

**The Jesus Way** / **THE WAY OF FAITH**  
**Passion**  
**John 2:12-25**

<sup>12</sup> After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days. <sup>13</sup> When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. <sup>15</sup> So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup> To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!” <sup>17</sup> His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

<sup>18</sup> Then the Jews demanded of him, “What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?”

<sup>19</sup> Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”

<sup>20</sup> The Jews replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” <sup>21</sup> But the temple he had spoken of was his body. <sup>22</sup> 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. John 2:12-22

The month is Nisan, comparable to our March/April, AD 30. It’s time for the Jewish Passover in Jerusalem. Jesus’ first disciples – Andrew, John, Peter, Philip and Nathaniel – have spent less than three weeks with their Teacher, who is now growing in popularity. They have heard him declared to be the Lamb of God by John the Baptist, they’ve seen him turn water into wine, and now they observe his fiery passion as he zealously drives these merchants from the Temple in Jerusalem.

We’re told that, following his first miracle in Cana of Galilee, that Jesus went down to Capernaum with his mother, Mary, and his brothers and his disciples. Capernaum became Jesus’ base of operations throughout most of his ministry.<sup>1</sup> This is the last time that Jesus’ mother is mentioned until the crucifixion. Here, his brothers are also mentioned, indicating that Jesus *did* have younger siblings. Any idea of what is called the “perpetual virginity” of Mary can be dismissed right off.

From Capernaum, Jesus and his disciples “go up” to Jerusalem. That’s about a three day journey. Though Jerusalem is south of Capernaum, it’s always said that one “goes up” to Jerusalem. The reason Jesus makes the trek is for the Jewish Passover. We know that the Jewish Passover commemorated the deliverance of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. It reminded every Jew of the time when the death angel passed over every home that had the blood of a lamb applied to the doorposts of their house (Exodus 12-13). Attendance at the Passover celebration was required for every male Jew age twelve and over. By this time, Jesus had made many trips to the Passover in Jerusalem, but this was the first visit during his public ministry.

I can hardly imagine what Jesus felt as he entered those temple courts. He saw the crowds of people, pushing and shoving, trying to get to the tables of the merchants. He heard the bleating of sheep, the flapping of pigeon wings, and the ringing of coins on the tables. He smelled the barnyard odors of animal waste. He probably had to sidestep the piles of manure in the

passageways. He observed the greedy merchants, bartering their goods and the moneychangers haggling over the exchange rate.

The specific “temple court” referred to is the Court of the Gentiles. During the Passover, Jewish proselytes came from many nations surrounding Israel. Since they couldn’t carry with them their animal sacrifices such a long distance, there had to be some place for them to purchase these sacrifices once they arrived in Jerusalem. There needed to be a ready-at-hand stock of oxen for the thank-offering, lambs for the paschal offering and doves poor folks offering. At one time the animal merchants set up shop on the other side of the Kidron Valley on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. But as time passed, they began to realize they could make a much better profit if they moved closer to the Temple courts. Before long, they had set up shop right in the Temple precincts. Maybe they concluded that, since it was the Court of the Gentiles, it was unclean anyway. What harm could they do by bartering their goods in this area set aside for pagans?

And then there are the money changers. Pilgrims from other lands were obliged to change their money into the Palestinian coinage that was alone acceptable to pay the required half-shekel temple tax. It seems, too, that all of these essential and legitimate services became a highly profitable business and eventually a corrupt racket directed by nonetheless than the ex-High Priest, Annas. Bottom line, the Court of the Gentiles had been transformed into a gigantic one-stop shopping mall, a sort of gigantic Wal-Mart!

Needless to say, Jesus is enraged. He reaches down and picks up – from the litter covering the floor of the Temple court – some twine discarded by the merchants. He binds it together, making a whip of cords. And in his righteous anger he begins to drive out the sheep and cattle. He scatters the coins of the money changers and overturns their tables. And to those selling doves, he said, “Get out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!”

I’m not quite sure where Jesus’ disciples were during all of this. I’m sure that what just transpired before their very eyes was the last thing they were expecting as they entered the Temple courts with Jesus. In all the excitement and confusion, they had most likely retreated to a corner of the courtyard in order to remain as discreet as possible. Maybe they began to have second thoughts about whom they were following. After all, what would you have done? But as they watch such holy zeal displayed in their Teacher, they remember one verse of the Old Testament, found in Psalm 69:9 “Passion for your house burns within me.”

I’ve asked myself this past week, “Can *I* say that...that ‘passion for your house burns within me?’” Can *you* say that? Are you “passionate” about God and being in His presence? What is this “passion” that motivated Jesus to do what he did that day? And what kind of passion should characterize our lives as Jesus followers?

Notice what the verse says: “Passion for *your house* consumes me.” Literally the verse says, “Passion for your house has eaten me up!” The passion that motivated Jesus on this occasion was a *passion for God’s house*. Throughout the Old Testament, the Tabernacle in the wilderness and then the Temple in the Promised Land were the meeting place of God and his people. This in no way means that God was confined to a specific place. In fact, when Solomon dedicates the Temple in Jerusalem he says, “The heavens, even the highest heavens cannot contain you. How much less this temple that I have built!” (1 Kings 8:27-28). Nevertheless, before the coming of

Christ, the temple (the “house” of God) was the tangible symbol of God’s presence. And so the psalmist can say – as we sang earlier – that to spend a single day in the courts of God was worth more than a thousand elsewhere (Psalm 84:10).

However, with Christ, all of this begins to change. Even while the Jews are still short-of-breath from having been run out of the temple premises, they come and ask Jesus “Hey, what miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all of this?” Did you catch that? They really don’t dispute Jesus’ actions in cleansing the Temple. No one questioned the fact that the Temple needed to be purified. I think that they even recognized that it was a purely messianic act.<sup>ii</sup> But they want a “sign.” “Prove to us that you have the authority to do this!”

So Jesus responds, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up again in three days.” Maybe Jesus was even pointing at himself as he said those words. But if he was, these religious leaders didn’t catch on. At this point they thought he was really wacko! This fellow is out of his mind! “It’s taken forty-six years to build this temple and you say you’re going to raise it up in three days?” Of course, John adds, the temple he had spoken of was the “temple” of his body. And after he was raised from the dead, the disciples recalled what he had said and it all began to make sense.

Jesus not only *cleansed* the Temple, he *replaced* the Temple. “The Word became flesh and made his *dwelling* among us,” John says (John 1:14). The very language of the tabernacle, meaning “to dwell,” is now used to describe God “pitching his tent” among us in the person of Jesus Christ. It follows then that those who are connected by faith to Jesus also become the “temple of God.”

This is true *individually*. Paul says, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). But this is also true *corporately*. Paul says again to the Corinthians: “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

What is the meaning of all of this? Nothing inspires a passion for God like knowing we are the very temple of God. As believers, individually and collectively, we are the very dwelling place of the Creator of the universe! Did you catch that? Does that “rock your boat?” Do you truly believe that? That truth should infuse within us a profound passion to commune with God and to take full advantage of our privileges as the people of God. That truth should also motivate us to come together regularly as the people of God, because as we do we become the visible “house of God” (Hebrews 3:1-6).

But there is more. The passion that motivated Jesus was not only a passion for the house of God and communion with his Father in heaven. *It was also a holy passion, a righteous anger against sin.* Jesus’ radical act of turning over the tables of the money changers and driving out the greedy merchants from the courts of the Temple was the indisputable sign that with God there must be no compromise or complacency. Jesus’ anger was a holy anger against all that would distract us from being with God, from knowing God, and from experiencing his purifying presence in our lives.

“Be angry and sin not,” Paul tells us. Sin calls, not for apathy, but for anger; not tolerance, but indignation. God hates idolatry. Why? Because all forms of idolatry – whether it be an idol on a

stand, commerce in the temple, or a car in your driveway – is a counterfeit to the character of God. Sinful anger moves us away from God; righteous anger moves us toward God. Sinful anger is concerned with protecting oneself. Righteous anger is concerned with protecting others as well as the honor and character of God. And on this occasion, Jesus is angry. He's angry because the very dwelling of God has become a place of commerce and convenience.

What corners of compromise need to be cleaned out in your life?

What tables of temptation need to be overturned?

What strongholds of sin need to be identified and repented of?

You see, a true passion for God will lead us to some pretty serious house cleaning. For judgment always begins with the household of God.

Some of us need to run from sexual immorality. In the very passage we referred to earlier, Paul tells us to “flee immorality.” And the reason we are to run from it is because our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:18). He goes on to say, “You are not your own, you are bought with a price. Therefore honor God in your body.”

But I suspect that some of us struggle more with hidden corners of compromise than with strongholds of sin. Even the merchants and money changes of Jesus' day were, at least at first, carrying out a legitimate role. Sacrifices had to be purchased. Money had to be exchanged. It was more *where* and *how* they were doing it, than *what* they were doing. After all, God had provided the sacrifices as well as the money; it was man's heart that had perverted it all.

The same can happen in our lives. John Piper in his book *A Hunger for God* says this:

The greatest adversary of love to God is not his enemies but his gifts. And the most deadly appetites are not for the poison of evil, but for the simple pleasures of earth. For when these replace an appetite for God himself, the idolatry is scarcely recognizable, and almost incurable. “The pleasures of this life” – these are not vices. These are gifts of God. They are your basic meat and potatoes and coffee and gardening and reading and decorating and traveling and investing and TV-watching and Internet-surfing and shopping and exercising and collecting and talking. And all of them can become deadly substitutes for God.<sup>iii</sup> — John Piper

Have you allowed certain “good gifts” of God to become substitutes for God in your life? Have you become complacently satisfied with your house, with your family, with your computer, with your job to such a degree that passion for God is missing?

I'll share with you how God has spoken to me through this passage this past week. The privilege of ministry is a good gift of God. There is not a day that I do not thank God for the privilege of being able to devote my entire life to enabling God's work in the lives of others. I love to preach, I love to counsel, I love working with our staff, and I love this church body. But even that good gift of God can become a substitute for God himself. I don't want that to happen. Would you pray for me and for our staff that our passion will be first of all for God?

There is one other area where you and I can compromise who we are as the living “house of God.” Those whom Jesus drove out of the temple courts were *consumers*. They were there for their own profit. They had lost sight of what the Temple was really all about. It’s not too unlike that today. We live in a consumerist society. Seventy percent of Americans visit shopping malls each week, far more than attend church. And far too many, when they do attend church, come with the same consumerist mentality. What is there here *for me*? Do I like the music? Do I like the preacher? Do I like the building? Do I like those who attend? Do they like me? We shop for churches like we shop for underwear...we want just the right fit. Nothing uncomfortable.

In C.S. Lewis’ *Screwtape Letters*, the demon Screwtape instructs his nephew Wormwood that if he can’t keep his patient from attending church, to at least turn him into a church shopper, always looking for the “church that ‘suits him;’” turning him into a “taster, a connoisseur of churches.” You see, this is the devil’s strategy. And it’s just as consumer based as our consumerist society. In response, Lewis argues that the church should be a unity of “place,” not a unity of “likings” or affinity groups.<sup>iv</sup> It should be that supernatural community that pulls people together who naturally may be very different than one another. But consumer Christianity continues to turn God’s house into a marketplace. Walls of division are erected between people of different nationalities and socio-economic class, because it just feels better to be with people who are like us.

I suspect that this is why when Jesus cleanses the temple a second time in the last weeks of his ministry (Matt. 21:12ff; Mk. 11:15-17; Lk. 19:45ff.), he adds a very important phrase: “My house will be called a house of prayer *for all the nations*.” This tells us something else very important about Jesus’ passion...it resulted in selfless prayer for the nations.

Remember, these merchants had set up shop in the “court of the Gentiles” which is literally the “court of the nations.” The Temple, constructed by Herod the Great, was composed of three courts: the court of the Priests, the court of the Jews, and the court of women. All three of these were on the same level as the temple itself. But far below was the court of the Gentiles. The court of the Gentiles was separated from the rest of the temple by a stone barricade that was more than 1 ½ meters thick. From any part of the Court of the Gentiles, non-Jews could look up and see the Temple itself but were not allowed to approach it. Along this barricade were various notices that read in both Latin and Greek, “Trespassers will be executed.” In fact, two of these notices have been discovered by archeologists in the last 100 years.

Originally, the court of the Gentiles was intended to be a place where all the nations of the world could come and pray. And not only could they pray, but they could hear Jews praying for them. But now, not only was the court of the Gentiles isolated from God’s house, it had become a “den of thieves.” After all, who prays for the nations anymore? Over the years, Israel had grown increasingly ethnocentric, introverted, nationalistic and preoccupied with her own existence rather than the salvation of the nations.

I see here that true spiritual passion is a passion for God’s house. And we, the body of Christ, are that house. True spiritual passion demonstrates itself in a righteous anger against sin and compromise. And true spiritual passion is reflected in selfless prayer for others, the nations of the world.

The “table” God calls us to this morning is a table for all peoples, whatever nationality or social bracket you may come from. We are invited to this table because the “man for all nations” gave his life once for all for our sin. He even tells those who oppose him in the Temple, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” And he did just that. He died as the final sacrifice for sin. And he rose to prove it.

This table is for all who name the name of Jesus Christ. If you have not yet come to that point of believing in Jesus Christ, then this table is not for you. On the other hand, if you place your faith in Christ this morning as the forgiver of your sin and as the leader of your life, then we invite you to partake.

I urge you to use this opportunity to search your own heart. As you take this bread and drink this cup, which represent the “Passion” of our Lord Jesus, take your own spiritual temperature. How has God spoken to you this morning? Maybe your prayer is: “God, renew the passion that once burned in my heart for you.” Maybe your prayer is one of repentance of sin, of complacency, or of compromise. Whatever your need is this morning, come and share at this table of fellowship which makes us one in Christ. There are individuals at each table. They are there to pray with you for any special need you may have.

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<sup>i</sup> It is referred to as “his own city” by Matthew (Matt. 9:1).

<sup>ii</sup> Maybe they recalled the words of the prophet Malachi who said: See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me [that’s John the Baptist]. Then, suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple...but who can endure the day of this 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. Malachi 3:1-4

<sup>iii</sup> John Piper, *A Hunger for God*

<sup>iv</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, with *Screwtape Proposes a Toast*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1982), pp. 72-73 as cited by Paul Metzger, *Consuming Jesus: Beyond Race and Class Division in a Consumer Church*, 53-54.