

## **John 2:12-17**

### **What makes Jesus angry?**

I wonder if any of you have started spring cleaning, dusting and turning out cupboards and draws, getting rid of all those tins and jars lurking at the back of the cupboard that are well past their sell by date. For many of us being locked down at home has given the opportunity to have a good sort out.

This morning we're thinking about a time when Jesus performed a radical spring clean, a spring clean like no other in in the Jerusalem Temple.

In this extraordinary passage we see something about Jesus which we might find shocking, we see Jesus in the Temple - and he's really angry.

The temple was the beating heart of Judaism. It was the centre of worship, of national celebration and mourning. It was also the place where you'd find more animals both alive and dead than anywhere else. But above all else it was the place where Israel's God had promised to live in the midst of his people. It was the focal point for the nation.

And it was here that Jesus shockingly turned everything upside down. The clearing or cleansing of the temple is documented in all four gospels so it clearly a very significant event.

While John describes it at the beginning of Jesus's ministry just after his first miracle at Cana, changing water into wine, Matthew, Mark and Luke place it at the end of Jesus ministry just after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, in Holy week.

Scholars are in debate about whether the incident actually happened twice or whether, as is perhaps more likely, that John saw it as so significant, such a key event, that he placed it at the beginning to give a context to everything else Jesus did, a kind of metaphor for the ministry of Jesus in its entirety.

John was far more interested in the theological meaning. John may well have been thinking of the great prophecies of the coming of the Messiah

In Malachi 3 we read:

“Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the Lord Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.

Right from the beginning John wants us to know that Jesus is the Messiah of God come to renew the Jewish faith to bring passion and purity back into the worship of God.

He wants us to understand that what Jesus did in the temple is a hint at the new meaning he was giving to Passover when he would later share that supper with his disciples and speak of his body broken and his blood shed, the true Passover Lamb sacrificed for the sin of the world.

Let's take a closer look at what made Jesus angry. What was it that moved Jesus to act as he did?

**1)** First, I think it was because they were exploiting the worshippers.

It was Passover time. 'Passover was and is, the greatest of the Jewish feasts, when they celebrated deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Every adult male Jew living within 15 miles of Jerusalem had to be there. But it wasn't only the Jews in Palestine who came to Passover. By this time Jews were scattered all over the Mediterranean and beyond and it was the dream of every Jew to celebrate the Passover at least once in Jerusalem. It was a small city with narrow streets - it would have been packed, surging with people, surging with religious feeling. And attention was focused on the Temple.

In the Temple Courts Jesus found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money."

Temple Tax was the issue. Everyone over 19 had to pay a tax to the Temple - half a shekel: the equivalent of 2 days wages. This maintained the ministry - daily sacrifices, salaries of Priests, Levites, musicians. Because people came from all over the world there were a vast range of currency in use: coins from Rome, Greece, Egypt - all of them were used throughout the city - markets, stores - everywhere except the Temple., only Jewish coins could be used in the Temple.

The money changers exchanged the currency for the people. But the exchange rate was high they made a good profit on each transaction! The worshippers were being exploited.

Then there was the trade in animals. The animals used for offerings and sacrifices had to be perfect. Chances were that if you brought an animal from someone other than the Temple traders it would be rejected as impure by one of the Temple inspectors. People were having to pay excessive amounts for pigeons, lambs. Here again was bare faced extortion at the expense of poor and humble pilgrims who simply wanted to come and worship.

It was impossible for Jesus to stand passively by while the worshippers were exploited in this way. He was angry

**2)** All of this was going on in the Temple Courts, in the part called the "Court of the Gentiles". The banking, the cattle-market, the bartering - all happening in the only part of the Temple available to non-Jews: Gentiles were being excluded and Jesus was angry.

The way to God was being exploited and the way to God was being obscured.

God's plan was that Gentiles should have access to Him - He is the God of the whole earth. Even in these old covenant days He made provision for Gentiles. Jesus came to be the saviour of the world, not just of Israel. And He was angry. Mark tells us a little

more of what Jesus said:

“My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations, but you have made it a den of robbers...” (Mark 11:17)

Jesus was reacting against Jewish exclusiveness all of the goings on in the Temple courts shut out those Gentiles seeking to worship God.

**3)** God’s house was being desecrated, the house of prayer, but there was no prayer, only business. the place of worship, but there was no worship, only trade. The place to meet with God, but the way was blocked and Jesus angry –

"... he made a whip of cords and drove out from the Temple courts both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!"

Jesus was angry for good reason. He was concerned about the things that really matter. He knew that life has no meaning without God, and so he wanted this Temple open, available, cleared out so that, going there, people could meet with God.

Jesus was angry, Jesus was passionate in his love for His father and the honour of his name, he was passionate about prayer and worship that it should be sincere and accessible to all, he was passionate about people.

I wonder what gets us hot under the collar? Are we passionate for these things? A concern for God’s honour will make us better worshippers, more ardent in prayer, it will promote a zeal for evangelism, for justice, give us a deeper love for others.

This astonishing scene provoked a reaction.

We’re told the disciples remembered the words of Psalm 69, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

As the disciples watched Jesus at work in anger, they saw ancient promises being fulfilled. Wouldn’t the Messiah reform and renew the people’s worship? Isn’t this what Malachi had promised?

The Jews on the other hand asked what right Jesus had to act in this way they demanded of him, “What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"

What can you do to prove your claim?

Jesus’s answer is astonishing:

“Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.”

The Jews replied, it’s taken 46 years to build this Temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the Temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead his disciples remembered what he’d said. Then they believed the scriptures and the words that Jesus had spoken."

Jesus's point was, that since he, the Messiah, had come, the whole system of Temple worship, offerings, ritual and sacrifice was at an end. "You can destroy this temple now because it's no use at all, and on the third day I will raise up a new one".

And so he did. On the third day Jesus rose again from the dead and a new way to God was opened: no more need for specific places of worship, ritual or sacrifice - now access to God is open, direct, clear for all. Jesus has offered the ultimate sacrifice and fulfilled the meaning of the Temple.

Matthew tells us that when Jesus died on the cross the curtain in the Temple, the most important part of the place, was torn in two from top to bottom, the way to God was open.

And, as if to put the seal on it, in AD70 - only 30 or 40 years after Jesus's resurrection, in fulfilment of his prediction, the entire Temple was destroyed by the Romans and never rebuilt.

On that day the sacrificial system was brought to an end and never re-instated. Jesus has built a new temple - the Church, the Body of his people throughout the world indwelt by his Spirit - we are the Temple of God.

As Paul reminded the Corinthians Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?

Jesus certainly did some spring cleaning in the temple that day!

As we think about Jesus cleansing the temple, we should also think about some other cleaning that needs to be done. We're in the season of Lent a time to look inside ourselves and see if there's anything in us that needs to be changed. Are there some areas of our life where Jesus needs to do some "spring cleaning"?

Let me close with some words from Psalm 139:

Search me, o God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.