

GOSPEL OF JOHN
JESUS CLEANSING THE TEMPLE
JOHN 2:12-22

Introduction

John is the only writer to record this first clearing or cleansing of the Temple by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

A second cleansing occurred at the end of Jesus' ministry about three years later and that event is recorded in the other three Gospels. So, as we look at this today, what exactly was going on here?

I. WE SEE CHRIST'S PASSOVER IN THE TEMPLE! (Vs. 13-14)
"Passover" was and is the most important of the 3 great religious feasts to the Jews. By the time of Christ, it had become a major Spring festival.

To prepare for *Passover*:

Roads would be repaired for the great influx of people.

Tombs would be whitewashed so nobody would accidentally touch them and defile themselves.

Homes would be cleaned, cooking utensils washed, and the house was searched to make sure no leaven was found.

Those living in Jerusalem were expected to put up guests, so they thoroughly cleaned their houses.

***Passover*, if you remember, is a time when the Jews celebrate their deliverance from Egyptian bondage by the LORD!**

The *Passover* was an annual memorial event that was instituted by the LORD. (The institution and requirements for observing it are found in *Exodus 12-13*)

Jews from all over would come to the Temple in Jerusalem to present their offerings of a lamb.

The animals would be sacrificed in the Temple. The fat would be burned, and the blood would be offered on the altar.

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The meat would be taken home, and roasted, and eaten by the family during a detailed celebration of the event.

During *Passover* was also the time that they would pay the Temple tax of a silver ½ shekel coin.

So, "*Passover*" was a special time of WORSHIP—both in the Temple, and in the family. **It is the *Passover* meal that Jesus ate with His Disciples just before His crucifixion.**

Jerusalem was always bustling with activity and excitement during *Passover* as it was the biggest event of the year and Jewish families, both near and far, would travel to the Jerusalem Temple for the feasts.

I say that **we see Christ's *Passover* in the Temple**, because

- 1) Christ is Jehovah God Who instituted *Passover* and
- 2) Because *Passover* pictured what He came for—To shed His blood to redeem us from the bondage of our sin!
- 3) Christ observed *Passover* which, to me, shows His acceptance of what was yet to come to Him at the cross of Calvary.

According to *verse 14*, Jesus went to the Temple, and saw merchants selling oxen, sheep and doves (the sacrificial animals). Understand that it was inconvenient for many people to bring their own animals with them on their journey to Jerusalem, so they would buy their sacrificial animals in Jerusalem.

Jesus also saw the money-changers, whose job it was to exchange the money that the people brought for the special silver ½ shekel for the Temple tax.

The people couldn't use just any coin for the Temple tax.

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People came from all over the then known world, and some of the coins had the impression of heathen gods or of Caesar on them.

It was considered blasphemy to offer a coin with the image of a heathen, for the service of God's Temple. So, the money-changers would exchange their coins for the Temple coin.

What had happened here though is that the Temple had become a Mall of sorts for the convenience of the people. It was a one-stop shopping center for everything you needed for *Passover* in one place.

They were using the **OUTER COURT** of the Temple for this marketplace. There were four courts in the Temple.

- 1) The **COURT OF THE PRIESTS**, which was the inner court, where only the Priests could go.
- 2) The **COURT OF THE JEWS**, where only natural-born Jews were allowed. It was this court where they handed over their sacrifices to the Priests.
- 3) The **COURT OF WOMEN**, where the women were allowed, and could go in no further.
- 4) The **COURT OF THE GENTILES** was on the outside of these others, and it was this large open area that had been turned into this great marketplace.

When Jesus came to the Temple, He saw all the booths set up for the merchants and the money-changers. **WHAT WAS THE PROBLEM?**

Well, **the marketplace had moved into the Temple area, and the Temple of God was being dishonored.**

Instead of worship, prayer, and praise, Jesus found a feeding frenzy of corruption and greed.

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We find out more about what was happening from historians:

- 1) Annas, the High Priest had sold franchises for the concession stands to the various merchants and money-changers. He would sell them to the highest bidder. So, he was making a killing!
- 2) The merchants were charging inflated prices for the oxen, sheep and doves. Much the way that unscrupulous people sell inflated goods to folks who are at their mercy today. (Think of Hurricane price gouging!)
- 3) If you brought your own oxen sheep, or dove, the Priests would tell you that it was unclean and you had to purchase one of their "*clean*" animals. They might allow you to trade in your "*unclean*" animal. THEN, they would turn around and sell your "*unclean*" animal to someone else as a "*clean*" animal.
- 4) The money-changers would cheat the people by charging an unfair exchange rate for their foreign coins.

So, what Jesus saw was GREED, CORRUPTION, and WICKEDNESS being carried on right there in the Temple of God in the Court of the Gentiles.

The COURT OF THE GENTILES was a place set aside for those who were not born Jewish, but had converted to Judaism. (i.e. They had seen that Jehovah God was the one and only true God and they renounced their pagan ways, and turned to the God of the Jews.)

Proselytes were looked upon by the Jews as being in a "*lower class*". For a Gentile to become a Jew, he had to be circumcised, baptized, and offer a sacrifice. After his baptism, he was given a new Jewish name, and he had to cut off all ties with his family, even his wife if she did not convert.

Jesus looked upon these Gentiles as a very special people.

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The Jews thought that by their birth, they had inherited a place in God's Kingdom. They thought that all God required was for them to be born a Jew. Of course we know from the book of Romans that is not the case.

These Gentiles, though, had not been BORN as Jews. They CHOSE to be Jewish because they CHOSE to serve and honor the God of the Jews! They had SACRIFICED to come into God's family and they WANTED to worship God in His Temple!

So, Jesus was appalled at what He saw taking place in the Court of the Gentiles. The marketplace was NOT outside the Temple gates but was inside the Temple area where these Gentiles would worship.

II. WE SEE CHRIST'S PURIFYING OF THE TEMPLE! (Vs. 15-16)

Jesus was no doubt angry at the dishonest, greedy, practices of these money changers and merchants. He particularly disliked the placement of this market place on the Temple grounds rather than outside of them! They were making a mockery of God's house of worship.

Just imagine what Jesus was HEARING! All the commotion, the arguing over exchange rates, the bargaining over the price of the animals, the angry voices of those who were being cheated.

Next, imagine what Jesus was SMELLING! The stench of the livestock market and their manure.

Then, imagine what Jesus was WATCHING! The greed of the merchants, the cheating, the profiteering, and the circus-like atmosphere in a place that was supposed to be for WORSHIP!

Jesus got ANGRY. Because this wasn't the way His Father's house was supposed to be treated!

I sometimes wonder what God thinks of His Church in the 21st Century. Many have gotten off the path that He wants us to follow!

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Some have turned His house into something He never intended for it to be! **Many are just going through the motions of something they call worship and have lost their focus on what true worship of our Heavenly Father should be!**

I once heard someone put it this way: *"Our problem today is that we worship our work, work at our play, and play at our worship"*

As I said in my introduction, shortly before Jesus was crucified, He went into Jerusalem and AGAIN He found His Father's house being desecrated. He cleaned it out a second time! Listen to what He said – *Matthew 21:13–"And he said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves."*

God's plan is for His House to be a house of prayer. It is to be a special place! It is to be a place of worship and praise and prayer!

Vs. 16, "My Father's house" - The Jews had taken over the Court of the Gentiles and excluded them from worship. All the buying and selling was a DISTRACTION from true worship.

Jesus saw their attitude and actions! **Our attitude toward the house of God, is a reflection of our attitude toward God!**

We need to be UNDISTRACTED in our worship of God! I realize that there will always be some natural distractions. Most of these can't be helped. BUT we need to be sensitive about being a DISTRACTION from the worship of God!

God's house is to be as found in *Psalm 122:1–"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord."*

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III. WE SEE CHRIST'S PASSION FOR THE TEMPLE! (Vs. 17)

This is a quote from *Psalm 69:9*—a Messianic Psalm, that prophesies of the coming Messiah.

When Jesus cleansed the Temple, He was showing them that He was truly the Messiah sent from God!

His zeal was eating Him up! He had a PASSION for the things of His Heavenly Father!

Oh how there is a great need to have a passion when it comes to the things of God!

Some are more passionate about sports, about eating, about their job, about their entertainment, about any number of things than they are about their worship of Christ, about serving Christ, or about His Church.

Vs. 18 – The Jewish religious leaders wanted to know: “*Who do you think you are to be doing this?*” They understood that Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah when He called the Temple “*My Father’s house*”. “*If you’re really the Messiah, show us a sign.*”

Vs. 19-20 – It took 46 years to build the temple they were standing in.

- 1) There was no way they were going to tear it down.
- 2) And, even if they did, how could Jesus build it back up in just 3 days? They thought that this was ludicrous.

BY THE WAY, this was the charge that they used against Jesus to crucify Him. (*Matthew 26:60-61*)

They also used this to ridicule Him while He hung on the cross, (*Matthew 27:40*)

But, what was Jesus talking about?

Vs. 21 – Jesus was talking about His BODY, which they would destroy BUT, as God, He would raise 3 days later.

They had desecrated God’s Temple! God would raise up a new meeting place for worship that centered on Jesus. They came to the Temple to offer their sacrifices. God would sacrifice His Son Jesus, so there would be no more need of a Temple.

With the resurrection of Jesus, God raised up a new Temple in just 3 days!

Vs. 22 – Nobody got what Jesus was saying—UNTIL AFTER the resurrection.

Conclusion

So, how is this relevant for us?

Jesus wants a clean temple. AND ... He’s not just talking about our Church building. Jesus was talking about His “*body*” – *2:21*

You and I, as Believers, are part of the “*body*”, the “*body of Christ.*”
Romans 12:5 – “*So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.*”

Jesus is walking through His “*temple*” every day! He’s looking at His “*body*” of believers! What does He see? Does His “*body*”— i.e. His “*temple*”— need cleansing AGAIN?

Let’s make it a little more personal. (*1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:15, 19-20*)
We need to be clean “*temples*” to present to Him. If Jesus cleaned the Temple in Jerusalem, maybe He has some house-cleaning He needs to do here today.

Is there something in our life that is defiling God’s “*temple*”?

Is there something that Jesus needs to drive out of our hearts?

Is there something that’s standing between us and the right worship of holy God?

Only you can answer that for yourself and only Jesus can cleanse your heart!