Passover Feast, the temple cleansing, confrontation with the Jews, and many other miracles performed.

These verses also clearly address an area of concern that each of us share, and gives us great hope. Without a doubt, most if not all of us have struggled with some facet of ourselves that we just cannot seem to bring under the Lordship of Christ. We have confessed, prayed, counseled, resolved, and even covenanted with some portion of ourselves to overcome this sin in our lives: to no avail. This short episode gives us great hope! In short order God lets us know that he will have his temple clean; and we are that temple. Any remnants of that old, dead, decaying body of death will finally, one day, be removed. We will discuss this more later, but rest assured that “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion.”

We are about to discuss a very dramatic moment in the Gospel of John when Jesus cleanses the Temple. As always, John tells us where we are, what happened, and what the disciples learned; consequently, by the power of God’s Spirit, we are taught many valuable lessons. The events we will discuss tonight begin for Jesus and some of his closest disciples an eight-month stint (possibly from April to December), which is sometimes called his Early Judean Ministry: John 2:13; 4:3,35.

John starts us off with two short verses telling us where Jesus is and where he is headed.

**John 2: {12} After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days. {13} The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.**

Some have said that during this time, Jesus calls his disciples a second time. This time could easily have been when our Lord walked along the Sea of Galilee and called James, John, Peter, and Andrew, maybe to a more permanent relationship, as described in the synoptics. Then they’re off to celebrate the first Passover with Jesus as the acknowledged Messiah. Notice that John refers to the feast as the “Passover of the Jews.” While there may be no significance to the phrase chosen, written at this late date, there probably was already a significant separation between the Jewish and Christian faiths. Passover was and is a significant event in the life of the Jews, particularly male Jews, who were required to make this and two other mandatory trips to Jerusalem each year (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles – Deut 16:16 cf.).

Read: The Passover (Exodus 12:1-20)

**John 2: {14} In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons [turtle doves, doves], and the money-changers sitting there. {15} 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. {16} And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.”**

No doubt Jesus had been to the temple every year of his life for Passover as required. Certainly he had seen many of the sights which he saw on this occasion, but had taken no action, that we know of, prior to this. Probably like Luther visiting Rome, he had already become appalled at many of the practices he had seen over the years. But now, however, he is going to Jerusalem as Messiah, and he will fulfill several messianic prophecies by his actions. Malachi 3:1-3 is one messianic prophecy concerning this event:

**Malachi 3: {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; and 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 fullers’ soap. {3} He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD.**

And as the disciples saw:

**John 2: {9} For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.**

Jesus is clearly angry and he takes drastic action. Why? This was a patent misuse of God’s house: making it a “house of trade.” Probably a rather large crowd had set themselves up in the Court of the Gentiles; it probably looked a lot like a Swap Meet or Flea Market or literally an “emporium.” Irreverence is the term that comes to mind. Also, in other descriptions of his temple cleansing, Jesus reminds them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.” Not only were they trafficking in money changing and animal sales, but also in extortion and racketeering. Do we misuse God’s house today? Didn’t Paul even have to remind the Corinthians, and us, “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!” (1 Cor 6): a patent misuse of the temple of God.

An interesting note here is that the other three gospels record the temple cleansing at the end of our Lord’s ministry, in the last week before his crucifixion. John records this event at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. How can this be? As always, some folks will take apparent inconsistencies such as this and run amok spreading their opinions that the Scriptures are not error free. The answer, of course, with a little consideration is that there were most likely two temple cleansings, one at the beginning and one at the end of Jesus’ ministry. “A close look at the other gospel accounts reveals that there is a considerable difference in these events. A different Scripture is referred to; there is no mention of a whip; and our Lord makes a different claim for himself in that cleansing of the temple at the end of his ministry. On that final occasion our Lord made a great and final pronouncement in regard to the nation of Israel. Standing in the temple, having for the second time driven out the merchants and the money-changers, he spoke these dramatic words: “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. You shall not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,’” {Matt 23:39, Luke 13:35}.” [2] Thus he began his ministry; and thus he closed it.

Listen to this commentary about the event:

“Not only was he angry at the confusion, the clutter, the noise and the smells, but primarily he was angry at the extortion and racketeering that was going on. Once a year, every Jewish male had to go to the temple

and pay a temple tax. (It may be encouraging to us to realize that taxation is nothing new.) There was no escape; every male Jew was required to pay a half-shekel tax at the Passover season. Further, that tax could not be paid in Roman or Greek coin but had to be paid in a special temple coin. So it was necessary to change the Roman or Greek coins that were commonly employed into this special temple tax. That in itself was fine; money-changers were required for that. Having them available for the people was a convenience that was right and proper. But what was wrong was that there was an exorbitant price being extorted for making this exchange, so that sometimes almost as much as half of the value of the money being exchanged was paid to the money-changers for their service. The temple was making enormous revenues from this practice. At Passover season sometimes as many as two million people were in the city of Jerusalem, so there was a tremendous racket going on.

Furthermore, a sacrifice offered at the Passover season had to be made with an animal without blemish or imperfection. If, for instance, the animal was blind in one eye, if it had a tear in the skin, whatever, it was to be rejected. Scholars have discovered that in those days if someone brought an animal of his own to offer it had to be examined by the priests and it would almost certainly be rejected; the priests would find something wrong with it. This meant that the only animals that could be offered were those which were bought from the temple herd that was kept in an open courtyard in the court of the Gentiles. These animals had already been approved by the priests. But again, a tremendously inflated price was demanded for those animals. In fact, a bird could be brought outside the temple for the equivalent of 15 cents of our money, but the same bird, bought within the temple from the authorized purveyors of animals, would cost as high as \$15! This barefaced extortion, this demand for money from even the poorest of the poor was what aroused the flaming anger of our Lord.” [2]

There has been some discussion about whether Jesus was truly “angry” with the merchants and money-changers. The descriptive word used from the OT reference is “zeal.” “Zeal,” from the Greek *zelos* can infer anger or indignation in the meaning, but it is not required. From Psalm 69:9, we see that “zeal” consumed, devoured, or “hath eaten me [him] up.” Personally, I don’t think we should diminish or minimize Christ’s anger at this juncture. There seems to be a mental obstacle that prevents us from understanding that Christ is unconditionally loving and also unconditionally holy. He is tender and yet not yielding in any area of righteousness. Somehow we seem limited to seeing him as one way or the other, not both simultaneously. As we will discuss later, Jesus clearly understands that we are but “dust,” but he will not leave us be until we are anything but “perfect” sons and daughters of God – praise God! But Jesus was not ranting and raving furiously, lashing out in random blind rage, he was completely under control. In fact he didn’t deprive anyone of anything: all of their goods and money could be, and I’m sure were, collected back again.

Now, as you can imagine, with all this disruption taking place at such a crucial time, some serious minded and responsible Jews stepped forward and demanded to know by what authority or right did Jesus have for doing these things. And as usual, Jesus provides a hugely powerful and profound answer that reverberates forever down through time; and no one understood it for over 3 years!

**John 2: {18} So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” {19} Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” {20} The Jews then 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 about the temple of his body. {22} 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.**

(As a side note, construction on Herod’s temple was begun in 20 AD. Jesus is approximately 30 years old at this time, 26 BC. See Additional Notes section below.) Also, as usual, Jesus was speaking spiritually and prophetically, and the folks just didn’t get it. It wasn’t until after his resurrection with Jesus standing right in their midst that the disciples discerned the meaning of these words. It was strongly believed that Messiah would be raised from the

dead. Both Peter (Acts 2:24-33) and Paul (Acts 13:30-39) used the Scripture of Psalm 16:8-11, considered the strongest messianic prophecy about the resurrection, to support their claims of Christ's resurrection. (also cf. Matt 12:40; Matt 27:63)

**Psalm 16: {8} I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. {9} Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. {10} For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. {11} You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**

And so it came to pass. They understood these scriptures in a way in which they had never before understood them. It is the property of many prophecies never to be understood except by their accomplishment; but, when their fulfillment takes place, they cannot be misunderstood or applied to any other event. [7] These verses complete and bring us to the full picture of the two key points of this section of Scripture.

Once God the Holy Spirit put it all together for them, the disciples, and we, learn an extremely powerful lesson. Buildings or tents or structures have always been pictures of the house of God, but only pictures of the true temples. As Solomon clearly stated, "But will God indeed dwell with man on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built!" The real temples are bodies – human beings – in which God the Holy Spirit dwells. That is where God created a place where he can dwell – a God sized vacuum if you will. That is where God is glorified, in us. I'm sorry, Christian, you never get to leave church!

Right along with this revelation, it is learned that the Lord of that temple cares about the inward clutter, confusion and immorality that may be there, and he will not make peace with it. Right on the heels of the water to wine miracle, John gives us the temple cleansing episode; God will put his beautiful, refreshing, pleasing wine of his Spirit within these stone jars of ours, and he will drive out from this temple that which displeases him.

"Understand that the God to whom you have come, that loving, healing Lord with the warm, accepting and understanding eyes who touches you with forgiveness and cleansing is nevertheless unwilling to put up with the continuance of sin; he will cleanse his temple whether you like it or not. Hebrews tells us that if the Father loves us he will scourge us and chasten us out of his love until we begin to be what he designed us to be {cf., Heb 12:5-7, 12:11}. Some get upset at God for this. We feel he ought to settle for what we think is holy enough, but he [God] does not. He has in mind a temple where he can be glorified, where our deepest human desires will find satisfaction and fulfillment, and that requires cleansing. He will bring that about." [2]

C.S. Lewis says it quite elegantly in these two references from *Mere Christianity*:

A good many people have been bothered by our Lord's words, "Be ye perfect." Some people seem to think this means "Unless you are perfect, I will not help you"; and as we cannot be perfect, then if He meant that, our position is hopeless. But I do not think He did mean that. I think He meant "The only help I will give is help to become perfect. You may want something less: but I will give you nothing less...."

Now, if I may put it that way. Our Lord is like the dentists. If you give Him an inch He will take an ell. Dozens of people go to Him to be cured of some one particular sin which they are ashamed of (like masturbation or physical cowardice) or which is obviously spoiling daily life (like bad temper or drunkenness). Well, He will cure it all right: but He will not stop there. That may be all you ask: but if once you call Him in, He will give you the full treatment.

That is why He warned people to “count the cost” before becoming Christians. “Make no mistake,” He says, “if you let Me, I will make you perfect. The moment you put yourself in My hands, that is what you are in for. Nothing less, or other, than that. You have free will, and if you choose, you can push Me away. But if you do not push Me away, understand that I am going to see this job through. Whatever suffering it may cost you in your earthly life, whatever inconceivable purification it may cost you after death, whatever it costs Me, I will never rest nor let you rest until you are literally perfect – until My Father can say without reservation that He is well pleased with you, as He said He was well pleased with Me. This I can do and will do. But I will not do anything less.”

And yet – this is the other and equally important side of it – this Helper who will, in the long run, be satisfied with nothing less than absolute perfection, will also be delighted with the first feeble, stumbling effort you make tomorrow to do the simplest duty. As a great Christian writer (George MacDonald) pointed out, every father is pleased at the baby’s first attempt to walk: no father would be satisfied with anything less than a firm, free, manly walk in a grown-up son. In the same way, he said, “God is easy to please, but hard to satisfy.” *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, Chapter 9

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Of course we never wanted, and never asked, to be made into the sort of creatures He is going to make us into. But the question is not what we intended ourselves to be, but what He intended us to be when He made us. He is the inventor, we are only the machine. He is the painter, we are only the picture. How should we know what He means us to be like? ... We may be content to remain what we call “ordinary people”: but He is determined to carry out a quite different plan. To shrink back from that plan is not humility: it is laziness and cowardice. To submit to it is not conceit or megalomania: it is obedience.

Here is another way of putting the two sides of the truth. On the one hand we must never imagine that our own unaided efforts can be relied on to carry us even through the next twenty-four hours as “decent” people. If He does not support us, not one of us is safe from some gross sin. On the other hand, no possible degree of holiness or heroism which has ever been recorded of the greatest saints is beyond what He is determined to produce in every one of us in the end. The job will not be completed in this life: but He means to get us as far as possible before death.

That is why we must not be surprised if we are in for a rough time. When a man turns to Christ and seems to be getting on pretty well (in the sense that some of his bad habits are now corrected), he often feels that it would now be natural if things went fairly smoothly. When troubles come along – illnesses, money troubles, new kinds of temptation – he is disappointed. These things, he feels, might have been necessary to rouse him and make him repent in his bad old days; but why now? Because God is forcing him on, or up, to a higher level: putting him into situations where he will have to be very much braver or more patient, or more loving, than he ever dreamed of being before. It seems to us all unnecessary: but that is because we have not yet had the slightest notion of the tremendous thing He means to make of us....

Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of – throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself. *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, Chapter 9

“It is clear in this account that many of the people involved in the traffic in the temple were unaware there was anything wrong with it. Through the years and through tradition, however, it had all crept inside the temple until people were probably unaware that anything was wrong with the practice. But our Lord knew. He refused to compromise with it, or put up with it, and forced the issue so people saw what God saw when he looked at the temple. This is what John wants us to remember. We are dealing with a God of reality, a God who cannot be

fooled, a God who will always deal in loving forgiveness with anyone who does not defend his evil. When we admit it, when we come asking to be cleansed, and freed, he never turns us away, he never deals with us harshly. But when we come justifying our actions, excusing them, fooling ourselves, we find him refusing to commit himself to us.” [2] And that brings us to our last three verses tonight.

**John 2 {23} Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. {24} But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people {25} and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.**

Jesus “knew all people.” Why? Because he made all things, and because he was the all-wise God, and he knew all men because he alone searches the heart and tries the reins. He knows who is sincere and who is hypocritical; he knows them in whom he can confide and those to whom he can neither trust himself or his gifts. [7] Jesus’ great signs and wonders drew many an interested party. And though “many believed” in Jesus because he was the miracle worker, Jesus did not seem to commit himself to them. That is a strange phenomenon in the Christian world yet. How many people come to Christ and ask him to be their Lord, yet they do not seem to be changed; there is no reality about their Christian living; they go right on much as they were, even, eventually, drift away, and never come back. Why is that? John explains it here. He says it is because Jesus knew Man, therefore he knew what a man or woman was like.

We telegraph our true selves all the time by the looks on our faces, the tones of our voices, the positions and stances we take with our bodies, and many other things. Not only did Jesus read the inside, but as a perfect man, he could also clearly see the outside. (Take note, our enemy, while unable to read our hearts, is a master at reading our body language.) We cannot fool Jesus. Though these folks came to him and said they wanted to follow him, he could clearly read their hearts and know whether it was real or not.

Reader, he also knows you; your cares, fears, perplexities, temptations, afflictions, desires and hopes; your helps and hindrances; the progress you have made in the Divine life, or your declension from it. If he knows you to be hypocritical or iniquitous, he looks upon you with abhorrence; if he knows you to be of a meek and broken spirit, he looks on you with pity and delight. Take courage – you can say, “Lord, you know all things, you know that I do love you and mourn because I love and serve you so little. Help me to love, to understand, to respond, to serve.”

#### Additional Comments or Questions:

##### **1. How old was Jesus at this time, and how do we know?**

We do not know for sure the exact age of Jesus when He was crucified, but He was probably 33 years old. Here is the argument:

Jesus was baptized. But the reason He was baptized was to “fulfill all righteousness,” (Matt. 3:15). He had to fulfill the legal requirements for entering into the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4; Heb. 5:8-10; 6:20). Priests offered sacrifice to God on behalf of the people. Jesus became a sacrifice for our sin (1 Pet. 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:21) in His role as priest.

To be consecrated as a priest, Jesus had to be: 1) washed with water - baptism - (Lev. 8:6; Exodus 29:4, Matt. 3:16). 2) Anointed with oil - the Holy Spirit - (Lev. 8:12; Exodus 29:7; Matt. 3:16). Additionally, He may have needed to be 30 years old, Num. 4:3, “from thirty years and upward, even to fifty years old, all who enter the service to do the work in the tent of meeting.”

Therefore we can conclude that Jesus began His earthly ministry at the age of 30. Since it went on for 3 1/2 years before Jesus was crucified, it is safe to say that He was 33 at the time of His death. [6]

## 2. What's the history of Herod's temple talked about here.

Herod's Temple in Jerusalem was a massive expansion of the Second Temple along with renovations of the entire Temple Mount. Herod the Great's expansion project began around 19 BC. The renovation by Herod began with the building of giant underground vaults upon which the temple would be built so it could be larger than the small flat area on top of Mount Moriah. Ground level at the time was at least 20 ft. (6m) below the current level, as can be seen by walking the Western Wall tunnels. The edge of this platform remains everywhere; part of it forms the Western Wall.

In 1948, Jordan destroyed the Jewish Quarter and much more of the wall was revealed along the southern side. In 1967, Israel took control of Old Jerusalem (and the Temple Mount) from Jordan. It was found that the wall extended all the way around Temple Mount and is part of the city wall near the Lion's Gate. Thus, the Western Wall is not the only remaining part of the Temple. Currently, "Robinson's arch" remains as the beginning of an arch that spanned the gap between the top of the platform and the higher ground farther away. This was used by the priests as an entrance. Commoners entered through the still extant, but now plugged, gates on the southern side which led through beautiful colonnades to the top of the platform. One of these colonnades is still extant and reachable through Temple Mount.

The Temple itself was allegedly located on the site of what today is the Dome of the Rock. The gates let out close to Al-Aqsa. The Temple was destroyed by Roman troops under Titus in 70 AD. (The most complete ancient account of this event is *The Jewish War*, by Flavius Josephus.) The Roman Umayyad and Byzantine governors built palaces out of the rubble, as well as a Temple of Jupiter and a Church, but it was not until the Dome of the Rock was built between 687 and 691 that the last remnants of the Temple were taken down.

### Construction

Herod was interested in perpetuating his name for all eternity through building projects, and his construction program was extensive. He had magnificent palaces in Masada, Caesaria and Tiberius. Herod built temples for various pagan gods to serve the gentile populations, which were paid for by heavy taxes on the local Jewish population.

But his masterpiece was to be the Temple of Jerusalem. The old temple, built by Zerubbabel nearly half a millennium before, despite frequent renovation, most notably by the Maccabees in the century before, was still run down and rather small. (The precinct at the beginning of the Second Temple period is said to have been 50 meters by 150 meters, an area comparable to or smaller than an American city block.) So in 20 BC, Herod announced that the old temple would be torn down and replaced with something truly magnificent. The Cohanim, or Jewish priesthood, as well as the rest of the population, were skeptical, requiring Herod to quarry all the stones required for the project before the deconstruction of the Post-Exile structure could begin.

An agreement was made between Herod and the Jews – the sacrificial rituals, called *korbanot*, were to be continued unabated for the entire time of construction, and the Temple itself would be constructed by the Cohanim.

Mt. Moriah had a plateau at the northern end, and steeply declined on the southern slope. It was Herod's plan that the entire mountain be turned into a giant square platform. To do this, a trench was dug around the mountain, and huge stone "bricks" were laid – the largest measuring 44.6 feet by 11 feet and weighing 628 tons, while most were in the range of 2.5 by 3.5 by 15 feet. It is believed that the stones were transported from the quarry on specialized carts. As the mountainside began to rise, the western side was carved away to a vertical wall and bricks were carved to create a virtual continuation of the brick face, which was continued for a while until the northern slope reached ground level. Part of the Antonian hill to the north of Moriah was annexed to the complex and the area between was filled up with landfill.

The Southern wall was designed as a grand entrance. Recent archeological digs have found thousands of "Mikvas" (ceremonial bathtubs) for the ritual purification of the worshippers, as well as the grand stairway leading to the now blocked entrance. [Karen Armstrong, in her book on Jerusalem, complains bitterly of these excavations].

Inside the walls, the platform was supported by a series of vaulted archways, now called "Solomon's stables" which still exist and whose current renovation by the Palestinian authority is extremely controversial.

As for the temple itself, it was made, not of local stone, as was the rest of the complex, but imported white marble, which was in sharp contrast to the entire city and gleamed in the daylight.

Legend has it that the construction of the entire complex lasted only three years, but other sources such as Josephus say that it took far longer, although the Temple itself may have taken that long. It is possible that the complex was only a few years completed when the future Emperor Titus burnt the place to the ground in 70 AD. [8]

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**Pictures of Herod's Temple:** <http://www.azwalker.com/john/images/herod-temple-pics.pdf> (6.38 MB)