

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
April 15, 2012

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

Read John 2:13-22

Key verses: “He told those who were selling the doves, ‘Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!’” (John 2:16) “Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up’” (John 2:19).

Passover brought pilgrims to Jerusalem from across Israel and beyond. Because people came from so far, it was often impractical for them to bring their own animals for sacrifice in the temple. To meet this need, merchants sold these animals and money changers changed foreign coins into the local currency. The money would have been used both to purchase the animals for sacrifice and for temple offerings.

What raised Jesus’ righteous indignation were two things: 1. These animal merchants and money changers were conducting their business in the temple itself. 2. Bible scholars tell us that they were jacking up their prices to exorbitant levels, taking advantage of people who were coming to the temple to worship God. What was meant to be a place of sacred worship had become both a common marketplace and a den of thievery.

So Jesus drove the animal merchants and the money changers out of the temple. His heart must have been breaking as he cried out: “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” (v. 16)

Interpreters have wondered about the anger expressed by Jesus as well as his use of a whip. Two conclusions seem warranted here: 1. The “whip of cords” was needed more to remove the animals than to hurt the animal merchants and money changers. Although the Bible doesn’t tell us this explicitly, it seems the likely interpretation. 2. Jesus was certainly angry, and rightly so. There is a time to be angry about the right things, and the desecration of that which is holy is reason for righteous indignation.

These verses (vv. 13-17) speak to another issue that is relevant for us today. Considering Jesus’ passionate response to the actions of the animal merchants and money changers, how might he feel about other unworthy reasons for church involvement? For example, how might Jesus feel when people go to church more to make business or political contacts than to worship the living God?

The second major part of this passage concerns Jesus’ comments about destroying the temple and raising it up in three days (vv. 18-22). To summarize, after Jesus drove out the animal merchants and money changers, the Jewish leaders challenged his authority to do so by asking this question: “What sign can you show us for doing this?” (v. 18).

Jesus answered them: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (v. 19) The religious leaders assumed Jesus was speaking of the Jerusalem temple. So they challenged him with these words: “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” (v. 20)

Of course, John tells us, Jesus was not referring to the Jerusalem temple but to his own body (v. 21). Jesus was saying, “Destroy my body [which is a temple of God] and in three days I will raise it up.”

It is significant that we study this passage on the Sunday after Easter. The early church made Jesus’ bodily resurrection the center of our faith based on the following evidence: (1) the empty tomb; (2) the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus; (3) the disciples’ post-resurrection understanding that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament’s Messianic prophecies; and (4) the disciples’ memory of Jesus’ own predictions that he would be crucified and buried but would rise from the grave after three days.

So, John tells us of this conversation with the Jewish religious leaders about destroying the temple: “After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word Jesus had spoken” (v. 22).

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