

## **Trouble in the Temple - John 2:13-25**

Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Three unforgettable years had passed since that first Passover Feast the disciples had experienced with Jesus. What a memorable Passover that had been, when Jesus shocked everyone by creating a major ruckus in the temple courts. Since then the disciples had learned a lot more about Jesus and what was important to him, though still they struggled to understand his plan for ushering in God's kingdom. But this latest Passover, the fourth one they had hoped to experience with Jesus, had not gone at all as they had expected.

Oh, Jesus had tried many times to warn the disciples ahead of time about what was about to happen, but still they just couldn't wrap their minds around how that could actually be possible. How could the Master of the wind and the waves, the Walker on water, the Healer of every kind of disease, the Raiser of the even the dead, be Himself put to death by the very people he had come to save? That just seemed incomprehensible. How could the Son of God be killed? And yet, just as Jesus had predicted...on the night before Passover...he had been suddenly arrested by the Roman authorities, quickly put on trial the next morning before Pontius Pilate and found innocent by him. But then, at the loud and riotous demands of the people being stirred up by the Jewish religious leaders, Jesus had been handed over to be crucified.

Imagine what must have been going through the minds of the disciples on Saturday, the day after the crucifixion, as they wrestled with the undeniable fact that Jesus, the One in whom they'd placed all their hopes and dreams; the One who had loved them like no one else ever had and had shared every part of his life with them; the One who had trained them and made them the men they were today; the One they'd imagined would be setting up his earthly kingdom with them at any moment. Their Jesus was actually dead...gone from their presence like so many other loved ones they'd lost in their lives... wrapped up in grave clothes from head to foot and locked in a tomb. They'd seen it all happen with

their own eyes and even watched as a spear was thrust into his side and the blood and water flowed out of his body.

What do you think they remembered about Jesus on that dark day after his crucifixion, as they thought back on his life and the time they'd spent with him? How would they have described him and what was important to him to others? What about you? If you were to think about what you know about Jesus Christ and the time he spent walking this earth as a human being, how would you sum up in a few short statements what Jesus was like and what was important to him? What if you were to ask the average person on the street to describe Jesus and what he was like, what do you think most people would say? Probably a very common response would be something like this: *Jesus was kind and loving and accepting of all people. He was non-judgmental and hung out most with greedy tax collectors and prostitutes and adulterers and drunkards. He went about doing good and teaching people how to be good and love others.*

Are some of these statements true about Jesus? Are some perhaps misleading and not entirely accurate? Would you say there's anything crucial missing from that short description of Jesus? Well, if you've ever really studied the Gospels in depth...the four different historical records we have of the life of Jesus...you would definitely say that there are some key truths missing from that description of Jesus I just gave you, and that some of those statements are downright inaccurate.

I want to invite those of you who have Bibles today, to turn with me to the Gospel of John, chapter 2, verses 13 through 25. Today we're going to possibly expand our concept of who Jesus is and see a side of Jesus that's rarely incorporated into most people's description of who he is and what's important to him. Let's begin by reading the full passage, beginning in verse 13 of John, chapter 2:

***13 The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. 15 And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. 16 And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things***

***away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."***

***18 So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was speaking about the temple of his body. 22 When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.***

***23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. 24 But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people 25 and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.***

May the Lord bless the reading of his Word and give us eyes and hearts and minds to understand what it means for us today.

## **II. CLEANSING THE TEMPLE BUILDING (Vs. 13 to 17)**

Well, as we begin by focusing on the first section of this passage, verses 13 through 17, which I've labeled in your sermon notes: *Cleansing the Temple Building*, we get a very intense picture of Jesus in action that doesn't quite fit the image most people have in their mind of him. This was actually the first Passover Feast Jesus had attended in Jerusalem with his new disciples, which probably only numbered five at this point, including Andrew, John, Peter, Philip and Nathanael. And arriving in Jerusalem Jesus and his disciples made their way to the temple, where Jesus was completely appalled by what he found there. In the place that was set apart as the very dwelling place of God and was to be treated as sacred, holy, distinct, and devoted to his glory and worship, he found cattle, sheep and pigeons and people trying to make a financial profit off of God's people and their desire to offer sacrifices and worship him.

And do you know what you always find wherever there are cows, sheep and pigeons? You guessed it: *Manure and bird poop!* There's simply no way around

that fact of life, is there? So here in the temple courts, meant to be pristine and set apart and glorifying to God, Jesus found dirty animals and manure everywhere. And even worse, he found greedy people who were worshiping the false god of money and trying to make a dishonest profit off of God's prescribed method of worship at this point in history.

To help us understand how this might have affected Jesus, I want to share a brief illustration. Imagine for a moment what it would be like if you had just finished setting up for a very special birthday party for your child. You've scrubbed the floors and cleaned every part of the room, gotten out your best plates and goblets from the china cabinet, put name cards out, beautifully wrapped the gifts, and placed in the center of the table the most beautiful cake you've ever made in your life. As you prepare to leave for one final trip to La Grande to get the last few items you need for the party, you glance back at your handiwork and just can't believe how special everything looks and how loved your child will feel at this special birthday party. With that picture in your mind you depart for your trip to town, excited about the party which is only a few hours away now. Three hours later you return home to make final preparations for the party which is scheduled to start in just 30 minutes. People will be arriving momentarily!

But as you come in the door of the house, something seems very wrong. You left the dogs locked in the back room, or so you thought, but they're not there anymore. The door's open and there's a strange, disgusting smell in the air. As you come around the corner into the kitchen, you look into the birthday party room and this is what you see: Both dogs are on the table. Broken glasses and plates are scattered on the floor. Birthday presents are unwrapped and chewed up. Your beautiful cake is completely destroyed. Dog poop and dog throw-up are on the table and the floor and have even been tracked into the living room. And as you survey the complete disaster and breathe in the repulsive smell of sick dogs, there's a loud knock at the door. People are arriving for the party.

Perhaps we can understand through this simple illustration some of what Jesus must have been feeling when he arrived at his Father's house and saw the filth and greed that had taken root in the very place where people were meant to encounter the one true God and discover how they could be in right relationship with him. And how Jesus responded to this pollution and corruption of God's dwelling place blows apart the images most people have in their minds of him.

Quietly making a whip of cords, he then loudly and aggressively used that whip to drive the sellers and the money-changers with their cattle and sheep completely out of the temple. And not only that, he dumped their precious coins all over the floor and actually turned over their tables! This was not a quiet scene. And finally, turning to those selling pigeons or doves, he said: ***“Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.”*** Is this side of Jesus usually incorporated into our concept of who he is? Perhaps it should be!

Always meek and mild, never speaking a harsh word? I don’t think so! There were certain attitudes and actions of people that Jesus responded to and addressed aggressively, boldly and with willingness to shame people and hurt their feelings and wake them up from the terrible and ungodly path they were on. And Jesus was especially passionate and fully committed to preserving the holiness and godliness of the place that had been set apart as God’s dwelling place and where people were intended to get a glimpse of what God is like and how to live in right relationship with him.

You see, the temple building should have been sparkling clean and shined up and ready for the arrival of the One to whom it all pointed: *Jesus Christ, the real sacrificial Lamb who would be sacrificed one and for all for the sins of the world.* But instead, as Jesus arrived to begin his road to the cross he found the temple filthy, full of manure, and being used as a place to make money. And he found those in charge of it corrupt, prideful, consumed with their own glory, confident in their own righteousness and completely unaware of their desperate need for a Savior. And make no mistake, Jesus will always aggressively deal with those who are corrupting God’s dwelling place and putting out stumbling blocks that keep people from knowing God as he is and coming into right relationship with him.

Well, as the disciples watched Jesus confront the powerful religious leaders head-on, bringing great shame on them for their mismanagement of God’s house, and as they watched him drive out the filthy animals and the greedy merchants with a whip, their understanding of who Jesus is and what’s important to him grew by leaps and bounds. And a prophetic passage from the Hebrew Scriptures about the Messiah, the Savior, from Psalm 69, verses 8 and 9, was fulfilled right before their very eyes. Listen to how it had described Messiah hundreds of years before he arrived:

***8 I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's sons.  
9 For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those  
who reproach you have fallen on me.***

It's hard to imagine how culturally inappropriate it was for Jesus to do what he had just done in the temple. To shame the religious leaders and drive out temple merchants with a whip was the ultimate in the breaking of social customs. No matter how much a person disagreed with what was going on in the temple, it was unthinkable in Jewish culture that they would address it in this fashion.

Now we aren't told in the John passage how Jesus' brothers responded to what they saw Jesus do in the temple, but we do know that until after his resurrection even his own brothers didn't believe in him. Jesus became a stranger to even his own brothers. Perhaps it started here with their embarrassment over Jesus' behavior in the temple. But even though what Jesus had done was culturally unacceptable, it was completely right and good and needed desperately to be done. And there was no one more qualified to do it. Jesus was more than willing to bear shame and embarrassment and reproach in order to accomplish his Father's purposes, and *what people would think* wouldn't deter him from doing what he knew needed to be done. This was just the beginning of the shame he would bear on his way to bringing salvation to the human race.

### **III. RAISING THE TEMPLE BODY (Vs. 18 to 22)**

Well, let's move on now to verses 18 to 22, which I've labeled in your sermon notes: *Raising the Temple Body*. Let's read again verses 18 through 22:

***18 So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was speaking about the temple of his body. 22 When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.***

As expected, the Jewish authorities weren't at all happy about what had just happened in the temple. They were horrified, in fact. They wanted some tangible

proof that Jesus was SOMEBODY...that he had the authority to overrule them, shame them, and create such a huge ruckus in the temple courts. **“What sign do you show us for doing these things?”** they asked him. And Jesus simply responded, **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”**

Little did they know that Jesus was actually giving them a profound prophecy about a real, miraculous, never-before-seen-in-history, sign that he was going to give them that would unequivocally, without-a-doubt, prove, once-and-for-all, that he had all the authority and more in the universe to do what he had just done. And ironically, it would be their own sin, pride, arrogance, and self-righteousness that would set the stage for this miraculous sign to take place. The blindness to the truth that resulted from the pride and self-righteousness of the religious leaders would soon lead them to seek the death of the very One who had come to bring them life.

Of course we already see this spiritual blindness in action as they responded to Jesus’ statement about destroying the temple. Rather than asking what he really meant by that or humbly seeking an explanation, they instead made a mockery of his promised sign. Can’t you hear the arrogance and ridicule in their response? There’s no humility or trying to understand what he really meant. Instead, just this sarcastic question: **“It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?”** Come on!

Now it’s important to remember that not all the Jewish religious leaders were responding to Jesus this way. There were a few humble, godly men who were truly looking for the Messiah and were able to see beyond the embarrassment they had just experienced to realize that what Jesus had done was actually good and long overdue. Just after this event, in fact, in John chapter 3, we see at least one of them, a man named Nicodemus, approaching Jesus in humility and seeking to understand his true message. What a sharp contrast he provides to the way most of the Jewish religious leaders were responding to Jesus. This reminds us that a true understanding of the message of Christ and the salvation he provides always begins in one place: *with true humility*. That’s how the blindness is removed from our eyes. As long as we continue in pride and arrogance, confident in our own wisdom or self-righteousness, we simply can’t see the truth and truly understand the simple message of Jesus Christ.

Of course, what Jesus was really talking about here was the temple of his body. We discover that Jesus viewed his body as a dwelling place of God himself...a place where God lives and where God is glorified and where other people can catch a glimpse of God and his glory. Have you ever thought about the implications of the human body being intended for a dwelling place of God? Think about that for a moment. Is your body currently functioning as healthy temple of the living God, a place where God is glorified and others can see evidence of God's work and his message of salvation? If it's true that our bodies are meant to be temples of the living God, do you think the God who created us cares at all about what we do with the bodies and minds he's given us? Food for thought! Jesus clearly viewed his human body this way, and the New Testament writers held the same view (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Well, Jesus' prediction about his future death brought about by the Jewish religious leaders, and his resurrection from the dead three days later, seems to have gone over everybody's head at this point in his ministry. Even his disciples didn't seem to get what he was talking about, though they made a mental note of it and remembered it later. In fact, if we journey back to where we began today, between the crucifixion and the resurrection, perhaps this was one of the things the disciples were remembering and wondering about on that dark day.

Just a couple days earlier as they were traveling to Jerusalem, Jesus had said to them: **"...the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day"** (Matthew 20:18b-19). It doesn't get much clearer than that does it? And yet still the disciples couldn't accept it. But now, the first part had come true just as Jesus had predicted. Dared they hope that the last part could come true as well? Such a miracle seemed beyond the realm of possibility, even for Jesus. How could a dead man raise himself from the dead? Dead is dead, right? Dead people have never been known to do anything, much less perform a miracle.

Well, Sunday morning dawned, and we all know what happened on that beautiful day, the third day after Jesus' crucifixion. It's what we're celebrating today. Jesus kept his promise. Though the temple of his human body had been destroyed through the efforts of the chief priests and scribes and at the hands of the Gentile soldiers, three days later he raised it up just as he had promised three years

earlier. The Jewish leaders finally had the sign they had requested, and it was the most powerful sign of Jesus' true identity and authority imaginable. The disciples responded to it as Jesus calls all people to respond to it: *by believing with their whole heart in Jesus and his word.*

But do you know how the Jewish religious leaders as a whole responded to the sign of Jesus resurrection, even when they had numerous eyewitness accounts and unmistakable evidence that it truly had taken place? This could be one of the saddest moments in human history, and the one which shows most clearly how deep the darkness and pride of the human heart can go. Never underestimate it. Only the power of God bringing each of us to true humility and surrendered belief in Christ can break it. Well, when the Roman soldiers who had been guarding Jesus' tomb came to tell the Jewish religious leaders how they'd witnessed a great earthquake and an angel of the Lord rolling away the stone from Jesus' grave, listen to how they responded:

***12 And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers 13 and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' 14 And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." 15 So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.***

Even the best, most convincing, unarguable evidence was not enough to overcome the hardness of their hearts and their own desire for power and glory and selfish gain.

#### **IV. KNOWING THE HUMAN HEART (Vs. 23 to 25)**

And this brings us to our final three verses for today, verses 23 to 25, where we find out that, even at that first Passover with his disciples, Jesus was well aware of the darkness of the human heart and how desperately we need God's miraculous work in our hearts to come to true humility and that enduring belief in him for salvation. I've labeled this brief section in your sermon notes: *Knowing the Human Heart.* Let's read these last verses:

***23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. 24 But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people 25 and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.***

On the surface things were looking good. We're told many people saw the great signs Jesus was performing and as a result believed in his name. Jesus could have just assumed this was true heart belief that would last when things got hard, when persecution started, when his teachings got difficult. But he knew better. He knew that many of these people were just impressed with the miracles he was performing and interested only in what they could get from him. He knew their belief would only last while things were exciting and while they were getting something out of it. For most it was not a surrendered belief that truly wanted him as Savior and Lord and was willing to follow him and trust wherever he would lead and no matter how hard things got. He knew what was in the heart of human beings and how they needed a real heart change brought about by God himself.

And this is why Jesus had come. He had begun his long road to the cross, so that he could pay the penalty for the sinful attitudes and actions flowing out of hard human hearts, and then provide new, soft, healthy hearts and the presence of God himself to those who would simply come to him in humility and repentance of sin and believe in him as Savior and Leader of their lives. And just as he would one day be resurrected from the dead, so everyone who trusted him would be spiritually raised from the dead and begin a new life with him that would never end!

## **V. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION**

Have you heard what God is speaking to you personally today through his Word and this account of Jesus in the temple? Most importantly, he's calling all people to respond to Jesus the way his disciples did as they lived with him and saw him in action: *with humility and true heart belief that invites Jesus to be both Savior and Leader of our lives*. Did you know the primary reason the apostle John wrote this book of the Bible and arranged it the way he did? He tells us in one simple statement near the end of the book. Are you ready to hear it? In John, chapter 20, verses 30 and 31, this is what he wrote:

***Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.***

There's only one place to find true life in this world and it's by believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God...not just an intellectual belief, but a belief that surrenders to Jesus as Savior and Lord and results in a changed life as we begin living as his disciples and walking with him through life.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead, which was confirmed by hundreds of eyewitnesses and by the fact that most of his disciples experienced horrible deaths because they refused to renounce their claim that they had truly seen Jesus alive from the dead...his resurrection is the most powerful evidence that he truly is the Son of God, the Savior of all those who will simply come to him acknowledging their sin and need for him, believing in his death for their sins and resurrection from the dead, and inviting him to their Savior and Lord. That's the simple good news of Jesus Christ. *Repent, believe and forever receive.* That's the simple path to life and salvation in Jesus' name. As the apostle Peter said to those stubborn Jewish religious leaders after Jesus' resurrection:

***This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."***

If you haven't yet truly believed in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and begun following him, please do it today. Begin by calling out to God to give you the humility and faith that you need. If you will, God will give you new spiritual life, forgiveness, a new identity as his adopted child, and his very presence living inside you through the Holy Spirit. I'd love to talk with you about it if you're ready and I'm going to put up on the screen a simple prayer you can pray to accept him today.

## **A Prayer to Accept God's Free Gift of Salvation**

God, I admit that I have sinned against You...  
I turn from that sin right now...  
I don't want to live my life that way anymore...  
Jesus, I believe that you died on the cross for my sins...  
And that you rose from the dead...  
Right now, I put my trust in You alone for my salvation...  
Jesus, You are my Lord and my Savior...My life is Yours...  
Thank you for forgiving my sins and making me a new creation...  
Thank you for giving me Your Holy Spirit and adopting me as your child...  
Teach me through Your Word how to live life with You...  
Amen.

Now for most of you here who have already believed in Jesus Christ and begun following him as his disciple, I hope you haven't missed the important applications this passage has for our lives today. I'll briefly summarize a couple things that stood out to me as we close. First of all, we need to wrap our minds around the reality that as believers in Christ, our bodies truly are dwelling places of God intended to be set apart, different from the world, and glorifying to God. As we begin truly growing in Christ and following him, other people should be able to see glimpses of the glory of God in the way we treat them and live our lives. As such, our attitudes and what we do with our bodies and minds are important and Jesus is as passionate and committed to developing and preserving the holiness of our temple *bodies* as he was to doing the same in the temple *building*. May this lead us to healthy fear of the Lord and a commitment to aggressively deal with sinful attitudes and actions as they arise. And may it lead us to remember that our primary goal in everything we do in life is to glorify God and give other people an opportunity to see his glory on display through us.

This applies to both our individual lives and to our lives together as the body of Christ. You may have noticed that there's hasn't actually been a temple building since 70 AD, when it was destroyed by the Romans. Do you know where the corporate dwelling place of God, the temple, is now? It's not a church building. It's not just in Baptist churches or Bible Churches or any certain denomination. Instead it's wherever the true people of God are gathered together and seeking him through his Word. Wherever that happens, in a church, in a house, in a field,

or anywhere else in the world, God himself is present in a very special and unique way. Yes, of course, he's always present within each true believer, but as we gather together as his unified children pursuing him and worshiping him in spirit and truth, the power and glory of his presence is revealed like nowhere else.

But there's something awful that can derail and pollute and create a filthy mess within the temple of the gathered people of God. And it's the same things that had created a filthy mess in the temple building when Jesus arrived during that first Passover. The application for us today as a church body is this: *Personal agendas, selfish ambition and personal profit-making have no place in the body of Christ.* When we're concerned about promoting ourselves or getting our personal preferences fulfilled or working for our own personal gain, we're not operating in love and humility toward each other and we're bringing animals and manure into the holy dwelling place of God. As James tells us: ***"Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing."***

And what's the result for both people in the church and those who visit? We put out stumbling blocks that hinder them from seeing the glory and presence of God and coming into right relationship with him. And let's not think that Jesus won't come with a whip if necessary to aggressively get us back on track with his purposes! May we always examine our heart motives under the direction of the Holy Spirit as we operate together in this church body in authentic love for God and each other. Let's live in the new resurrection life and power he's given to each of us through faith in Christ and allow his glory to be revealed through us!

**SERMON APPLICATION AND DISCUSSION GUIDE**  
***Trouble in the Temple – John 2:13-25 – 4/1/18***

**Read John 2:13-25, asking the Holy Spirit to guide you as you read. Look at the surrounding verses, take your time and talk to God as you read and meditate on it. Think through the following, writing notes and thoughts and looking up related Scriptures as needed:**

Write down from the passage or from what was shared in the sermon: 1) a truth that stands out to you; 2) anything you believe God is showing you or telling you personally through it; 3) any related Scripture that comes to mind; 4) any questions you have.

How does the image in this passage of how Jesus reacted in the temple and what he did there affect your understanding of who he is and what's important to him?

What are some ways or situations where Jesus might do something similar in your own life or the life of our church body?

Should we ever take the approach Jesus took when addressing issues in our church body? Why or why not?

How conscious are you on a day-to-day basis that your body is a dwelling place of God himself? What does this mean for you in a practical sense and does it help you in your Christian walk?

Considering that our individual bodies are dwelling places of God and that the gathered church body is to be the place where God's presence is most fully known and revealed, what are some of the guiding principles that should direct how we conduct ourselves individually and how we conduct ourselves together as the body of Christ?

**Summarize below anything God is calling you personally to believe, any actions God is asking you to take, or any attitudes He wants to change. Repent where needed and enjoy God's mercy. Then pray over these items and make a plan for change by the power of the Spirit.**