

## Introduction

Recap: Thus far in the series we have discovered the key to John's intended purpose.

Ch. 20:31ff. reveals that he included these signs that we might believe that Jesus is the **Jewish Messiah and the unique Son of God from eternity**. *The key to believing is bearing witness along with John and the Disciples to the signs. And the key to believing in the signs is to see how the glory of God is revealed in the signs.*

**The glory is God's dwelling or tabernacling presence—manifested in sacred space:** (1) a garden sanctuary in Eden, (2) a mobile tabernacle in the midst of the nation of Israel, (3) a stone temple in Jerusalem. And (4) incarnation of God's one and only Son in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. And the prophets prophesy that Solomon's temple, though destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, will someday be replaced by New Temple—the people will return from the exile from God's presence, and the glory will once again come down and tabernacle—dwell in this New and better Temple.

**This week in 2:13-23, we're going to look at a story that actually doesn't occur until the last week of Jesus' life**, but John has pushed the story forward to be the second miracle he wants to highlight. Now remember we said, because this is a memoir, the stories can be loosely arranged, and ancient readers or hearers did not expect a chronological account. That was not a hang up for them.

**The story is told here but mentioned in the other synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke)**. That is a reversal of what we normally see in John's gospel, where he mentions a story that is only told in the synoptics. This story only appears in Matthew, Mark, Luke as an accusation during Jesus' trial. Now John sees that and says, "Hmm. I want to tell that story. Here's what Jesus said when he cleared the temple."

**Main Thought: The story confronts false and corrupt worship, simultaneously revealing to us that the Jewish Temple—the sacred space where God accepted the worshiper through a bloody sacrifice is now superseded by the new Temple and a new and better sacrifice.**

### **Text: 2:13-23**

<sup>13</sup>The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. <sup>15</sup>Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup>He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" <sup>17</sup>His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." <sup>18</sup>The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" <sup>19</sup>Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." <sup>20</sup>The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" <sup>21</sup>But he was speaking of the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup>After 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.

## 1. Jesus confronted corrupt religion.

**Background:** In John's Gospel, the Jerusalem temple is most often a place of conflict where Jesus and the religious leaders mix it up.

- **Jesus wen up to Jerusalem:** From Jericho or Galilee, one would have to travel the Jericho road which is a 14-mile hike up 3300 ft of winding, arid, narrow road. The last leg of the journey was all the way to the top of Mt. of Olives, overlooking the Kidron valley below and Jerusalem.
- **Jewish Passover:** This festival was instituted Leviticus based on the Exodus 12 and the first Passover meal—commemorating their salvation from Egyptian bondage.
- **Temple Courts:** Unlike the first temple (Solomon's), this temple had clear partition walls of separation—dividing walls that segregated the holiest Jews from the females and gentile court. Jesus is likely on the outer court where the Gentiles were supposed to worship.
- **Merchants selling,** cattle, sheep, doves. These were the animals bought by the out-of-towners who relied upon local vendors to supply them their ritual sacrifices.
- **Money Changers**—authorized dealers who were required by rabbinic law to offer their money exchanging services for free. Out-of-town Jews and converted Gentiles would have come with all kinds of Roman coinage, but the temple rituals and taxes required “pure” coinage—which they deemed as the half shekel.

**Problem:** Mk. 11:15-16, 2:15-16; Jesus has made a mess of their market. He's turned over their kiosks where the business transactions were taking place, and he's driven the shoppers, sellers, and sacrificial animals all out of this temple court.

**Mark 11:16** “You have made it (the Temple) ‘a den of robbers.’”

**Jn. 2:15** “Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!”

Jesus sees 3 things going on: (1) because this sacred space which was supposed to be a house of worship and solemn prayer has now become a noisy market and a place of commerce—a for profit enterprise and (2) the money changers are likely adding an exorbitant percentage to their exchange rates in order to recuperate their own loses for unpaid time, and (3) this provides them the perfect opportunity to price-gouge and exploit the out-of-towners.

**This is the picture of corrupt religion.** Turning the sacred into big business for the sake of profiteering through inflated exchange rates and price-gouging.

I want to say this very clearly: (1) Christian principles and values can greatly enhance your business. (2) And sound and prudent business practices can greatly enhance your ministry.

**Having said that...**

**Principle of application:** Christianity is not a business, the gospel is not a product, and the church is not a place of commerce. We are not called to sell a product, though we compete in the marketplace of ideas.

The telltale sign of corrupt and shady religion is any time the gospel becomes a product that a church or a ministry is selling for financial gain. Or, any time someone monetizes promises of the abundant life.

Few things made Jesus angrier or aroused his fury like watching corrupt religion turn the gospel into a for-profit marketplace, and the Sanhedrin is complicit either by sanction or turning a blind eye.

## 2. Jesus confronted ingrown religion.

Mk. 11:17 “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’”

**Background:** The passage Jesus quotes here (not cited by John but found in Mark's gospel) is from [Isaiah 56:7](#), but I want to read you the full context:

**Isaiah 56:6-8** “And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—<sup>7</sup> these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”<sup>8</sup> The Sovereign LORD declares—he who gathers the exiles of Israel: “I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered.”

**Problem:** The selling of sheep, cattle, doves, goats for ritual sacrifices used to take place in the Kidron Valley which slopped down. Herod the Great moved the kiosks into the Gentile court with the compliance of the Jewish Sanhedrin (the high court of Israel who managed and governed the affairs of worship). **So now, there is nowhere for you as a Gentile convert to convene, pray, or transact with the one true God of the universe.** You, as a Gentile believer have gone through the effort of being circumcised, you and your male children; switching over to a very difficult Jewish dietary system, and a commitment to practice Sabbath which means whatever business you ran as a pagan—you have one less day to make a buck; *and you've committed to make the arduous journey* to travel from whatever Roman province you live in bring your whole family, the expense of renting an inn or a room and meals and on and on.

So you get to this grand, marvelous temple to find that as a gentile convert—you *must stay out in the gentile area and moreover, there is a partition wall* in front of you with signs posted all around it “No Gentile May Enter this Sanctuary on Penalty of Death” and so what are you to think? You are an outsider. You don't belong.

**Principle of Application:** Our first priority is to gather disciples who worship in Spirit and in truth—our second priority is to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus, but our third mandate must be clear—the church exists for the people who are not yet in it.

Religion that fixates only on the needs of insiders will always communicate that the people who aren't part of our group yet don't really.

**Jesus confronted corrupt and ingrown religion...**

### **3. Jesus confronted routine religion.**

2:17 "His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

**Background:** Now, later when Jesus is tried and sentenced before Pilate and the people, Pilate contrives an ingenious solution to a potential massive riot on his hands (if the Jesus followers revolt it will be a riot like nothing he has ever imagined). He puts before the people a lowlife, criminal, thief—a subversive revolutionary named Barabbas (son of the Father). Jesus who is called the Son of God and Barabbas, a man who fancies himself to be the Son of the Father. The people, under the instigation of the religious elites, choose the wrong son of the Father.

Now, those **two men represent two zeal traditions in Israel**. One is a political revolutionary tradition that Jesus has completely and repeatedly repudiated. The men in this tradition broke Roman laws to push for the sake of Jewish nationalism and that is not Jesus' path.

**Jesus' zeal tradition is that of the persecuted prophets.**

1 Kings 19 Elijah said, "I have been very zealous for Yahweh" but Israel has rejected your prophets, torn down the sacred altars and alas—I'm the only one left.

Psalm 69:9 "Zeal of your house will consume me, and the insults of those who insult you fall upon me." The context of that Psalm is the persecution of the Psalmist in the midst of his zeal, his passion, his fervor for his God.

Romans 12:11 "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor as you serve the Lord."

**Principle of Application:** Jesus saw the very people who were presiding over sacred Jewish faith, the money changers who were transacting it—corrupted through and through. And one man stands consumed, eaten up with a passion for God and his holy house.

- We need to be zealous to safeguard the sacred trust of the Gospel.
- We need to be zealous to safeguard the unity of the body of Christ.
- We need to be zealous to keep our commission and mission central.

#### 4. Jesus was confronting obsolete religion.

Jn. 2:18-19 “<sup>8</sup>The Jews then responded to him, “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?” <sup>19</sup>Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”

**Background:** The temple was constructed 400 years earlier; the renovation and expansion projects of Herod took over 40 years—and the temple was likely still under construction in Jesus' day. **And shockingly, Jesus claims he can rebuild it in 3 days.** John reminds us that he was talking about the temple of his body—resurrected from the dead in three days.

**Principle of Application: The message of the passage is clear—God does not dwell in houses or temples made by human hands (Acts 7; 17).**

- The tabernacle and temple were only ever supposed to be temporary symbols doing two things: **(1) pointing back to the Garden when** God dwelled among men and women who had not sinned, and **(2) pointing forward to a time when the Spirit** would be poured out on all flesh dwelling and tabernacling with forgiven sinners—who themselves look forward to a day of resurrection.
- Jesus is the reality to the type, the flesh and bone reality of the symbols of OT religion. Those portraits existed as inscriptions on sacred stone, emblems and symbols and rich spaces for worship and devotion. **But Jesus was the flesh and bone reality of what only previously existed in portraitures of OT religion—a promise** so glorious and grand, yet so new and shocking that the prophet had to say “No eye has seen no ear has heard what God has prepared for those who love him” and yet Paul declares “but he has made it known to us.”

**God now dwells in the hearts and the minds and the souls of redeemed people.**

**2 Cor. 6:16** “What agreement is there between the **temple** of God and idols? For we are the **temple** of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

**Ephesians 2:20-22** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. <sup>21</sup>In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup>And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Some interesting application questions that may come out of this could be:

(1) What examples of dishonest and exploitative religion have you seen in the past? How did it make you feel to see "religion" take advantage or exploit people in the name of God or Jesus? Did it make you angry? It should.

(2) How can we check ourselves against the tendency to become too inwardly focuses in terms of church life and community? How can we challenge ourselves to think "outwardly" and missionally in the community? Does the heart of the church beat for the people who are not yet in it?

(3) What is John challenging us to do in order to maintain our personal excitement and zeal for the things of God? How can we keep from allowing our faith to become lifeless and routine religion?

(4) How does Christ make obsolete some of the learned religious behaviors we've grown up with?

Can you think of any examples of "man-made" religious practices that have crept into the Christian faith that are not biblical, or maybe are more Old Testament than explicitly New Testament?