

16. The Gospel of John—2:12-17 (a)

“The Temple of God” Pt.1

(1/28/18)

John 2:12-17 (NKJV)

¹² After this [wedding in Cana] He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples; and they did not stay there many days. ¹³ Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. ¹⁵ When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. ¹⁶ And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" ¹⁷ Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "*Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.*"

Here in this passage Jesus cleanses the temple.

There is some debate as to whether He cleansed it twice—once at the beginning of His ministry as recorded in John's gospel chapter two; and then again at the end of His ministry as recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke's gospels.

Or if He only cleansed the temple once, at the end of His ministry, but John places it at the beginning of his gospel as a way to set forth his thesis that Jesus is the Son of God, Who died and rose from the dead (v.19) to save us from hell.

I have gone back and forth on this—but the position I have settled on was that He probably cleansed the temple twice, once at the beginning and again at the end of His public ministry.

We read in verse 13—“**Now, the Passover of the Jews was at hand**”

The Feast of Passover took place in the Spring of the year and was one of three major feasts that every adult male Jew that lived within 20 miles of Jerusalem was required by law (Deut.16:16) to attend—the others were Pentecost (early summer) and Tabernacles (fall).

Now even though every adult male Jew that lived within 20 miles of Jerusalem was required by Jewish law to attend the Passover—Jewish pilgrims from all over the known world flooded into Jerusalem for this feast.

And yet, right up front, we get an indication from the Holy Spirit that something was wrong.

You see, John refers to it as the “**Passover of the Jews**”—but in Exodus 12 when God first instituted the feast He said, “*It is the Lord’s Passover.*”

Something had changed it from the *Lord’s* Passover to the Passover of the *Jews* (‘Jews’ was a word that John uses in his gospel to speak of the Jewish leadership—scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priests etc.).

This feast had been ‘highjacked’ by the Jewish leadership who had turned it into something corrupt and unholy, so much so, that the Lord no longer even associated Himself with it—let’s see what corrupted this feast.

John 2:13-14 (NKJV)

¹³ Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ **And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business.**

The Temple was the place where animals were brought to the priests and then sacrificed to atone for sin—

“ For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.” (Lev.17:11)

The purpose of atonement was so that man's sins could be covered allowing him and God to have fellowship (communion) with one another.

However, the temple was also a place of worship and prayer—at least that's what God intended it to be before it had been corrupted.

Now before we look at that—let's look briefly at the temple itself.

I. The Temple of God in Jesus' Day

A. The Temple Configuration

In the New Testament there are two words which are translated *temple*.

The actual temple proper was called *naos*—and was a relatively small building in comparison to the whole temple area.

The temple proper contained the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies into which only the High Priest could enter—and then only once a year on the great Day of Atonement—Yom Kippur. ('day of covering').

It sat on the top of Mt. Moriah which is still called the *temple mount* to this day.

Now the temple proper or *naos* was surrounded by thirty-three acres which together were called the temple precincts—the Greek word for the whole area is the word "*hieron*."

The area of the temple precincts closest to the temple proper consisted of a series of successive and ascending courtyards that led up to the temple mount where the actual temple building sat.

If we start on top of the temple mount and move downward—the uppermost court, the one that the temple actually sat upon, was—

1. The Court of the Priests

It was called the **Court of the Priests** because only the Jewish priests could enter into this area.

It was in this court that the priests would offer sacrifices to God on the brass altar and wash in one of the Lavers (wash basins) before entering into the Holy Place of the Temple to burn incense to God on the golden altar of incense which stood in front of the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies.

2. The Court of the Israelites

From that uppermost court, you'd walk several steps down until you came to the next court—the *Court of the Israelites*.

It was in this court that the Jewish men (and only Jewish men) assembled for the temple services.

3. The Court of the Women

From the Court of the Israelites you'd descend several more steps until you came to the *Court of the Women*.

Into this court any Jew could enter, but it was called the Court of the Women because this was as far as a Jewish woman could go.

4. The Outer Court of the Gentiles

From the Court of the Women you descended five steps to a level area on which there was erected a five-foot stone barricade that went around the entire temple enclosure.

Then from that level there were fourteen more steps that descended to ground level, to the **Court of the Gentiles** also known as the **Outer Court**.

According to the Jewish historian Josephus, that five-foot stone wall that separated the Court of the Women from the Court of the Gentiles had signs all around it at various intervals stating that no foreigner (Gentile) was permitted to go any farther.

Those signs read, *“No Gentile may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.”*

That wall was a visible reminder of the separation that existed between Jews and Gentiles.

The Jews, as the covenant people of God, were ‘close’ to Him.

The Gentiles were outside the covenants of God and were seen as ‘far away’ from Him—and below the Jews (the Court of the Gentiles being on the lowest level).

But in the mind of God even though the Gentiles were outside the covenant relationship that He had with the Jewish people and therefore were far away—that didn’t mean that He didn’t love the Gentiles or that He didn’t want to bring them close by including them in the covenant relationship He had with the Jews.

Remember God had told His people that they were to be a light to the Gentile nations and that it was His desire to bless every nation through the coming Messiah (Gen.12:3)—and to demonstrate this God placed the Court of the Gentiles in the temple for the very purpose of winning Gentiles to Himself.

You see, this was the place where Gentiles could come and learn about the God of Israel in the hope that they would convert to Judaism and be brought ‘near’ to God by becoming a part of His covenant people.

And so, the idea was that priests would be standing around this court, talking to Gentile seekers, witnessing to them about the God of Israel, answering their questions and praying with them.

It was supposed to be a holy place, a place of reverence and prayer—but instead the Sadducees and chief-priests had turned it into a place of business—a corrupt business which led to Jesus calling it a “*den of thieves*.”

B. The Temple Corruption

1. Animal Sellers

As I said, at Passover time Jews from all over the known world would converge on the city of Jerusalem—upwards of 2 million pilgrims.

And many of these Jews would want to offer an animal sacrifice there at the temple for their sins—besides the lamb they would need to celebrate the Passover meal with.

So, the Jewish merchants in Jerusalem set up all kinds of shops or ‘booths’ in the Court of the Gentiles in order to accommodate those Jews who wanted to purchase animals for sacrifice.

Now on the face of it that didn’t sound so bad—and it could very well have started out as a service and ministry for those Jews coming from too far away to drag along animals with them for sacrifice.

But unfortunately, over time this ministry turned into a business and then as Annas and Caiaphas, the Jewish High Priests, got their hands on it—a corrupt business.

The merchants working in cahoots with the priests began to rip the people off for their animals charging up to ten times the normal going rate.

And even if you brought your own animal, the priest would examine it until he found some flaw or defect in it and then he'd reject it—and you'd be forced to buy one of their pre-approved kosher animals at the hyper-inflated price.

It was a real hustle—a total rip-off, taking advantage of people who just wanted to worship God.

2. Money Changers

You see every Jew 19 years and older was required to pay one half shekel every year as a temple tax—but you had to pay the tax with the Temple Shekel—Roman currency was not accepted.

So, the Sadducees and chief priests had set up money changing tables all over the Court of the Gentiles where Roman currency could be changed for Temple Shekels for those who wanted to pay their taxes or to give an offering to God.

But here again there was corruption as the money changers were charging exorbitant exchange rates to the people who wanted to give to God.

So wicked men had turned the worship of God into a corrupt business, making money off of the name of God, and ripping people off who simply wanted to worship God.

No wonder the Holy Spirit refers to it as the 'Passover of the Jews' and not the *Lord's Passover*.

This was especially tragic in that—all of this corruption and merchandising was taking place in the Court of the Gentiles—the place where Gentile seekers were supposed to meet with the priests about converting to the Jewish faith.

And yet, when they got there and saw all the corruption and greed going on right there in the House of God—I wonder how many just turned around and went home?

I wonder how many seekers who come to God's 'house' today and see all of the greed and emphasis on money simply leave and write Christianity off?

But, this was a real problem back then—how could the temple in Jesus' day be a place of worship and prayer with so much corruption and merchandising going on?

The answer of course was that it couldn't—so the Lord had to clean house!

C. The Temple Cleansing

John 2:14-17 (NKJV)

¹⁴ And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. ¹⁵ When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. ¹⁶ And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" ¹⁷ Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "*Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.*"

Mark records that Jesus also said to them, "**It is written, '*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations,*' but you have made it a '*den of thieves.*' "** (Mark 11:17)

The temple couldn't be what God designed it to be as long as it was defiled with all of this merchandising and ripping people off—so Jesus took care of it!

He cleansed it from all this corruption and turned it, once again, into *a house of prayer*.

Now, there are those who think that Jesus “*lost it*” and acted in the flesh when He took a whip and drove the animals out and turned over the money tables—that’s absolutely ridiculous.

If Jesus had acted in the flesh that would have been sin and would have made Him a sinner.

And since sinners can’t die for sinners—it would have blown His mission and destroyed any chance for us to be saved.

“Yes, but He got angry and anger is a sin, isn’t it?”

No, anger in and of itself is not sin—there is such a thing as righteous anger—“*Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up*” (v.17)—quoting from Psalm 69:9.

Righteous anger, is always anger when someone else is being wronged, when someone else is being treated unjustly and therefore—you rise up to defend or help them.

Jesus wasn’t defending His own honor or retaliating against those who had done Him wrong.

No, He is acting here out of righteous anger because His *Father’s house* (the temple) had been defiled and *His* name denigrated—so He acted righteously by driving out the sin without sinning Himself.

It’s possible to get angry about something and not sin—“*Be angry but do not sin.*” (Ephesians 4:26)

Look, it is perfectly righteous, as you drive by an abortion clinic, to get angry—it is unrighteous and sinful to go in and harm those who work there. “*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord.*” (Romans 12:19)

We should be angry with injustice, crime, racism and violence against our fellow man—as well as rebellion, blasphemy and immorality against the holy name of our God.

However, much of the anger we express is not of the righteous variety but rather—self-centered and uncontrolled anger which stems from wounded pride or hurt feelings of being wrongfully treated by another.

It's interesting what Matthew records happened after the temple was cleansed, after the corruption was driven out—

Matthew 21:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ Then *the* blind and *the* lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.

Of course, these were literal healings—but I think this also applies spiritually.

It's only when the 'House of God' today (the local church) is holy and uncorrupted by greed can it truly be a healing place where blind sinners can be made to 'see' spiritually speaking, and those crippled by sin can be healed and begin to walk rightly with God.

I. The Temple of God in Jesus' Day

II. The Temple of God in Our Day

Ephesians 2:19-22 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner *stone*, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

The Church is the temple of God today—the place where He dwells in the hearts of His people.

Jesus cleansed the temple in His day because it had been corrupted—only then could it become what God intended it to be.

What is the Church to be and not to be if it's going to fulfill the purpose for which God created it?

A. What the Church is not to be

1. The church is not to be a place where the worship of God is exploited into a money-making enterprise.

Mark 11:15-16 (NKJV)

¹⁵ So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. ¹⁶ And He would not allow anyone to carry wares (commerce) through the temple.

In other words—Jesus forbid the commercialization of the worship of God—He forbid the house of God from being turned into a business.

The commercialization of the Church takes different forms—one form that is very popular today is running the church like a corporation that looks to *market* the church to people which it sees as potential *customers*.

This creates a man-centered, consumer-driven model of the church that focuses more on church growth than personal holiness.

In fact, I heard an elder at one of these churches make the statement, “*we give the customer what they want*”.

In his book, “*This Little Church Went to Market*” author Gary Gilley talks about the mindset and lengths that some churches, which have embraced this kind of thinking, will go to in bringing, what they call “Unchurched Harry and Mary” into their churches—

“The new-paradigm church would have no problem agreeing that [unchurched] Harry's true need is salvation from sin (although sin is often redefined). But they do not believe that Harry will respond to such a gospel unless we dress it up with other enticing offers. Felt needs is the porthole, they believe, through which Harry is reached in order that his true spiritual need is met. According to their marketing research Harry is not interested in truth; therefore, he does not react well to 'Thus saith the Lord.' And Harry is not interested in the future (including heaven); therefore, reaching him through concern for his eternal destiny is futile.” (Gary Gilley)

One reviewer summed up Gilley’s book this way—

“Overall, Gilley argues that the "new-paradigm" church has resorted to a market-driven approach to evangelism and church growth, where the gospel is not seen as something sufficient to attract people. Instead, he argues, these market-driven churches try to find out what it would take to get people to come to church by finding out what they feel they need -- doing surveys, asking what people are interested in, asking why they don't come to church, etc. Then, they try to implement what they learn.

Gilley argues that this fundamentally amounts to setting forward a new gospel, and that the true gospel inevitably falls by the wayside. You can't simultaneously tell someone what they want to hear and try and meet their felt needs and tell them that they are sinners desperately in need of salvation, having offended a holy God, and bound for judgment unless they repent.

I don't know about you, but I'm not naturally eager to hear that I've sinned. So if a church operates based on surveys of what people want to hear, it will almost inevitably quit preaching about unpopular subjects like sin, and instead, Gilley argues, preach about how Jesus can solve our problems and give us what we most want. Gilley argues that this approach to church growth probably results in church growth, all right, but churches growing by being flooded with people who are unconverted, and who remain unconverted.”

So, the church as a *corporation* is one way the church is being commercialized today—a corporation (their churches even look like corporate centers!) that produces a product for consumers instead shepherds caring for and feeding God’s sheep.

We’ll need to leave it here and pick up our study on this next week—as we continue to look at what the temple of God (the Church of Jesus Christ) must not be, and then what it should be.