

Transcript

The Jesus Story - The Cleansing of the Temple

In the last session, we looked at the 'Wedding in Cana'. Verse 11 ended by telling us:

11 This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.

This was the proof that Jesus was who He claimed to be, 'The Messiah'. This miracle gave the disciples positive proof of who He was. His brothers, they took a little longer to believe in Him. We know they did later because two letters in the New Testament are believed by most commentators to have been written by two of the brothers of Jesus, James and Jude. But this miracle was a fantastic start to the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus.

Now, in the next verse, verse twelve, John goes on to record what happened next.

12 After this He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples;

Following the wedding, Jesus departs with his disciples and his family, going down to Capernaum. Throughout his public ministry, Capernaum would be the base for the work of Jesus. Just a small village on the main north-south highway through Galilee. Capernaum was a Jewish community. Other places in Galilee could involve Gentiles or a mixed community.

12 ... Jesus, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples;

The whole family remained together on this journey. At this time this was not a very large group. There is something that we really need to keep in mind. John the one writing this gospel, was there at the beginning, he was an eye witness, he was the only one of the gospel writers to witness first hand all the early ministry of Jesus. He was there with Jesus, when these things took place. And he would know just who else was there.

John was one of Jesus' first disciples, and, remained with Jesus right up till the end, to the cross. and he became a powerful preacher of the Gospel after the resurrection of Jesus. Although the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke had been around for years, when John wrote his gospel it was not his intention to go over that well-covered ground again. What he wanted to do, was just to add new information and descriptions of the acts performed by Jesus that they had missed out. In fact, roughly three-quarters of the material found in this gospel is unique to John.

We can safely fit verse 12 into the account that the other gospels record; of Jesus when He makes a second call to the disciples. Matthew, Mark and Luke record that as Jesus was walking along by the sea of Galilee he saw the brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, and Peter and Andrew, the sons of Simon, fishing, and he called them to follow him.

This must have occurred on this occasion when, after the miracle at Cana of Galilee, Jesus moved down to the sea and stayed for awhile with his mother and his brothers

in Capernaum, at the north end of the sea of Galilee. John wants us to see these events as closely following one upon the other. He is maintaining a rather precise account of the timing of the crucial events at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus.

John describes the first few days of public ministry of Jesus in chapter one and the first 11 verses of chapter two. Then he tells us that after the wedding, Jesus, His disciples, and His family make their way down to Capernaum; ‘Jesus, His mother, and His brothers’. It seems important to John that we know that Jesus did have brothers from the marriage of Joseph and Mary.

This is how Matthew describes it 1v25:

25 And Joseph did not know Mary till she had brought forth her firstborn Son.

Matthew makes a point of telling us that Mary was a virgin until the term: “did not know Mary until,” means did not know her sexually, until after Jesus was born. The idea here is that after Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph had a normal relationship of intimacy and there would be children from that union.

The fact, that Jesus had brothers and sisters, is important to our understanding of who Jesus is. God intended that His Son would come into the world and be like us. Jesus, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples.

This group would consist of probably eleven in total. There would be, Jesus, and, His mother. And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas (Mt 13v55)

The first disciples John and Andrew, they were the first on the scene, followed by Simon Peter, Philip and Nathanael. Jesus took quality time out to be with his family and friends. There is a very important message for us here. Jesus, just like the rest of us needed that time of friendly fellowship. We too need a time when we can encourage each other in the Lord.

Jesus encourages His family and friends by joining them for a “gathering” and in doing this He underlines the importance of friends and family.

There is a good lesson for all of us here. Jesus does not want burnt out disciples. We all need those times of Christian Fellowship and relaxing, a time to recharge our spiritual batteries.

This is what we read in Marks gospel 6:30, after the apostles returned from a preaching trip:

30 Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught.

Now just look at his in verse 31, and He said to them:

31 “Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.”, For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.

32 So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves.

The bible is filled with exhortations demonstrating our need for times of refreshing. Ps 46:10:

10 Be still, and know that I am God;

Jesus stayed in Capernaum while he was preaching in Galilee, and it seems as if Jesus made it his headquarters in Galilee, and what little rest he did have, would be there. The company that travelled with Him were his mother, his brothers, and his disciples. Wherever Jesus went, He hardly ever went alone, having called these disciples to a more permanent relationship with himself.

Now they had left all to follow Him. He left with them for Jerusalem to celebrate the first Passover as the accepted Messiah, the Promised One.

In verse 13 it tells us:

13 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Much of the Gospel of John revolves around the Passover festivals in Jerusalem. John wants to make sure we never lose sight of who Jesus was and why Jesus came. Jesus is not the main character in an interesting story. He is far more than a wise teacher. Jesus came to earth because of Passover. He came to fulfil, once and for all, God's promise of a spotless Lamb who will take away the sins of the world.

At the beginning of the Gospel of John we read this declaration from John the Baptist when he describes the mission of Jesus, 1:36:

36 And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!"

Now what we are going to look at next is a picture takes some real effort to imagine. What Jesus sees going on in the temple courts troubles Him a great deal! The place of prayer has become a place of profit-taking. It smells more like a barnyard than the place where anyone would seek God's presence.

When Jesus arrived at the Temple He found there were people doing business in the outer courts of the temple, and they had ruined the only place where Gentiles could come and worship. This area was called the court of the Gentiles, and they had turned it into Farmers Market. Pens filled with oxen and sheep, cages filled with doves. The noise and stench would be unbelievable, it would have created a foul atmosphere while dealers and pilgrims stood around arguing over the prices.

There would be men there with cages of doves, and alongside these sat the money-changers, each behind his little table, covered with piles of coins. A real shambles, with all the noise of an Eastern flea market! The Temple had become the most greedy, dishonest and corrupt place in all of Israel and Jesus was about to clean it up.

It was probably His Righteous Anger that really carried the day. Forget the pictures that artists have tried to paint. All the artist impressions that I have seen depict a slim looking man with a beard brandishing a small whip clearing a big room of people and animals.

Jesus must have gone like a whirlwind through the Temple. You can almost sense the shame the anger and the sorrow welling up in Jesus as He strikes out at the whole wretched business, all of it, animals, tables, money, and men!

"Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!"

The whip demonstrated both authority and force. Deep-rooted unrighteousness is not dealt with passively. The whole house must be cleansed if true worship is to be restored. The words in the passage are strong: He “drove them all out,” and “poured out the changers’ money and overturned the tables.”

This was The Angry Son of God in action:

16 And He said to those who sold doves, “Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!”

The very size of this scene would be amazing, there would have been literally hundreds and hundreds of people, all manner of animals, traders and religious leaders; and Jesus herded them all out. This is a picture that no artist could paint.

Holy Anger.

You have heard the expression: ‘All Hell broke loose’. Well let me tell you, that is nothing to be compared with when all Heaven breaks loose. The sight of the money changers and animal-sellers angered Jesus.

Let it never be said that getting angry is a sin. God gets angry, and on this occasion Jesus most certainly was very angry at the sin on display. The incident of Jesus forcibly clearing the temple is a contradiction of the traditional impression of Him as that of gentle Jesus meek and mild. Gentle He was, and patient, merciful and long-suffering when dealing with contrite sinners; but, stern and inflexible in the presence of hypocrisy.

People often see Jesus as the friend of children and suffering Saviour, but in this scene we see Him demonstrating not only His righteous anger in defending what is right, but also, His physical power. No one stood in His way or stood up to Him. Thirty years old with a couple of decades working as a carpenter meant that He was no physical weakling. He was not afraid of removing those elements that were spoiling the purity of the temple. His religious zeal moved Him to a righteous indignation and anger towards those who were in the wrong.

This was a very natural reaction to injustice and impurity.

When Jesus drove those doing business out of the temple courts, He did not do it in a flash of anger. He took the time to make a whip of cords and thought carefully about what He would do. Jesus made a “scourge of small cords” (literally a braided whip of ropes) and drove them all out of the temple. And not only did He drive out the corrupt businessmen, He released the sheep and oxen too.

He then overthrew the money changer’s tables and poured out all the money they had extorted from the people. The merchants and the moneychangers did not care that the Temple was a holy place. They did not come to worship God there. They came to earn money for themselves!

When Jesus saw them, he forced them all to leave the Temple. He was very angry. The merchants and the moneychangers did not respect God’s house, and they did not respect the people who came to worship him there. The merchants and the moneychangers did business in the Gentiles’ Courtyard. For the Gentiles, this courtyard was the only place in the Temple where they could pray. But it was very

difficult to pray in an atmosphere like that. So Gentiles who wanted to worship God could not do this. And this would be another reason that Jesus became so angry. Their greed for money is interfering with the Gentiles' coming to worship the one true God. They've trivialized the worship of God. When unbelievers entered the temple and saw the commerce, they would assume the God of Israel is an excuse used to extort people's money.

Jesus is angry because his Father's house is being corrupted, and worship is being perverted. Jesus' love for his Father fuels his anger at the temple's corruption. Jesus does not lose his temper. He is not out of control. He does not fly off the handle. But he is angry. Jesus is in control of his emotions and He can put into words why he is so angry, He displays his anger without sinning. Jesus is angry because the Jews have desecrated his Father's house (v16).

The desecration of the holy Temple with cattle, manure, and greedy money changers demanded a response on the part of Jesus the Messiah. The Jewish Temple was God's house yet this holy place had become a dirty, noisy market. Jesus made a whip out of cords and drove the merchants and their animals from the Temple court. He overturned the tables of the money changers, scattering their coins on the pavement.

The traffickers fled before his glance; not in terror of his scourge, or of one man whom they might have defied, but there was something about him that struck fear; an authority, a divine majesty,

The act was superhuman. If any one doubts this; let them try to clear a market of hundreds of greedy traffickers with a single scourge, and see just how far they will get with it. Along with the traders he drove out their cattle, and overturned the tables of the money changers. The Jews did not question the legitimacy of the action taken by Jesus against the merchants and money changers. This is what we read this in verse 18:

18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"

They knew that what was going on in the Temple was wrong, so what they did was to question His authority. Who did He think He was? The Jews demanded of Jesus a miraculous sign to authenticate His status and prove His right to take such action. Jesus does answer them, but, they don't understand just what He is telling them. Perhaps we need to read this passage. The question concerning the Temple we find in verses 18-22:

18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"

19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

20 Then the Jews 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 of the temple of His body.

22 Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

This last statement by John shows that John wrote his account some years after the others. It would be years after because he could tell us:

When He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them;

Three years later, when Jesus comes to Jerusalem again He will enter the Temple a second time and once again remove these men who are conducting business for profit in the House of God. There are two accounts of Jesus cleansing the Temple we can easily explain the differences between John and the other three gospel accounts.

John in his account puts Jesus clearing the temple at the beginning of His ministry. And, remember John was present when this took place. The other three gospel accounts describe what happened when Jesus cleared the Temple at the end of His ministry, just before He went to the cross.

Now that business with the religious leaders is finished, Jesus can return to His originally-intended plans. John does not go into detail or give any kind of a listing of the various miracles Jesus did while at Jerusalem but he does mention that Jesus was active in doing miraculous work while in the city. This is what we read:

23 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did.

24 But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men,

25 and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

There is a life-and-death difference between believing in His name “when they saw the signs which He did,” and believing in Him because of who He is. Seeing signs will create excitement, but it also creates a belief that is sometimes superficial. The dramatic cleansing of the temple was no small matter, nor were the signs which followed. Here is a wonder-working Messiah who seems to fit their shallow expectations.

How prone we all are to put our trust in whatever will impress us even today we are surrounded by subtle pressures to settle for a certain kind of Leader. A kind of religious star system who make conceited gospel promises to solve everyone’s hang-ups and problems. Spectacular religious TV specials that make all our local church affairs seem drab by contrast. And the show must get bigger and more dazzling all the time.

Many of us who believe that we are born again. Do we really know the true cost of discipleship? This comes only when we submit to Jesus Christ as Lord on His terms. It is only when we accept Jesus on His terms that He will commit Himself to us.

“But Jesus did not commit Himself to them.”

He knows, without anyone telling Him, what is in all of us. Many believed in His name when they saw the signs: Jesus knew that this was a thin, superficial belief. It wasn’t

based on anything other than an admiration of the spectacular. Knowing this, Jesus did not commit Himself to them.

“If belief is nothing more than admiration for the spectacular, it may cause many to applaud, but the Son of God cannot commit Himself to that kind of faith.”

If you are like me and many other born again believers and often feel like you are completely unworthy of the love of Jesus, then you are a perfect candidate to follow Him. Every man that Jesus chose, every woman that He saved, every life that He changed; they were all imperfect and repeat offenders of sin.

Jesus showed incredible patience and understanding with every struggling sinner and at no time does He ever cast anyone aside who makes mistakes. Before Peter denied that He knew Jesus, three times, Jesus told him it was going to happen. Jesus instructed Peter that after this took place and he came to his senses; that he should return to Jesus and strengthen his brothers by what he learned during his failures.

In other words: “take what you learn from your mistakes and use it to encourage other people who are also struggling and failing.”

No person should ever feel that Jesus could not possibly forgive their sins. He can and He has, and He always will. Jesus is in the business of using people with flaws, and restoring those who fail.

Well, we must finish here, but there is much more to look at. In the next chapter, we shall be looking at a very interesting conversation that took place at night with a man called Nicodemus.

Chapter three begins:

1 There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

2 This man came to Jesus by night.

It was a conversation that has changed millions of lives down the years. But, that will be next time.