

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **The Cleansing of the Temple**

**John 2:14-17**

#### **Part 2**

On June 23, 2003, the NPR radio show "fresh air with Terry Gross" interviewed Dr. Samuel Barondes the author of a new book, *Better than Prozac: Creating the Next Generation of Psychiatric Drugs*. The book traces the history and analyzes the effectiveness of the current crop of antidepressants and considers the drugs of the future.

Certainly I don't want to be critical of those who have chosen to spend their lives creating better and better drugs to treat this very serious problem of depression. But for the Christian there is a better solution. It is called worship.

There is nothing quite so encouraging for us as Christians than to choose to come into the Lord's presence and focus on Him rather than on ourselves. Can this very simple change in focus improve the quality of our lives? Of course! Could it lift the veil of depression that afflicts certain Christians from time to time and usher them into a life filled with praise and thanksgiving? Absolutely!

But we need to understand that this ability to focus on the Lord and His goodness toward us will not take place in a vacuum. It will only take place if we are committed to removing anything from our lives that is inconsistent with worship. We should not be so naïve as to think that we will be able to focus on the Lord and His goodness to us while we tolerate things in our lives that are displeasing to the Lord. It is only as we purpose ourselves to remove the obstacles to worship that we will receive the grace to enjoy Him and His goodness to us.

The importance of keeping our lives free from anything that is inconsistent with worship will be forcefully brought home to us in the passage that we began to study last week.

This brings us back to John 2:12-25 which is John's account of Christ cleansing the temple. And the question that we have been asking is this: What do we learn about Jesus in John 2:12-25? And of course there will be a number of things that we will learn.

The first thing that we learned was that Jesus was committed to the Passover (John 2:12-13). Let me read for you **John 2:12-13, "After this (after the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee) He (Jesus) went down to Capernaum, He and His mother, and His brothers, and His disciples; and there they stayed a few days. (13) And the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem."**

Getting to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover was not an easy thing. He first of all walked 16 miles downhill from Cana to Capernaum. Then after making certain preparations in Capernaum, which took several days He then walked approximately 100 miles uphill to get to Jerusalem. Was Jesus committed to the Jewish Passover? I think this is obvious.

Jesus was willing to expend a great amount of time, energy and resources to fulfill this very basic and fundamental requirement of the Mosaic Law.

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Hopefully we will be just as conscientious in fulfilling the requirements of a disciple of Christ even though the demands of those basic requirements will never be quite as overwhelming in a functional sense as the demands of the Mosaic Law.

What else do we learn about Jesus in **John 2:15-25**? We not only learn that Jesus was committed to the Passover, but we learn that Jesus possessed a *zeal* for the sanctity of God's house (John 1:15-17). Let us read **John 2:14-17**, "**(14) And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves and money changers seated. (15) And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers, and overturned their tables; (16) and to those who were selling the doves He said, 'Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a house of merchandise.' (17) His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for Thy House will consume Me.'**"

Let us now take a look at **verse 14**, "**And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves and money changers seated.**" What do we see in this verse? Jesus and His companions finally arrived in Jerusalem after a long and difficult trip. At some point in time after arriving in Jerusalem Jesus made His way to the temple. In fact, He may have been going to the temple often after His arrival for the Passover, but there was one particular visit to the temple that was particularly noteworthy. And it is this one particular noteworthy visit that is being recorded for us here in **John 2:14**.

As He entered the temple on this particular occasion, He would have found Himself in the outer court, which was known as the "Court of the Gentiles." This was a place that any person, Jew or Gentile could come to worship God. Encircling the outer edge of the court of the Gentiles was a magnificent colonnade of white marble pillars three rows deep on the north, west, and east side forming very impressive porches. But the most beautiful porch of all was actually on the South side.

The porch on the south side of the Court of the Gentiles had four rows of marble pillars and was approximately 105 feet in width. The total number of marble pillars supporting this roof was 162. This particular porch was known as the "royal porch." It is in this area that the priests most likely allowed the sellers of sacrificial animals and the moneychangers to set up shop. And it is in this area of the temple that we find Jesus most likely encountering the sellers of the oxen and sheep and the moneychangers seated.

This encounter between Jesus and those He found here in **John 1:14** was not by accident. Jesus was on a mission. He had some important work to do. And that mission was not to purchase an animal or to convert coinage, but rather to remove all those he found in **John 1:14**. He was there to remove what should not be there.

But exactly how was He going to do this? Perhaps He could simply ask them nicely to leave. Perhaps He could just sit down and reason with them. But He chose neither of these options.

Let us go on to read **John 1:15**, "**And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers, and overturned their tables.**"

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When it says that He made a scourge, we should not think of the type of scourge that was used by the Romans to scourge Christ. We should not think of a scourge made of leather imbedded with pieces of metal and bone. This scourge was not nearly so lethal.

The scourge that Jesus used in John 2:15 was rather unimpressive as a weapon, it was made out of cords (SCHOINION) or reeds. It would sting but it would not injure. But even though the weapon itself was not intimidating, the person wielding the weapon was both threatening and intriguing at the same time. In what way was Jesus threatening?

Jesus was one very angry person. Although it was not specifically stated that He was angry, I believe that this would have to be reasonably assumed. The anger of God is a deliberate reaction to all that violates His holy nature (Exodus 4:14 , Numbers 12:9). And since Jesus is God, it should not surprise us that we would see Jesus choosing to express His anger at certain points in time.

In fact, the Scriptures specifically tell us that Jesus expressed anger on several occasions (Mark 3:5; 10:14). **Mark 3:5** tells us that the hard hearts of certain members of the synagogue at Capernaum provoked Him to anger. **Mark 10:14** tells us that the callous manner in which the disciples treated the families bringing their children to Him for a blessing provoked Him to anger.

Was Jesus angry when He found what He found in the temple? I believe based on His actions that we would have to say, "Yes!"

The word "drove" (EKBALLO) literally means to cast out, with the suggestion of force. Visualizing what this must have looked like certainly would portray in our mind an image that we might not typically associate with Christ. But even though it may not be our typical image of Christ, it is still no less Christ. This is truly a part of who Christ is. And it also needs to be a part of who we are.

Why was this scourge of cords or reed in the hands of Jesus threatening? I believe that the scourge in the hands of Jesus was threatening because of the degree of anger and force that He was exerting in removing them from the temple. He was a man possessed.

But even so it is very difficult to imagine that the very threatening nature of His actions could explain by itself the effectiveness of His attack. Certainly there were enough people in the temple area that any man, no matter how possessed that person might have been, could have easily been wrestled to the ground especially if that person was simply using a scourge of cords. The effectiveness of the attack was not only made possible by the fierceness of it but also by a certain level of intrigue that the people may have been experiencing with Christ. What might have contributed to this intrigue?

The intrigue that people may have been experiencing with Christ would have been produced by recent miracles performed by Him in Jerusalem (John 2:23). Let me read for you **John 2:23, "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, beholding His signs which He was doing."** What were those miracles? We do not know but we do know that He did perform them.

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Why was Jesus so effective in driving out all those specifically identified in the temple in **John 2:14**? I believe that His exertion of force was effective because of the converging of two different factors. The fierceness of His attack combined with the intrigue that people had with Christ because of His miracles performed in Jerusalem around the time of the Passover.

But not all those He was removing from the temple were driven out. There was one special group that He simply told to get out. Let us now read **John 2:16**, "**and to those who were selling the doves He said, 'Take these things away.'**" Why didn't He drive these sellers of doves out with the rest? Because the doves they were selling were in cages and would have needed to be removed by someone. And of course in this case that someone would have been the sellers of the doves.

You can drive out oxen and sheep with a scourge but it is very difficult to drive out doves that happen to be in cages. I suppose He could have released them but that would have resulted in the sellers suffering financial loss. Apparently Jesus did not want those He was removing from the temple to be injured, either physically or financially. What an impressive display of anger under control.

But what exactly was the problem with these people that Christ was driving out of the temple? Let us continue to read the verse, "**And to those who were selling the doves He said, 'Take these things away, stop making My Father's house a house of merchandise.'**"

The word "merchandise" (EMPORIUM) denotes a trading place or an exchange. We get our English word "*emporium*" from the word that Christ uses. We now know why Jesus was so angry. He was angry because the temple had become a house of merchandise. The focus was no longer simply on the Lord when these sellers of oxen and sheep entered the temple. The focus was no longer simply on the Lord when these moneychangers entered the temple. Their focus was now on making a profit. They may have been in a place where you might expect worship to be taking place but they were not worshipping.

Were these merchants cheating and robbing the people? This might have been the point that Christ was making during the second cleansing of the temple at the end of His public ministry but there is no evidence of this here in this passage. The issue that Christ is addressing in John 2:14-17 is not what they were doing but where they were doing it. They may have been performing a very helpful service to the Jews, especially those traveling long distances to Jerusalem but they had messed up big time when they set up their booths in the temple. These merchandisers had made a mockery of the temple. Their focus on entering the temple should have been simply on the Lord but their focus was on making money.

The temple was to be a house of worship but the sellers and the moneychangers had turned the temple into a market.

How can we apply this story of the cleansing of the temple to our own lives? Does this mean that we should not be selling donuts and cupcakes and such things like this out in the quad area each Sunday? Not necessarily! It is not about whether or not we are selling donuts or cupcakes in the quad or even in the auditorium.

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Let me ask you this question. Where is God's temple today? Every Christian individually is God's temple (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). Let me read for you **1 Corinthians 3:16-17, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? (17) If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are."** Are you a Christian? Then you are God's temple. With this understanding we are now able to apply the passage that we have been studying. As God's temple we cannot allow anything to come into our lives that is inconsistent with the worship of God. Isn't this what was happening in **John 2?** The selling of sacrificial animals and the changing of money was inconsistent with the purpose of the temple. But how does this practically apply to our lives?

How will you know when you have driven out, by the grace of God, all those things that are inconsistent with the worship of God from His temple, which is you? You will know when you have driven out all those things that are inconsistent with the worship of God when you are filled with praise.

If your heart is not today filled with thanksgiving and praise to God, if your heart is not filled with the joy of the Lord, if you are not enjoying worship, then you need to do some housecleaning.

But, not only is every Christian individually God's temple, but the church corporately is God's temple (Ephesians 2:19-22). Let me read for you **Ephesians 2:19-22, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, (20) having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus being the corner stone, (21) in whom the whole building being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; (22) in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."**

As a church we will not be able to fully experience the joy of corporate worship until that which is not consistent with the worship of God is fully and totally removed. What is this temple I am referring to? I am referring to our church.

How serious do we need to be about removing anything that is inconsistent with the worship of God from our individual lives and our corporate body? We need to be as zealous as Christ. Let us now read **John 2:17, "His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for Thy House will consume Me.'"**

### CONCLUSION

Do you want to be able to come into the Lord's presence and find a place of refuge, a place where joy reigns and peace rules, then we need by the grace of God to zealously remove anything from our lives that is inconsistent with the worship of God.

Is zeal for the Lord's house consuming you or are those things that interfere with your personal worship allowed to remain?