

Cleansing the Temple

I see you went to a Christian college,” the interviewer said to Makayla. “My sister graduated from there. How did you like it?”

Makayla feigned a smile. She had not enjoyed it. It had been two years of isolation and pain. When she couldn’t take it any longer, Makayla had transferred to a public university and completed her bachelor’s degree.

Makayla had high hopes when she enrolled. She thought it would be like going to school at a big church, of sorts. She wasn’t put off by the hard work or challenging courses. Makayla had rolled up her sleeves and dived into her studies.

What she wasn’t prepared for were the very real but invisible racial lines that seemed to keep her from feeling like a part of the thriving college life that was happening all around her. The Black population at the school was only about seven percent. But Makayla had expected that, because it was a Christian college, things would be more favorable for her—or at the least that she would enjoy it. She had not.

Makayla had prayed. Should she stay or should she go? Then the Lord provided a wonderful financial opportunity for a transfer to the school that was now her alma mater.

“They had an excellent education program,” Makayla said of the Christian college.

- 1.** *Are you ever surprised by the standard that Jesus upholds, particularly in relation to believers?*
- 2.** *What do you observe in the growing secularization and removal of God from public life?*
- 3.** *What kind of prayers should we pray for our institutions?*

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

John 2:13–17 KJV

13 And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, 14 And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: 15 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; 16 And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. 17 And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.

John 2:13–17 NIV

¹³ When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵ So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

As is customary for Jews during Passover, Jesus travels to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast (v. 13). This is the first of three, possibly four, Passovers that Jesus is recorded as celebrating (John 5:1; 6:4; 11:55).

Jesus enters the temple courts, where He finds money changers and people selling cattle, sheep, and doves. The temple courts are the outermost part of the temple complex. For travelers who come from long distances, it is more convenient to purchase an animal on site, rather than transport one. And if a person wishes to bring financial offerings, only one kind of coin is allowed in the temple. Thus money changers do business in the temple courtyards and offer "acceptable" coins (those with a high silver content), which they will gladly exchange—at

exorbitant transaction rates. Ironically, these “acceptable” coins feature pagan images, which offend many Jews, since God permits no graven image of Himself (Ex. 20:4). The priesthood who run the temple of the first century is widely seen as corrupt, but powerful. They seem to be enriching themselves by allowing this commerce.

Using a whip of cords, Jesus drives everyone out, along with their animals. He scatters the money changers’ coins and flips their tables (v. 15). He commands the people selling doves to leave. Doves are a sacrifice used especially by people who cannot afford larger animals (Lev. 5:7; 12:8). They have made His Father’s house a marketplace (v. 16).

The Court of the Gentiles, the only part of the temple where Gentiles are permitted to pray, has become a chaotic marketplace. Verse 17 reveals the disciples’ reaction, though it is not clear whether they have this reaction immediately or much later. The disciples think of the words of David, when he cries out to God while facing hostile enemies. David shows incredible courage and commitment to God’s temple: “Zeal for your house will consume me” (Ps. 69:9). Like David before Him, Jesus is passionate for God’s glory, and He risks a controversy by calling attention to a problem.

4. *When Jesus arrives at the temple, what does He discover in the temple courts?*

5. *Why does Jesus object to animal merchants and money changers?*

Jesus Speaks about His Body

John 2:18–25 KJV

18 Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?

19 Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this

John 2:18–25 NIV

¹⁸ The Jews then responded to him, “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?”

¹⁹ Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I

temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

20 Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? 21 But he spake of the temple of his body. 22 When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.

23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. 24 But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, 25 And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.

will raise it again in three days."

²⁰ They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" ²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

²³ Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name.

²⁴ But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. ²⁵ He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.

The Jewish leaders (in this case, probably the authorities of the temple priesthood) ask Jesus for a sign to prove His authority from God. This request comes from a place of skepticism. They are demanding that He justify himself on their terms, and Jesus never complies with these types of demands. Since His authority comes from God, He gives a sign that they do not expect or understand. He says he will raise (or rebuild) it in three days (v. 19).

The questioners think Jesus is saying He would like to rebuild a new physical temple. At this point, the temple has been undergoing reconstruction for 46 years (v. 20). We know that the work went on long after Jesus' ministry. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, the temple

work began around 20 BC and continued until AD 64. From the perspective of the temple authorities, this is not a building project that can be completed in three days.

Verse 21 gives the narrator's explanation, something for readers to understand when the listeners do not. As Jesus speaks about a temple, He is actually talking about His body. Readers of the Gospel know that Jesus is God, who took on flesh to dwell among His people (1:14). The purpose of a temple has always been to welcome the presence of God and to offer sacrifices. But now, Jesus' resurrection body can serve as a replacement temple, since meeting Jesus also means encountering God (1:18; 14:6). Through Jesus, it is no longer necessary to worship God in a particular place (see also 4:21–23).

According to John, not even Jesus' disciples understand what His words could mean (v. 22). After Jesus' death and resurrection, they come to understand more. The disciples will then "believe the scripture" and the words that Jesus has taught (v. 22). It is only after Jesus' resurrection that His closest friends realize the surprising way that God has fulfilled a redemptive plan.

The text ends by saying what Jesus continues to do during the Passover. The people are able to witness Jesus doing many miraculous signs—which John does not describe—and many respond with faith. But there remains an element of uncertainty. The faith of the crowds does not lead Jesus to affirm their trust, since He has knowledge about the hidden motives of each person (vv. 24–25). Jesus will continue to say and do things that display the heart of God, but His message will challenge the comfortable.

6. *How does Jesus respond to a demand for a sign?*

7. *How are the temple and Jesus' body connected?*

8. *Why wouldn't Jesus entrust Himself to the people?*

When Is Anger “Righteous”?

The world around us seems to be angry. We hear stories of road rage, when an angry exchange between drivers turns tragic. Protests when people peacefully march in support of human rights too often diminish into angry name-calling, physical violence, and vandalism. Righteous indignation is rampant over what people do, say, and believe.

For Christians, is there a scenario when anger is righteous, or excusable? It’s easy to assume that, with Jesus as our example, imitating anything He does is acceptable. But this story is not an open invitation to start flipping tables whenever we feel offended. Jesus had a specific mission and a unique authority as the Son of God. His role was to follow the prompting of the Father, whether that meant healing the sick or turning over money tables in His Father’s house to expose rampant corruption.

Scripture generally treats anger in a negative light. James 1:19–20 says, “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.”

When faced with difficult situations, it’s easy to yield to emotions and act on them. However, wisdom usually dictates against an impulsive reaction. Jesus ultimately won over the masses through demonstrations of humility, kindness, graciousness, wisdom, and love. If you desire to be like Christ in your words and deeds, those positive qualities can set you on the right path.

9. *Do you think that there are scenarios where “righteous anger” is justified for Christians? What are some examples?*

10. *What did James mean when he said that human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires?*

11. *Have you ever witnessed an angry exchange between Christians in church? Was it productive or destructive?*

A Cause Worth Praying For

As we consider our motives and hearts, we might find that there are particular issues and causes that make us angry: we feel our temperature rising, the hair on the back of our neck might stand up, and we might feel sick. This type of reaction can also prompt us to think about what God would have us do. Do you sense an invitation to pray over a particular issue?

► *As you take a moment to offer a silent prayer to God, invite Him to remind you of what things (behaviors, injustices, failures) make you angry.*

► *Because of my strong emotions, I sense that God is calling my attention to the topic of _____.*

KEY VERSE

And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.

—John 2:16 KJV

To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!"

—John 2:16 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of July 21 through July 27

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Revelation 11:1–13—God Preserves.

Tues. Revelation 12:1–11—Victory through the Lamb's Blood.

Wed. 2 Kings 25:1–7—David's Lineage Is Cut Down.

Thurs. 2 Kings 25:8–21—The Temple Is Destroyed.

Fri. Daniel 11:21–35—A King's Treachery.

Sat. Matthew 23:1–12, 37–39—Lament for the Wicked City.

Sun. Matthew 24:1–8—Don't Be Led Astray.