

*It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.*

**Weekly Edition – June 23, 2017**  
**Gospel According to St. John – First Year**

## The Gospel of John: Jesus Clears the Temple – Part 2

<sup>21</sup> What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

<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 people 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 courts, 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! Stop turning 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> The Jews then responded to him, "What 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> They 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.

<sup>23</sup> Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name. <sup>24</sup> But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. <sup>25</sup> He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.

## Entering into Scripture: A Meditation on the First Passover

I awoke this morning in my hometown of Capernaum. While large by the standards of some of the surrounding villages, it is yet a small town. I feel comfortable here - this is my place and these are my people. So I feel right at home, having been taken in last night by the owner of this place who is a friend of Mary and her family. Being a small town everyone knows one another - as an acquaintance if not as a friend, and the homeowner is more like an acquaintance to me. It is my first time in his home and he has made me feel welcomed; so much so that I slept late. It is only now that I am aroused by sounds of the morning bustle outside.

Immediately my head swims with thoughts. I think of my friend John the Baptizer. I feel self-

conscious at having left him. It was only a few days ago that he pointed out Jesus as He walked by saying, "behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." My friend and I left John's company immediately and have been with Jesus ever since. My thoughts trace to last weekend - the wedding in Cana, not far from here. The jars of water. The wine steward's stunned pronouncement. I must admit, it was the best wine I have ever tasted!

Here we linger for a few days. The mood is casual and relaxed, light-hearted even - as we get to know Jesus and one another. I feel so welcomed by Him; so relaxed in His company. There is a certain warmth in the air. I don't want it to end.

### The Gospel of St. John

#### Part I

- Prologue 1:1-14
- First Year 1:15 – 2:22
- Second Year 2:23 – 6:71
- Third Year 7:1 – 12:50

#### Part II

- The Last Discourse 13:1 – 17:26
- The Arrest and Trial 18:1 – 19:16
- Death and Resurrection 19:16 (b) – 21:25

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I do note a certain tension between His brothers and Jesus. From what I am able to sense it is one-way, as it is clear to me that Jesus loves His brothers.

After a couple of days of hanging out together, it is time for us to make our way to Jerusalem. I hate going there. But all of us must go present ourselves in the Temple three times each year according to our Jewish custom. Jerusalem will be a mob scene, like it always is on these occasions. But this one, the Passover, is the worst if you ask me. It is hot and packed and noisy and smelly and filled with smoke from ovens crammed in everywhere to cook the Passover Seder for all the pilgrims coming from all the surrounding countryside. The smell of the burnt offerings fills the tightly compacted city streets in a smoggy stench. While I am always stirred in my worship of God during these pilgrimages up to the Temple, I really don't like the circus and commotion that surrounds it. And I especially hate the added garrisons of Roman soldiers who assemble on these occasions. I do my best to keep my distance from them.

So I appreciate traveling with Jesus and His mother and brothers as we make the sixty-mile journey from Capernaum up to Jerusalem. The mood is light and joyful and Mary keeps us engaged with stories about Jesus as a boy. It keeps my mind far from the chaos which lays ahead.

On one occasion, years before, when Jesus was just a boy - not even of age - the family somehow mistakenly left Him behind. They made the terrifying discovery almost a day later. Panicked, they raced back up to Jerusalem. The crowds had thinned by then as all the pilgrims were returning to their hometowns. Jerusalem looked like a pigsty; the aftermath of a circus. They eventually found Him in the Temple at the feet of the teachers of the Law. Apparently, He made quite an impression.

Listening to Mary, I missed the conversation between Jesus and His brothers about the

arrangements for the Passover Seder, yet as we entered Jerusalem, Mary and her boys went off one way and Jesus told us that we were going to the Temple. He said, "to My Father's house." We somehow knew what He meant.

It was a chaotic and unruly scene as we drew near, exactly the part I hate. The throng was so dense I could barely move- jammed with people and animals and carts. It was like a madhouse.

As we moved up the steps and entered under the massive gate into the outer court - the one named for the Gentiles, where even those outside of God's covenant could come and offer prayer - it was just as I expected to find it. It was like an emporium. My parents told me it had not always been this way. There had been a time, long ago in the early days of construction on this massive edifice, when the merchants had to set up shop elsewhere. But apparently, to help pay for the continuing construction work on this amazing place the rulers and priests had begun to grant site-leases here within the courts of the Temple.

This chaos before me - of herdsmen selling animals for sacrifice, merchants selling doves for us to make our offerings, bankers exchanging coinage into "clean money" to pay the Temple tax - there is something about all of this that just seems so wrong to me. Maybe at the heart of it all this is why I hate coming up here three times a year.

It is hard to move about in this dense mob scene. But as we go I notice Jesus bending over from time to time. He picks up cords that are scattered around being trampled under-foot. As He moves about I notice He is weaving them together. A companion pulls me away to point something out to me. I honestly don't recall what. But next thing I know a commotion breaks out behind me. I can't quite make out what it is, but my heart immediately seizes with fear. This can't be good. A riot only brings down the wrath of the authorities and I sure don't want to get caught up in it.

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Panic-stricken I strain to find Jesus and my friends in the commotion, but it is too dense, too crowded for me to see the cause of the ruckus or locate my friends. I do sense that the outer courtyard is emptying as I can feel a flow of the mob towards the gates. I step forward to get a better look - and it is then that I see Jesus. What is He doing? Has He gone mad? With His newly braided whip Jesus is beating on the animals and chasing them from their pens in the courtyard out into the streets of Jerusalem. It is a mad scene. The herdsman take-off in pursuit of their animals as Jesus wrecks their pens. The crowd continues to disburse - rushing to scurry through the gates and away from the ruckus. The courtyard quickly empties of people and animals. I am shocked at the spectacle before me - and speechless too. I fear for my friend. Surely at any moment the Temple Guards will seize Him.

Once all the cattle and sheep have been dispersed, Jesus marches over to the tables of the bankers. He hurls their coins to the ground and over-turns their tables. They are sent scrambling to their knees to scoop up their money. As this madness plays out in front of me, many more scurry to through the gate to make their exit. I think I should be one of them. But I am held captivated by what I see before me. A thickening knot forms in my stomach. I think I am going to throw-up. Surely, they will seize Him at any moment. Has He gone mad? I take note of a growing number of clergy forming a perimeter. No one raises a hand to stop Him. They simply look onto the madness in stunned confusion, as do I.

When not a single table remains upright, Jesus marches over to the birds-men. "Get these out of here!" He demands. They do not pause, but immediately gather-up their bird cages and rush out through the gates. "My Father's house is to

be a house of prayer - but you have turned it into an emporium!" Jesus cries loudly. His voice was strong; collected.

The next moment seemed to drag on for an eternity, as if played out in slow motion. The court is now substantially empty. Bankers on their hands and knees collect their coins and pick-up tables. None of the animals remain, except a few sparrows who move in to take advantage of the spoils. Wrecked pens are all around; one that had been teetering finally collapses with a loud thud. I now see the Temple guards standing with the priests. Everyone is speechless. A quiet calm comes over the place.

A few priests and teachers of the Law step forward. I do not know them, but from their vestments I can tell they are men of rank. They approach Jesus. "By what authority do you do this?" they ask. "What sign can you show us?"

Jesus replied, "Destroy this Temple and I will rebuild it again in three days." Not possible, I think to myself.

They responded to Him saying, "It has taken forty-three years to build this and you are going to rebuild it in three days?" They were incredulous. But no one moved as much as a finger to seize Him.

Jesus turned away, dropped His braided whip of cords, and quietly made His way towards the gate. I and my companions, after pausing, made our way also - following Jesus. As I passed through the gate I glanced back over my shoulder to take in the scene. Wrecked pens. Over-turned tables. Bankers on their hands and knees. Bewildered priests. Confused Temple guards. What just happened? Who is this Jesus? No one speaks. We just follow.

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### (Con't from last week) Reflection 6: Honest Scales

You do not condemn the emporium; You do not condemn the marketplace. What You condemn is that we have gotten our priorities wrong. Our place of worship has become an emporium. This was a house of prayer, but we neglect our prayer and turn it into a bizarre! Worse yet, Your priests set up a system of corruption here in Your outer-courts. In another place, Your prophets speak out against false measures and corrupt weights. Here, they are not

only on display, they are approved by Your priests – those who are set-apart to worship You in Spirit and truth. But these are blind guides. Even worse, these guides steal from the very flock You have given them charge-over. Oh, that we would subvert our trade to our worship. Oh, that in worshipping You in Spirit and truth the scales of our trade would be honest, holy, pleasing and acceptable to You.

### Reflection 7: The Pangs of Conscience

The priests and the Temple guards do not stop You. Perhaps they knew better – perhaps their own conscience spoke to them about how wrong this was. They profane the Court of the Gentiles, the place where those outside the covenant promise of Israel could yet come to offer prayer and thanksgiving to the Living God. They do so by selling plots upon which others may set-up shop – in full knowledge that their trade was dirty trade, but turning a blind eye because they benefitted from the graft and corruption. And it did not end here, but spilled out into the streets and surrounding villages too. The entire system was corrupted

through and through. Those who raised goats and lambs for a living forced to sell to these middle-men at a discount; then these middlemen turning around and re-selling at exaggerated prices for wrongful gain. The faithful had no alternative but to pay above market prices to acquire an “approved” sacrificial offering. Yes, their hearts convicted them, so they did not move against You. But instead, they demanded some sign of Your authority to do these things. How the heart of an unrepentant man will demand to know Your authority, rather than listen to the pangs of one's own conscience.

### Reflection 8: Descent to Capernaum; Ascent to Jerusalem

The Temple-cleansing episode at first catches us by surprise, Lord. We have a hard time reconciling Your anger on display here with Your other qualities – like those we see in the Sermon on the Mount. Yet John's Gospel frames for us a clue and it can be found in the preceding descent to Capernaum followed immediately by Your ascent to Jerusalem. First You go down among Your people, to a village that never accepts Your divinity; to a people who prefer darkness to light. Such is the stain of sin. Next You go up to Jerusalem – Your holy habitation and the one place on earth where Your shekinah glory resides in the Holy of Holies. Capernaum represents Your descent into the world as man

among a people who reject You. Jerusalem, and in particular the Temple, represents the heart of God – the place of Your holy dwelling. Yet even this, the one place in all the earth that should be a safe harbor for all mankind, has been corrupted and polluted by those very keepers You have set over the people. They delight in keeping people trapped in their sin. So Your rage directed at them, for profaning the faith, for trampling on the gifts of God, for enslaving sinners for their own gain – is not only understood, but reveals the righteous indignation You have towards sin and the awful consequences of death it unleashed on Your people – indeed, on Your whole creation.

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### Reflection 9: No Longer Stones, But Your Precious Body

The mood here in the Court of the Gentiles is quite different from the mood a few days earlier in Cana at the wedding feast. Yet the two share common themes: You tell Your mother that Your hour had not yet come in Cana, while here You allude to Your hour when You say, "tear this Temple down..." The wedding feast begins "three days later" and here You say You will raise-up the Temple again in three days. By these and other references we see the undertones of Your death and resurrection hidden

in plain view. We also see that the Temple in Jerusalem – the center of worship and sacrificial life under Your old covenant, is to be replaced with the temple of Your body as the center of worship and sacrificial life under the new covenant: "This is My Body, broken for you... This is the cup of My blood poured out for you..." I praise You for the glory of Your Temple celebrated in the Eucharist. I praise You for the wonders of Your Word revealed on the pages of Holy Scripture.

### Reflection 10: Tearing Down and Rebuilding

"Tear down this Temple and I will rebuild it in three days." Here You spoke the truth, Lord. You prophesied that they will tear down the Temple – the Temple of Your body – in which Your divinity meets Your humanity. They will tear it down by hanging You from a tree. But You will rebuild it, rising on the third day. And while they will tear it

down, they can do nothing without Your consent. You will permit them to tear it down. It must be torn down, for if it is not torn down, it cannot be raised. And if it is not raised, there is no salvation – there is no Eucharist. I thank You Lord, that You lay down Your life and take it up again for me.