



The Gospel of John

“The Word Became Flesh”

John 2:12–25

November 17, 2013

Introduction

There is no more important question than, “Who is Jesus Christ?” This question has profound implications and unparalleled significance. Simply asking it can generate a vast array of responses — from bitter hostility to fervent devotion. But mere contemplation is not enough. The question must be answered. And answering it incorrectly, no matter what the excuse, can lead to eternal destruction. The clear testimony of the Scriptures is that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God. But despite this clear testimony, many skeptics will try to deny or disprove the truths of the Bible. Perhaps you’ve heard of some who claim that Jesus was a liar or a lunatic. Those claims are completely without foundation if we read the Scriptures at face value. In the end, every human being must come to grips with the truth of Jesus’ divine nature and believe in Him if they are to avoid eternal condemnation.

Jesus Cleanses the Temple (2:12–22)

The passage at hand is one such example where some try to build a case that Jesus was a lunatic. They claim that Jesus was some kind of crazed maniac running around with a whip disrupting the local economy. But to view this account simply in this light is to miss the point entirely. This passage is not about disrupting the economy. It is about Jesus’ deity.

The Setting (vv. 12–13)

Following the wedding at Cana, Jesus and His family moved from Nazareth to Capernaum (cf. Matt 4:13; Luke 4:31; John 6:24). This was the spring before the first Passover of His ministry. Capernaum was on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee and Jesus only stayed a few days because they needed to go up to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. That journey would have been about 120 miles since they would have gone around the region of Samaria. It would also culminate with a 3,500 foot vertical climb between Jericho and Jerusalem. This is the normal route Galilean Jews would travel on their way to various feasts.

John mentions three Passovers (2:13; 6:4; 11:55) and possibly a fourth (5:1 — only identified as a feast). This would make Jesus' ministry 3½ years long beginning in the fall of A.D. 26 and ending in the spring of A.D. 30. Passover was celebrated on the 14th day of the lunar month Nisan (full moon at the end of March or beginning of April) and was immediately followed by the seven-day Festival of Unleavened Bread (15–22 Nisan).

Passovers in the Gospel of John

2:13	A.D. 27
5:1	A.D. 28
6:4	A.D. 29
11:55	A.D. 30

The Action (vv. 14–17)

When Jesus arrived at the temple, He found all sorts of commerce taking place. During the Passover Festival, people would stream into Jerusalem from all over the region and it was much more convenient for them to purchase sacrificial animals on site. Thus, facilities were provided for the sale of animals and birds. Additionally, there was a temple tax levied on every Jewish male between the ages of twenty and fifty (cf. Exod 30:11–16). Since this tax had to be paid in local coinage, there was a need for money-changers. Some have suggested that Jesus' reason for driving out these people was because they were engaging in unethical business practices. After all, Israel was supposed to be distinguished from other nations by having just balances and fair trading practices (Lev 19:35–36). But notice the nature of Jesus' complaint. He was not upset because of unethical business practices. Instead, He drove them out because these kinds of marketplace activities should not have been occurring *at all* in the temple courts. Since Jesus was a single man acting alone, and since this incident is not said to be a miraculous event, the effect was likely to promote moral and spiritual purity. (This may be a possible allusion to Malachi 3:1, 3 — an event which will occur in connection with the Second Coming.) As a result of this purge, the disciples were reminded of a passage from a messianic Psalm: "For zeal for Your house has consumed me..." (Psalm 69:9a NASB). There the psalmist is crying out to God because of the oppression of his enemies, who fail to appreciate the psalmist's concern and commitment to the temple. Even despite the moral and spiritual corruption in that day, the temple was still the Lord's house and Jesus zealously desired that moral and spiritual purity in that place.

The Response (vv. 18–22)

These “Jews” were either temple authorities or representatives of the Sanhedrin. They *did* have the right to examine the credentials of someone who had taken this kind of drastic action. Unfortunately, they were not concerned whether the cleansing of the temple was right or wrong. Their chief concern was with the question of authority. The fact that they did not treat Jesus as a criminal but asked for a sign, indicates that they thought He might be a real prophet. The problem is that Jesus had already given them a sign by driving out the merchants. This matter of demanding a sign would become a common practice of the Jewish leaders throughout Jesus’ ministry. And in every case it always reveals their petulant, unbelieving hearts. There are many instances where Jesus performs a miracle and is approached by the Jewish leaders to perform another. And in every case the answer is always the same —

“A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.”

~Matt 16:4 (cf. Matt 12:39; Luke 11:29–30)

The sign of the prophet Jonah is the same sign He speaks of here in verse 19. It is a prediction of His death, burial, and resurrection. Even as we look at the various “signs” in John’s gospel, the final and ultimate sign is Jesus’ own resurrection from the dead! Without a belief in this sign, a person is hopelessly and eternally lost. The same was true for the Jewish leaders. But at the time, Jesus’ response to their question seemed somewhat cryptic. It wouldn’t be until after His resurrection that even His disciples would understand His true intent here (v. 22). This charge was also brought against Him at His trial before the Sanhedrin:

“Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying, ‘We heard Him say, “I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.”’”

~Mark 14:57–58

When the Jews heard Him referring to destroying the temple, they immediately thought of the physical structures in which they were standing. Their comment about 46 years of construction has been the subject of some debate. Virtually all translations give the impression that the construction of the temple had been going on for 46 years. As such, the “temple” would refer to the entire temple complex. Herod the

Great began his reconstruction of the temple in the 18th year of his reign (20/19 B.C.), but the work was not finished until A.D. 63/64. The 46th year would be a.d. 26/27.

Some, however, translate the first part of verse 20 “This temple was built 46 years ago.” The “temple” would then refer to the temple sanctuary which was completed in 18/17 b.c. and mean that this Passover would be in a.d. 29/30. The problem with this view is that the Jews’ reply to Jesus doesn’t make sense. They were trying to refute Jesus’ statement by suggesting that three days is an impossibly short *duration* for construction, given the 46 years it had already taken to complete only a portion of the temple complex. Stating that the temple sanctuary was completed 46 years ago would have been immaterial to the conversation.

Inadequate Faith (vv. 23–25)

Faith and belief are major themes in John’s gospel. Belief in the person of Jesus Christ is the necessary and initiatory step if a person is to be saved and have eternal life. But we must be careful not to be too eager in assigning salvation to individuals when we encounter terms like “belief” and “faith” in the text. This is one such example.

After Jesus had driven the merchants out of the temple, He went about doing many miracles. The result of this was many people who believed in His name. But verses 24–25 suggest that Jesus knew their faith was not a *genuine* faith. Their faith was based on the miracle alone and was only superficial. In other words, the object of their faith was the miracle. But genuine faith has as its object Christ Himself. If we genuinely entrust ourselves to Jesus in faith, He will also entrust Himself to us as our Savior!

Conclusion

Jesus demonstrated a zeal for the proper worship of God. Worship is not about buying and selling. It is a spiritual activity and follows the proper biblical forms prescribed for today — prayer, praise, preaching, giving, serving, etc. But proper worship must also come from a regenerate heart of faith and belief. And that begins with the person and work of Jesus Christ. Without true faith our worship would be worthless. Don’t be caught having an inadequate faith!

~AWB