

THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE AND THE BEGINNING OF THE END FOR JESUS

John 2:12-22 - "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. [14] In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, 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." [17] His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." [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."

Mark 11:15-18 - "And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. [16] And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. [17] And he was teaching them and saying to 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." [18] And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching."

Matthew 26:59-61 - "Now the chief priests and the whole Council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, [60] but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward [61] and said, 'This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'"

Matthew 27:35-40 - "And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. [36] Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. [37] And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." [38] Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. [39] And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads [40] and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

My only point in linking these other texts from the synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) with our text from John's gospel is to show that this event of clearing out the money changers and the animals and the words of Jesus upon doing so stayed with Jesus right up to the end of His life. In fact, Mark makes it clear that it was at **this** point - the very point of what has become known as Jesus' **cleansing of the temple** - that the leaders began to realize Jesus had to be killed.

Notice John 2:13 - "**The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.**" It was the annual celebration of the Jewish Passover, which made the Temple an incredibly busy place in Jerusalem. Everyone had to come for sacrifice. Currency had to be exchanged. Animals had to be purchased. Procedures had to be followed for animals to be purified, etc.

By the way, this is something unique in John's account. John specifically mentions **three Passovers**. There is this one in **John 2**. Then there is one in **John 6** where Jesus multiplies the loaves. And finally there is one in **John 18 and 19** where Jesus goes into the most detail preparing His disciples that **He Himself** will become the Passover Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. John's account is important because it is primarily from his account of the number of Passovers (3) that we deduce the fact that Jesus had a **three year** public ministry before He was crucified.

Also, we witness a **change in tone** with today's text. The delight of seeing water turned to wine is gone. We are brought face to face with a very **angry** Jesus. The whole mood is blazing with confrontation and violence. We learn that not all the changes Jesus makes are as welcomed as turning water into wine. His disturbing, overturning presence, as John tells his story, changes things quickly and radically. So Jesus **welcomes** and **blesses** sinners who are tired, weak and humble. But He comes down like thunder on the proud

and self-reliant.

In these first two encounters with Jesus in John's gospel he wants us to see both sides of this world's encounter with the Word made flesh. The disciples of John the Baptist were quick to respond in faith and follow Jesus as soon as He approached and invited them. Yet, amazingly, the religious leaders and scholars of the Jewish Scriptures were immediately rejecting of Jesus. And this leads us immediately into our first point:

1) **SURPRISINGLY, JOHN MOVES THIS ACCOUNT OF THE TEMPLE CLEANSING FROM THE *END* OF JESUS' MINISTRY IN THE SYNOPTICS TO THE VERY *BEGINNING* IN HIS GOSPEL**

John 2:13-16 - "The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. [14] In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, 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.'"

All of the synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) place this account of Jesus' actions near the *end* of His public ministry. John places it right at the beginning. We know from John's account that he's aware of the chronology of the Temple and the times of its construction from **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?'"

John can do the math. Specifically, there were forty-six years from the beginning of construction to the time of this conversation with Jesus. In other words, John *knows* exactly when this cleansing of the Temple takes place. So the question remains as to why John so obviously takes this event and moves it at will to the opening of his account.

And the answer, I believe, ties in with John's opening prologue. John takes us straight to *Jerusalem* - and straight into the *Jewish Passover* at that - to put flesh and bones on his opening diagnosis in **1:10-11** - "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. [11] He came to his own, and his own people [His own Father's House - the very Temple in Jerusalem - the priests and Levites - those preparing the sacrifices that pointed to the Lamb of God - *Those* people!] **did not receive him.**"

2) **JESUS SAYS SOMETHING THAT COSTS HIM HIS LIFE**

John 2:16 - "And he told those who sold the pigeons, 'Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade.'"

And now I want you to remember how I took the time at the beginning of this teaching to read the way everyone brought this event back at the end of Jesus' life - how it became a foundational part of the plot against him. Everyone from the religious and legal authorities to the common people jeering at Jesus around the cross **talked about this event**. But the words they quote aren't really the ones that sparked such animosity and jealousy among the power brokers of the day.

It was the way Jesus claimed **His own authority** over the Temple that rattled their cage - **"Do not make my Father's house a house of trade!"**(16). He didn't say **"our" Father's house,** or **"your" Father's house**. It was the way He **separated Himself** from the rest of these religious heavyweights that smacked of blasphemy.

It wasn't the first time Jesus had done this. We can all remember His words, even as a young boy, when his frantic parents had lost Him and traced His steps back into the Temple - **Luke 2:48-49** - **"And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.' [49] And he said to them, 'Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'"**

So the religious leaders and sellers want to know **who does Jesus think He is?** Where does this outsider get the right to kick all of them out? It's not just an issue of loss of monetary profit. That's just part of the problem. The real issue is, quite literally, **who made Jesus God?**

And that's why John places this miracle right up front in his account. What we're seeing played out is the reaction of the proud and self-righteous to the truth of **John 1:14** - **"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."**

3) **WHAT THE TEMPLE WAS JESUS NOW IS**

John 2:18-21 - **"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."**

Of course, we know from John's explanation that Jesus wasn't talking about the physical Temple building in Jerusalem. John tells us clearly Jesus was talking about His own physical body as the temple that would be destroyed and raised up in three days (21).

But the question still remains, why did Jesus use that term **"temple"** to describe His body when they were all standing in

Jerusalem, right at the Temple site, and during Passover to boot? What would make Jesus use such a volatile image? Why would He choose a term that was so prone to being misunderstood by His Jewish audience?

And there's no getting around it. There is a **massive self-assertion being made by Jesus in this exchange with the Jewish leaders**. He's being deliberately **dramatic** and **explosive** in His word choice. These leaders ask Jesus for a **sign** to validate His authority for driving them all out of the Temple - **John 2:18** - **"So the Jews said to him, 'What sign do you show us for doing these things?'"**

And the sign Jesus gives is shocking indeed. In His **atonement death** (that's the **"destroying"** part of Jesus' words) and in His **resurrected body** (that's the **"raising"** part of Jesus' explanation) He was telling all who would hear that what the Temple **used** to be was now going to be permanently **replaced** and **completed** in His own Person.

This was a huge claim. The Temple was not **indispensable**. It would be off the scene completely in about **70 A.D.** Jesus was now **indispensable**. The crucified, risen Lord of all was the new everywhere present, worthy of worship, sovereign Temple of God for all who would come to the Father through the Son.

This will all be explained in detail to the woman of Samaria at the well in John chapter four. But John puts the cleansing of the Temple right up front in his gospel account to introduce these massive claims of the Word made flesh right out of the gate.

And the permanent, eternally relevant message of this text is the answer to the most important question anyone can ever ask. **If you are going to meet God Almighty for yourself, where will you find Him?** Answer: **You will have to come to Jesus Christ, the living, permanent Temple of God.** This is the place where God makes Himself available to all who will come.

4) THE FINISHED WORK OF CHRIST AND THE WAY THE FIRST DISCIPLES CAME TO UNDERSTAND THE SCRIPTURES

John 2:16-17, 20-22 - **"And he told those who sold the pigeons, 'Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade.'** [17] **His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me'....20-22....**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.**"

John is the only apostle who records this exchange in such detail. And he has a wonderful purpose in mind. John **begins** his account with this exchange at the cleansing of the Temple because he wants to place - just as he opened his gospel in chapter one - the **uniqueness** of Christ - the promised Messiah - right up front.

This is why he links up Jesus' actions in the Temple with the prophetic words from **Psalms 69:9** - **"For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me."** The disciples didn't just see **a man** consumed with zeal for the Father's House. They saw in Jesus' actions the fulfillment of these words about the zeal of the promised Messiah.

One other insight from these prophetic words from the Psalmist. They are frequently misunderstood. The Psalmist doesn't mean that Jesus was consumed by His own anger, as though it was His own *zeal* that was "*consuming*" Him. No. The last part of **Psalm 69:9** explains in what sense Christ's zeal *consumed* Him - "**For zeal for your house has consumed me, and *the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.***"

In other words, His zeal for His Father's house would consume and destroy Him in the sense that *in the process of defending His Father's honor He would find all the others in the Father's house turning against Him*. The Messiah's zeal would cost Him His life. And the Apostle John wants all of his readers to know right up front that this wasn't something spinning out of control. This was all in the Father's plan.

The disciples, for the very first time in John's account, begin to *see* their own Scriptures differently. They begin - just begin - to see that not only is the Temple finding its fulfillment in the Risen body of Jesus Christ - that *He* would now become the permanent dwelling place of God for mankind - but they also begin to see that their own Jewish Scriptures also find *their* fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ as well.

Notice the way John places the *words of Jesus* and the *recorded Scriptures* side by side in the disciples' growth in faith - **John 2:22** - "**....and they believed *the Scripture* and the *word that Jesus had spoken.***" To say this about anyone else's words would be blasphemous. Such is the massive shift in - the great revelatory earthquake - that came with the Word made flesh. Nothing has ever been the same since.

5) **SOMETIMES WE MUST WAIT TO FULLY UNDERSTAND GOD'S GREAT WORKS**

John 2:20-22 - "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.**"

John notes this gap between what Jesus revealed and when the disciples *understood* what He revealed. And it is frequently such. Disciples must listen carefully to Jesus Christ. We have His words constantly and immediately in the Scriptures.

Faith is sometimes rewarded *immediately* and sometimes *eventually*. The disciples simply listened and treasured what Jesus said. They seemed not benefitted by what He revealed at that moment. But they didn't cast aside Jesus' words.

And we learn that listening to God is a *patient* listening. His promises and His truth don't wear out or cool off with the passing of time if we hold them firmly in our minds and hearts. Contrary circumstances don't cancel out Christ's words. Imagine the disciples watching these enemies of Christ win every battle. They saw Him captured. They saw the phoney trial and the guilty verdict. They saw Him beaten and whipped. They all deserted Him in His darkest hour. That's how sure they

were that He had lost and they were next.

Then the Resurrection. And they remembered what He said about His temple being destroyed and then being raised in three days. And it all made sense then. Just wait. Christ's words always ring true in the end.