

# Session 8

April 19, 2020

## Unit 2: Jesus Encounters . . .

### The Money Changers at the Temple

Jesus is the focus of authentic worship.

#### The Word

John 2:13-25

#### Session Outcome

To discover ways to find Jesus at the center of all our worship.

#### Discover:

Illustrated Bible Life takes a look at the extensive preparations necessary to celebrate the Jewish festival of Passover, and provides verse-by-verse commentary on the Scripture passage.

#### Last Week:

We celebrated the good news that Jesus' resurrection brings to our world.

#### This Week:

We will see how we must allow God to guide our motives and attitudes toward our relationship and worship of God.

#### Watch:

Dr. Hahn introduces this unit on "Jesus Encounters . . ."

#### Listen:

This week's Illustrated Bible Life podcast on FoundryLeader.com examines the annual festival of Passover as celebrated in Jesus' day.

## **Discover:**

In Judaism, the feast of Passover was the most important of the annual pilgrimages, as it commemorated Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Those who had to travel a long distance to the temple in Jerusalem often found it easier to purchase what they needed from the merchants and money changers on the Temple Mount. This week's Illustrated Bible Life article helps us to understand what "Preparing for Passover" required of ancient Jews.

# **Engage the Word**

## **TROUBLE AT THE TEMPLE**

### **John 2:13-17**

Jesus went "up to Jerusalem," is a recurring phrase (more than 20 times) in the New Testament. Jerusalem, in the Judean hills, meant a person would travel physically "up" to the city. The word "up" may also have a theological nuance. Travel to Jerusalem was a pilgrimage to the heart of Jewish faith.

This visit may have come near the end of Jesus' earthly life. The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) each report a cleansing of the temple just days before Jesus' crucifixion. But in John it is quite early. Did John position this episode early for theological emphasis to highlight the opposition Jesus would continually face from "the Jews" (more on them later)?

Some people attempt to keep both the Synoptic accounts of the conflict (as happening during Jesus' last week) and John's (in contrast, near the beginning of Jesus' ministry) in their reconstruction, arguing for two cleansing of the temple events. But no gospel reports two temple conflicts. Each gospel gives important space to a single dramatic cleansing of the temple (Matthew 21:12–17, Mark 11:15–19, and Luke 19:45–48). This session draws primarily upon John's account.

Jesus saw "the temple courts" (probably the Court of the Gentiles) being used as a "market" (the Greek word shapes the English word "emporium"). Jesus bristled with anger. Taking a "whip" to some merchants and their operations, He drove the offenders out. Only John mentions the whip (Latin "flagellum"), which was sometimes used to drive animals. On occasion it was an instrument of torture, with small pieces of metal and bone attached to the cords. These could rip the flesh of the one being whipped. The more subdued sense, driving animals or people in a certain direction, is probably meant. Jesus made a whip and acted to right the wrongs He saw. Jesus' anger relates importantly to the temple being the "house" of God. It was also the only part of the complex in which God-fearing Gentiles could gather for worship.

Because the sacrificial system required many animals, Jesus' objection may have been more about the location of the sales, rather than the selling and buying itself. Perhaps He took offense at amounts charged by the vendors. Jesus seems to have cooperated with payments to support the

temple (Matthew 17:24-27). The money changers did provide a necessary service, exchanging a variety of money for the acceptable half shekel of Tyre (Exodus 30:11-16).

The disciples remembered Jesus' teaching based on Psalm 69:9. Only John includes this Old Testament verse. The Old Testament passage looks back on what had happened. The zeal "has consumed" (NRSV). But John 2:17 has a future tense reading, "will consume me," giving the psalm a predictive aspect. Jesus' "zeal" for His "Father's house" would be a passion that will "eat at him" ? throughout His ministry. Also, by employing the Greek perfect tense (2:17) John essentially says "it remains written." ? The long ago word from God stood true in Jesus' time, and will stand throughout the ages to come.

## **SIGNS AND MISUNDERSTANDING**

### **John 2:18-22**

Many times the opponents of Jesus are called "the Jews." John uses the phrase some 30 times. On occasion "the Jews" are people who did not understand Jesus (about half the usages). Sometimes "the Jews" were violently opposed to Jesus. Near the end of John, "King of the Jews" is a term of derision (18:39), and the judgment attached to Jesus' cross (19:19). Jesus was Jewish, and all His early followers were as well. John was not placing all Jews in the enemy category. Rather, John points out the significant resistance of some Jewish leaders, an opposition that eventually led them to call for Jesus' death.

Critical misunderstanding happens in 2:19-21. Is the temple a building, or is it Jesus' body? Exaggerated irony—"three days" versus "forty-six years" demonstrates the inability of the Jewish leaders to understand Jesus. Even the most devoted disciples needed a post-resurrection faith to understand "the Scripture" and Jesus' words. Jesus spoke of His body, not a stone and timbers structure. (Similar is John 1:51.) There Jesus ("the Son of Man") is like the stairway that connected the heavenly and the earthly (Genesis 28:12). With Christ's coming, "Bethel," (Genesis 28:19) the house of God, would be not a place, but encountered in a person. Jesus identified himself with the "temple," the connecting point of God the Father and an assembly of worshipers. Announcing himself as "temple," Jesus anticipated His resurrection and prepared disciples then and since for a celebration after "three days."

## **BELIEF AND TRUST**

### **John 2:23-25**

Another key term is "sign" or "signs." The singular and plural forms combined total nearly 20 instances. These begin at 2:11 and continue to 20:30. A careful study of "signs" in John's gospel will point the reader to various levels of faith demonstrated in the characters. Signs, for some, led to lasting faith as disciples. They believed the Scripture and Jesus' words. Many believed in Jesus' name. The same foundational Greek word translated "entrust," indicates that Jesus did not fully give himself to those with only a limited faith. A more developed belief, a resurrection faith that brought one into ongoing discipleship, was needed.

## **Did You Know?**

Jesus' anger is kindled because of the peoples' idolatry. They had taken the place of God and turned it into something else. Jesus quite forcefully reminds them His kingdom is not about turning a profit. Today, the church must avoid those things that turn a house of worship into a mere marketplace.

## **Did You Know?**

Important events in Jesus' life and ministry tended to happen around the time of Passover. Note the temple would have been quite crowded when Jesus drove the money changers out.

## **Reflect**

What aspects of today's scripture identify barriers to Jesus-centered worship? Which are the most challenging to you?

Rick Williamson is a Professor Emeritus of Biblical Literature at Mount Vernon Nazarene University. A retired elder, he has been a pastor and a chaplain.

## **Discussion Guide**

### **Insight**

The Jewish people understood the temple to be the point of intersection between the realm of God and the realm of earth. At that point of intersection, revelation was given and sins were forgiven. By declaring His body to be the temple, Jesus proclaims that He himself would now be the center of God's activity in the world, in the point of God's in-breaking kingdom, the locus of God's revelatory and salvific work.

### **Connect to My Experience**

Begin by asking your group if they have ever been witness to an injustice or abuse of power. Perhaps a teacher was cruel to a fellow student or a co-worker was wrongly terminated after being unfairly accused of something. If so,

How did you respond in the moment?

How did this experience make you feel?

What did you find to be the most troubling aspect of the encounter?

Often times, it is only up reflection we realize the importance of the moment.

Upon reflection, how do you wish you had responded?

Did the experience change your behavior in the future? If so, how?

### **Transition:**

In this passage, Jesus is filled with anger at a grave injustice and abuse of power occurring in the temple. Vendors, selling supplies to Jewish worshipers, have overrun the temple court most likely reserved for God-fearing Gentiles to pray. It is clear that the people of God have abandoned their vocation as the light to the nations and allowed the temple itself to become an object of worship.

## **Connect to the Word**

Invite someone to read John 2:13-17, then discuss the following,

What begins as a simple trip to Jerusalem for a holy feast takes a wildly unexpected turn. Upon entering the temple, Jesus sees vendors selling animals for sacrifices and money changers exchanging Roman coin for temple coin. Neither of these practices was unusual. Buying sacrifices at the temple was a logical solution to this problem. But something is wrong. Perhaps the dealings are unfair, the vendors and money changers swindling poor peasants come to the Holy City. But, perhaps a more likely cause of the righteous anger in Jesus is not the practices themselves, but the location of the practices. The buying and selling likely overtook the only place in which non-Jewish people could pray in the temple, the Court of the Gentiles.

Why would the displacement of the Gentiles from their place of prayer be cause for such violent anger in Jesus?

What are your initial thoughts and feelings when you read/hear verses 15-16? How might Jesus' words and action point to the seriousness of the situation?

In what ways were the practices taking place in the temple courts working against faithful worship of God?

The text describes Jesus as being consumed by zeal for the house of God. Why might the author have included this reference (an excerpt from Psalm 69)? How do we hear that reference differently knowing that the temple will soon no longer be the hub of God's presence on earth? Invite someone to read John 2:18-22, then discuss the following,

The temple was the place where the God of the universe and sinful people met. It was a place where sacrifice for sin and atonement were made. However, through His death and resurrection, Jesus becomes the temple—a meeting place between God and sinner. A place where reconciliation is made possible. Jesus is announcing a new creation in which He himself will be the connection between heaven and earth, between a holy God and sinful humanity.

What dramatic shift will this require from His hearers in the temple courts? How will this shift impact their worship practices, currently centered around the temple?

The onlookers cannot understand the new thing that God is doing apart from divine revelation. How might the listeners have postured themselves to be better able to hear and understand God's work in their midst?

Invite someone to read John 2:23-25, then discuss the following,

After the dramatic scene in the temple, Jesus carries on with His work, performing signs to reveal the in-breaking kingdom of God and His own identity as the Son of God.

It is one thing to believe in the signs of Jesus; it is quite another to believe and give oneself over to Jesus' message and calling to follow after Him.

What factors might have prevented witnesses to Jesus' signs moving from a signs-based faith to a true, transformative faith in Jesus as Messiah?

Jesus knows the heart. There is no pretending or hiding. How might the hidden motives of these early listeners and witnesses to Jesus influenced their worship in positive or negative ways?

## **Connect to My Life and the World**

Share with the group the following: This is an uncomfortable text. It was uncomfortable for the original hearers who could not imagine worship beyond the temple and it is uncomfortable for us to see active anger in Jesus. But Jesus' visceral response should give us pause and highlight the significance of faithful worship to the heart of God. Jesus' desire is for all of creation to be rightly ordered, God and humankind in right relationship to one another.

In this text, the people of God were limited in their understanding of God's work in the world by their former experiences of God.

How might our past experiences with God hinder our ability to see God at work presently, or in perhaps a new way?

Jesus was incensed by the abuses taking place in the temple. In the very place God designated for all people to worship and pray, the people misused the space for their own ends.

How might we be guilty, not only of poor stewardship of the Lord's resources, but also misusing them for our own gain?

Israel lost sight of its identity as a people set apart to worship and make God known to all people. How might a renewed focus on our identity as the people of God, set apart for participation in God's mission, safeguard against idolatry?

Jesus is the center of Christian worship. What might it look like to re-center our corporate worship around the person of Jesus?

Consider playing the song “Be Still My Soul” as group members silently reflect on today’s passage.

Close in prayer.

Sessions 8-14 are written by

Stephanie Lobdell

Stephanie is the Co-Lead Pastor at Mountain Home Church of the Nazarene in Mountain Home, ID with her husband Tommy. They have two kids, JoJo and Jack.