**John 2:13-25 Sunday 3rd March**

The holy gospel according to John, chapter 2 beginning at verse 13.
**Praise and glory to God.**

**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 for your house will consume me.”[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%202%3A13-25&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26113a)]

**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 in his name.[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%202%3A13-25&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26119b)] **24**But Jesus would not entrust 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.

This is the gospel of Christ
**Praise to Christ the word.**

Please be seated.

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This is one of the most striking passages in the Gospels. It shows Jesus seemingly in anger, and on the verge of violence as he drives the money changers out of the temple. It is a powerful story which appears in all four gospels. In the three synoptic gospels of Mathew, Mark and Luke, the story appears towards the end of his ministry, after he has entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. But here in John’s gospel it is placed at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. In the other three gospels Jesus goes to Jerusalem only once. This clearly defines a significant difference with this gospel of John, where he goes several times and celebrates three Passovers there.

The last time Jesus was reported to be with John was in Galilee in the village of Cana with a joyous occasion of Jesus at a wedding, where John says that Jesus gave his first sign of who he actually was, referring to turning water to wine. Here today, on a more serious note, we find Jesus at the Passover in Jerusalem, cleansing the temple. The story delivered a different sort of message, and clearly showed that Jesus had a distaste for religion being driven by market forces, or manipulating for financial benefit to both the Jews, the leaders, and the traders.

Slide 1 - The Temple Market

The story opened with this lively scene of a marketplace in the outer court of the temple. There would typically be by some estimates hundreds of thousands of pilgrims there to celebrate the Passover festival. It was a profoundly serious occasion for the Jews and the temple area was crowded, because, not only had they come to the feast of the Passover, but they had business to do in Jerusalem, many with sacrifices to bring, as had Mary and Joseph after Jesus was born. For an animal sacrifice at the temple, many would bring their own animals from home. But any animals to be sacrificed had to be without a blemish and there were animal inspectors at the temple. Apparently, the animals brought in from outside rarely passed inspection, yet low and behold, the temple just happened to have unblemished animals that they could buy. How convenient, here you could buy the offering from the temple market on Saturday and offer it back on a Sunday, all in the same temple. These Jewish Priests were quite an entrepreneurial lot.

Furthermore, there was also a temple tax to pay, a per capita fee assessed on every Jewish family, which was needed to maintain the temple. The problem for the visitors was that only Jewish shekels accepted by the temple priests. – No Roman or Greek coins were allowed. But not to worry, by coincidence, shrewd money changers gladly converted the coins to shekels – for a fee of course.

The area had been turned into a marketplace, with animals for sale, and money changers calling out rates for trading and doing their business. Exchange rates could vary like the price of petrol these days, and it’s a bit like going to the Dentist, if you are well dressed, it always seems to cost more.

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So why did Jesus act as he did? When he arrived, he had a good look at what was going on, and it is not like he had never seen it before. As John recalled, he had been to Passover many times before. But now Jesus had officially embarked on his public ministry where he would present himself, not so much as a carpenter from Nazareth, but as the Messiah that God had sent to Israel. He saw that it was a marketplace, right there in the temple courts, and something stirred deeply within him. It seemed outrageous to walk up to the house of God and hear the exchange rates being shouted out by the traders, or the mooing of the oxen and bleating of sheep.

Slide 3 – Jesus clearing the temple

Commercialising the temple like this did not meet with Jesus’ approval. So, Jesus upset it all, driving out the animals, the moneychangers, and the inspectors. Without glossing over the magnitude of disapproval, it was not an impulsive kneejerk reaction because he had first taken the time to fashion some rope into a whip to give people a strong incentive to clear off. Given that the traders were there at the indulgence of the temple priests, they probably didn’t foresee the behaviour that Jesus was about to show.

Oops! Jesus had made quite an impact, and a significant mess. Consequently, the temple lost revenue and you can imagine he was now very unpopular with the high priests. In the synoptic gospels, Jesus had admonished the temple for becoming a den of robbers instead of a house of prayer. However, Jesus’ formal accusation in John is not limited to exploitative economic practices, his objection was about making the temple into a marketplace. It was the commercialisation of the temple and obstructing people seeking the presence of God that was clearly offensive to Jesus. This perceived misuse of a church or temple is appropriate to this day.

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I remember years ago as a church warden that we knew an Anglican church should only be used for Godly purposes. Consequently, things like the annual church fair were held outside in the church grounds, never in the building. However, in times of emergency such as floods, earthquakes, fires etc, we could shelter many families in this building. That would indeed be a Godly purpose for a church. Sadly, while we were on holiday we drove through evidence of the Cyclone Gabriel mess at Eskdale, where they could not have used the church as a shelter because it too was flooded.

When Jesus cleansed the temple, many questions arose about him and the authority he seemed to assume, and Jesus gave what is thought to be his first allusion to the resurrection: Jesus answered them, destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days. They of course replied, it has taken forty-six years.

Slide 5 – Jesus on cross/Jesus resurrected

John tells us that the disciples later recalled what he had said and realised that he was speaking metaphorically, he was speaking of his body as the new temple, which would be destroyed by his crucifixion, and which he would raise up again in three days.

As a metaphor, Jesus’ indicated that following his life, death, and resurrection, Christianity will replace the temple as the location of the dwelling place of God.

Now as you can imagine, this was a threat to the religious establishment and the beginning of the serious plot to get rid of him.

What nobody but Jesus realised was that this apparently random act was part of God’s overall plan to have Jesus executed by his own people, so that he could be resurrected to begin God’s new covenant with, this time, all people, and not just the people of what is now Israel.

We are all beneficiaries of what started as a random act of vandalism, God never acts randomly – there is a reason for everything, even if it may not appear apparent at the time.

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Amen.