Jesus Clears the Temple

John 2:12-25

Key Verse: 2:16b “…Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!”

John, the author of this book, wrote about Jesus in 1:14b, “…*We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth*.” According to John, Jesus is the Son of God who is full of grace and truth. Last week we learned how Jesus blessed the wedding banquet by changing water into wine. The wedding banquet could have been big trouble for everyone there because of the shortage of wine. But Jesus changed the water into wine, and that the banquet was more pleasant and blessed than before. By changing water into wine Jesus showed God’s glory as the Son of God. By changing water into wine Jesus proved that he came to save the world. By changing water into wine Jesus showed that he is full of grace and love.

In today’s passage we see an opposite picture of Jesus, who became angry and violent in the temple court. He confronted the religious leaders and merchants by clearing the temple. This proves that Jesus is full of truth and righteousness. Let us study why Jesus cleared the temple, why he became angry, and what Jesus’ words and actions meant to us.

First, Jesus is the Son of God. (12-17) After Jesus performed his first miraculous sign at the wedding banquet in Cana of Galilee, he went down to Capernaum with his mother, brothers, and disciples. There he stayed for a few days. (12) When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. (13) It was the Passover, when all the Jews (including those who lived in foreign countries) came to Jerusalem to celebrate the day of God’s deliverance of the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt. This was like Independence Day in America. Jesus went to the temple in Jerusalem to observe Moses’ law. According to Moses’ law, all Jewish males over 20 years old must go to Jerusalem and give their offerings to God in the temple.

What happened in the temple court when Jesus arrived? Look at verse 14. “***In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at the tables exchanging money.***” According to Moses’ law, every Jew must bring animals as an offering to God. Those who couldn’t afford cattle or sheep must offer doves. For the convenience of those who traveled from far distant countries, the temple authorities allowed them to buy animals in the temple court. In order to buy and sell animals there were many animal merchants and money changers in the temple court. The money changers made money from the rate difference between common currency and temple currency. In the animal business and in money changing there were terrible corruptions such as bribery, exploitation, fraud, and injustice. The real problem was that the religious leaders, including high priests, were deeply involved in these corrupted businesses.

What did Jesus do when he saw this? Look at verses 15-16. “***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 exchangers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market***!” They had never seen this Jesus before, who became so angry and violent. He was a gentle shepherd. He was full of grace. Jesus himself said, “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest…for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*.” (Mt 11:28,29) But in the temple court he was furious, and he drove out all the merchants and animals and overturned the tables. Why? What caused him to become so angry? It was because the religious leaders and the greedy merchants made the holy temple into a market. In fact, the merchandise was allowed in the Gentile court under the authority of the high priests. This Gentile court was the place where the gentiles visited, prayed, and worshiped God. It should have been a place for worship and prayer. But, instead of prayer and worship, there were all kinds of animal noises and smells, and the sight of people yelling and fighting filled the court. Above all, Jesus was furious about the religious leaders’ greed for money and their abuse of authority.

The temple was the house of the Father God. The temple was the place where God dwells. The temple was where God’s eyes and ears were open for his people. The temple was where God the Father chose, consecrated, and dwelt. In 2 Chronicles 7:12-16 the Lord God appeared to Solomon at night and said*: “I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices. 13“When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, 14if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. 15Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. 16I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.* The temple was where God dwelt. But the religious leaders made this holy temple of God into a market, a place for making money. This made Jesus furious and caused him to clear the temple.

500 hundred years ago today God called Martin Luther to challenge the corrupted papacy and the Catholic regime, and to reform the church. In Catholic terms, indulgences were a way to reduce the amount of punishment one would receive in Purgatory for sins. The church taught people that their punishment from their present sin could be temporarily reduced through prayer and good works. At that time Pope Leo X sold indulgences to those who gave money to rebuild St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. The aggressive marketing for this project caused Martin Luther to protest the abuse of papal authority. Luther rebuked the authority’s greed and the conspiracy behind this project. He also claimed that the forgiveness of sin belongs to God alone, not to anyone - even the Pope - for any purpose. In thesis 28 Luther wrote, “As soon as a coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs." How could men’s sin be forgiven by offerings of money? How could men’s sin be pardoned by any other human being? Martin Luther’s protesting the corrupted the church was like Jesus’ clearing the temple. Righteousness comes only from faith in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and rose again from the dead. It does not come from any good works, material contribution, or religious achievement. Our sins are forgiven only by God through faith in Jesus Christ, not from any authority or organization or person. As Martin Luther said, we cannot buy salvation with money. We can be saved only through faith in Jesus Christ and by God’s grace alone. (Eph 2:8) This is why Paul said, “*The righteous will live by faith.*” (Ro 1:17)

Second, Jesus is the temple. (17-22) How did his disciples react to Jesus’ words and actions? They found Jesus in the Scripture - from Psalm 69:9, which says, “***Zeal for your house will consume me.***” We are not sure if the disciples remembered this verse at that time or after Jesus died and rose again from the dead. But this verse foretold Jesus’ death on the cross. Jesus’ vigorous zeal for his Father’s house and his guardianship of God’s interest caused his death on the cross. What was the religious leader’s response? Look at verse 18. “***The Jews then responded to him, “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this***?” The Jews were seeking signs from Jesus which would prove his authority to clear the temple. The Jews meant that Jesus should have brought proofs to verify his authority.

How did Jesus answer them? Let us read verse 19 together. “***Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.***” Jesus’ answer shocked the Jews, who were seeking for signs. Jesus said that he would rebuild the temple in three days. The Jews replied in verse 20. “***It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days***?” The temple was built by King Herod. It was a huge building built with massive stones and marble and decorated with lots of gold. It took forty-six years to build the temple. But Jesus said that he would raise it in three days. But verses 21-22 say what Jesus really meant. Look at verses 21-22. “***But the temple he had spoken of was his body. 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***.” Jesus’ disciples realized that the temple Jesus had spoken of was his body, not the temple building. Of course, Jesus could raise the temple building in three days, even in a second if he wanted, because he is the Almighty God. But what Jesus really meant here was that his body would be broken on the cross and raised on the third day. Jesus meant his death and resurrection, not the building itself. Later people used what Jesus said about the temple to accuse him of being the destroyer of the temple. (Mk 14:58)

Jesus is the temple, where the atonement of our sins occurs. In the era of the Old Testament, the high priest offered atoning sacrifices in the temple. As Hebrews says, “*the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance*.” (Heb 9:7) In the temple, the high priest brought the blood of animals to cleanse his sins and all sins of the people. But now Jesus himself became the temple. He himself became the high priest who offered the atoning sacrifice. Jesus himself became the Lamb of God, who took away the sins of the world. The Hebrews 9:12 says, “*He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption*.” When Jesus said, “Destroy this temple.”, he meant, “Crucify me!” When he said, “I will raise it again in three days,” he meant, “I will be raise up in three days.” Jesus is the holy temple where our sins are forgiven. Jesus is the holy temple where our eternal redemption is achieved. Jesus is the holy temple where our eternal life starts. Jesus is the temple where we can meet the holy God.

Third, we are the temple of the living God. (23-25) While Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name. (23) They exclaimed “Wow” and praised Jesus’ name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. He knew those who had praised him would betray him and accuse him and send him to death on the cross. Jesus was not swayed by people’s praise or popularity. He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person. Jesus is God who knows everything in and about us. He knows what we think and what we desire in the deepest part of our soul. Above all, Jesus knew that men should repent of their sins and be redeemed by his blood. Jesus knew that we were created in God’s image and likeness, but that we sinned against God and were destined to die because of our sins. Jesus knew that men can be saved and be restored as the holy people of God through faith in himself.

Indeed, we are created in God’s holy image and his likeness. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6:16, “*We are the temple of the living God*.” He meant that our body is the temple where the Holy Spirit dwells. (1 Co 6:19) We ought not defile this holy temple with sins of lust, hatred, jealousy, pride, idolatry, debauchery, and so on. We must not displease the Holy Spirit with drugs, marihuana, smoking, alcohol, or other intoxicated liquids. There was once a very stubborn and proud Christian prison guard in Korea. He beat many prisoners who rebelled against him and against the authorities. He drank and smoked. One day his church pastor visited him and prayed for him to keep his body as the holy temple of God where the Holy Spirit dwells. The guard was so ashamed of himself for not keeping his body as the temple of God, but as a drinking bar and a chimney. He repented of his sins of abusing his body which was given by God. And he stopped beating the prisoners, and brought them to Christ!

God created us in his own image and likeness. We need to keep our body and soul holy and pure. We are the temple of the living God. We must repent of all our sins and clear our hearts as Jesus cleared the temple. Let us repent and have the Holy Spirit dwell in us. Let Jesus clear our greed, pride, lust, selfishness, fear, anger, hatred, jealousy, and all dirty and corrupted elements and make our heart become a house of prayer for all nations. May Jesus come into our hearts, clean us, redeem us, forgive us, and dwell in us forever. Amen.