

April 6, 2014  
Community Baptist Church  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: John  
643 South Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as you prepare to study John 2:13-22.

1. Why were there merchants in the temple selling animals?
2. How do we explain this display of anger from God the Son?
3. Who were the “Jews” in this story and why did they ask for a sign?
4. What is the really significant point of this story?

### **AN UNUSUAL SIGN GAVE CAUSE TO BELIEVE** **John 2:13-22**

Jesus said that when He rode into Jerusalem on a colt He fulfilled the promise, “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden’” (Matthew 21:5). Yes, riding into the city on a donkey would convey meekness.

Jesus taught, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). He demonstrated that truth. He also taught, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29).

Of course this kind and meek Savior taught us, “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). Therefore, our attitude toward each other must be,

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

One day, on one of the most important days of the Jewish year, this meek and mild Jesus from the hills of Galilee fashioned a whip, marched into the temple precincts, turned over the money changers’ tables, and drove out all the merchants and their livestock. I just think you would have had a hard time convincing the people who watched this bedlam that the fellow with the whip in his hand is quite meek and mild. So how do we explain this? Why did John write about this situation in an effort to help people believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior from sin?

### **Jesus’ Disciples Remembered What Was Written (vv.13-17).**

As is true in many situations we find in the Bible, in this case also it is good to be familiar with the setting (vv.13-14). A major point of concern is that the Passover was at hand. John wrote, *The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem (v.13)*. This was one of the three very significant feasts of Israel’s calendar year. Three times a year all the adult males were to go to Jerusalem to celebrate. In the law God required, “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed” (Deuteronomy 16:16). By Jesus’ day, the rule had become that every male who lived within fifteen miles of Jerusalem had to attend.

When were these days? The Feast of Unleavened Bread began the day after Passover and lasted a week. It was held during the month Nisan 15-21 which would be equivalent to our time of March-April. The Feast of Weeks, which was also known as Pentecost or the Feast of Harvest, began on Sivan 6 which was always 50 days after Passover. The third feast, the Feast of Booths was also called the Feast of Tabernacles or Ingathering. This feast began the week after the Day of Atonement (which was on Tishri 10). The date for

Tabernacles was Tishri 15-21 which would be the same as our end of September, first of October.

Passover was always on Nisan 14. It had nothing to do with national holiday schedules and everything to do with God's clear statement in Leviticus 23:5. At this feast, God's people were to commemorate the exodus from Egypt. On that night long before, each family killed a spotless lamb and applied the blood of the lamb on the doorposts and lintel of the house so that the Death Angel would "pass over" their house. Hence the name "Passover." That night the families (or groups of 10 people) roasted the lamb (or goat) and ate the meat along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. God required that this grand event that displayed God's mercy was to be pictured annually at Jerusalem.

So we are not too surprised to read that *Jesus went up to Jerusalem*. Matthew, Mark, and Luke do not mention this event in Jerusalem. According to their accounts, they wrote about Jesus being in Jerusalem on only two occasions—once when He was a twelve-year-old child, and the second time on the week when He was crucified. Conversely, John put Jesus in Jerusalem at three different Passovers (2, 6, 11), during an unnamed feast (5:1), during the Feast of Tabernacles (7:2), and during the Feast of Dedication (10:22). So who presented the correct story? Everyone did. John typically included things that the other writers of the Gospels, who wrote much earlier than he did, left out.

That being true, it seems likely that Jesus went to Jerusalem and cleaned the merchants out of the temple early in His ministry (John's account), and then repeated the cleansing at the end of His ministry (the record of Matthew, Mark, and Luke). That there were two cleansings might be proved by some obvious differences. The writers of the Synoptic Gospels wrote that Jesus quoted the Old Testament as His authority for driving out the merchants, while John wrote that Jesus used His own words as the only authority He needed (v.16). The Synoptics say that Jesus told the people to quit using the temple area as a shortcut, but John's account didn't mention that. The Synoptics make no mention of Jesus giving the very important sign of "destroy this house and I'll raise it in three days" as John wrote in His account (v.19). This sign is very important because at His trial Jesus' adversaries will bring it up.

Whenever the Passover was, we can be quite sure that Jesus joined approximately 2 million people in Jerusalem. Records from Jesus' day indicate that over 200,000 sacrifices were offered each Passover. If we figure ten people for each lamb or goat (the law's requirement) that puts the number of participants (none of which were Gentiles) at over 2 million.

At this huge gathering, the merchants were on hand. *In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there (v.14)*. The term "temple" would have included the whole complex which took in more than just the temple structure, but also the women's court, the court of the Gentiles, and Solomon's porches. In Jesus' day, the merchants would set up their tables in the court of the Gentiles. This became known as Annas' Bazaar because Annas, the former High Priest, was in charge of it. It seems to be general knowledge that this circus cheated the people and made Annas very wealthy.

In many ways, the bazaar was a practical solution to practical problems. It was easier for the pilgrims to buy sacrifices at the temple than to haul them to Jerusalem from wherever the people lived and came from. The down side is that the merchants charged exorbitant fees for the animals that people would sacrifice for various offerings (doves, lambs, goats, oxen). Especially during the Passover, the visitors would come from out of town, buy the "family" lamb, take it to their quarters for a couple of days, and then take it to the temple on the day of Passover to sacrifice it. Such animals could be purchased outside the temple, but the sacrifices had to be approved by the "inspector priests" who would generally determine that the animal was not "spotless enough" to offer to God. Therefore, the poor pilgrim was forced to buy a "pre-approved" animal from the temple merchants for about ten times as much.

Also money-changers were necessary so that the males could pay their annual poll tax of ½ shekel. Of course, that tax had to be paid with Jewish coins which would be either the Sanctuary shekel or the Galilean shekel. These coins were required ostensibly because they were more accurate in weight and pure silver. The tax was equivalent to about two days' wage for a common laborer. According to some ancient evidence, the exchange rate might have been as high as 12.5%. Other scholars think that the fee might have been as high

as a day's wage to exchange some coins. It went like this. If two guys showed up and wanted to pay the tax, they could not share one shekel. They had to exchange the shekel for two ½ shekels and each time that transaction took place, the money-changers charged for it.

We can easily understand that the God who said: "*Unequal weights and unequal measures are both alike an abomination to the LORD*" (Proverbs 20:10) would not think kindly on such a scene.

That is the setting. Now what did Jesus do when He saw this abuse (vv.14-16)? He drove out the merchants (vv.15). *And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables (v.15).* The picture looks extreme to human nature. We expect a tyrant to get mad and drive his opponents away with a whip. But how do we explain Jesus losing His temper?

Since Jesus never sinned, it is impossible that He lost His temper in this display of righteous indignation or righteous anger. It seems most obvious in this case that Jesus demonstrated what Paul meant when he wrote that we should be angry but not sin. Still, even with that explanation, an effeminate culture has a hard time coming to grips with this picture. A culture that has no sense of right or wrong, a culture that preaches toleration of everything (except righteousness) has difficulty interpreting this scene.

In fact, this scene should have caused the people who watched it to remember what their Bible said. The last prophet to speak God's message before the 400 years of God's silence that preceded John, declared, *But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap (Malachi 3:2).* And here He was! God the King had showed up and was displaying just a glimmer of the wrath He has reserved for sinners in the last day. Did those very religious merchants think of the verse in their Bible that warned, *The time has come; the day has arrived. Let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn, for wrath is upon all their multitude (Ezekiel 7:12).* Somehow it seems very unlikely that the merchants had any inkling that Jesus' actions would have been justified and foretold to some extent in their Bible.

Jesus didn't just drive the merchants out but He explained why He drove them out. *"And he told those who sold the pigeons, 'Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade'"*

(v.16). Since Jesus was the exact imprint of God (Heb. 1:3), would we not expect Him to display wrath at some point against those who abused the place that represented God's presence? God put great emphasis on the fact that He was represented by the building, the temple in Jerusalem. It is the place where He chose to put His name (Deut 16:16). Any doubt that God meant by that place, the temple, was cleared up when Solomon dedicated the first temple and God made His presence known. God's presence was so obvious *that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God (2 Chronicles 5:14).*

That was then. Things change with the passing of time. Over time, God's people came to take God's temple for granted. They even desecrated it at times like the time when Ahaz put a pagan altar in the house where God chose to put His name. We read in 2 King 16:15 that Ahaz had a copy of an altar he saw in Damascus made, and he put it in the place of the bronze altar. What a blasphemous thing to do.

Because God intended for His house to represent Him and be the place of worshiping Him, He promised severe judgment against the people. God sent Jeremiah to the temple gates to declare, *"Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD'" (Jeremiah 7:4).* The prophet went on to say in that sermon, *"Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD. Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel. And now, because you have done all these things, declares the LORD, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh" (Jeremiah 7:11-14).* That was a very serious warning.

True to His word, God sent the Babylonians to destroy the city of Jerusalem, and the temple, and kill thousands of citizens and take many others captive leaving only the poorest of the people. Do you think those people got a picture of God's wrath against the sin they heaped upon God's house?

God the Son displayed the same kind of wrath against sin. The people who watched the spectacle and the merchants who felt the sting of His whip should have taken note. Within thirty-five years of this cleansing, the temple was once again destroyed when the Roman armies marched in and destroyed the city, leveled the temple, and scattered the people. Hear Jesus' warning the second time He cleansed the temple at the beginning of the week when He was crucified: "*See, your house is left to you desolate*" (Matthew 23:38).

How did the disciples respond to Jesus' actions (v.17)? We would not have blamed them if they would have been a bit embarrassed. Try to imagine the pandemonium. Animals were running helter-skelter through the temple precincts. Tables were overturned, money scattered, and people screaming and running for their lives from this "mad-man." This bazaar had been in place for years and was really quite an accepted fact by the people, though not an appreciated fact — kind of like gasoline tax. Surely the authorities would respond. Surely Messiah would not act so passionately against an established tradition of the religious leaders, would He?

We don't have to imagine what it was like. Still God's passion for His holiness causes people to question Him. Even pagans who claim to disbelieve God's existence react with accusations against God when natural phenomena or human wickedness wreaks destruction. How could the God of love also be a God of wrath? The same questions and accusations arise when God breaks out in anger against the sins of humanity.

The disciples saw it firsthand and they remembered what their Bible said. *His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume Me"* (v.17). Because He was God, Jesus was zealous for pure worship of God. Because He was God, Jesus was passionate about the purity of His house. Jesus' response was very significant because this particular structure was a tribute to Herod who remodeled the "second temple" to be a grandiose complex. Though it was the work of man's hands, it still represented God's presence to the people. This is where sacrifices were offered to God and where corporate worship took place. And so all the people connected it with God somehow.

At some point, the disciples connected Old Testament Scripture with Jesus. They remembered the words, *For zeal for your house has*

*consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me* (Psalm 69:9). David drew this conclusion years earlier. But now the disciples saw that same attitude displayed in the One they believed was Messiah. He fulfilled Scripture before their very eyes. Christ had given them reason to believe Him! So should the rest of the people believe!

### **Jesus' Disciples Believed the Word Jesus Had Spoken (vv.18-22).**

As the dust settled over the chaotic scene, the Jews gathered and asked Jesus for a sign of authority (vv.18-20). These were most likely the religious authorities who demanded an explanation. *So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?"* (v.18). The term "Jews" would have referred to someone in authority. Surely the temple guard would have been there because it was their responsibility to maintain order—especially during a feast with so many people in town. Or they might have gone to get Annas or maybe representatives from the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jews.

The response of the people in charge is telling. Here was a man from the hills of Galilee who was not part of the authoritative bodies and who had no authority granted by those bodies. He totally disrupted a lucrative business on one of the busiest days of the year. He was guilty of assault and battery. And they asked, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" Would a miraculous sign really convince them that Jesus had the right to do this outlandish thing? Later John would write, *Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him* (John 12:37). Yeah, that was the intentional blindness of the leaders.

Commonsense would have expected an immediate arrest with no questions asked. Apparently, something about Jesus caused the religious leaders to fear Him. Sure the mass of people would have resisted the authorities if they arrested Jesus. But it would seem that maybe the rulers knew in their conscience that Jesus was exactly right to run them out of the temple. Yet that fear did not keep them from demanding that Jesus do what they wanted Him to do in order to satisfy them.

There is an important principle in play here. The picture of Jesus doing what He needed to do and the religious authorities responding very weakly reminds us that we are not in charge! It is not unusual for mere humans to pray to their Creator demanding that He do their will. But our will is not the play book for life, God's will is. In spite of our rude and demanding nature, God graciously invites us to come to Him through Jesus Christ and make our requests known.

Jesus did not cave in to the demands of human authority. Rather, He gave them a future sign of His authority. *Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (v.19)*. The Jews would misunderstand because of Jesus' careful language. They wanted a sign of His authority and He told them that if they destroyed this temple, He would raise it up in three days. The verb translated *destroy* means to loosen, release, or disperse. But the word also means to undo, bring to naught, or break down which is the way Jesus used the word. The term *this temple* naturally would have sounded to the Jews like Jesus referred to the compound in which they were standing. In particular, Jesus used the word *naos* which referred to the inner most part, the most sacred part of the temple. The *naos* was the inner part, main building of the temple complex. The veil that separated the holy place from the holy of holies (the one that ripped when Jesus was crucified) was located in the *naos* (Matthew 27:51).

Jesus challenged the Jews to break down the most holy place and He would raise it up in three days. To *raise it up* is the word *ereirao*, which means to stir one's self or rise up from slumber. The word also means to build a building. Jesus spoke of stirring Himself from the dead, but that would not register at all with the religious rulers. Jesus gave them a sign that if they would have been thinking they would have understood some time later. Christ's resurrection was the greatest of all signs that confirmed His authority as God Himself.

The religious leaders were incredulous. *The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" (v.20)*. Their response is clear proof that they were clueless. They had no spiritual aptitude for God's truth and so the fulness of meaning in Christ's promise escaped them. People who are devoid of spiritual understanding are stuck with thinking earthly

thoughts about temporary life. So the Jews argued about a literal building that really impressed them.

It is much like people you know who have no grasp of spiritual truth. When you try to discuss with them the wonderful hope Paul had of putting off this earthly tent in order to occupy the heavenly house, they are thinking about a three-bedroom English Tudor on five acres of land on the outskirts of heaven. That is their idea of the "mansion just over the hilltop." Jesus just promised the most remarkable sign affirming His authority, the resurrection of His body, and the religious guys were transfixed by stones and mortar.

The disciples understood the sign (vv.21-22). John must have understood that Jesus spoke about His body because he wrote, *But he was speaking about the temple of his body (v.21)*. It was easy for John to write confidently that Jesus spoke about His glorified body because he had many years to digest the truth. But we need to remember that it took awhile for John to be convinced. At first, he was distraught that Jesus was killed. When he first heard that Jesus had "rebuilt the temple" he didn't believe (Luke 24:11). But he ran to the tomb (John 20:4). He saw the empty tomb and grave clothes (20:8). He believed. Then how is it that he went back to fishing? It took awhile for truth to register. John didn't quite understand the Master's plan for him at that time. But he understood well when he wrote this story over 50 years after the fact.

All of the disciples understood after the sign came to pass. *When therefore 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 (v.22)*. Because of this sign, this miracle, the disciples believed the Scripture. Picture a couple of discouraged disciples walking the road to Emmaus. Listen with them as Jesus, *beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:27)*. It is interesting that the history of the early Church written in Acts is full of references to the Old Testament Scripture, promises, pictures and types the apostles saw Jesus fulfill. Once Jesus opened their spiritual eyes, they had it. Therefore, they believed what Jesus said.

Do you believe only what you see, hear, and experience yourself, or do you believe everything in the Bible? Do you believe

only what makes sense, or do you trust what you read in the Scripture? Do you think you must be able to fully explain Jesus before you will trust Him to be your Savior? Do you “run things by” God to get His opinion before you decide what you think is best, or do you trust what He says in His word—Period!? John wrote these things so that we will believe in Jesus.