

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

The Cleansing of the Temple

John 2:12-13

Part 1

What is your mission in life? What is driving you forward? What is consuming your time, energy and resources? For most people sadly to say, it is all about the things of this world. It is all about things that are destined to pass away. For most people their lives are wrapped up in their homes, in their families, in their careers, in their comforts, in their pleasures. This certainly was not the way it was with Christ.

Remember how He responded to His mother when she wanted Jesus to intervene in some way at the wedding feast in Cana? What did He say? "**Woman, what do I have to do with you? My hour has not yet come.**" Why did He respond in this way? His relationship with His mother had changed. He was no longer basing His actions on her agenda, but rather on His Father's agenda. And He wanted His mother to know this.

Hopefully our lives are being shaped in this very same way. Not by what we want, not by what others want, but rather by what He wants.

But this is not easy, there will be costs involved. It will cost us time, energy and resources. Even in seeking to fulfill the most basic demands that God has placed on our lives. The Lord has called us to meditate on the Law day and night, He has called us to devote ourselves to prayer. He has called us to fervently love one another from the heart. He has called us to share our faith. These things and many more things like them should not be taken lightly. We must be willing to count the cost of it.

This weekend we will see the extent that Jesus is willing to go in order to fulfill the most basic of God's demands upon His life. Hopefully we will be willing to expend the same kind of time, energy and resources, as He was willing to expend in order to meet the same kind of basic demands.

This passage that we will begin studying this weekend contains an account of Christ cleansing the temple in Jerusalem. This is the first of two cleansings. The second cleansing is recorded for us in **Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17** and **Luke 19:45-16** and takes place near the end of His ministry.

As we begin to study this account of Christ's first cleaning of the temple we are going to learn a great deal about Christ. This weekend we will only consider the very first thing that we learn, and what is that?

We learn that Jesus was committed to the *Passover* (John 2:12-13). Under Jewish Law every male member of a family, 13 years of age or older, was required to participate in the Passover festival. In terms of what was expected of a Jewish male, this was basic. It could not get any more basic than this. And as we shall see in **John 2:12-13**, Jesus was very determined to fulfill that obligation. Let us begin our study by reading **verse 12, "After this He went down to Capernaum, He and His mother, and His brothers, and His disciples; and there they stayed a few days."**

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What does it mean when it says that "**He went down to Capernaum?**" When the Apostle John says that Jesus went down to Capernaum he means that Jesus literally walked 16 miles basically downhill from Cana in an east-northeasterly direction in order to get to Capernaum. Where exactly was Capernaum? It was on the northern edge of the Sea of Galilee.

Fortunately His trip to Capernaum was not by Himself. In fact, He went with a small group of people. Let us read the verse once again, "**After this (after the miracle at Cana of Galilee) He went down to Capernaum, He and His mother, and His brothers, and His disciples.**" Obviously we know exactly who His mother was but who are these so-called brothers? I believe that we would have to conclude based on the Scripture that the brothers mentioned here in this verse are, technically speaking, His biological half-brothers the offspring of Joseph and Mary.

I know that many people are surprised to hear that Jesus had brothers but this should not surprise us at all. Why? Though the Scriptures clearly teach us that Mary was a virgin up until the birth of Christ, it never indicates that she remained a virgin after the birth of Christ. Therefore, we should understand the reference to "brothers" as referring, from a technical standpoint, to his half-brothers, the biological offspring of Joseph and Mary.

Besides His mother and His brothers, who else accompanied Jesus to Capernaum? It says that His disciples also accompanied Him. Who were these disciples? Based on the teaching of **John 1:35-51** we would have to conclude that the disciples who accompanied Jesus to Capernaum were the same disciples who accompanied Jesus to Cana. And who most likely would that have been? The disciples that most likely accompanied Jesus on His trip from Cana to Capernaum were John, Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathanael.

We now know who traveled with Jesus from Cana to Capernaum but why were they traveling with Him? They were on their way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. How do we know this? Let us now read **John 2:13**, "**And the Passover of the Jews was at hand and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.**"

The Passover of the Jews was instituted by God to celebrate their *deliverance* from Egyptian bondage (Exodus 12:1-28).

The celebration of this deliverance necessitated that the Jews would acquire a male lamb one year old, and without blemish, which would be with them from the 10th of Nisan until the lamb was sacrificed on the 14th of Nisan. In other words, the lamb would have to enter into a special relationship with the family for a period of four days, at the end of

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March or the first of April before it was slaughtered and then eaten.

Why would the celebration of their deliverance from Egypt involve them taking a lamb into their home for four days much like you would a pet dog, only to sacrifice it four days later? Because this is exactly what they had been commanded to do on the very first Passover.

Let me read for you **Exodus 12:1-7**, "Now the Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt (2) 'This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you. (3) Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, "On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their father's households, a lamb for each household. (4) Now if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his neighbor nearest the house are to take one according to the number of persons in them; according to what each man should eat, you are to divide the lamb. (5) Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. (6) And you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight. (7) Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it.'"

These were the specific instructions given to the nation of Israel 3,500 years ago concerning the Passover lamb and its blood. But why were these instructions given to the Jews who were then in Egypt? These instructions were given because God had determined that without the blood of a very special lamb being shed and displayed in the very specific way that He had described, there would be no deliverance

This becomes clear as the Lord, through Moses, goes on to give further instruction concerning how this lamb was to be treated after it had been slain and its blood displayed in this very specific way. Let us now read **Exodus 12:8-14**, "And they shall eat the flesh that same night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. (9) Do not eat any of it raw or boiled at all with water, but rather roasted with fire, both its head and its legs along with its entrails. (10) And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire. (11) Now you shall eat it in this manner: with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in our hand; and you shall eat it in haste – it is the Lord's passover. (12) For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments - I am the Lord. (13) And the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance."

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The Passover is an incredibly important biblical event. In fact, the Passover was such an incredibly important event that it was to be celebrated by the Jews as a permanent ordinance. And of course, the Passover could not be properly celebrated without a very special *lamb* being sacrificed (Exodus 12:1-7).

Fortunately for the Jews involved in the first Passover, they did not have to go very far to slaughter their Passover lamb. But this obviously changed over time. In the time of Christ, the permanent site for the slaughtering of the Passover lambs was the *temple* in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 35). And of course this meant that Jews living a long way from Jerusalem would have to make a difficult trip in order to get there, which was the case with Jesus and those traveling with Him. This brings us back to **John 2:12**.

We have already seen that Jesus and the group traveling with Him in order to go to Jerusalem for the Passover had traveled approximately sixteen miles from Cana to Capernaum, but this was the easy part of their trip. The much harder part of the trip was still ahead of them. They apparently needed to use a few days in Capernaum to get ready for the difficult trip that was still to come. How do we know this?

Let us go back again to **John 1:12** and read the verse, "**After this He went down to Capernaum He and His mother, and His brothers, and His disciples; and there they stayed a few days.**" Why did they need to stay there a few days? They needed to stay in Capernaum a few days to *prepare* for their trip to Jerusalem. What would this preparation consist of? First of all they needed to stay in Capernaum to get some *rest* so that they would be ready for the hard trip ahead of them. And it was a difficult trip.

The trip they were preparing to take from Capernaum, which was 700 feet below sea level to Jerusalem, which was 2600 feet above sea level, was not an easy trip. The trip from Capernaum to Jerusalem meant that they would have to walk approximately 100 miles uphill. You might say, "That is not a big deal" but let me ask you a question. When was the last time you hiked 100 miles uphill?

There is very likely another reason they needed to stay in Capernaum for a few days. They also very likely needed to stay in Capernaum a few days in order to secure a *lamb* suitable for the Passover.

In light of the wedding feast in Cana I would find it very doubtful that this group had the opportunity to secure a lamb earlier, which would mean that the best time for them to do this would have been in Capernaum, which was a fairly large city, rather than waiting to go to Jerusalem. And I am very confident that Jesus and the group with Him would have wanted to purchase the lamb in Capernaum rather than Jerusalem.

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Why would I say this? First of all Most Jews, if possible, would have wanted to avoid the fees charged by the moneychangers in the temple.

If a Jew had to buy a lamb in Jerusalem they would have to go into the temple in order to buy a lamb suitable for sacrifice. Why? They would have to do this because that is where the sellers of these high quality lambs would congregate. I am not sure what the price of lambs might have been in Capernaum versus the price of lambs in the temple in Jerusalem, but I do know that those buying any animal in the temple would have to pay a hefty fee to a moneychanger.

When people came into Jerusalem and needed to buy an animal, they would find that whatever currency they brought into the temple to purchase an animal would have to be converted into Tyrian coinage, which was the official coinage of the temple. And, of course, a fee was charged by the moneychangers to make this conversion.

Why Tyrian coinage? In many countries and provinces coins were of uncertain alloy. When times were hard, rulers were able to stretch their available gold and silver by making the coins a little less valuable, either by simply reducing the amount of precious metal in them or by substituting some cheaper metal for part of the gold or silver. But the Tyrians were traders and knew the value of a stable currency. So they insisted their coins be of exactly the right weight and contain exactly the right amount of precious metal. This particular phenomenon most likely explains why Tyrian coinage became the official coinage of the temple.

Why would Jews in general try and purchase a lamb prior to getting to Jerusalem? First of all, the reason why Jews in general would want to buy a lamb before getting to Jerusalem was to avoid the fee charged by the moneychangers.

But for those Jews having to travel long distances to get to Jerusalem such as Jesus and His companions, I would think that this would not be a major consideration. I would think they would simply say, "This trip is hard enough without transporting a lamb, we will simply pay the fee to the money changer in Jerusalem and if the animals are more expensive in the temple, we will simply suffer it."

But though Jesus would fall into this group of people, for Jesus, purchasing the lamb in Capernaum rather than in Jerusalem was a moral issue (John 2:13-16). We will see this very clearly next week when He enters the temple and sees the sellers of oxen and sheep as well as the money changers seated at their tables. He will have zero tolerance for what He will observe there.

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Let me ask you a question, had Jesus ever been in Jerusalem for the Passover before this particular Passover? The answer would have to be what? Yes! As I shared with you the Law required that every Jewish male 13 years and older was required to go to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Would He have seen the sellers and moneychangers in the temple on earlier visits? Of course!

But this time is very different. He has now publicly presented Himself as the Messiah. This will not be like His other trips into the temple. His mother may not realize what is coming, His disciples may not know what is coming. His brothers certainly do not know what is coming. But Jesus knows what is coming. And there is no way that Jesus would be willing to go into the temple in Jerusalem to purchase an animal for sacrifice at the Passover. If He were going to secure a Passover lamb, it would have very likely been while He and His companions spent those few days in Capernaum.

Jesus was committed to celebrating the Passover. He was willing to travel from Cana to Capernaum, which was approximately 16 miles. He was then willing to spend a few days in Capernaum preparing for the trip from Capernaum to Jerusalem, which would require Him over a period of at least a week walking approximately 100 miles uphill. And if this were not difficult enough I believe that He purchased a lamb in Capernaum, which only added to the difficulty of the trip.

We hopefully now have a good firm handle on why Jesus and the group traveling with Him had made their way from Cana to Capernaum. They were on their way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.

This is all very ironic. Jesus, our *Passover* Lamb, was going to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7). What does **1 Corinthians 5:7-8** say in addressing the Church? "**Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. (8) Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.**"

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CONCLUSION

Jesus was going to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. He was doing something very basic to His faith. It was something He had been doing since He was a young boy. But His willingness to expend His time, energy and resources to fulfill this basic requirement had not diminished.

How about ourselves? Are we willing to invest our time energy and resources into the reading and study of God's word? Are we willing to invest our time energy and resources in the pursuit of prayer? Are we willing to invest our time energy and resources in the pursuit of Christian fellowship? Are we willing to invest our time energy and resources in the proclamation of the gospel?

What is shaping our lives? Is our life being shaped by our desires or by the *commandments* of God?