

The Lord's First Cleansing of the Temple

John 2:12-25

John 2:12-25 - *"After this He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers and His disciples, and they did not stay many days. ¹³ Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. ¹⁵ When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. ¹⁶ And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" ¹⁷ Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up." ¹⁸ So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ Then the Jews 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 of the temple of His body. ²² Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them, and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.*

²³ *Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. ²⁴ But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, 25 and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man."*

Background Notes

After the wedding in Cana, Jesus, along with His family and His disciples, went down to Capernaum (v12). They went down from the area of Nazareth, which is located on a high hill above sea level, down to Capernaum, which is located on the Sea of Galilee, and is below sea level.

Soon afterwards, the Lord left Capernaum and went up to Jerusalem for the Passover, in accordance with the Old Testament Law. According to the Law of Moses, all Jewish males were to go up to Jerusalem three times a year to celebrate Old Testament feasts of the Lord. The Passover was one of these festivals.

When the Lord arrived at the Temple in Jerusalem, He found that the Temple courts had been commercialized. Merchants were selling animals for sacrifice and moneychangers were exchanging foreign currency for Hebrew coins. At Passover, Jewish people came to Jerusalem from all over the Roman Empire, and they would have to exchange their foreign currency for the Hebrew coinage to pay the Temple tax. Foreign coins were engraved with the image of Caesar. Jews were forbidden to make graven images, so Hebrew coinage had no images.

These commercial activities, if honestly done, were acceptable - in their proper place. The problem was that the buying and selling was taking place in the Lord's House. The merchants had made the Temple courts a place for business deals, and the moneychangers' attitude was not worship - it was profit! There were big profits to be made on the exchange of the money and the selling of animals for sacrifice. As a result, the Lord "cleansed" the Temple. He cleaned it out! *"When*

He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables"(v15).

A couple of points about the cleansing of the Temple. The Lord cleansed the Temple on two separate occasions, and this was the **first** cleansing. The first cleansing took place at the beginning of the Lord's ministry, and second at the close of the Lord's ministry. John 2 recorded the first cleansing, and Matthew 21, Mark 11, and Luke 19 recorded the second cleansing.

A second point: the whip that the Lord made was not the vicious Roman whip that was used for scourging people. Rather, it was a small lash made with strings or cords. Notice that the text does not say that the Lord hit any *people* with the whip. Most likely He made the whip for driving the animals out of the Temple premises.

A third point: this display of the Lord's righteous anger was predicted in the Old Testament. Verse 17: *"Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."* This is a quote from Psalm 69 - one of the prophetic Messianic Psalms. The Lord was zealous to maintain the holiness of the Temple.

In verse 18 the Jews asked Jesus for a sign: *"What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"* The Lord answered, *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (v19).* The Lord was referring to the Temple of His Body (v21), but the Jews thought the Lord was referring to the Temple structure itself.

The Second Temple, sometimes called "Herod's Temple," was the Temple at the time of Christ. The Second Temple was Herod's expansion of the small Old Testament Temple known as "Zerubbabel's Temple." Zerubbabel's Temple was built when the Jews returned from their captivity in Babylon. It was built on the site of King Solomon's glorious Temple, which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

Herod's expansion was begun in about 20BC, and construction had already been going on for 46 years (v20). This was the Temple that the Romans eventually destroyed in 70AD. The foundational platform for Herod's Temple and its courtyards was there when our Lord was on earth, and it can still be seen today. In fact, the Western Wall (sometimes called the "Wailing Wall"), where devout Jews worship today, is the western side of that foundational Temple platform.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. There is a place for righteous anger.

Some folks don't like to read about the cleansing of the Temple because they feel it takes away from their concept of a meek and mild Jesus! Well, the Lord was meek, and He was gentle, but He was also angry on the appropriate occasion! The Lord was angry with the Pharisees because of their legalistic hypocrisy, and the Lord was angry that His Father's House had become a place for commerce.

By the way, in a coming day the wrath of God (God's very strong anger) will come against unbelievers. Revelation 6:16 says that unbelievers of that day will call to the mountains and rocks, *"Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!"* In this verse "the Lamb" is the Lord Jesus! Anger is not a characteristic of lambs, but in that day unbelievers will see "the wrath of the Lamb." Think of the Lamb of God being angry! But anger is not inconsistent with His love and mercy, because there is a proper place for righteous anger.

Ephesians 4:26 says, *"Be angry, and do not sin."* There is a proper place for us to experience righteous anger. Hearing the Lord's name blasphemed and His character maligned should cause anger within our souls. Seeing sin swept under the rug, or learning about people being treated unjustly should cause us to be angry. It is not wrong to be angry about that kind of activity. That is **righteous anger**.

Notice - Ephesians 4:26 adds *"...and do not sin."* You can be angry, but don't let your anger lead you to sin. Even righteous anger, if not handled properly, can lead to unrighteous and disastrous results. There is a place for righteous anger.

2. There is a difference between belief and commitment.

Verses 23-25, once again: *"Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man."*

What was going on here? If these people believed in Jesus, why weren't they saved? The reason is that there is a difference between **belief** and **commitment**. The Lord could read their hearts. He knew theirs was just a "profession" of faith. He knew that this was just "head belief," not "heart commitment."

The Lord knows what is in our hearts at this very moment. He knows all about the sinful heart of mankind (v25) and He knows the heart of every person (v24). He knows what is in your heart right now.

About 100 years ago, a French tightrope walker named Charles Blondin had a cable strung across Niagara Falls, and he actually walked across the Falls on the cable. Then he carried a person across and back, and other such stunts. In one of the stunts, a man got into a wheelbarrow and Blondin wheeled him back and forth on the cable in the wheelbarrow. The crowds were cheering! Then, as the story goes, Blondin turned to a man in the crowd and said, "Do you think that I could do that again?" The man said, "Yes, certainly." Then Blondin said, "Get in!" But the man would not get in! The line was drawn between **belief** and **commitment**.

Where are you today? Do you believe in Jesus with head knowledge only? Do you just believe the facts about Jesus? Are you only making a "profession" of faith, attending church, and so forth? Or is there true **commitment** to Jesus Christ?

Does your commitment make a difference in the way you live your life? There is a difference between belief and commitment.

Practical Application

1. Don't make God's House a "place of merchandise."

"And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" (v16). A number of people are committing that same sin today. Even Christians. Religion means "big bucks" for some people, and sadly, many people are in it for the money. Some TV evangelists are an example.

Is it possible for dedicated Christians to fall prey to this? It's easy to get involved in get-rich schemes in reference to the church or Christian ministry. We **all** have to be careful here. Don't make "God's House" a place of commerce!

Not long ago someone tried to get me hooked on some kind of "900" phone number moneymaking deal for Growing Christians Ministries. "Hey, why don't you start a phone ministry like Bible Trivia, or Knowledge of the Bible? You could even throw in the gospel! Every time people call your 900 number, your ministry makes money! You can have a self-supporting ministry by using a 900 number!"

Whenever you hear about easy ways to make money or get-rich-quick schemes "for the ministry," **beware!** What's the bottom line of the scheme? The bottom line usually involves "**me**" getting rich off the ministry in some way! It's possible for Christians to fall prey to this kind of thing, and sadly it happens all too often. We are all vulnerable, so **be careful.** Don't make God's House a "place of merchandise."

2. Have you cleansed God's temple?

The Lord cleansed the Temple, and so should we. What is God's temple today? In 1 Corinthians 3 we learn that the **Church** is God's temple today. *"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (v16).*

And 1 Corinthians 6:19 says that the **believer's body** is God's temple today. *"Do you not know that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you... and you are not your own."* So both the Church and the believer's body are temples. They are the dwelling places of the Holy Spirit of God. Therefore they must be kept holy.

In many local churches today, sin is not being identified and disciplined. God's temple is not cleansed from sinful practices. Cleansing the temple is no more pleasant today than it was in the Lord's day. We need to respect our elders and church leaders when they feel, before the Lord, that there is a need to "cleanse the temple."

What about the temple of your body? Are you a Christian? If so, *“do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?”* Have you cleansed God’s temple? Is there something in your life that needs to be cleansed? We all need to clean out the junk in our lives! Are there some secret sins that need to be dealt with? Have you cleansed God’s temple?

You will never be a truly happy Christian if you are an unclean temple. Let’s close with that question as a challenge - Have you cleansed God’s temple?