JESUS PURGES THE TEMPLE

Scripture: John 2:12-25.

This morning we resume our study in the Gospel of John. John wrote his gospel in response to false ideas about who Jesus was. As John writes, more than 50 years has passed since Jesus ascended back to heaven. All the other apostles are dead and most of the people who are around never knew Jesus or the apostles personally. So there’s quite a bit of speculation about who Jesus really was. John draws from his own personal knowledge and experience as one of Jesus’ twelve disciples, and he pens the Gospel of John to show that “Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31). So far we’ve heard from several reputable witnesses (John the Baptist, Andrew and Philip) who testified that Jesus is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” “the Messiah,” “the Son of God” and “the King of Israel”...their words. We heard Jesus claim that through Him, the Son of Man, we have direct access to God…His words. Then last week we saw Jesus perform a creative miracle at a wedding in Cana where he turned ordinary well water into really good wine. John says Jesus did this to manifest, to show His glory. As a result His disciples believed in Him. They genuinely believed that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the very Son of God and as we will see they left everything behind and followed Jesus.

As we continue on in Chapter 2 we are going to see further evidence that Jesus is God. READ John 2:12-13.

Jesus and His disciples leave Cana and head up to Capernaum for a few days. From there we are told that Jesus journeyed to Jerusalem for the Passover. We know His disciples go with Him because they are mentioned in passing later on. Just a little background to help you appreciate the scene in Jerusalem as Jesus arrives there. It was normal practice for every Jewish male over twelve years of age to travel each year at Passover to Jerusalem and go to the temple. The noted Bible commentator William Barclay estimates that there were perhaps two and a quarter million people in Jerusalem around this time. Whatever the actual number, there were a lot of folks in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. The Passover Feast commemorated the events recorded in Exodus Chapter 12 when God “passed over” the houses which had the blood of the lamb on the doorposts, sparing the firstborn in that particular house from death. It was on that fateful night that God demonstrated His power by killing the firstborn in houses all throughout the land of Egypt. As a result Pharaoh finally relented and let God's people leave. Thus God delivered His people, the nation of Israel out of bondage in Egypt. Time and time again throughout their history God would remind His faithless people, “Don't you remember when I brought you up out of Egypt?”

READ John 2:14.

Imagine the scene surrounding the temple complex. A very large crowd of people is gathered. There is the bustle of activity and commerce taking place inside the temple itself. There is the selling of oxen, sheep and doves for sacrifices, and money is being exchanged so that people can pay the temple tax. What Jesus sees infuriates Him. True religion has become a business. The priests and religious leaders have become materialistic and have allowed the worship of Israel to become big business. How irreverent! There is no spirit of worship here. There is no reverence for God and what He has done. So Jesus is angry and He takes quick and decisive action.

READ John 2:15-16.

With all the animals in the temple there are ropes lying around. Jesus takes some and weaves them together into a whip and then He proceeds to drive the whole bunch of them right out of the temple. Jesus did not save the whip for the sheep and the oxen. He directed it toward men. He drove them out AND the sheep AND the oxen. Picture this. Jesus, normally portrayed as gentle, meek and humble goes into that temple with a whip in His hand and drives the merchants right out of there. He cleared the temple. You might say to yourself, “Wow, that place must have been packed. How could one man do all that by himself?” Here’s how – by the power and authority of God. This is definitely a different side of Jesus than you normally see, isn’t it?

By the way this event is a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Look at Malachi 3:1. This is one of the most important prophecies in relation to the coming Messiah and what He will do. This passage has a future fulfillment in the Second Coming of Christ, but it has an initial fulfillment in this action of Jesus in John Chapter 2. READ Malachi 3:1, 3.

Jesus goes into the temple and just as Malachi said He would, He purifies His Father's house. So you see, John by putting this particular incident of the purifying of the temple here is saying that Jesus is Messiah, isn't he? The cleansing of the temple, the refining of the temple was a fulfillment of a Messianic promise.

Notice that the Son of God cleanses His Father's house with a whip in his hand. There are no negotiations. There is no delay in His action. This is the Messiah of Israel at work. With fire indignation He applies that whip right and left to those men and those animals, and then He walks over to those tables and turns them over. He tells the people with the doves to pick up their crates and take them out of the temple. Jesus Christ does not tolerate irreverent behavior toward God. God demands glory and reverence. Look at the statement Jesus makes to these merchants in verse 16. It’s significant. “Do not make My Father’s house a house of trade.” The KJV says, “a house of merchandise." Jesus refers to the temple as “My Father's house.” John is further driving home his central point that Jesus is God. Jesus is clearly stating here who He is…the Son of God.

God hates the phony offerings and religion of men, which is going on in the temple. In Isaiah Chapter 1 verse 11 God says, “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.” In Psalm 51:16 David says, “For You will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; You will not be pleased with a burnt offering.” What does God want? David goes on to tell us…“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.”

The activity going on in the temple was a far cry from the true worship of God. Jesus indicts the whole Jewish religious system by His action. Of course we know that Jesus would soon do away with the whole sacrificial system by offering for all time a single sacrifice for sin (Heb 10:12) and would become the perfect sacrifice, once for all – “the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.”

Notice the reaction of Jesus’ disciples. READ John 2:17.

This is a reference to Psalm 69:9 in which David says, “For zeal for Your house has consumed me; and the reproaches of those who reproach You has fallen on me.” The Jews understood this psalm of David to be a Messianic reference. David had a zeal for God’s house and was persecuted for it and, in the same way the Messiah would be zealous for God’s house and be persecuted for it. When one is zealous for the truth amidst error, they are going to be a target of men. David was and Jesus would soon be.

Well you know after an incident like this the Jewish leadership is not going to remain quiet about it. READ John 2:18.

It was obvious from the boldness, power and authority that Jesus had just displayed in the temple and that they just witnessed that He was no ordinary man. The Jews, the religious leaders, suspected that perhaps Jesus is some kind of prophet sent from God. And so they go up to Jesus and say, in essence, “Show us a sign to prove you had the right to do what you just did.” This is the evidence of unbelief. “Show us a sign.” Unbelief always demands a sign, proof. Well, first of all Jesus had just showed them a sign. What He had just done was miraculous – one guy single-handedly driving out a whole crowd of merchants and their merchandise from the temple complex without even a fight. What more did they want? Unbelief wants to see signs and miracles all the time... And they saw them all. Jesus did them for three years, He did miracle after miracle. And yet, in Matthew 12 they said, “We've seen all of Your miracles, Jesus and we conclude that You did them all by the power of Satan.” Pure unbelief. No matter what Jesus said or did they refused to believe He was the Messiah.

So what was Jesus' response? READ John 2:19.

Jesus tells them, “Here’s your sign – Kill me and I'll come alive in three days.” Only He says it in such a way that they don’t get it. There is a dual meaning in Jesus’ statement here. In one sense He is certainly referring to His own body as the temple. We know that from reading down in verse 21 where it says, “But He was speaking about the temple of His body.” John offers his readers commentary based on what he and the disciples learned years later following Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. But in a real sense Jesus is also referring to the literal temple there in Jerusalem. You destroy that temple there and in three days I will raise up a new temple. When Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross, temple worship was destroyed. How is that? The veil of the temple was ripped right from the top to the bottom. For all intents and purposes temple worship was destroyed right then, wasn't it? And it would be only a short time later when the whole temple building itself would be destroyed (70 A.D.)

Jesus adds, “I will raise it up.” Well, three days after His death He didn't rebuild the temple or sew that veil back up, did He? No, but by His resurrection power He built new temples didn't He? And where are these new temples today? They are in you and me as believers in Jesus Christ – we are the church. So Jesus was saying you destroy Me you'll destroy your temple, but that's okay. I’ll not only rise up, but I will raise another temple, believers, the church.

Well, no surprise really, but the Jews didn't get His real meaning. This is obvious from their response. READ John 2:20-21.

But the disciples didn't get the message either. READ John 2:22.

It wasn't until after Jesus' resurrection that the disciples understood this. The disciples didn't know any more at this point than anybody else did. They apparently did not believe in the resurrection. What happened when Jesus got crucified? Did they all wait by the tomb for Him to come out? No. They all scattered and went into hiding. They didn't understand what was going on. In fact, when He was finally raised they didn't believe it then either. They did not believe the report from the women. It wasn't until Jesus finally showed Himself to them that they believed. After His resurrection they woke up to what He was talking about three years before right here in Jerusalem.

Well, we can’t fool Jesus. He knows our hearts and the hearts of every man, woman and child. READ John 2:23-25.

Jesus knows genuine faith and he knows false faith. He knows what is in a person's heart. He knows what they think. Verse 23 says, “many believed in His name.” So what did they believe? Evidently Jesus was doing many miracles. He had been giving sufficient signs for those people who were looking for them in verse 18 but they still didn't believe Him. You see, genuine faith accepts what it cannot see with its own eyes. Hebrews 11 says that faith is the evidence of things not seen. Unbelief by contrast seeks after signs and miracles. People might claim they believe in Jesus but when the call goes out for real commitment, service, taking up your cross and sacrificial living, those without genuine faith will turn away. Were these people in these verses truly believers in Jesus Christ? I will let God be the judge of that. Jesus’ reaction would lead us to the conclusion that they were not truly believers. Verse 24 tells us that Jesus did not entrust Himself to them. The KJV says “commit.” It’s one thing to believe. Satan and the demons believe in Jesus. But they’re not saved! It is another thing to know Jesus Christ personally, to receive Him, to trust Him as Lord and Savior. Remember what John 1:12 says? “But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.” So there is apparently more to believing than just an intellectual ascent, head knowledge. There may have been people who actually believed that Jesus was the long awaited Jewish Messiah. But whether or not they truly were willing to commit themselves to Him is another story.

Jesus Christ can see every heart. Verse 25 closes with the words, “for He Himself knew what was in man.” He knows who genuinely believes and who doesn’t. When we meet Jesus Christ, we meet Him honestly or we don't meet Him at all. Jesus is not looking for a crowd of people to cheer His miracles. He is looking for a handful of faithful followers who will commit their whole lives to Him, who are willing, yes, even to die for Him.