

**The Word Became Flesh
(Week 5)
John 2:12-25
“When God Goes to Church”**

Introduction

“Destroy this Temple and I will raise it up in three days.”

John 2:19

After His first miracle at the wedding of Cana, Jesus went with His disciples and His family to Capernaum, located on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. This town became His “city of operations” for His ministry. Capernaum was also a small fishing village and not very far from Bethsaida, which was home to several of Jesus’ disciples. It was also reported to be the hometown of the tax collector Matthew, who would also become a follower of Jesus.

The next event that John describes for us is Jesus’ pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the passover feast (**vs.13**). It was required by law for all Jewish males to travel to Jerusalem three times a year for three of the feasts of The LORD. These feasts were Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot). The LORD had attended the Passover in Jerusalem many times before, but this time it was different. This time, He came to begin the process of introducing Himself to the nation. No longer would He be silent in matters regarding His chosen people and their sins. The time had come to clean house, and that is exactly what He did.

Some scholars have said that John moved this story to the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry in order to emphasize His mission, and that it did not occur at the beginning, but some three years later. They say this because the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke tell of a temple cleansing on the final week of Jesus’ life, which culminated with His crucifixion and resurrection. There is no controversy here. For what we are seeing in John is Christ’s **first** cleaning of the temple, and what we read in the other gospels is the **second**. For you see, Jesus wasn’t pleased with what He saw happening in His Father’s house on both occasions. And He did something about it. He cleaned house!

I would have loved to have been there to see the look on the faces of the Pharisees, and other religious leaders, when Christ came to church that day! I think that sometimes people can get so caught up in “religious activity” that they can forget why they even gathered in the first place. God’s house is a place to worship God. Period. That is all that matters. And Christ had showed up that fateful day to remind the people of this very fact.

When you came to the service this morning, did you do it because out of some sense of moral obligation, because it was the “right thing to do”? Or are you here today because you want to have an encounter with an Awesome and Holy God? Ritual, for the sake of ritual, is empty and a waste of time. But an encounter with God can change a person for life. Every week, many lost and hurting people are all around us, and they need Christ. Would they see Him, if they came to our service here at Freedom? Or would the noise of our religion drown out His voice?

For you see, music is good, when it is directed to Jesus. Preaching is good, when it points us to Christ, the only hope for fallen man. But religious activity apart from The Holy Spirit is a waste of time and effort. This world has plenty of all that is meaningless. It seems that there is a new “cause” with its false gods and its useless altars of worship arising every day. None of which truly addresses the disease of sin in this world. And none of it will satisfy the hunger and thirst of a lost soul. This world needs Jesus. So be it far from us to distract people from Him in any way. God forbid that we offer empty worship instead of The Risen LORD! For when this occurs, Jesus may just come to clean house!

I’m sure that none of those religious leaders that day expected God to actually show up and pronounce judgement upon them. And they were pretty upset when He did. But God has the right to judge and correct those who claim to worship Him. If Jesus came here today, would He be pleased with our worship, or would He need to do some house cleaning? Let us take a lesson from the book of *John* this morning and examine our own hearts, as we learn of *The Father’s Wrath*, *The Finished Work*, and *The False Worshipper*.

The Father's Wrath (vs.13-17)

The Jewish Passover was near, and so Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In The temple He found people selling oxen, sheep, and doves, and He also found the money changers sitting there. After making a whip out of chords, He drove everyone out of the temple with their sheep and oxen. He also poured out the money changers coins and overturned the tables. He told those who were selling doves . "Get these things out of here! Stop turning My Father's house into a marketplace!" And His disciples remembered that it is written: Zeal for your house will consume Me.

John 2:13-17

It is interesting to note that John calls the feast, "the Jewish Passover", rather than "The LORD'S Passover". For you see, it was God Himself that had instituted the Passover back when He led the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage (**Exodus 12**). John does this in order to emphasize just how far the religious leaders of Israel had strayed away from God. It was no longer God's Passover, it now solely belonged to them, and as such, it had become an empty ritual. God's glory had departed from Israel's worship.

Back in Exodus, God had commanded that every Israelite remove all the leaven from their homes when they observed the Passover. Leaven in The Scriptures is symbolic of sin. For just a touch of it can corrupt the whole, just as leaven makes its way through a lump of dough. To clean out the leaven was a picture of examining oneself to find the sin within and to purge it before observing the feast of The LORD. We, as Christians, are commanded to do exactly the same thing, before we partake of The LORD'S Supper.

So, then, whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup of The LORD in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sin against the body and blood of The LORD. Let a person examine himself; in this way let him eat the bread and drink from the cup. For whoever eats and drinks without recognizing the body, eats and drinks judgment upon himself.

1 Corinthians 11:27-29

When someone enters into a holy place, that person should be holy themselves. We must always confess our sins before God and ask to be forgiven when we come into His presence. God is very much offended by sin. If you do not believe this, then take another look at the cross of Jesus Christ. For it was on that cross that God forever displayed His wrath for our sinfulness. He took it out on His very own Son, rather than take it out on us. We should be both grateful and convicted by this reality, and therefore, we should, as a result, despise our own sinfulness and strive in the power of The Holy Spirit to be holy ourselves.

Pursue peace with everyone, and holiness — without it no one will see The LORD.

Hebrews 12:14

So then, the people were instructed to "remove the leaven (sin) from their houses". So when Jesus came to His Father's house that day, he did the very same thing. He cleansed the house! There were merchants there who had brought their corruption into His Father's house, and He would not stand for it. They were introduced to the wrath of God that day!

It is important for us to understand exactly what was going on there in order to see why Jesus was so upset. The Temple itself was divided into different sections. The "outer court" was almost like what we would call the parking lot at our church. This is where the Gentiles, who were seeking The One True God, were allowed to worship. They could go no further than this outer court. Next, there was an outer courtyard for Jewish women. After this, an inside court for Jewish males. And after this the inner sanctuary for the priest alone, and finally, The Holy of Holies reserved as the place for God. Now imagine just how far the Gentiles were being kept from the most holy place, and you will begin to see why Christ came!

Not only were the Gentiles (and even Jewish women to a lesser degree) kept at “arms length”, but the Jews thought so little of them, that they chose the only place where the Gentiles could come and pray as the place that they would set up their booths and table to sell the items needed to make sacrifices.

For you see, every sacrifice had to be approved by the priest, before it could be offered up to God. If you brought a sacrifice that was deemed unworthy, then you were forced to purchase an animal from the priests. They even required that you exchange your “unclean” roman coins for temple coins, before you could give of your tithe. And the exchange rate was a rip off! In short, these evil men were interrupting the prayers of the Gentiles with the noises and smells from their stockyard business and money exchange, and they were also taking advantage of the worshippers in order to make a profit. What had started out as a convenience, for those who had to travel far in order to offer their sacrifices to God, had been twisted into something evil and disgusting. And Jesus had come to clean house.

He threw over the money tables. Can you imagine the scramble for the coins rolling around on the pavement?! And He took some of the ropes used to tie up the animals and made a whip to drive them all out! Side note: Jesus was not the wimpy little guy that we see in all those ridiculous paintings hanging on church walls. He was a MAN and a strong one at that! It seems that real men are in short supply these days, but this man was as strong as they come. And when He displayed His Father’s righteous wrath upon those wicked men, they were filled with fear.

Our God has no use for sin. He also has zero tolerance for those who would use His Name to make a greedy profit for themselves. He will not tolerate wolves who pretend to be shepherds. So be afraid all you televangelists. Be very afraid. Christ is coming soon. And He will be bringing His Father’s wrath with Him.

The Finished Work (vs. 18-22)

So the Jews replied to Him, “What sign will You show us for doing these things?” Jesus answered, “Destroy this Temple, and I will raise it up in three days.” Therefore the Jews said, “This temple took forty-six years to build, and will You raise it up in three days?” But He was speaking about the Temple of His body. So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the statement that He had made. John 2:18-22

When the Pharisees came to question Jesus (after they had picked up all their loose change of course!), they demanded a “sign” from Him that would prove His authority to disrupt their greedy and immoral dealings in such fashion. Undoubtedly some of them had heard of Him and wanted a miraculous display for themselves. He offered no such appeasement. Jesus didn’t come to be this world’s entertainment. He wasn’t interested in the performing arts, as it were. He came to seek and save those who are lost (**Luke 19:10**).

Rather than perform a “miracle” for these wicked nonbelievers, He prophesied to them instead. He told them:

“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days.”

John 2:19

He was of course referring to His finished work upon the cross, when these very same religious leaders would demand His execution, and yet, He would most certainly not stay dead! He was in essence telling them what they would eventually do, and what His Father would do as a result. What they would intend as harm, God would intend for good.

It is also interesting this gospel’s use of words, when referring to “the temple”. The narrative begins by using the more common word for “temple” (*hieron* in the Greek), which was a word that was used to describe the entire temple complex in general. When Jesus speaks about the temple being destroyed and raised again, He does not use this word, but rather, the Greek word “*naos*”, which is a reference to the most holy portion of the temple proper. Make no mistake, the “temple” of Christ’s body is

the most holy entity that ever graced this earth. The Pharisees had no idea what He was really saying, and not even His disciples understood until His work upon the cross was completed.

The Pharisees assumed that Jesus was talking about their temple, the very one that King Herod had commissioned for them that had taken forty-six years to build and was still not completely finished in Jesus day. It is also interesting to note that when it was finally completed years after Jesus death and resurrection, it only remained standing for three years, before the Romans burned it to the ground! So much for the empty religions of man! That temple has yet to be rebuilt, but Jesus raised His Holy Temple in three days! The finished work of the cross has made everyone who believes in Christ a living temple of The Holy Spirit of God.

Don't you yourselves know that you are God's temple and The Spirit of God lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is holy, and that is what you are. **1 Corinthians 3:16-17**

The False Worshipper (vs. 23-25)

While He was in Jerusalem during the Passover Festival, many believed in His Name when they saw the signs He was doing. Jesus, however, would not entrust Himself to them, since He knew them all and because He did not need anyone to testify about man; for He Himself knew what was in a man. **John 2:23-25**

This is an important little passage, and we would do well to heed its warning. Just because a person *claims* to be a believer in Christ does NOT mean that they truly are. And Jesus knows the difference. You see, a true believer won't just believe in his head that Jesus is The Son of God. They will be changed in their heart as well. In other words, those who truly believe will follow Christ as a result.

I have met in my life all kinds of so called "believers" who claim to be saved, and yet live as ungodly as the rest of this world. Just like the temple of the Jews in this narrative, they are religious and yet still empty inside. The claim to worship God, but their actions prove them to be liars. Religion without Christ is nothing.

I am astounded by the actual Greek text of this passage. The word (*pisteuo*) that is used in **verse 23** rendered, many "*believed*" in Him, is the exact same word that is used of Jesus in **verse 24**, when it says that he would not "*entrust*" Himself to them. It literally should read, "*Many believed in Him, but he did not believe in them.*" For you see, you cannot fool God. He knows your heart. You may say that you believe, but your actions may just prove otherwise. So the question I must ask you today is this; "You say that you believe in Jesus, but does Jesus believe in YOU?" This is what Jesus has to say about a true believer:

"If you love me, you will keep My commands. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. He is The Spirit of truth. The world is unable to receive Him because it doesn't see Him or know Him. But you do know Him, because He remains with you and will be in you." **John 14:15-17**

And conversely, This is what He says about those who are false worshippers:

"Why do you call me 'LORD, LORD' and don't do the things I say." **Luke 6:46**

You may claim to believe in Jesus this morning, but does Jesus believe in you? Empty religion is just that, empty. But in Christ, we have life, and this life produces genuine worship. If He were to come to our church this morning would He offer His blessing or His wrath? Jesus died on the cross so that we could have something real. In Him, we have so much more than dead religion. We have a relationship with The Living God. How's your faith this morning? Have you accepted the finished work of Christ upon the cross, turned from your sins, and confessed Him as LORD (**Romans 10:9**)? Or are you just going through the motions of an empty faith. Come to Jesus today, turn aside from your emptiness and be filled.

Any let all the true worshippers say... TRUTH!!