

Cleansing the Temple

Bible Background • [JOHN 2:13-22](#)

Printed Text • [JOHN 2:13-22](#) | Devotional Reading • [PSALM 122](#)

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: DESCRIBE how Jesus' cleansing the Temple represents restoration in our lives; DESIRE a fresh revelation of God in the church; and CREATE a list of ways that we see God's power in our daily lives.

In Focus

Max could not recall when he began to lose his zeal for the Lord and the sacred things of God. He had been saved in his '20s and now at the age of 45, he felt that he was just going through the motions. Even attending church on Sundays had become routine and halfhearted. Often the services would be spirit-filled as other congregants praised and lifted up the name of Jesus, but he just felt numb—hollow inside. Max knew that his demanding management job at a Fortune 500 company often had him making some ethically questionable decisions, yet he always cooperated because he had to be a “team player.” Still, each time he made an unethical choice, something in him died; his spirit seemed to cringe. It was as though the Holy Spirit was asking him, “Who is your Master?”

Late one night, Max earnestly went to God in prayer, asking Him to forgive his sins, cleanse his life, and make him whole again.

Today's lesson deals with Jesus cleansing the Temple of everything that was not of God—everything that hindered true worship of the Living God. Like with the Temple, sometimes God has to help us clean up our lives as He brings restoration.

Keep in Mind

“And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise” ([John 2:16](#)).

Focal Verses

^{KJV} [John 2:13](#) 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 an 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.

^{NLT} [John 2:13](#) It was time for the annual Passover celebration, and Jesus went to Jerusalem.

[14](#) In the Temple area he saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices; and he saw money changers behind their counters.

[15](#) Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep and oxen, scattered the money changers' coins over the floor, and turned over their tables.

[16](#) Then, going over to the people who sold doves, he told them, "Get these things out of here. Don't turn my Father's house into a marketplace!"

[17](#) Then his disciples remembered this prophecy from the Scriptures: "Passion for God's house burns within me."

[18](#) "What right do you have to do these things?" the Jewish leaders demanded. "If you have this authority from God, show us a miraculous sign to prove it."

[19](#) "All right," Jesus replied. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

20 “What!” they exclaimed. “It took forty-six years to build this Temple, and you can do it in three days?”

21 But by “this temple,” Jesus meant his body.

22 After he was raised from the dead, the disciples remembered that he had said this. And they believed both Jesus and the Scriptures.

The People, Places, and Times

Herod’s Temple

The Temple. Located in Jerusalem, the Temple was the religious and political seat of Palestine, on a hill overlooking the city.

During their festivals, Jewish families from all over the world traveled there for the grand celebrations. “(King) Solomon had built the first Temple on this same site almost 1,000 years earlier (959 B.C.), but his Temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians, who took many of the Jews into captivity ([2 Kings 2:5](#)). The Temple was rebuilt in 515 B.C., and Herod the Great had enlarged and remodeled it” (*The Life Application Study Bible*, 1622). According to Strong, the temple embraces “the entire aggregate of buildings, balconies, porticos, courts (that is that of the men of Israel, that of the women, and that of the priests), belonging to the temple; the latter designates the sacred edifice properly so called, consisting of two parts, the ‘sanctuary’ or ‘Holy Place’ (which no one except the priests was allowed to enter), and the ‘Holy of Holies’ or ‘the most holy place’ (which was entered only on the great day of atonement by the high priest alone). Also there were the courts where Jesus or the apostles taught or encountered adversaries, and the like, ‘in the temple’; also the courts of the temple, of the Gentiles, out of which Jesus drove the buyers and sellers and the money changers, court of the women” (1996).

Background

The apostle John, the son of Zebedee and brother of James, is the author of the Gospel of John. He and his brother were called “Sons of Thunder.” John wrote to prove that Jesus Christ is not just a man, but is indeed the eternal Son of the Living God, and all who believe on Him will have everlasting life (reign with Him forever and ever in His kingdom). In other words, Jesus is fully God and fully man. In addition, because Jesus offers the gift of eternal life to all who believe on Him, He is also the Light of the world. He is the Word—the long-awaited Messiah. John not only reveals Jesus to us in both power and magnificence, he also shows us Jesus’ power over everything created as well as His love for all humanity.

At-A-Glance

1. Jesus Shows That the Temple Is Sacred ([John 2:13-18](#))
2. Jesus Reveals Another Meaning of the Temple ([vv. 19-22](#))

In Depth

1. Jesus Shows That the Temple Is Sacred ([John 2:13-18](#))

In the outer courts of the Temple—the Court of the Gentiles—the animal merchants and moneychangers were allowed to set up booths to do business. Since there were thousands of out-of-town visitors who came to celebrate the Passover, business was booming. The religious leaders gave these merchants and moneychangers permission to carry out their trades so that the leaders could make money for the Temple’s upkeep. However, they did not consider the fact that because there were so many people doing business, it interfered with the worship of the true and living God—the main purpose for visiting the Temple. This is one of the reasons that Jesus was angry.

In addition, because the Temple’s tax had to be paid in the local currency, many of the foreigners who came to the Passover celebration had to have their money converted. The moneychangers, however, cheated or exploited the people by charging exorbitant exchange rates. Therefore, their business interfered with worship, and they were cheating the people at the place of worship. Adding to these infractions was the fact that after the cattle, sheep, oxen, and doves that foreigners brought for the sacrifices were rejected for imperfections, the animal merchants sold new ones at inflated prices. This was also big business. Thus, Jesus was angry at the exploitation and greedy practices of these merchants and moneychangers. When He saw their blatant disrespect for the Temple and for those worshiping there, Jesus drove out the sheep and oxen, and “scattered the money changers’ coins over the floor, and turned over their tables” ([v. 15](#), NLT). He even told the people selling the doves to get their merchandise out of the Temple and admonished them not to turn His “Father’s house into a marketplace!” ([v. 16](#)). Jesus knew that turning the area into a marketplace was misusing God’s Temple; they had insulted Almighty God—His Father. When the disciples saw how Jesus responded to such disrespect, they remembered the prophecy from the Scriptures: “Passion for God’s house burns within me (Jesus)” ([v. 17](#), NLT). Of course, the Jewish leaders’ beliefs were in fundamental conflict with Jesus, and they demanded to know by what authority He carried out these acts. They insisted that Jesus show them a miraculous sign to prove that His authority was from God ([v. 18](#)).

2. Jesus Reveals Another Meaning of the Temple ([vv. 19-22](#))

Again, the religious leaders were not on the same page as Jesus. Here, Jesus speaks of His body as a temple, and the leaders thought He was still talking about the Temple where He had disrupted business— where He had driven out the merchants and moneychangers. They thought He was speaking of the Temple that Zerubbabel had built over 500 years earlier and Herod the Great had begun enlarging and enhancing. Herod’s efforts with the Temple were still under way, even though the remodeling project had started 46 years prior (*Life Application Study Bible*, 1623). Therefore, the religious leaders thought that Jesus was telling them this earthly temple could be torn down and rebuilt in three days.

Knowing how long it took to build the Temple, they were startled. However, Jesus was telling them that His body, God’s temple, would be crucified and resurrected in three days. Jesus’ words

would, of course, mean more to the disciples after Jesus' resurrection. These words would prove that indeed He is the Messiah—the Son of the Living God!

Search the Scriptures

1. Why was Jesus so angry with the merchants and moneychangers ([John 2:15-16](#))?
2. What did Jesus mean when He said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” ([v. 19](#), NLT)?

Discuss the Meaning

Some people have interpreted [John 2:13-22](#) to mean that there is to be no selling of any kind in the church. Is this the principle that you drew from the text? Why? Why not?

Lesson in Our Society

God's House is for worshipping the true and living God. It is never to be taken for anything other than that. It is a sacred place where congregants assemble to praise, lift up the name of Jesus, and hear from His inerrant Word. However, sometimes congregants do not respect the sanctuary and forget that they are entering the Holy God's presence. Some may even throw paper on the floor and leave their bulletins on the seats after the service. You take the lead in respecting God's House!

Make It Happen

Pray that God's House will always be respected as a house of worship and prayer, where seekers and believers can collectively come and share with God. Pray that His Word will always go forth with authority and power, and those who do not know Him as Lord and Savior will find Him.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

[John 2:13-22](#)

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:

The “Passover” was “the festival instituted by God for Israel at the time of the Exodus in order to commemorate the night when Yahweh spared all the firstborn of the Israelites but struck dead all those of the Egyptians ([Exodus 12:1-30, 43-49](#))” (Wycliffe, 1283). It was a time when thousands came from all over the world to participate in the celebration of what God had done to save His people by delivering them from slavery. In the Greek, “Passover” is *pascha* (PAS-khah), supplementing the definition that “the paschal feast, the feast of the Passover, extends from the 14th to the 20th day of the month Nisan” (Strong, 1996). Nisan is the first month of the Jewish sacred calendar ([Nehemiah 2:1](#); [Esther 3:7](#)), called “Abib” in the Pentateuch (The Books of the Law—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Nisan “corresponds to our March-April” (Wycliffe, 1210). It was during this time that Jesus went up to Jerusalem, went to the Temple, and found the animal merchants and moneychangers doing the big business of exploiting worshipers.

One principle that can be drawn from this study is that God’s House—the sanctuary— should always be a place of worship of the true and living God. Therefore, God’s people should never be guilty of exploiting or participating in overcharging anyone, even though as happened in our lesson today, the Temple tax had to be paid—the church has bills to pay. The church must remain beyond reproach. She represents a Holy (set apart from sin) God. Therefore, her witness must be untarnished.

[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 an house of merchandise.

Here we see the righteous anger of Jesus. His ire was so aroused by what He saw in His Father’s House that “he made a scourge of small cords” ([John 2:15](#)). The word “scourge” in Greek is *phragellion* (frag-EL-le-on) and means “whip.” In dealing with these defilers of the Temple, Jesus meant business as well, and He made a whip to get the job done. Not only did He drive out the merchants and moneychangers, but He did the same with the sheep and oxen and then overturned the tables. After He spoke, “Make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise” ([v. 16](#)), there was no doubt as to where He stood on the matter and how distasteful He found their actions to be. After all, God’s House is where worshipers go to commune with Him.

From this passage, we learn that there are times when the church must stand on what is right— God’s principles. If something is not right in God’s House, then the church must, with the whole armor of God, set God’s House in order.

[17](#) And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.

Jesus’ disciples then remembered what was written about Jesus. The word “zeal” in the Greek is *zelos* (DZAY-los), meaning “ardour in embracing, pursuing, defending anything” (Strong, 1996). In other words, Jesus saw the wrong being done and would not stand still and let it continue. He set out to correct the matter, pursuing and defending. He was consumed with

righting the situation. Therefore, He took action. He did not wait for someone else to right the wrong.

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

The religious leaders were expecting Jesus to show them a sign to prove His authority to rid the Temple of the merchants and moneychangers as well as their merchandise. The word “sign” in Greek is *semeion* (**say-MI-on**), and means “of miracles and wonders by which God authenticates the men sent by him, or by which men prove that the cause they are pleading is God’s” (Strong, 1996). In other words, these religious leaders were in charge of the Temple and they would not just accept Jesus’ word that He was who He said He was. They wanted to see a miracle to prove that He was sent by God. They wanted Him to demonstrate that He received His authority from God.

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

However, Jesus stopped talking about the Temple that had been enlarged and remodeled for 46 years (20 B.C.) by Herod the Great and still was not finished; He started speaking of another “temple”—His body. The word “temple” in Greek is *naos* (**nah-OS**), which means “used of the temple at Jerusalem, but only of the sacred edifice (or sanctuary) itself, consisting of the Holy place and the Holy of Holies (in classical Greek it is used of the sanctuary or cell of the temple, where the image of gold was placed which is distinguished from the whole enclosure)” (Strong, 1996). Jesus applies this word to Himself; He shifts attention to something else that was sacred—His body that would be sacrificed for the sins of humanity. He predicts His crucifixion on that cruel Cross at Calvary. Three days He would be in the grave, but He would rise again on the third day. Death could not and would not keep Him in the grave!

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

The Jewish leaders could not believe Jesus’ words. They misunderstood Him. They reminded Him that the Temple out of which He drove the merchants and moneychangers had taken 46 years to build and remodel, so they asked if He was saying that He could “rear it up in three days.” The word “rear” in Greek is *egeiro* (**eg-I-ro**), meaning “to raise up, construct, erect.” They wanted to know if Jesus meant that He could erect the Temple in three days. Of course, if they truly recognized Him as the Son of the Living God, they would not have asked that question. However, they were in spiritual darkness.

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.

Again, Jesus was speaking of His own body as “the temple” ([v. 21](#)). Yet, even the disciples—who still did not fully appreciate who Jesus was—remembered after He was risen from the dead that He had told them about rising again. The word “remembered” in Greek is *mnaomai* (**MNAH-om-ahee**) and means “to be recalled or to return to one’s mind, to remind one’s self of” (Strong, 1996). Jesus was true to His Word. He did rise again, just as He said He would.

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