

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (10-01-1999 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

John 2:12-25

Cleansing of the Temple

Introduction

Changing water into wine demonstrated the authority of Jesus over the physical world. The cleansing of the Temple demonstrated His authority over the house of God.

N.B. In the synoptic Gospels, the cleansing of the Temple comes right at the end of Jesus' life, yet John records it at the start of His ministry. Were there two cleansings, or did John not keep it in chronological order? The answer may be in the fact that John's whole Gospel is about the cleansing work of Jesus, and this story is the key to all that follows. Malachi's prophecy was fulfilled on the Lord's coming to Jerusalem's Temple. Jesus the Messiah came to cleanse and purify, the **Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.**

Anger which Christ displayed

Nowhere else in the Gospels is such energetic action and righteous anger displayed by Jesus. This was righteous anger – not petulant or vindictive or self-centred like our anger. A scourge of small cords, used to tie up animals, drove out the money changers, and the sheep and the oxen. He overthrew the tables, and money ran all over the floor. He was deeply angry, and fulfilled the prophecy **Zeal for your house will consume me** (Psalm 69:9; John 2:17).

For what reason? Firstly, the dishonesty of the whole thing. The Passover Feast was the greatest of all Jewish Festivals, attended by all Jews within 20 miles of Jerusalem, and many pilgrims from the Mediterranean world (who aimed to attend the Passover in Jerusalem once in their lives). There would have been up to two and a quarter million Jews in and around Jerusalem for Passover.

They had to pay the Temple tax – half a shekel (two days wages) in special Temple coins, because other coins, especially those bearing the Emperor's head, were considered polluted. On exchange, the pilgrims were exploited. They would be taxed on the exchange, and then there would be another tax on the change they were given.

So with the animals they offered for sacrifice – they had to pay up to 20 times above the street price to purchase an animal that was accepted by the inspectors. An animal bought on the streets would be rejected as unclean – so pilgrims were exploited again. All this dishonesty and trickery was going on in the name of God. Materialism in the name of religion.

Jesus was also angry because all this was taking place in the house of God – where there should have been quietness and reverence, essential for worship. **Guard your steps when you go to the house of God** (Ecclesiastes 5:1). Instead, worshippers were

in the midst of a cattle market with all its noise and smell, shouting and bargaining. How impossible to be in the right spirit for worship. A lesson to us on the need to be quiet before a service, to prepare ourselves for worship, and not to keep others from preparing themselves. The church is the house of God, where His Word is read, and where Christ is especially present. This should be on our minds – and it is very hard to think on these things when there is a buzz of conversation and laughter.

Then all this took place in the court of the Gentiles, the only place where Gentiles could come in the Temple. They would not be able to be quiet and pray. Instead of encouraging the Gentiles to search for God, the scene here of greed and profit-making was a hindrance.

Three things which excite the anger of the Lord – dishonesty, irreverence, and putting others off instead of helping them. So we see the Lord blazing with anger. It is strange to modern ears, who often perceive Jesus as a pale figure, effeminate, “gentle Jesus, meek and mild”. More accurate to portray Jesus as a revolutionary. Love – and wrath. Mercy – and anger. He loves the sinner – and hates the sin. C.f. the “Wrath of the Lamb” (Revelation 6:16). Sin is an enormity to Him, and He offers people a choice – to leave sin and go to heaven, or to cleave to sin and go to hell.

Claims which Christ made

Jesus was naturally indignant. He dared to challenge the established practices and authority of the priests. He spoke to them of “My Father’s house”. Who did He think He was? He also spoke of “destroying this temple and raising it up in three days”. Of course He was referring to His own body, which they would destroy, and which would be raised again to demonstrate His divine power and authority. **I have authority to lay down my life and authority to take it up again** (John 10:18). N.B. the resurrection teaches us many things – life after death, forgiveness secured – but it also proclaims the deity and power and authority of Christ. **Declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead** (Romans 1:4).

All others are servants, but Christ is the Son in a unique sense. He was one with the Father, and we have to honour the Son as we honour the Father (John 5:23). To see Him is to see God (John 14:9). All authority is given to Him (Matthew 28:18). His claims are true and are to be heeded and obeyed. But even the disciples did not realize all this till after He was raised from the dead. The teaching of Jesus lay sleeping in their minds for three years as they followed Him around, seeds which bore no fruit until after the resurrection when they remembered and understood and believed the Scriptures.

Helpful to remember this. Many sermons appear to be preached to heedless ears, but not necessarily lost and thrown away. We know from words of testimony that verses learnt by children, words spoken by leaders, sermons preached by the humblest of men, have often come to light after many years, sometimes even after the speaker is dead. Preachers, teachers, parents – we must carry on our work, sowing seed in faith and patience. Our labour in the Lord will not be in vain. It may come to life after many years. **Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again** (Ecclesiastes 11:1).

Insight into men's hearts

The chapter ends by telling us that while He remained in Jerusalem for Passover, Jesus performed many other miracles which are not recorded, and many believed. **But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man** (John 2:24-25). Many trusted (επιστευσαν) in His name... but Jesus did not trust (επιστευσεν) himself to them. This is a warning that Christ does not give Himself to all who profess faith in Him.

There was discrimination throughout His ministry. He spoke of those who called Him "Lord, Lord", and who even prophesied and did miracles in His name, but who at the end would hear the words "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:21-23). There is such a thing as superficial faith, skin deep, five-minute wonder. People can be attracted to Christ, who are looking for sensations and excitement. But there is no real heart commitment, especially when they discover Christ's call to self-denial and self-surrender. They soon move on to the next thing offering excitement. The seed can fall on stony ground, and appear to spring up – but dies back quickly because no depth, no root (Mark 4:5).

It is possible to be interested in Christ, attracted by Him, profess faith in Him, have feelings excited by Him, it is even possible for our minds to accept, but still the heart is not right. **Devils believe that, and shudder** (James 2:19), but they do not have heart faith. No real change of heart. Outward appearance of being a disciple only. Jesus spoke of white-washed tombs (Matthew 23:27), outwardly beautiful, but inwardly containing dead men's bones and all uncleanness, a picture of hypocrisy and lawlessness. The church at Sardis had a reputation of being alive – but actually it was dead (Revelation 3:1).

Jesus is not concerned with a crowd of admirers, but with a small company who know what they are doing and are committed to Him to the end. He knows what is in a man. He is not deceived. Despite all our weaknesses and failures, He can look into our hearts, and recognise heart submission, and trust and surrender. And so He commits Himself to us.

Conclusion

Christ displayed anger at dishonesty, irreverence, and the hindrances that kept people from Him. Indeed, anger at all sin. He claimed to be the Son of God, with power. He had insight into the hearts of men. All is laid bare before Him. We have to come to Him saying, "Save me Lord, I perish".