

# COMMENTARY ON JOHN

## LESSON NUMBER 24

**“ John 2:14 ” *And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: <sup>15</sup> And when He had made a scourge of small cords, He drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; <sup>16</sup> And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not My Father's house an house of merchandise. <sup>17</sup> And His disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten Me up.”***  
.....John 2:12-13)

### **THE FIRST CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE**

#### INTRODUCTION

After Jesus, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples left Cana, and briefly remained in Capernaum, they continued their journey to Jerusalem, because *“the Jew’s Passover was at hand.”* There are four particular Passover’s mentioned in the Gospels. The one attend by Jesus and His parents when He was twelve (Lk 2:41). The Passover of our text, when Jesus was thirty years of age, and had commenced His ministry (John 2:23). The Passover taking place around the time He fed the five thousand (John 6:4), and the Passover during which the Lord would lay down His life, a ransom for many (Matt 26:2,17; Mk 14:1; Lk 22:1; John 13:1). The latter is reported in all four Gospels. Only Luke records the one attended by Jesus when He was twelve, as well as the last one, at which time Jesus was crucified. John records the Passover of our text, the one during which He fed the five thousand, and the one during which Jesus was crucified. It is interesting that much of Christ’s life revolved around the ordinances associated with the Old Covenant: the feast days (John 2:23; 4:45; 7:14,37; 10:22), the Sabbath days (Mk 1:21; 6:2; Lk 4:15; 13:10), and Temple activities (Mk 11:27; 12:35; 14:49; John 7:28). This provides us with some rationale concerning the Jewish nation, the covenant made with them, and the manner of their life. It all provided a context in which the Christ could be properly raised, and within which He could make Himself known. Divine care was taken for Jesus not to be primarily known as a social Innovator, a Corrector of social disorders, or a means to the realization of personal ambitions. The purpose for which He was sent integrated with God’s *“eternal purpose,”* and was in no way intended to be temporal, or to promote temporal objectives and resolutions. That is a revolutionary thing to comprehend.

#### **HE FOUND IN THE TEMPLE**

**“JOHN 2:14 ” *And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting.”***

Jesus was often found *“in the Temple”* – walking (Mk 11:27), teaching (Mk 12:35), preaching the Gospel (Lk 20:1), healing (Matt 21:14), and not allowing people to carry a vessel through it (Mk 11:16). One of Satan’s temptations even involved him bringing Jesus

to Jerusalem, and setting Him on a pinnacle of the Temple (Lk 4:9). Toward the close of His life He was described in this manner: *"And in the day time He was teaching in the temple; and at night He went out, and abode in the mount that is called the mount of Olives"* (Luke 21:37). It is said of the people, *"And all the people came early in the morning to Him in the temple, for to hear Him"* (Luke 21:38). So now, upon arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus heads for the Temple. He knew there were corrupting teachers there – but they were intruders, and did not belong there. He was aware of the blight of dead routine, and the presence of hypocrisy in some who went there, but they also were trespassers in the Temple. It was not built for them.

Assuming Jesus regularly attended the Passover, this could well have been the thirtieth one He attended. At the very least, having attended them since He was twelve years of age, this would have been the eighteenth Passover He had attended. It is inconceivable that He, of whom it was said, *"He will magnify the Law, and make it honorable"* (Isa 42:21), would ever fail to do something His Father had commanded. We know that on the Sabbath day, it was His *"custom"* to be in the synagogue, associated with the reading of the Scripture (Lk 4:16).

**HE FOUND IN THE TEMPLE.** It may not be viewed as an advantage, but Jesus does examine people and things. He said to the church in Sardis, *"I have **not found** thy works perfect before God"* (Rev 3:2). When He went about among men and confronted a person with exemplary faith He said, *"Verily I say unto you, I have **not found** so great faith, no, not in Israel"* (Matt 8:10). He said to Peter and James and John and Andrew, *"Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: **Lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping.** And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch"* (Mark 13:3,35-37). Once, after Jesus had healed a paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, it is written: *"Afterward Jesus **findeth him** in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee"* (John 5:14).

Now, Jesus comes to the Temple. What will He find there. This is *"the house of prayer"* (Isa 56:7; Matt 21:13). Is that what He will find – many people praying? This is His *"Father's house"* (John 2:16). Will He find the people worshiping God, speaking of Him one to another, and honoring Him by their words and conduct? Or, will He simply ignore what He sees, and simply engage in prayer Himself? This is the kind of Jesus many serve today. Many reason like the Israelites who had departed from the Lord: *"The Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not"* (Ezek 9:9). Others reason, *"The Lord shall not see"* (Psa 94:7), and *"Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?"* (Isa 29:15). Like the wicked some men say of God, *"He will never see it"* (Psa 10:11). But this is all a delusion. The Lord saw Adam and Eve (Gen 3:9-19), Cain (Gen 4:9), the world of Noah's day (Gen 6:5), the builders in Shinar (Gen 11:5-8), Abimelech (Gen 20:3), Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:21), and Jerusalem at the time of Christ (Lk 13:35). You may be sure that Jesus will take note of what He sees in His Father's house!

**THOSE THAT . . .** The sight that greeted Jesus in the *"house of prayer"* was a commercial setting. They are described as *"those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting"* (John 2:14). He saw an assortment of animals oxen, sheep, and doves. He saw those who were converting money to the Temple coinage: *"changers of money,"* or those *"exchanging currency."*<sup>CEB</sup>

Surely this will be considered a good thing – a ministry of convenience, to eliminate the need to get ready to come to the house of God, taking an offering from your own

flock, and gathering the required coinage. The people could just come as they were, without any due preparation. They could obtain what was required after they arrived. That way, they could go about their own business until the last minute, and still be able to meet the Divine requirement – at least that is what they thought.

These merchants, however, had neither part nor lot in the work of the Lord. Their purported service was an unacceptable intrusion, and they were trespassers in the house of the Lord. The Lord could say to them what God said to Israel: *"who hath required this at your hand, to tread My courts?"* (Isa 1:12). The Amplified Bible reads, *"When you come to appear before Me, who requires of you that your [unholy feet] trample My courts?"* In Christ, such people are referred to as *"old leaven"* that is to be purged out of the church (1 Cor 5:7-8). They are opportunists who seek to exploit the people of God, offering some imagined minuscule benefit for their own advantage. The number of professing Christians would be significantly reduced if all opportunists, charlatans, and exploiters were purged from their number. Such are extortioners, or swindlers (1 Cor 5:11).

### **HE DROVE THEM ALL OUT**

*"<sup>15</sup> And when He had made a scourge of small cords, He drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables."*

**WHAT HAD JESUS CONFRONTED?** Jesus had confronted opportunists in the Temple of God – men who were making their living by supplying things pertaining to religion. They were supplying a service that enabled supposed worshipers to serve God conveniently, and without personal preparation. It may have appeared to be a thoughtful service, but that is not how the Lord viewed it—and He saw and knew human motives, as well as intentions and personal views of God.

**HE MADE A SCOURGE.** Other versions read, *"a whip,"* <sup>NKJV</sup> and *"a lash."* <sup>WILLIAMS</sup> A *"scourge"* was a whip of substantial strength to induce pain, or force animals to move out of a location. It could also be used on men. Jesus told His disciples that some would *"scourge"* them (Matt 10:17; 23:34). He told them He Himself would be *"scourged"* (Matt 20:19). In His trial, Jesus was scourged by Pilate (Matt 27:26; Mk 15:15; John 19:1). A certain captain was going to have Paul, *"examined by scourging"* (Acts 22:24). The eleventh chapter of Hebrews mentions believers who experienced *"mockings and scourgings"* (Heb 11:36).

I mention these things to confirm that Jesus prepared Himself for a violent response to what He was witnessing. Although some do not realize this, Jesus has more regard for God and the house of God than He does for men. He does have love for men, but He loves God more than He loves men.

**HE DROVE THEM ALL OUT OF THE TEMPLE.** Other versions read, *"threw everyone with their sheep and cattle out of the temple courtyard,"* <sup>GWN</sup> *"chased them all out of the Temple,"* <sup>NLT</sup> *"He put all forth out of the Temple,"* <sup>YLT</sup> *"forced all of them to leave."* <sup>IE</sup>

The *"them"* were the merchants, and He drove them out with a scourge. I do not think He was striking the ground with it. Confirming Jesus drove out *"those that sold oxen and sheep and doves,"* and *"the money changers,"* the text reads, *"He drove them all out of the Temple, AND the sheep, and the oxen."* Other versions read, *"WITH the sheep, and the oxen,"* <sup>NKJV</sup> *"INCLUDING the cattle and the sheep,"* <sup>CEB</sup> *"the sheep and cattle AS WELL."* <sup>CJB</sup>

He did not ask them to leave, but forced them to do so. How can this be reconciled

to Isaiah's statement of the Messiah: "because He had done no violence" (Isa 53:9). Isaiah meant that the Messiah was guilty of no crime, or doing violence for personal gratification, or robbery, etc.— "violence" such as filled the earth during the days of Noah (Gen 6:11). I will not speculate on the details involved in driving the merchants and moneychangers from the Temple. However, it does not appear to have been a gentle manner in which these people and their animals were expelled from the Temple. It also seems apparent that they left without their money.

**HE Poured OUT THE CHANGER'S MONEY.** Other versions read, "poured out the coins of the moneychangers," <sup>NASB</sup> "scattered the coins," <sup>NIV</sup> "sending in all directions the small money of the changers," <sup>BBE</sup> "dumped the moneychangers' coins," <sup>GWN</sup> and "spilling and scattering the brokers' money." <sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

This was probably a significant collection of coins, and might well have represented a large percentage of the merchant's wealth. However, in the house of God, they were of no value, and were treated as something without true worth. Here, in the domain of prayer and worship, money was nothing more than "filthy lucre" (1 Tim 3:3), and the "mammon of unrighteousness" (Lk 16:9). These men might have said that the work of the Lord costs money, and therefore carved out a place for themselves. But, in the house of God, Jesus will not place a value on their service or their coinage. In things pertaining to life and godliness, the value of those who work with convenience and money is questionable: fund raisers, budgeteers, investors, etc. I realize this is a sensitive area, but do not see how, in view of this text, it can be ignored.

**HE OVERTHREW THE TABLES.** Other versions read, "overturned the tables," <sup>NKJV</sup> "knocked over the money-changers' tables," <sup>CJB</sup> "He upset on the ground and overturned their tables," <sup>WEYMOUTH</sup> "upending the table," <sup>MESSAGE</sup> and "upsetting and tossing around their trays (their stands)." <sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

It must have been a sight: animals being herded out of the Temple, their owners being driven out, money strewn about on the floor, and tables and their contents knocked over. It all may have looked like chaos and disorder. Actually, however, the presence of these men, their animals, their tables, and their money had brought chaos and disorder into the house of God. The attention of the people had been turned from God and prayer to business; from sacrifices to a convenient way of obtaining sacrifices. Now, the people no longer had to prepare to go to the house of the Lord. Further, there were now people in the Temple who were not there to pray or worship. They had found the Temple to be nothing more than a place to conduct business.

There are numerous parallels in today's churches. Whatever a person may think of buildings in the work of the Lord, a structure that has been built for service to God should not be used for community service, political voting, etc.

### **WHAT JESUS SAID TO THEM**

*"<sup>16</sup> And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not My Father's house an house of merchandise. <sup>17</sup> And His disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up."*

**UNTO THEM THAT SOLD DOVES.** Doves were offered by those who were poor, and could not afford the larger animals. After giving birth, a mother was to bring an offering to make an atonement. The Law specified, "And if she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtles [turtledoves <sup>NKJV</sup>], or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, and the other for a sin offering: and the priest shall make an atonement for

*her, and she shall be clean" (Lev 12:8).*

**TAKE THESE THINGS HENCE.** The doves were in some sort of cages, which the sellers were to carry out of the Temple, instead of the doves being let loose and flying about in the courts of the Temple. The presence of these merchants and their goods contradicted the purpose for the house of the Lord, and therefore they were to be removed.

**MAKE NOT MY FATHER'S HOUSE.** Those who imagine that buildings are of no consequence to God must take note of this word of Jesus. The Temple, although it could not fully contain God, was His "*house.*" That is where He communed with the High Priest from above the seat (Lev 16:2; 2 Sam 4:4). 234 times it was called "*the house of the Lord*" (1 Kgs 7:12). 84 times it was called "*the house of God.*" Elsewhere Jesus referred to it as "*a house of prayer*" (Matt 21:13; Isa 56:7). This is where the Father's business was conducted (Lk 2:49). Here is where sacrifices were made (1 Kgs 12:27). The "*sacrifice of praise*" was offered here (Jer 33:11). The "*service of song*" was here (1 Chron 6:31). Ministry to God was done here (1 Chron 26:12). Later, Jesus would be found teaching there (Matt 21:23; Lk 21:37), and the apostles were as well (Acts 5:25).

All of these things were associated with God, and there was no ordained service there that was not centered in Him. For Jesus, that meant there was no place for merchants and moneychangers. This house was not for buying and selling, or merchandising. It was for sacrifice, praise, spiritual commerce and holy exchange.

**HIS DISCIPLES REMEMBERED.** The twelve had not yet been chosen, so these were the disciples garnered to this point. So far as what has been revealed to this point, they are Andrew, John, Peter, Philip, and Bartholomew. These men, as was also true of the disciples chosen later, thought in terms of Scripture. They had a working knowledge of the Scriptures, and therefore associated what they had just seen with what was written in Scripture.

**THE ZEAL OF THINE HOUSE.** The text they recalled is written in Psalm 69:9: "*For the zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up.*" In that Psalm David was accounting for the reaction of others to his choice of the Lord: "*for Thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face. I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children.*" (Psa 69:7-8). And why was this so? It was because the zeal of God's house had consumed Him. Paul quotes the last part of the verse in Romans 15:3, also applying it to Jesus: "*For even Christ pleased not Himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on Me.*"

The disciples saw that Jesus had been consumed with His Father – His will, and even His house. In this case, the profanation of His Father's house by merchandisers had aroused His indignation. In a sense, it was a form of idolatry, devoting time and effort to the acquisition of money, and doing it in the very house of God. It was of the same order as the deed of Eliashib the priest, who had the oversight of "*the chamber of the house of our God*" – the place where they had *collected "the meat offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the corn, the new wine, and the oil, which was commanded to be given to the Levites, and the singers, and the porters; and the offerings of the priests"* (Neh 13:5). Eliashib prepared in that very place "*a great chamber*" for Tobiah, the arch-foe of Nehemiah (Neh 13:4-5). Seeing this abuse, Nehemiah did what the Lord Jesus did. He "*cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber,*" and commanded that they cleanse the chambers, and devote them to their appointed use (Neh 13:7-9).

It had probably been a long time since any holy action that aggressive had been

witnessed by anyone in Jerusalem. Now, however, the Son of God had arrived, and He will not minister in the midst of defilement. It is because of defilement that Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden, and Israel was expelled from Canaan. It is why John the Baptist refused to baptize the Pharisees (Lk 3:7), Ananias and Sapphira were purged from the Jerusalem church (Acts 5:1-10), and a certain fornicator was expelled from the Corinthian assembly (1 Cor 5:1-5). Now Jesus confirms there has been no change in the Divine character. It is why Jesus solemnly warned the churches in Ephesus (Rev 2:4-5), Pergamos (Rev 2:14-16), Thyatira (Rev 2:20-23), Sardis (Rev 3:1), and Laodicea (Rev 3:15-16). That is five of the seven churches to whom Jesus spoke.

All of these cases were like sellers and merchandisers and moneychangers in the courts of the Lord. They had brought certain defilement into a place dedicated to the Lord, and it had arouse Divine indignation.