

13 The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. 15 And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. 16 And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." 18 So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was speaking about the temple of his body. 22 When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. 23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. 24 But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people 25 and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

Whenever I hear a fellow Christian talk about this passage, it is almost always applied in terms of righteous anger. It usually goes something like this. "Jesus clearly had righteous anger. Remember what he did in the temple when he drove out the money changers, turned over their tables and drove them all out with a whip? That was true righteous anger. And Ephesians says 'Be angry and do not sin.' Therefore, we are called to have a righteous anger."

Right? Haven't you heard this a lot? And such a statement is technically correct. There certainly is such a thing as righteous anger but the vast majority of times I have heard this passage used is when people are trying to justify unrighteous anger with a proof-text. "See, Jesus did it so we can too."

The other thing that is confusing about this passage is the titles in your Bibles.

ESV: Jesus Cleanses the Temple

NIV: Jesus Clears the Temple Courts

NASB: First Passover—Cleansing the Temple

So they all have the same basic title for this passage. It is a correct description but it is not necessarily what we call the Big Idea. The big idea is just that—the main point of the passage. So when you are reading a portion of Scripture, you should always ask, "What's the big idea?" And you have my permission to say it like a real Italian with your arms up in the air, "Hey, what's the big idea?"

There is often more than one way to express the big idea but I can tell you this. "Jesus Cleanses the Temple" is NOT the big idea. That's just a description. Neither is "Jesus has Righteous Anger" the big idea. Yes, Jesus did have righteous anger and Jesus did cleanse the temple, but why? The answer to that question will give us the big idea. The big idea I have assigned to this passage is: Worship from the Heart.

Worship from the Heart...

1. May turn your life upside down.

Some of you may have noticed that this cleansing of the Temple seems a little different than the one recorded in the other gospels. And they are different because they are two separate events. This one occurs at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry and the other takes place in the last week of his life just after the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. In Matthew, Mark and Luke's telling Jesus says, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers." But he does not say that here in John. There are other differences which make it quite clear that there are two separate events.

Another unique part is that only John records that Jesus made his own whip of cords. To me, this speaks of the very deliberate nature of what happened. Most people picture this scene with Jesus something like a semi-crazed lunatic. He's smacking people with the whip. He throws over the table of money. You wouldn't want to pick a fight with this Jesus. He'd tear you apart. At least that's the way the movies show it and how most of us think about it. Most of the classic artwork looks like this. The tables are overturned, men and women are flung on the ground and you have a woman lying on the ground who is probably screaming, "Jesus, don't hit me!" Personally, I don't think he used the whip on the people but only on the animals.



Now make no mistake. Jesus was angry, but I really don't think he was acting like a raging lunatic, as we often picture him in this scene. The big idea here is that this was not worship from the heart. This was anything but that.

We know the Old Testament has all of the regulations for sacrificial worship and ritual

cleansing. There's so much of it that we have a hard time reading those parts. But the Bible also records plenty of strong criticism of these same rituals. Right out of the gate the prophet Isaiah set forth strong words for the Israelites.

Isaiah 1:14-15

*Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates;
they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.
When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.*

Tell me—was Jesus the same God who gave this warning through Isaiah? Yes! So we could in fact put Isaiah's words onto the lips of Jesus here. My soul hates your feasts (and this was a Passover feast). They are a burden to me. I am weary. I hide my eyes from you. I will not listen. Jesus hated what was happening in the temple. It was all ritual and works, but no heart. Jesus hated it and he was angry but he was not a maniac.

These irreverent acts were being done in the outer courts of the temple area. They were large areas and a place where people regularly gathered. That's what they were meant for, but they were never intended to be a place of heartless profit.



So Jesus literally turned the place upside down. The last sign he did was very private, wasn't it? The miracle of water to wine was only witnessed by the disciples and the servants. No one else knew anything about it. But this was the most public religious place you could be and at the most important time of the year—the Passover.

Jesus turned everything upside down. Sometimes our religious life has to be turned upside down as well. The human heart is so deceitful that we are often not aware that we may be doing the right thing but with the wrong motives. We can come to church, sit in the pews, sing songs of praise, serve in the nursery or whatever, but your heart is not right in that work. You feel unappreciated. Maybe you subtly feel like you are earning favor with God as you serve. Sometimes when you seek true worship from the heart, it will turn your life upside down. Just as the tables of the money changers were turned upside down, so must our false notions of service and worship be overturned. If it is not worship from the heart, it is not worship.

Worship from the Heart...

2.is Trinitarian.

This is not the main point of the story but it is worth noting. Jesus calls the temple “My Father’s house. Jesus continually talks of His father and their perfect relationship. There is no explicit mention of the Holy Spirit here but we are reminded that there is plurality in the Godhead. There is one God existing in three persons. A perfect relationship, an intimate fellowship. This is the relationship Jesus had with His Father.

A few weeks ago I mentioned the book, “I Dare to Call Him Father.” For this formerly Muslim woman, understanding God as her Father was a huge breakthrough for her.

"Father, oh my Father God," I cried, with growing confidence. My voice seemed unusually loud in the large bedroom as I knelt on the rug beside my bed. But suddenly that room wasn't empty any more. He was there! I could sense His Presence. I could feel His hand laid gently on my head. It was as if I could see His eyes, filled with love and compassion. He was so close that I found myself laying my head on His knees like a little girl sitting at her father's feet. For a long time I knelt there, sobbing quietly, floating in His love. I found myself talking with Him, apologizing for not having known Him before. And again, came His loving compassion, like a warm blanket settling around me.

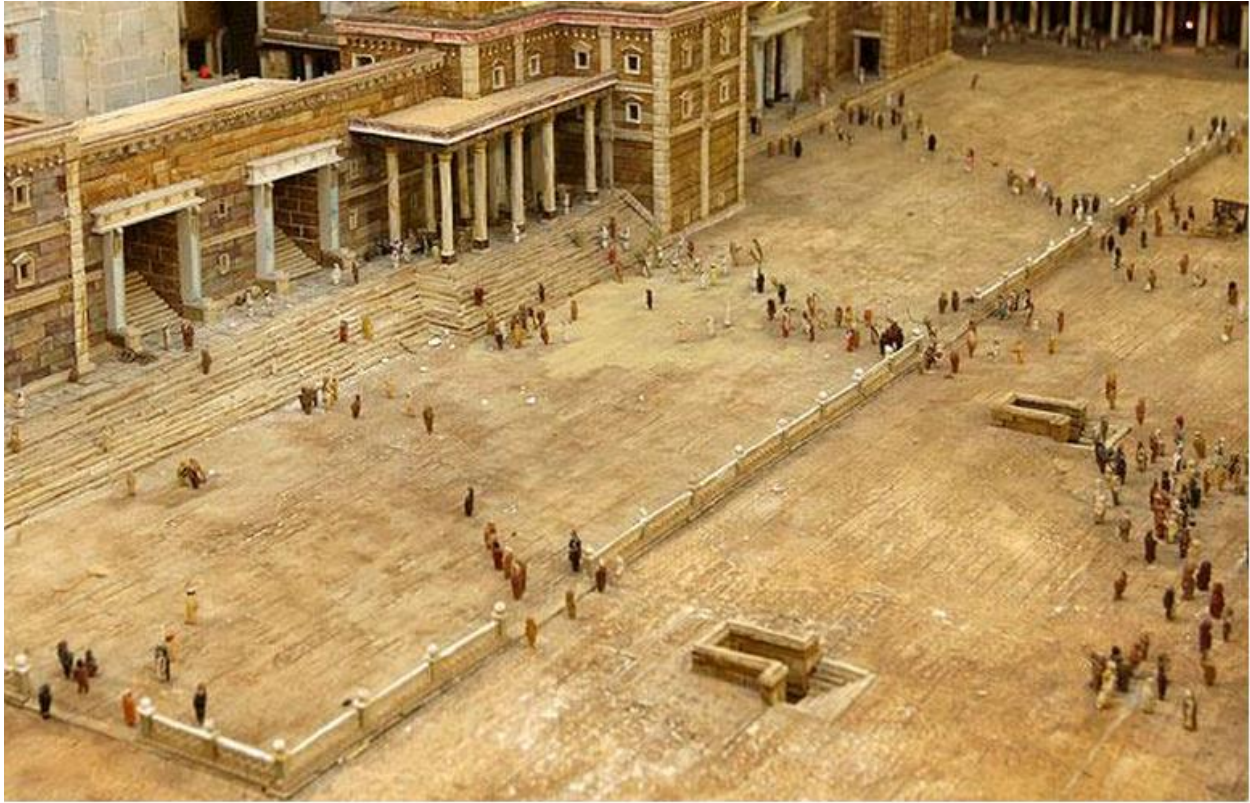
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This had an impact on her, in part, because she had such a good relationship with her own father. But many of you have not had the same blessing, so sometimes it is difficult for you to address God as your Father. It is true—our earthly fathers are supposed to model themselves after our Heavenly Father. But even the very best fathers fall very short. But we must remember that our faith is Trinitarian. You can't have Jesus without the Father. If there is any sense in which your earthly father is interfering with your understanding of your Heavenly Father, then you need to separate those two relationships. The Father longs to embrace you just as he embraced this woman in the quiet prayers in her own home.

Worship from the Heart...

3. only comes through Jesus' death and resurrection.

The religious leaders were upset by what Jesus did so they asked him for a sign. *Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."* This happened in AD28 and by this time the temple area had been under construction for 46 years. However, it was not fully completed until AD63, so it actually took about 80 years for full completion. We can imagine up to four generations of men in one family taking part in the temple construction.



This is a model of Herod's Temple, but by this time there were parts of it that were unfinished. So when the Jews answered Jesus about how long it had taken to build, they were well aware that even after 46 years it was still not done. So Jesus' response about raising a temple back to fullness in three days absolutely knocked them off their feet. Remember, this was Jesus' answer in response to their request for a sign. They were demanding a sign to demonstrate the spiritual authority by which he ran the money changers from the temple. But destroying the temple was not a sign they were willing to take. They saw it as complete nonsense.

Interestingly, this same event was used against Jesus at his trial. The false witnesses said, 'We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands. (Mark 14:58)

Jesus clearly saw the temple in typological terms. The temple was a type of the Messiah, a forerunner of something better. The temple was himself, his own body. Here at the beginning of his ministry he was already speaking about his death and resurrection, although in very vague terms. Even his brand new disciples were clueless about its meaning.

This temple as his body also looks back to chapter one. *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1:14). The word 'dwelt' or 'dwelling' means a tent, like the Tabernacle. God's glory dwelt in the Tabernacle just as it did in the temple. But even the more permanent temple was not permanent, was it?

Solomon was right when he prayed, *But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!* (1 Kings

8:27) No tent, no Tabernacle, no Temple made by human hands could ever contain the glory of God. God did choose to dwell with his people there for a time, to come down to them and condescend to them for our good. But all of that was looking forward to the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us. And here Jesus told everyone that the temple of his body must die and be raised to life three days later. Without this, there is no worship from the heart. If trust in Jesus' death and resurrection is not at the core of your belief, then you have no worship, for you are not yet a Christian.

If this was the Lord's temple 2000 years ago, where is Jesus' temple now, in 2016? Paul tells us in Ephesians 2.

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Eph 2.19-22)

We, the body of Christ, are being built into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. That profound thought alone would take several more sermons to flesh out.

Worship from the Heart...

4. is helped by, but not dependent upon signs and miracles.

The Jews demanded a sign from Jesus. In Matthew Christ said, *An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah* (Matthew 16:4). What these Jews missed was the fact that the cleansing of the temple itself was a sign. Jesus had the authority and right to do what he did but the Jews missed that fact altogether.

On the other hand, the gospel of John was written and the signs were done by Jesus so *that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name* (John 20:31). Jesus did signs to demonstrate his deity, that he was God. That he had all authority to heal sickness and to forgive sins. But Jesus signs and miracles are on his own terms and we do not have a right to demand them or to base our faith on them.

How many times have you said, "If only God would..."? We can be much like these faithless Jews. In our own way, we demand a sign. In the quietness of our heart we say, "If only God will heal my dad from his cancer, then my faith would be stronger." "If only God caused my daughter to repent and turn back to him, I would believe." There is nothing wrong with asking the Lord for such things as long as we are not demanding them as a sign to prove his faithfulness to us. He has already done that.

Worship from the Heart...

5. Always includes saving faith.

The end of this passage records instances of faith.

22 When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.²

The disciples believed, but only later when they understood. We are told that “many” believed in him. But then John added this amazing verse.

24-But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people 25 and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

What John meant was that the faith of these people was not a true faith. We will see this several times in the gospel of John. Crowds follow Jesus, they claim to have faith in Jesus only to fall away a little while later. Most of us have seen this in the lives of friends and family. We all know people who we thought were dedicated believers only to see them later abandon their faith. That is always painful and sobering to watch but they all serve as important reminders to search our own hearts. If you are between the ages of ten and twenty, chances are you are following Christ right now largely because your parents did. But have you made your faith your own faith? Whatever your age, are you in any danger of falling away from faith in Christ? What is likely to push you away? Is your faith and worship from the heart?

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¹ Bilquis Sheikh, *I Dared to Call Him Father: The Miraculous Story of a Muslim Woman’s Encounter with God*, Chosen Books: Grand Rapids, © 1978, pp. 145-146.

² What were the “signs” that Jesus was doing here? The text does not tell us, but I can think of three possibilities.

1. Jesus cleansing the temple was the sign that led to belief. This certainly was one sign but the text has the plural “signs,” indicating more than one. Perhaps the multiple parts of the temple cleansing were viewed as multiple signs.
2. Even though the miracle at Cana was a private miracle, because the disciples and the servants witnessed it, it is possible that news of this miracle was already spreading in Jerusalem. (Personally, I don’t think this was very likely, but it is possible.) The sign at Cana combined with the sign of the temple cleansing equaled “signs.”
3. Jesus did signs that were not recorded in this chapter, just as John explicitly stated in chapter 20. “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

My tentative conclusion is a combination of these possibilities—that the temple cleansing was one sign and then Jesus did others signs which were not recorded.