



One Page Sermon

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Worship Every Sunday at 9:30 AM

John 2:13-25 Jesus clears the Temple and a tale of Three Passovers

Before we get too far into this passage, we must make a few things clear. Jesus did not condone violence against Jewish people in the Temple. In light of the recent hostage crisis at the Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, Texas, I feel that needs to be made clear. This story of Jesus using a whip to clear the Temple is not an example of Jesus using a weapon to do violence against humans. A clear reading shows that Jesus used chords “like a whip” to clear out the animals. While turning over the tables might have been an act of anger, it was not an act of violence. Jesus, all of the twelve disciples, and the entirety of the early church were a part of the Jewish faith and would have abhorred any violence done against Jewish people. This story of Jesus clearing the Temple is not a story of Christianity replacing Judaism. Historically this is a story (one of many in the Gospel of John) that has been used to justify mistreatment, persecution, anger, and violence against Jewish people. This is a terrible perversion of the story. That being said, what is happening here?

This is Jesus’ dramatic public debut. He had already performed a sign at the wedding in Cana, but that was mostly just for his own followers. This is the first detailed public event in his ministry which gives it added significance. This is the first of three Passovers Jesus spends at the Temple. The next one comes immediately after he provides food for 5,000 people (John 6:4). The last comes at his crucifixion, when he embodies the Passover Lamb (John 19:14).

Think for a moment of this thread of Jesus at the Temple at Passover. In this scene, he clears the Temple. Before the next Passover he provides bread for thousands. At the last he is the Paschal Lamb.

In this scene, Jesus disrupts the normal operations of the Temple. He says that it is the House of God, not a house of market (a more direct translation—something to ponder for those who worship “the market” as if it is a deity). When the religious leaders ask for an explanation, he tells them that if they tear down the Temple, he will raise it up in three days. In this moment, he is referring to his own death and resurrection. The House of God is the place where God abides. Jesus is telling them that he is now the place where God abides. When his body is destroyed, it will be raised up in three days. The abiding presence of God is not in the Temple—it is in Christ himself.

This is a radical statement that they cannot comprehend in the moment. In fact, the disciples themselves won’t understand until after the fact. This is the beginning of Christ’s public ministry and he starts with this symbolic protest. In this upheaval he is saying, “God does not live here. God is incarnate with me.”

At the next Passover Jesus himself will provide the bread. The act of feeding 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish reveals that Jesus is the source of manna and provision. On a mountain (like Sinai) on the other side of the Sea (in the wilderness), Jesus provides bread. This is another step in showing that he is the abiding presence of God.

Finally, at the last Passover, Jesus himself becomes the Paschal Lamb. The culmination of the meal of Passover, the Paschal Lamb was a symbol of salvation for the people. It was a sacrifice, but it was also the centerpiece of the great communal feast. It was the way to remember that God saved the people from slavery. In the Gospel of John, Jesus is crucified on the Day of Preparation—this is the day that the Paschal Lamb was sacrificed.

These three Passovers reveal Jesus’ true identity. He is the House where God abides. He is the source of Manna in the Wilderness. He is the Paschal Lamb. Jesus is the presence of God in the world. He is the source of bread and sustenance. He is the sacrifice that leads to salvation. He is the celebration of salvation and remembrance of God’s continued presence in our lives.



This work of art by Scarsellino (c. 1580) is beautiful, but also a perfect example of how this passage has been misinterpreted. In this painting Jesus is shown about to strike a woman prone on the ground. This is in direct opposition to the nature of Jesus and is not a proper reading of the Biblical text. The story says that he used chords to drive out the animals—not the people. There is no reason to read this verse and believe that Jesus struck any person.