



## LENT BIBLE STUDY - 2022 ENTERING THE PASSION OF JESUS

#2

### THE TEMPLE – RISKING RIGHTEOUS ANGER

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#### Mark 11:15-19 & John 2:13-21

The episode often referred to as the 'Cleansing of the Temple', in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, comes after Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. However, in John's gospel, the incident happens much earlier – at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, following Jesus' first miracle when water was turned into wine.

Differing details give us differing insights and perspectives. We should not say that because stories differ in detail, then the gospels can't be trusted. Instead, we should explore what is being shared, in order to help us understand better.

So, here is what we know: the Temple complex is huge (about the size of 12 football pitches). Jesus, therefore, did not disrupt the entire business workings, but did something symbolically. The vendors sold their goods in an area known as the Court of the Gentiles. The only place that sacrifice could take place, and depending upon what they could afford, pilgrims would purchase their sacrificial animal in this place. The Temple was actually something very different to the way we think of the church building.

In all accounts, though, Jesus drives out the money changers and vendors in an act of holy anger. There are times, it would seem, when 'business as usual' is totally inappropriate – even obscene. Was it because the poor were being taken advantage of, or that there were those in cahoots with the Roman authorities; that the high priest was corrupt, etc? We have all kinds of plausible ideas of what the issue could be.

Consider these points:

1. Jesus did not hate the Temple and did not reject it. If he had done so, his disciples would not have continued to worship there.
2. Jesus is not opposed to purity laws.
3. Jesus says nothing about the Temple exploiting the population.
4. The Temple has an outer court where Gentiles are welcome to worship. Although they were welcome, they did not have the same rights and responsibilities as Jews.

Caiaphas's (the high priest) job was, among other things, to keep the peace. He was the representative of the people of Judea to Rome. He was appointed by Rome, so could only do his job as long as Pilate let him. He was, quite literally, caught in a dilemma being both nominal leader of the Jewish people and being responsible for the maintenance of Jewish tradition. One major dilemma, for example, would be that Rome wanted him to offer sacrifice to the emperor – something he and the other Jews refused to participate in.

When Herod needed money for his building schemes, he would often raid the Temple treasury – taking away funds that were there to help the poor, as well as maintain the Temple.

So where does that take us in understanding Jesus' anger?

At the beginning of Mark's account, Jesus quotes from Isaiah 11:17, saying:

*"Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a **house of prayer for all nations**'?"*

Jesus' concern is not the Temple, but the attitude of the people who are coming to it. (Read: Isaiah 56:6-7) Jesus is standing in the courtyard of the Gentiles, where people of all nations can gather. The temple was a place for both Jew and stranger to meet. (See Leviticus 19:18, 34). In effect God's love encompasses all.

The issue is not with the Temple excluding Gentiles – there are churches that we could go to which would not allow us to participate in some of the rituals – but the attitude toward the ‘stranger’.

In other words, the Temple was not actually being a house of prayer for ALL, where EVERYONE was genuinely welcomed.

Interestingly, Matthew and Luke do not include the phrase ‘for all nations’, and simply refer to the Temple as a ‘house of prayer.’

Jesus, in Matthew 21:13 quotes Jeremiah 7:11, when he uses the phrase ‘**den of thieves**’ – he doesn’t mean a place where robbers go to count their loot. He actually refers to those who are what we might call Sunday Christians – those who follow their own code of conduct during the week, and then make a show on a Sunday – thus making the church a ‘den of robbers’ or a ‘cave of sinners’ – a place for showing off.

Jesus, and Jeremiah for that matter, are saying that the Temple should be a place where people find community, welcome the stranger and repent of their sins; a place where people are helped to live a godly life.

John’s gospel, on the other hand, uses the term ‘**marketplace**’ to describe what is going on to make Jesus angry. (Read Zechariah 14:21). Jesus is anticipating that there will be a time when there is no need of vendors and the sacred nature of the Temple will spread through all the people – indicating a time when ALL peoples, ALL nations can worship in peace and in love. The picture is one where there is no difference between home and house of worship, because all are treated as sanctified.

In John’s gospel Jesus says, “*Destroy the Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*” Jesus, as John’s gospel states, changed the subject from the building to his body (John 2:21; see a similar phrase in Mark 14:58 and Matthew 26:61). These are words with which people taunt Jesus on the cross.

John’s gospel was the last of the four gospels to be written. Thus, the author would have known about the destruction of the Temple in 70AD. Following its destruction people would have continued to worship in their homes and synagogues.

Jesus was sharing the new truth that his body was for them a new temple – in eating bread and wine they could find the peace they had previously found in the Jerusalem Temple.

Paul later talks about the followers of Jesus as the ‘body of Christ’ (1 Corinthians 12:25) and members of the body are to take care of one another. He also talks about the body being the ‘temple of the Holy Spirit’ (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Some final thoughts about bodies:

John says that Jesus’ body is the New Temple. His body is a sign of the new covenant – a means of reconciliation, a ransom for many. How do we respond to such generosity?

The idea that the body be a place of welcome for all people. Is that true today?

The body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit – another way of realising that humankind is made in the image and likeness of God. Do we see that sense of the divine in others?

