

Rob Mathis
Sermon: John 2:12-25
Clearing the Temple Courts
And foretelling His death

John 2:12-25

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Jesus Clears the Temple Courts

¹³ When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵ So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!” ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

¹⁸ The Jews then responded to him, “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?”

¹⁹ Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”

²⁰ They replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” ²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

²³ Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his

name.²⁴ But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people.²⁵ He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.

I have entitled my sermon, “Jesus-Who is this Man?” I would venture to say this is the singular, most important question you or I will ever have to grapple with. For, with the answer lies one’s destiny forever.

- Today, in our sermon series, we find ourselves mid-way through the 2nd chapter of the Gospel according to John
- Thus far John, one of the original disciples of Jesus, introduces Jesus as God, as being the co-creator of the universe; the Light of the World; the Word of God made flesh; the One and Only Son of God, who came from the Father and is full of Grace and Truth
- The Disciple John is unequivocal in his pronouncements about Jesus Christ as he opens his Gospel
- This John then switches quickly to a narrative of John the Baptist; a powerful if eccentric prophet called of God to be a witness of the Light, who proclaims he himself is not the Messiah, but he is called to point to Jesus Christ as the long-awaited “Lamb of God”; the “anointed one”.

- Then, in the latter part of Chapter 1 Jesus begins to call His disciples
- In chapter two Jesus initiates His public ministry in a very subtle way; changing water into wine at a wedding in Cana; this use by the Disciple John of the wedding feast harkens itself back to

**Isaiah 25:6 “On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare
a feast of rich food for all peoples,
a banquet of aged wine—
the best of meats and the finest of wines.”**

This prophecy of Isaiah was written several 100 years before Jesus’
birth, yet it is pointing not only to the end times but also to God’s
heart for ALL peoples, not just Jews.

- Now, keep in mind, when John is writing his Gospel, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he is crafting his message to focus the reader on the most salient points. John is, in fact, weaving a well-told, well-thought-out story that the reader should pay attention to with great care.

So now we are caught up; and can dive into today's passage; John

2:12 to 25

Verse 12: After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

- Here we read that Jesus leaves Cana and “goes down to Capernaum”
- This was a little over 16 miles of walking, and from Cana would have in fact been a mostly downhill walk to the water's edge
- Capernaum, as the Book of Matthew (4:13) tells us, became Jesus' center of operations in Galilee for much of His ministry. John may be making this point by including this information early in his narrative.
- Capernaum had developed into a bustling vibrant trading village with several hundred inhabitants by the time Jesus arrived. It was situated along the Via Maris, a major trade route connecting Egypt with Damascus and beyond; caravans and traders would

have passed through here regularly; it was also on the north edge of the Sea of Galilee;

Now let's look at verses 13 to 17;

¹³When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

This is a direct reference to Psalm 69:9

Truthfully, when some read this passage, their reaction is concern and confusion that Jesus would exhibit what appears to be violence, especially in the Temple;

- Keep in mind that Jesus was not out of control, as some of the Jewish leaders would have seen Him;

- Very much in control, Jesus takes the time to make a simple whip of cords-ropes probably brought by the people with the animals;
- It is clear from the wording John uses that he is talking about Jesus using His authority to drive out the sellers, the animals, and the money changers; this word “drive out” is the same Greek word used in the Gospels for the Spirit of God driving Jesus out into the desert after His baptism;
- So Jesus is using His God-given authority, His voice moved by the Holy Spirit,

The sellers would likely have fled in shame right away, the animals would soon follow with Jesus moving them out;

Why do we see this very visible action from Jesus, who just before this is portrayed as this “behind the scenes rescuer” of not only a wedding feast and the dignity of the groom, but also leaves plenty of really good wine for the new couple to sell and get on their feet financially?

Let’s take a look at this scene: there are, during the Passover Week, as many as several hundred thousand additional people in the environs of

Jerusalem. The streets, the nearby hills, the roads, and paths, everywhere would have seen this discordant mass of people, animals, dust, and the almost unbearable cacophony that surely must have been Jerusalem that week.

When Jesus makes His way to the Temple, He is not arriving to unfamiliarity. The Temple is in fact the place where He had been dedicated as a baby, where at age 12 He discussed the things of God with the religious leaders, and where He had traveled to every year for the Feast of Passover. The first sight He would encounter at the Temple complex is the Court of the Gentiles; this is the very outside of the Temple; the Jews did not even consider this a sacred place; it was in fact much like a chaotic market;

- Note here that The Jewish leaders were so concerned with external purity of their religion that they had built a fence, called the Soreg, which separated the Court of the Gentiles from the Temple Proper.

Large stones were placed along this fence and it was written very clearly in Greek that any unrighteous person faced certain death if they passed from the Court of the Gentiles to any other part of the

Temple Complex. (Ephesians 2:11-14 Paul says that the Middle wall of the partition, this Soreg, was broken down by Jesus' death and resurrection).

- This Court of the Gentiles was like Grand Central Station at high noon during The Passover. There was an open market of animals to be purchased for sacrifice, and large wooden tables set up for people to exchange their money for coins considered acceptable to pay the Temple Tax. These were not necessarily bad behaviors in and of themselves. What was the real problem?
- First, we must remember that always in God's economy, the poor, the rejected, the excluded, the downtrodden and broken are exceptionally precious to Him. In this Temple designed by the Jewish power brokers and enforced by their own guards, there really was no place for the outcasts of the world to seek God; By using this area as a sales place and allowing it to be desecrated it literally blocked access to God for these people.
- Second, those coming from long-distances often were forced in this Temple Court to pay exorbitant prices to exchange their

money and to purchase the animals required for sacrifice; imagine it this way; people are traveling along trade routes, risking robbery and attack; so they would take their larger coins and hide them on their person, and not carry smaller, less-valuable coins. It also would have been prohibitive for most to drag along an animal to sacrifice. Once they arrived at the Temple, they would have stood in line and met with a shulhani, a money changer; these would take the pilgrim's money, exchange it for acceptable money (often the Tyrian shekel, which was weighed out much more accurately) with the money changers exacting often exorbitant costs on these people trying to be faithful followers of God.

- Behind the scenes, Jesus knew that the powerful Jewish leaders, even the High Priest, controlled the money flow into the Temple and were becoming very wealthy and powerful on the backs of those who could ill afford the costs. In other words, it was a wicked and corrupt system, not unlike any other godless enterprise, and Jesus knew this.
- These are the reasons Jesus was outraged

So, look at the response of the Jewish Leaders;

- 18; The Jews then responded to him, “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?”
- The Jewish leaders demand a sign of Jesus, so they are questioning His authority; they are not honestly inquiring to gain knowledge of God’s truths, but rather simply to challenge Him
- 19; Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”
- Jesus responds with a prophetic response; prophesying of His own death at their hands; Note that Jesus says that He will raise “it”, His body the temple, Himself.
- Verses 20-21: They replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?”²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

- So these leaders then scoff at His explanation; they see Him as arrogant, challenging of their authority and a threat to what they hold dear;
- It is out of these kinds of interactions that the Pharisees and Sadducees and scribes all became embittered against Jesus. They could sense the rumble of some far-off storm starting to brew and they did not like it. Theirs was a world of carefully controlled and scripted circumstances. They saw God as someone to box in and control. I believe this was borne out of deep fear, mixed with the toxic elixir of greed and selfishness.
- So then let us go on to the last verses for today;
- John 2:23-25
- ²³ Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name. ²⁴ But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. ²⁵ He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.

- So, even though Jesus refused to “perform” for the Jewish leaders, much like He refused to perform for the devil when tempted in the wilderness, Jesus, I believe driven by the Holy Spirit and His compassion for the hurting, did go out while in Jerusalem and heal the sick, lame, blind and broken.
- Yet, John makes it clear that people are fickle and Jesus was not going to trust broken humanity to even begin to understand what His Kingdom was about.

So, what have we seen today?

First, the essentials of this passage show us God’s priorities:

- To have concern for those less fortunate, those who are lonely, hurting, afraid, brokenhearted, poor in all ways
- And He responds to those who are humble of heart
- And His attention is paid toward those who somehow, by His Grace, recognize their desperate need for His salvation

Let us ask the question; who did Jesus become for those who followed Him?

We see that at each turn of events the disciples see more clearly who

Jesus is;

They will find Him personally in the Old Testament

In the prophecies of old; in the actions He lived out, in the words He

spoke;

What we see in John is his chronicling the growth and development

of these early disciples;

And ultimately, we see two main roads each of us must choose from:

John's Gospel is showing that Jesus is Lord of all; and He has an

expectation that humanity will make a choice, either for Him or

against Him.

You see; as the people in Cana found, those who invite Jesus are

blessed by Him

Contrary to this beautiful wedding reception, we see the Jewish

leaders as uninterested in the true King, and consumed with

maintaining their place of privilege, their power, their riches; they

saw Jesus as an intrusion, a threat, a power to be destroyed. In all of

human history I do not believe any group of people were more sadly

blinded than Jesus' own people; they saw and heard of His miracles and power yet denied His righteousness and majesty.

It is, by the way, no accident that John put these two stories, the wedding feast and the ruckus in the Temple, side by side. He is using the literary device of contrast to illustrate the responses of humanity to Jesus. The two major responses are clear; then there is the way the crowds in Jerusalem saw Jesus-and how they "believed in His Name" because they saw the signs He was performing:

So where are you today?

- Do you desire to invite Jesus into your life? Maybe you have made overtures towards this One that John says is God, yet truthfully you have left Him on the stoop?
- Maybe your whole life you have watched from afar His workings but, like many of Jesus' day, you have kept at a safe distance so you don't get "too obligated" with Him?
- Maybe you are one of the disinterested; perhaps fascinated at the idea that there is really a personal God who loves you? But then frankly are too busy or preoccupied to look much further?

- Or perhaps you are one of those who actually feels antagonism toward Jesus, toward His perceived demands on your life? Or even are turned off with what a mess the world is? And think that if God were real He would fix all this mess?

John says in 20:30-31 that he wrote His Gospel so that you may believe and in believing, you may have life in Him

- That is the very reason He took the time, nearly 2,000 years ago, to write down what God wanted people everywhere to know. To know that this Jesus is who He said He was. He died for each one of us; He took every single rotten thing each of us throughout all of human history ever would do, think, feel, possess; and He allowed Himself to be crucified together with it all; then 3 days later Jesus raised Himself from the dead. And He is alive. And He is creating a people for God's own possession. A people created to experience God, life and the most utterly amazing time in eternity. That, my friends, is the entire purpose for the existence of humanity, the world and the universe.

- In finishing Who Is this man Jesus in your life? I know and can testify that this Jesus is real and He loves you more than you can imagine. He will not force Himself on you. However, if you ask Him to show Himself to you, in earnest, He will do just that. He promises to.