

John 2:13-25
May 4, 2025

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: The word “zeal” evokes the idea of being passionate about something. When you think about the church, our place of worship, think about the zeal or passion you have for it. What crosses the line for you? What are possible examples of things you might see that would raise your dander?! [Let people engage]

Transition: Jesus had a “zeal” for His Father’s house! You could say that He had a state of passionate commitment to His Father’s house. This account is a great reminder that Jesus is watching every community of believers as they gather “in His name.” He knows what is in each person’s heart, so He will know if we are passionate in maintaining the intent of why we meet together. Let’s read the story and then we’ll process it.

BOOK:

Jesus Clears the Temple Courts

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 (Greek: a state of passionate commitment) for your house will consume (Greek: eat up or devour) me.”

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 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 (Greek: place confidence) in his name.

24 But Jesus would not entrust (Greek: place confidence) 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.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

In the clearing of the temple, Jesus brought forth God's standards of what is right and what is wrong. While legalism was denounced by Jesus, holiness was maintained. The issue at hand was not business or profit making as such but the mockery of the entire sacrificial system of the temple and the exploitation of devout men and women by greedy individuals who were capitalizing on religious sentiment.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 292-294). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

His Zeal (John 2:12–22)

Jesus, His family, and His disciples remained in Capernaum a few days, and then He went to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Each Jewish man was required to attend three annual feasts at the Holy City: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Deut. 16:16). The feasts mentioned in the

Gospel of John are Passover (John 2:13; 6:4; 12:1), Tabernacles (John 7:2), and Dedication (John 10:22). The unnamed feast in John 5:1 may have been Purim (Es. 9:26, 31).

Though He deliberately violated the man-made religious traditions of the Pharisees, our Lord obeyed the statutes of the Law and was faithful to uphold the Law. In His life and death, He fulfilled the Law so that, today, believers are not burdened by that “yoke of bondage” (Acts 15:10).

Jesus revealed His zeal for God first of all by *cleansing the temple* (John 2:13–17). The priests had established a lucrative business of exchanging foreign money for Jewish currency, and also selling the animals needed for the sacrifices. No doubt, this “religious market” began as a convenience for the Jews who came long distances to worship in the temple; but in due time the “convenience” became a business, not a ministry. The tragedy is that this business was carried on in the court of the Gentiles in the temple, the place where the Jews should have been meeting the Gentiles and telling them about the one true God. Any Gentile searching for truth would not likely find it among the religious merchants in the temple.

Our Lord suddenly appeared in the temple and cleaned house! He was careful not to destroy anyone’s property (He did not release the doves, for example); but He made it clear that He was in command. The temple was His Father’s house, and He would not have the religious leaders pollute it with their money-making enterprises.

The condition of the temple was a vivid indication of the spiritual condition of the nation. Their religion was a dull routine, presided over by worldly minded men whose main desire was to exercise authority and get rich. Not only had the wine run out at the wedding feast but the glory had departed from the temple.

When they saw His courageous zeal, the disciples remembered Psalm 69:9, “The zeal of [for] Thine house hath eaten me up.” Psalm 69 is definitely a messianic psalm that is quoted several times in the New Testament: Psalm 69:4 (John 15:25); Psalm 69:8 (John 7:3–5); Psalm 69:9 (John 2:17; Rom. 15:3); Psalm 69:21 (Matt. 27:34, 48); and Psalm 69:22 (Rom. 11:9–10).

There was still a godly remnant in Israel who loved God and revered His temple (Luke 1:5–22; 2:25–38), but most religious leaders were false shepherds who exploited the people. When Jesus cleansed the temple, He “declared war” on the hypocritical religious leaders (Matt. 23), and this ultimately led to His death. Indeed, His zeal for God’s house *did* eat Him up!

He also revealed His zeal by *giving His life* (John 2:18–22). It was logical for the religious leaders to ask Him to show the source of His authority. After all, they were the guardians of the Jewish faith, and they had a right to test any new prophet who appeared. “The Jews require a sign” (1 Cor. 1:22). Often, during His ministry, the leaders asked Jesus to give them a sign; and He refused to do so, *except* for the sign of Jonah (Matt. 12:39ff). The “sign of Jonah” is death, burial, and resurrection.

Jesus used the image of the temple to convey this truth. “Destroy this temple [My body], and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). Being spiritually blind, those who heard misunderstood what He was saying. Throughout the Gospel of John, you will find people misunderstanding *spiritual* truth and interpreting in material or physical terms (John 3:4; 4:11; 6:52). Herod’s temple was started in 20 b.c. and not completed until a.d. 64. How could one man “raise it up” in three days?

This statement was, of course, a prediction of His own death and resurrection; and His disciples remembered it after He was raised from the dead. But His enemies also remembered it and used it at His trial (Matt. 26:59–61); and some of the people mocked Him with it when He was dying on the cross (Matt. 27:40).

In writing this Gospel, John included a number of vivid pictures of the death of the Savior. The first is the slaying of the Lamb in John 1:29, indicating that His death would be that of a substitute for sinners. The destroying of the temple is the second picture (John 2:19), suggesting a violent death that would end in victorious resurrection.

The third picture is that of the serpent lifted up (John 3:14), a reference to Numbers 21:5–9. The Savior would be made sin for us (1 Peter 2:24). His death would be voluntary (John 10:11–18): the Shepherd would lay down His life for the sheep. Finally, the planting of the seed (John 12:20–25) teaches that His death would produce fruit to the glory of God. His death and burial would look like failure, but in the end, God would bring victory.

The temple was an important element of the Jewish faith, for in it God was supposed to dwell. All of the ceremonies and sacrifices of the Jewish religion centered in the temple. When Jesus suggested that their precious building would be destroyed, their angry reaction was predictable. After all, if *His* body is the temple, then the Jewish temple would be needed no more. In this cryptic statement, our Lord actually predicted the end of the Jewish religious system.

But that was one of the purposes John had in mind when he wrote his Gospel: the legal system has ended, and “grace and truth” have come through Jesus Christ. He is the new sacrifice (John 1:29) and the new temple (John 2:19). John will tell us later, that the new worship will depend on inward integrity, not outward geography (John 4:19–24).

His Knowledge (John 2:23–25)

While in Jerusalem for the Passover, Jesus performed miracles that are not given in detail in any of the Gospels. It must have been these signs that especially attracted Nicodemus (John 3:2). Because of the miracles, many people professed to believe in Him; but Jesus did not accept their profession. No matter what the people themselves said, or others said about them, He did not accept human testimony. Why? Because, being God, He knew what was in each person’s heart and mind.

The words *believed* in John 2:23 and *commit* in John 2:24 are the same Greek word. These people believed in Jesus, but He did not believe in them! They were “unsaved believers”! It was one thing to respond to a miracle but quite something else to commit oneself to Jesus Christ and continue in His Word (John 8:30–31).

John was not discrediting the importance of our Lord’s signs, because he wrote his book to record these signs and to encourage his readers to trust Jesus Christ and receive eternal life (John 20:30–31). However, throughout the book, John makes it clear that it takes more than believing in miracles for a person to be saved. Seeing the signs and believing in them would be a great beginning; in fact, even the disciples started that way and had to grow in their faith (compare John 2:11 and v. 22).

Throughout the Gospel of John, you see the Jewish people divided over the meaning of these miracles (John 9:16; 11:45–46). The same miracles that attracted Nicodemus to Jesus caused some of the other religious leaders to want to kill Him! They even asserted that His miracles were done in the power of Satan! Our Lord’s miracles were testimonies (John 5:36), giving evidence of His divine sonship; but they were also *tests*, exposing the hearts of the people (John 12:37ff). The same events that opened some eyes only made other eyes that much more blind (John 9:39–41).

It is important to see that Jesus tied His miracles to the truth of His message. He knew that the human heart is attracted to the sensational. The 5,000 that He fed wanted to make Him King—until He preached a sermon on the Bread of Life, and then they left Him in droves! “Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). In grace, Jesus fed the hungry; in truth, He taught the Word. The people wanted the physical food but not the spiritual truth, so they abandoned Him.

“He knew what was in man” is a statement that is proved several times in John’s Gospel. Jesus knew the character of Simon (John 1:42). He knew what Nathanael was like (John 1:46ff), and He told the Samaritan woman “all things” that she had ever done (John 4:29). He knew that the Jewish leaders did not have God’s love in their hearts (John 5:42), and that one of His disciples was not truly a believer (John 6:64). He saw the repentance in the heart of the adulteress (John 8:10–11) and the murder in the hearts of His enemies (John 8:40ff). Several times in the Upper Room message, Jesus revealed to His disciples their own inner feelings and questions.

As you follow our Lord’s ministry in John’s Gospel, you see Him moving gradually out of the bright light of popularity and into the dark shadows of rejection. At the beginning, it was easy for people to follow the crowd and watch His miracles. But then, His words began to penetrate hearts, with conviction following; and conviction leads either to conversion or opposition. It is impossible to be neutral. People had to decide, and most of them decided against Him.

Yes, Jesus knows the human heart. “Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe” (John 4:48). People who want His works but not His Word can never share His life. “Seeing is believing” is not the Christian approach (John 11:40; 20:29). First, we believe; then we see.

Miracles can only lead us to the Word (John 5:36–38), and the Word generates saving faith (Rom. 10:17).

Our Lord's accurate knowledge of the human heart is another evidence of His deity, for only God can see the inner person. This brief paragraph prepares us for the important interview with Nicodemus recorded in the next chapter. Note the repetition of the word *man* from John 2:25 to 3:1. Nicodemus wanted to learn more about Jesus, but he ended up learning more about himself!

Blum, E. A. (1985). *John*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 279-280) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

John recorded a cleansing of the temple at the beginning of Jesus' ministry whereas the three Synoptics recorded a temple cleansing toward the end of His public ministry (Matt. 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–16; Luke 19:45–46). Probably there were two cleansings, for there are differences in the narrations. John was undoubtedly aware of the Synoptics, and he supplemented them. The first cleansing caught the people by surprise. The second cleansing, about three years later, was one of the immediate causes of His death (cf. Mark 11:15–18).

2:13–14. As was the custom for the **Jewish** people (Ex. 12:14–20, 43–49; Deut. 16:1–8) **Jesus went up to Jerusalem** to celebrate the **Passover** (cf. two other Passover feasts—one in John 6:4 and one in John 11:55; 12:1; 13:1). This reminded them of God's grace in delivering them from the bondage in Egypt. It was a fitting time for His ministry.

The temple courts refer to a large courtyard, the Court of the Gentiles, surrounding the temple enclosure. (See the sketch of the temple.) The buying and **selling** of animals in the area was probably rationalized as a convenience for the pilgrims coming into Jerusalem. But abuses developed, and the pilgrim traffic became a major source of income for the city. With **money** to be made, worship easily became corrupted. The money changers were another convenience for the pilgrims. Temple dues had to be paid in the acceptable Tyrian coinage, and a high percentage was charged for changing coins.

2:15. Malachi predicted that One would come suddenly to **the temple** to purify the religion of the nation (Mal. 3:1–3). In moral indignation Jesus started a small stampede of the **sheep and cattle** and **overturned the tables**.

2:16. Jesus protested the turning of His **Father's house into a market**. He did not protest the sacrificial system itself. The purpose of the sacrifices was in danger of being lost. In the second cleansing of the temple toward the end of His ministry, Jesus' attack was sharper. Then He called the temple area "a den of robbers" (Luke 19:46; cf. Jer. 7:11). Jesus frequently referred to God as "My Father." Only through Jesus can the Father be known. "No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him" (Matt. 11:27).

2:17. Jesus' **disciples remembered** Psalm 69:9, which speaks of the fact that the Righteous One would pay a price for His commitment to God's temple. This **zeal for** God would ultimately lead Him to His death.

2:18–19. **The Jews**—either the Jewish authorities or the merchants—**demand** some proof for His right **to** challenge the existing order (“Jews demand miraculous signs,” 1 Cor. 1:22). But instead of giving in to their demand, **Jesus** gave a veiled saying. As with His parables in the Synoptics, one purpose of an enigmatic saying was to puzzle the hearers who opposed Him. He desired that His hearers ponder the saying in order to perceive its significance. **Destroy this temple** is in the form of a command, but the sense is ironic or conditional. At Jesus' trial He was accused of saying He could destroy the temple and **raise it again in three days** (Matt. 26:60–61). A similar charge was made against Stephen (Acts 6:14).

2:20–21. Herod the Great decided to replace the temple of Zerubbabel because it was not of the same glory as that of Solomon's (Hag. 2:3). Since work on Herod's **temple** began in 20 or 19 b.c., **46 years** bring the date to a.d. 27 or 28. The work on the whole temple complex continued until around a.d. 63. The statement of **the Jews** meant either that the sanctuary was completed in 46 years or else one phase had been completed. How then, the Jews asked, could He rebuild **it in three days**? That would be impossible! The Greek words for **and You** are emphatic, suggesting their contempt for Him. Of course, by **the temple** Jesus meant **His body** which, after his death, would be resurrected in three days.

2:22. Even Jesus' own **disciples** did not understand His enigmatic saying at first. It took the light of the Resurrection to illuminate it. They did not see the need for His death, so they did not think along these lines until after the event. Nor did they understand the Scriptures which speak of the Messiah's suffering and death (Isa. 52:12–53:12; Luke 24:25–27).

2:23. **While ... in Jerusalem** during **the Passover**, Jesus did other **signs** which John chose not to describe. The effect of these miracles (which were probably healings) was to elicit faith on the part of **many people**. They **believed in His name**, that is, they trusted in Him. This was not necessarily saving faith as the next verse implies. They believed He was a great Healer, but not necessarily a great Savior from sin.

2:24–25. **Jesus** knew that a temporary excitement or a faith based on signs was not sufficient. Many of the early followers later turned back when He did not take up the role of a political king (cf. 6:15, 60, 66). Until His death and resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit, the foundation for faith was not fully laid. Having supernatural knowledge, Jesus does **not need** human help to evaluate **men**. As God, He sees beyond the superficial to people's hearts (1 Sam. 16:7; Ps. 139; Acts 1:24). John 3 and 4 give illustrations of this truth. He knew Nicodemus' need, and He told the Samaritan woman about her past (4:29). The connection of chapter 3 to chapter 2 is evident (cf. **in a man** [2:25], and “Now there was a man” [3:1]).

White, J. E. (1998). *John*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (p. 468). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

God's Standard (2:12–25)

In the clearing of the temple, Jesus brought forth God's standards of what is right and what is wrong. Present for the Passover, a time of remembrance for Israel's deliverance from Egypt, Jesus encountered individuals who were profiteering from the religious festival. Jews who had traveled great distances needed to purchase animals for sacrifice, as well as exchange their money into local currency. They encountered entrepreneurial individuals who offered both services. While legalism was denounced by Jesus, holiness was maintained. The issue at hand was not business or profit making as such but the mockery of the entire sacrificial system of the temple and the exploitation of devout men and women by greedy individuals who were capitalizing on religious sentiment.

This spectacle aroused the indignation of the Jews. Their concern was not the moral issue of whether the sellers and money exchangers should have been there in the first place but on what grounds Jesus took it upon Himself to expel them. The Jews called for a "sign," and Jesus responded, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." Jesus was referring to the temple of His body, but his Jewish antagonists associated His comments with the temple building, providing the groundwork for some of the mockery and ridicule Jesus was subjected to while hanging on the cross (Matt. 27:40; Mark 15:29).

Allen, J. P. (1972). John. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The Teacher's Bible Commentary* (pp. 667-668). Broadman and Holman Publishers.

The Beginning of Signs (John 2:1–25)

The passage—John now proceeds to show how signs produce faith in some, rejection by others. The key in this chapter is the repetition of the idea concerning belief (vv. 11, 22, 23).

Two signs are described, and others only stated. One of the miracles took place before the eyes of the disciples. The second was verbal, and its meaning was not clear to them until after the resurrection—the greatest miracle.

Special points—You need to see it as John saw it. He had followed a new master, but he knew very little about him. There were already five disciples: John, Andrew, Peter, Phillip, Nathanael (possibly James). Jesus understood their need to have reasons for believing. An opportunity came quite naturally at the wedding festival to which they had been invited.

Cana was near enough to Nazareth for Mary to be there, and in some authority. When the wine failed, she under-took to relieve the embarrassment. Jesus and his friends were outside the banquet hall, since they were near the water jars. These had contained water used in the Jewish rites of purification (v. 6). As such they were strictly not permitted near food or drink.

Mary probably meant for Jesus to send for more wine. His response to her was not disrespectful. It likely was his way of reminding her that the new status between them was never again to be a simple mother-son relationship. He was committed to another role, another kingdom.

In a moment Jesus decided what he would do. The six stone jars there suggested the sign to him. The number is important—six. It was the worst number to the Jews, falling just short of the perfect seven. And the water pots were identified with ceremonial law. So then, what if he filled each container with water to the brim? Would not this signify fulfilment, completion? And, what if the water next drawn from the well should suddenly become wine? Could that not suggest that spirit (the lively wine) was superior to formal law the water? Would not the entire episode declare to those who saw that he, himself, had the right to bring the old ways to fulfilment and originate the new?

This is what Jesus did, and a splendid reason for doing it. He had no interest in merely making wine. He was revealing himself. His mission was not to make the wedding feast merry. It was to lead men to believe in him as creator and Lord of his new kingdom.

Did he accomplish his end? Verse 11 makes it plain, “And his disciples believed on him.”

The word “sign” appears again in verse 18. The Jewish leaders had rallied from their shock after Jesus drove the animals from the Temple area. They demanded some token of his authority. He really gave them a sign, it was just that they did not recognize it.

You cannot but wonder if Jesus casually laid his hand on his own breast when he said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (v. 19). Whether he did or not, it was his meaning. That supreme act of his divine nature, his resurrection was full proof of his authority over God’s Temple. He was God; but they were then incapable of accepting it. But at the right time, “his disciples remembered” (v. 22), and that was the important thing. When they remembered, they believed.

Truth for today—We who follow Christ need the same prod to faith that John did. In the prologue he declared, “All things were made by him” (1:3). Our discipleship is not of a mild-mannered teacher who pleads for loyalty. We follow One whose power made the worlds. He speaks and everything in nature recognizes his authority. He has the rights of Creator.

And we are his new creation. Freed from legalisms and mere regulations, we are sons of a spiritual realm. It is high above every form of ritual religion. As the water looked at its creator and blushed into wine, so we are free from dead works, and alive to his vital presence.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). John 2:13-25. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.