

“The Zeal of Christ”

November 16, 2025

John 2:13-25

I. Introduction

Generally, when we think about Jesus, we think of a gentle or a meek person. We are reminded of the Sermon on the Mount in [Matthew 5:39](#) where He said, “**But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.**” We sing about “The Gentle Shepherd,” “The Lamb of God” or about His “Meekness and Majesty.” But as we read this story of the clearing of the Temple, we certainly see a different picture of Jesus. From our point of view, this Jesus wasn’t gentle or meek or mild. The Jesus found in [verses 13-16](#) made a whip of cords, overturned tables, and threw the religious establishment into disarray.

Earlier in [John 1:29](#) John the Baptist called Him “**the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,**” but in today’s Scripture we see Jesus as the “**Lion of the tribe of Judah**” from [Revelation 5:5](#). And as a Lion, He has teeth and claws. Here we see Jesus, the Lion of Judah, passionate, driven, dramatic and even angry as He drove the animals and merchants out of the Temple. Here we see the zeal of Christ as He confronts the merchants and leaders of the Temple.

Turn to John’s testimony in the beginning of a letter he wrote to fellow Christians, [turn to 1 John 1:1-3](#). The Apostle John was with Jesus from the beginning of His earthly ministry. He saw Jesus’ miracles, heard His teachings, and observed His life up close and personal 24/7 for three years. For this reason, John wrote the Gospel of John so that his readers would also understand Jesus’ true identity as “**the Christ, the Son of God**” ([John 20:31](#))—God Incarnate; Lamb and Lion. In today’s Scripture Jesus’ zeal for God, His Father, is seen first in His response to distracted worship.

II. Jesus’ Response to Distracted Worship

The Feast of Passover commemorated Israel’s deliverance from bondage in Egypt, when the Lord, through His angel of death, killed the first born of the Egyptians but passed over the houses of the Israelites who had followed Moses’ instructions as recorded in [Exodus 11 & 12](#). Later Moses wrote in [Deut. 16:16](#), “**Three times a year all your men must appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose: at the**

Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks and the Festival of Tabernacles.” So, in obedience to God’s law, Jesus went up to Jerusalem to observe both the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread which followed. This is the first of 3 Passovers mentioned in John’s gospel that Jesus celebrated; the others are found in **John 6:4** and **John 11:55**. Although He deliberately violated the manmade religious traditions of the Pharisees, Jesus obeyed all the statutes of the Law and was faithful to uphold the Law.

When He arrived in Jerusalem, Jesus would have found the city bursting with Jewish pilgrims from all around the Roman world. They were there to celebrate this most important of Jewish feasts--Passover. Because of the multitudes who came, Passover would mean big business for Jerusalem-based merchants. Those coming from any distance would need food and a place to stay. They would also need to buy animals for sacrifice once they arrived in Jerusalem. As well as sacrificing, every Jewish male 20 years old or older had to pay an annual temple tax (**Exodus 30:13-14**). But because of the unreliable purity of the silver content of coins from various countries, the tax could be paid only by using Jewish or Tyrian coins, so non-residents would have to exchange their money for acceptable coins.

Undoubtedly, the selling of animals and exchanging money had begun as a convenience for those Jews who had to come long distances to worship in the Temple. But over time, like so many things man gets involved with, these activities changed from a ministry to a business. Not wanting to miss out, the priests had established a very lucrative business on the Temple grounds for exchanging foreign money and selling the animals needed for sacrifices all at a huge profit. In fact, during Jesus’ day, it was called the Bazaar of Annas, the High Priest at that time. This loud, raucous, competitive market had been brought into the outer court of the Temple—the Court of the Gentiles.

As He surveyed the sacred temple grounds turned into a bazaar, Jesus must have been appalled and outraged. The appropriate worshipful atmosphere that should have been there in the house of God was completely missing. The sound of heartfelt praise and fervent prayers would have been drowned out by the bawling of oxen, the bleating of sheep, the cooing of doves, and the loud haggling of vendors and their customers. The place where the Jews should have been meeting the Gentiles and telling them about the one true God had become, as Jesus called it in **Matthew 21:13**, a “**den of thieves** or **robbers.**”

Since the purity of temple worship was a matter of honoring God, Jesus took swift and decisive action. Jesus cleared the Temple. He made a whip of cords (probably those used to tie the animals) and He “drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle.” But in His anger, He was careful not to destroy anyone’s property, e.g., He didn’t release the doves, but He made it clear that He was in command. “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market.” The Temple was His Father’s house, and Jesus would not have the religious leaders pollute it with their moneymaking businesses.

The disciples must have watched in amazement as their new-found Master cleared the Temple. Later they would remember Psalm 69—a Messianic Psalm. In particular, verse 9 which says, “For zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me.” Oh, there were some like Zechariah, Simeon, and Anna who still loved God and revered His Temple (Luke 1:5-22; 2:25-38) but most religious leaders were false shepherds who took advantage of the people. When Jesus cleared the Temple, He “declared war” on these hypocritical religious leaders. Jesus’ two physical clearings of the temple (this one at the beginning of His ministry and the second at the end his ministry on the Monday following Palm Sunday (Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46)), along with His constant assaults on their hypocrisy, were more than enough motivation to cause the leaders of the Jews to seek His crucifixion. Jesus’ zeal, Jesus’ passion for God and God’s house would consume Him as He died on the cross. Jesus’ zeal would lead to His death.

III. Jesus’ Response to the Questioning Leaders

Jesus’ actions brought a quick response from the Jewish leaders. The Jews who confronted Jesus were either members of the temple police force, representatives of the Sanhedrin, or both. Arriving to investigate the commotion in the temple court, they demanded of Him, “What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?” Their question was not a request for information, but a challenge to this new prophet. Jesus had taken it upon Himself to disregard their authority and regulate the temple activities Himself, and they wanted a miraculous sign as proof of His authority for doing so. As Paul would write in 1 Corinthians 1:22, “The Jews require a sign.” Often during His ministry, the leaders asked Jesus to

give them a sign, but they never accepted the ones they were given. Later, in [John 12:37](#), John wrote, “**Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe Him.**”

Jesus’ reply to the questioning leaders, “**Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days,**” baffled the Jewish authorities and, for the time being, His disciples as well. Being spiritually blind, those who heard misunderstood what He was saying. Throughout the Gospel of John, there are people who misunderstand spiritual truth and interpret it in material or physical terms like Nicodemus did in [John 3:4](#) or the woman at the well in [John 4:11](#) or Jesus’ followers in [John 6:52](#). Here, in today’s Scripture, the leaders couldn’t understand how Jesus could possibly accomplish in three days’ work what had already taken 46 years and was still not finished. The construction of Herod’s temple—a temple to rival Solomon’s temple—began in 19 or 20 BC and wasn’t completed until AD 64. *(To save you time, these numbers mean that Jesus started His ministry in AD 26 or 27.)*

Jesus’ statement was, of course, a prediction of His own death and resurrection. His disciples may not have remembered or understood until “**after he was raised from the dead,**” but His enemies remembered His words and used them at His trial—[turn to Matthew 26:59-61](#). When He was dying on the cross, some of the people mocked Him with His words as well: “**You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself!**” ([Matthew 27:40](#)). Picturing His death as the destruction of the temple also suggested a violent death that would end in victorious resurrection.

IV. Finally, there’s Jesus’ Response to Unsaved Believers.

John wrote that while in Jerusalem for the Passover, Jesus performed “**miraculous signs**” that are not described in any of the Gospels. It may have been these particular signs that especially attracted Nicodemus—[turn to John 3:1-2](#). Because of these miracles, many people professed to believe in Him; but Jesus did not accept their claims. “**But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men.**” No matter what the people themselves said, He did not accept their testimony. Why? Because, being God, He knew what was in each person’s heart and mind.

The word “*believed*” in [John 2:23](#) and “*entrust*” in [John 2:24](#) are the same Greek word, *pisteu*,w., *pisteuo*. In other words, John was saying that “*these people believed in Jesus, but He did not believe in them.*” They were “*unsaved believers.*” They believed in the miracles, but they didn’t believe in the miracle **Worker**. It was one thing to respond to a miracle but quite something else to commit oneself to Jesus Christ and continue in His word. It takes more than having faith in miracles for a person to be saved; even the demons believe in God—[James 2:19](#) says, “*You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder.*” Seeing the signs and believing them is a great beginning—even the disciples started that way but then they had to have faith in the One doing the miracles. They had to “*Come and see.*”

Jesus didn’t believe in these men, because He knew the true state of every heart; “*He knew what was in a man.*” He saw in Nathanael the heart of an honest, true seeker, but He saw in these people a superficial façade—just an attraction to His spectacular signs. Genuine saving faith goes far beyond that. It demands whole-hearted commitment to Jesus as the Lord of one’s life, [turn to Matthew 16:24-26](#).

Throughout the Gospel of John, the Jewish people are divided over the meaning of these signs. The same miracles that attracted Nathanel and Nicodemus and others to Jesus caused some of the other religious leaders to want to kill Him. Some even said that Jesus’ miracles were done in the power of Satan; [Luke 11:15](#) says, “*But some of them said, ‘By Beelzebub, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons.’*” Jesus’ miracles were testimonies—in [John 5:36](#) Jesus said, “*I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.*” In [Acts 2:22](#) Peter preached, “*Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.*” Jesus’ miracles gave evidence of His divine Sonship.

V. Conclusion

There are several things that can be seen in today’s Scripture. First, the 3 different scenes in today’s Scripture highlight Jesus’ deity. As God, He single-handedly cleared His temple with Messianic zeal; as God He accurately predicted His own death and resurrection 3 days later; and as God He truly knew the

thoughts of every man's heart. Jesus' lordship goes hand in hand with His deity. As the God of the universe, He is worthy to be worshiped and obeyed—reverently adored as the King of kings and Lord of Lords and worshiped as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Rev. 5:12 says, “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”

At the same time, these 3 scenes also picture the process of salvation. The clearing of the temple demonstrated God's hatred of sin and impurity and the need for purification. The second scene, the discussion of Jesus' resurrection, revealed that God had a plan to provide life in Christ who, as Paul wrote in Romans 4:25, “was raised to life for our justification.” The final scene, the shallow belief of many of the people, revealed that God's provision of salvation—eternal life—comes only through genuine saving faith; of believing the miracle Worker as well as the miracles—as Jesus said in Luke 14:33, “In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”

Finally, we are reminded that we must guard **how** we come to worship. I doubt that the Jewish leadership initially set out to make a huge distraction in the Court of the Gentiles, but over time they lost perspective about the purpose of the Temple; what worship was all about. Turn to Psalm 95:1-7. As Psalm 96:8 puts it, “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.” Worship is about God, not about us. When we come together on Sunday mornings to worship, we must be sure that the sound of heartfelt praise and fervent prayers are not drowned out by actions in this building or by concerns—in or out of church—that displace God from being the priority in our minds and hearts. We need to guard our times of worship—as a congregation as well as in our own quiet times. We must make sure our worship brings honor and glory to God and not to ourselves. As Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”