

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

The Cleansing of the Temple

John 2:18-25

Part 3

We as Christians need to be careful when it comes to keeping our lives free of anything inconsistent with worship. Why? Because the Scriptures teach us **"that the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked who can know it."** If we are going to be successful at this we need to honestly and humbly come before the Lord, asking Him to search our hearts, in very much the same way as David did in **Psalms 139:23-24**. Let me read these two verses for you, **"Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; (24) and see if there be any hurtful way in me and lead me in the everlasting way."** The importance of this I believe will be driven home to us this weekend as we continue our study of the cleansing of the temple.

In studying this passage, we have been asking the question, "What do we learn about Christ in John 2:12-25?" And of course there are a number of things.

We have learned 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."** Fulfilling this basic requirement of the Mosaic Law of celebrating the Passover was not easy and hopefully this recognition would spur us on in our own efforts, as the disciples of Christ to stay actively involved, not only with the Scriptures but with prayer, fellowship and outreach as well.

What else have we learned about Jesus in **John 2:15-25**? We not only learned that Jesus was committed to the Passover. But we have learned that Jesus possessed a zeal for the sanctity of God's house (John 2:15-17). 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.'"** Hopefully we are as zealous as Christ when it comes to removing anything from our lives that is inconsistent with worship. Hopefully our zeal for the Lord's house will consume us in the same way as it consumed Christ.

There may be some people here this weekend who might say, "I certainly would have attacked anything inconsistent with worship in my life if I had seen something, but I just didn't see anything." If this is your testimony, then it is extremely likely that you are not seeing your life through the eyes of Christ. And this brings us back to John 2:12-25 and the third and final thing that we learn about Christ from this passage. What is it?

We learn that He possessed knowledge of what was in the heart of man (2:18-25). We may not be able to see into our hearts. We may not be able to see who we really are, but Christ can and we see this demonstrated in two different ways in **John 2:18-25**.

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We see Christ's knowledge of what was in the heart of man first of all demonstrated in His interaction with the "Jews" (2:18-22). Let us read **John 2:18**, "**The Jews therefore answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, seeing that You do these things?"**" Who are the "Jews?"

The "Jews" who confronted Jesus after He cleansed the temple are most likely, the *temple* police. The temple police were Levites and were responsible for the care and protection of the temple. Not only did they have the right, but they also had the responsibility to question the credentials of Jesus in light of what He had just done. What had He done? He had, without the knowledge, or the consent of Jewish religious leaders, cleansed the temple of everything He felt was inconsistent with worship.

How had He been able to accomplish this by Himself? He was able to accomplish this by Himself because of the fierceness of His attack, combined with a certain intrigue or curiosity that the Jewish people possessed concerning Christ.

Certainly we can easily understand how the fierceness of His attack might have contributed to His success with some people. But it was the people's intrigue with Christ and His miracles in general that I believe played a far greater role in what He was able to accomplish.

Had Jesus actually been performing miracles in Jerusalem during the Passover? And the answer, that we noted last week, is of course yes.

Let us once again read **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.**" The cleansing of the temple did not take place in a vacuum. I believe based on His recent miracles that there was a real buzz concerning Christ when He entered the temple. He was not a man who was going unnoticed in Jerusalem. There were people that day, perhaps many people that day, who were entertaining the thought that Jesus may have been sent by God, perhaps He might even be the Messiah.

There was no way that the Jewish people were about to wrestle Him to the ground in the temple. In fact, as His attack, which was very fierce unfolded, the intrigue that the Jewish people had with Christ only increased. Why would I say this? Listen to **Malachi 3:1-3**, "**Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and He will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming, says the Lord of hosts. (2) 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, (3) And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness.**"

In **Malachi 3:1** we have two messengers. The first messenger who is to go before and to prepare the way is John the Baptist.

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The second is "the messenger of the covenant," the Lord Jesus Christ. The prophecy concerning the first messenger is quoted in all four Gospels as applying to John the Baptist; there is no guesswork here. However, the messenger of the covenant is never referred to anywhere in the Gospels, and the reason is obvious. This messenger of the covenant is the Lord Jesus, but this passage hasn't anything to do with His first coming. This is His coming not in grace, not as a Redeemer, but as a Judge, as the One who will establish His kingdom and put down the rebellion that is on this earth.

When will this happen? This will happen after the rapture of the church. This will occur after the great tribulation of 7 years. This will occur when Christ returns to set up His millennial kingdom.

And where will this cleansing begin? It will begin in His temple. What does **Malachi 3:1** tells us? He will "**suddenly come to His temple.**" For the Jews, who may have been entertaining the thought that perhaps Jesus was the Messiah, His cleansing of the temple did nothing to diminish this possibility in their mind rather it only fueled it.

Jesus after performing miracles and cleansing the temple could not be ignored by the temple police. The buzz that was present concerning Jesus, when He had entered the temple, had now I am sure turned into a roar. The temple police were compelled to act. What would they do?

This was not an easy situation for them. They might have asked Him are you the Messiah? Which would have been a very appropriate question. But they chose, perhaps out of fear, to simply ask Him a question "**What sign do you show us, seeing that You do these things.**"

They have asked Him for a sign. How will He respond? Jesus' response to the temple police was brilliant (John 2:19). Let us read His response in **John 2:19 "Destroy this temple, and in three days, I will raise it up."** How was this response so brilliant?

The first reason why Jesus' response was brilliant was because it satisfied, from the perspective of the Jewish authorities, their specific demand. Jesus, it would appear from their perspective, had offered them exactly what they wanted, a miracle that would demonstrate that He had the authority to cleanse the temple. What was the miracle that they thought He had offered? Jesus from the perspective of the Jewish authorities had offered to reconstruct the temple in three days if they would tear it down.

Now how likely would it be that they would do what He suggested? Not very likely at all! But neither could they say that Jesus had not offered them a powerful 'miraculous sign' to establish His authority. Certainly if He could reconstruct the temple in three days after it had been destroyed no one could say that He did not have the authority to cleanse the temple of everything inconsistent with worship. The authorities in effect were between a proverbial rock and a hard place.

Though Jesus had met their demand, the authorities found themselves unable to test the veracity of His offer so they simply expressed their disbelief (John 2:20). Let us read **John 2:20, "The Jews therefore said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"** These Jewish authorities were incredulous. The sign that they believed Jesus was offering in response to their request was beyond belief.

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The temple where they were presently worshipping was known as Herod's temple. The construction on this temple, which was simply a reconstruction of Zerubbabel's Temple, had begun in 19 B.C. The work on the sanctuary initiated by Herod was completed in 18 months, but the rest of the construction was still ongoing in the time Christ. In fact, the Jews in **John 2** told Jesus that the temple had already been under construction for 46 years. The total amount of time required to complete the construction of Herod's temple, which was completed in 63 AD, was 82 years.

The thought of Jesus rebuilding Herod's temple in three days, a temple which had already been under construction for 46 years and which would continue to be under construction for another 36 years before it would finally be completed, was simply unthinkable, at least to these Jewish authorities. But of course there was no way that these authorities were actually going to put Jesus to the test and find out if He could actually do it.

What is the first reason why Jesus' response to the Jewish authorities was so brilliant? The first reason why Jesus' response was so brilliant was because it satisfied, from the perspective of the Jewish authorities, their specific demand.

What was the second reason? The second reason why His response was brilliant was because it meant that His disciples in the future would be able to see that He had *predicted* His resurrection.

We will see this in **John 2:21-22**. Let us begin by looking at **John 2:21**. What does it say? "**But He was speaking of His body.**" When Jesus was speaking of the temple, the Jewish authorities understood Him to be speaking of Herod's temple but He wasn't. He was speaking figuratively of His own body.

The Father and the incarnate Son enjoy a unique mutual indwelling. Listen to **John 14:10-11**. This is Christ speaking to His disciples, "**Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works.**"

D.A. Carson in his commentary on the Gospel of John says, "It is the human body of Jesus that uniquely manifests the Father, and becomes the focal point of the manifestation of God to man, the living abode of God on earth."

Was Jesus the temple of God? He was uniquely the temple of God. And it was the temple of His body that He was referring to when He told the Jewish authorities that if they destroyed the temple that He would raise it up in three days. Obviously the Jewish leaders did not understand what He meant and most likely, neither did His own disciples at the time.

Let us read **John 2:22**, "**When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken.**" Notice what it says, "**When therefore He was raised from the dead His disciples remembered that He said this and they believed.**"

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It would seem that the disciples at the moment when Christ said what He said to the authorities that they were just as clueless as the Jewish authorities on the true meaning of His words. But after the resurrection then everything became very clear to them.

First of all, Old Testament Scriptures that had prophesied the resurrection became clear to them. Let us continue to read, "**When therefore He was raised from the dead His disciples remembered that He said this and they believed.**" They believed what? They believed "**the Scripture.**" This could be referring to one of several different Old Testament passages. It could be referring to **Psalms 16:10** or to **Isaiah 53:12**. But no matter what particular Scripture John specifically had in mind, they believed. But not just Old Testament Scripture but the words that Jesus spoke here in **John 2**. Let us again continue to read in the verse, "**When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken.**" Jesus response to the Jewish authorities was brilliant. It was brilliant first of all because it satisfied, from the perspective of the Jewish authorities, their specific demand. It was brilliant secondly because it meant that His disciples in the future would be able to see that He had predicted His resurrection.

We have now considered what happened, but I believe that it also is important to explore what did not happen. Let me ask you a question. Why did Jesus not simply perform for these Jewish authorities a miracle of the kind that He had been performing in Jerusalem during the days of the feast? The reason why Jesus provided the sign that He did rather than a sign similar to what He had been doing was because He knew their heart was evil (Matthew 12:38-40). How do we know this? We know this by comparing the incident recorded for us here in **John 2** with an incident recorded for us in **Matthew 12:38-40**.

What did He say in these verses in **Matthew 12:38-40**? "**Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him, saying, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from you,' (39) But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but of Jonah the prophet. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.'**" Based on the information by Christ in **Matthew 12:38-40** what would we have to conclude about the temple police in **John 2**? Jesus saw them as a part of that evil and adulterous generation. Jesus does not see that these Jews, these temple police had any spiritual appetite at all. They were in effect spiritually calloused people. And therefore the only sign He was about to give them would be the future sign of His resurrection.

If their heart had been good, they very likely would have acknowledged that His action of cleansing the temple was foundationally just. But there seemed to be unwillingness on their part to confess what Jesus had done was not only good but also necessary. They didn't approach Him and say, "Thank you for removing these things that were inconsistent with worship from the temple." They did not say that.

And not only that but if their heart was good, they very likely would have also acknowledged their own culpability. But there seemed to be unwillingness to do this as well. They did not to say Him, "We feel so ashamed that we tolerated these practices in the temple.

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We should never have allowed this to happen." Or, "We should have made this an issue with the high priest, but we didn't and we are so sorry." They could have said these things but they didn't. They were a part of an evil and adulterous generation and Jesus was not going to play their games. And that is why He gave them the sign that He did. This is the only sign that the world should expect to see or needs to see. If people reject the miracle of the resurrection they will reject every other miracle as well.

We have been studying Christ's cleansing of the temple. And there are numerous things that we learn about Christ from this incident. First of all, we learned that Jesus was committed to the Passover in John 2:1-11. Secondly, we learned that Jesus possessed a zeal for the sanctity of God's house in John 2:12-17. And now we are learning that He possessed a knowledge of what was in the heart of man. We see Christ's knowledge of what was in the heart of man first of all demonstrated in His interaction with the temple police in John 2:18-22. But we are not done.

We see Christ's knowledge of what was in the heart of man again demonstrated when He chose not to entrust Himself to those who professed faith in John 2:23-25. Let us now read **John 2:23-25, "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, beholding His signs which He was doing. (24) But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, (25) and because He did not need anyone to bear witness concerning man for He Himself knew what was in man."**

Obviously as we have already noted that Jesus had been actively performing miracles in Jerusalem during the time period around the Passover. And we have already noted how this activity very likely was the primary reason why He had not been wrestled to the ground by the Jewish multitudes as He cleansed the temple. But His miracles apparently not only created a certain intrigue with Jesus but there were those who were professing faith in His name as well because of His miracles. Isn't this exactly what **John 2:23** tells us, "**Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, beholding the signs which He was doing.**" When it says that they believed in His name it would appear to mean that they have come to believe in Him as the Messiah. And why had they come to believe in Him as the Messiah. They have come to believe in Him as the Messiah because of His miracles.

When the disciples who were with Christ saw what was happening, I am sure that they got really excited. They might have made the suggestion to Jesus, "Let us get all these people together and challenge them to get the Word out that you are the King of Israel the promised Messiah." But this was not about to happen! Why?

Let us now read **John 2:24-25, "But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, (25) and because He did not need anyone to bear witness concerning man for He Himself knew what was in man."**

Jesus was not going to entrust Himself to those who had made *spurious* professions of faith. Those spoken about here in these verses as having made professions of faith were not genuine disciples. Their relationship with Jesus was not about them recognizing His right to rule over their lives, it was all about the miracles. Jesus knew this.

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Jesus sees to the bottom of every heart, detects every superficial confession, every trace of indifference or hostility. Jesus knows what is in the heart of man.

CONCLUSION

We need to be zealously removing anything from our lives that is inconsistent with worship. If we are committed to this, then we should be continually asking God to reveal to us things that need to be driven out of our lives, not only sins of commission but the sins of omission as well. And hopefully, by the grace of God, He will reveal to us what we need to know so that we might honor Him with our lives and reap the blessings that comes to those who truly worship Him in spirit and in truth.

May God by His grace help us to see and remove anything from our lives that is inconsistent with *worship*.