

GOSPEL OF JOHN 3

Showdown

Every authentic country-western movie has to have a showdown. Two men stand a couple feet apart, legs spread, gun in holster, hats low, shining spurs, scary looks in their eyes, and then the draw. The end; one man left standing. In the gospel of John, there is a showdown of sorts that takes place. No guns, hats, boots, spit, or spurs, but doves, sheep, goats, and coins. I like to think of the temple cleansing as a showdown. Here we have Jesus; the new way of coming to God, the ultimate sacrifice, coming face to face with the very temple He came to replace.

Now the Passover, the setting of this particular passage, was not an everyday event. The Passover was one of the annual festivals that every adult male Jew who lived within fifteen miles of Jerusalem was required to attend.¹ It was the greatest of all the Jewish festivals and feasts. It was the dream of Jewish males from all over the world to one day celebrate the Passover in their ancestral land, Jerusalem. It is possible that as many as 2,250,000 Jews sometimes assembled in the Holy City to keep Passover.² Jesus, being a Jewish male, who lived close by, celebrated the Passover in Jerusalem at least three times that we know of in the gospel of John (2:13; 6:4; 11:55). The goal for most Jewish males attending was to get into the temple courts, pray, worship, and make a sacrifice. In order to do this, they would have to exchange their money with the money being used in the temple, as well as purchase an animal to sacrifice in the temple. They could not bring their own animal to sacrifice because it would most likely get turned down as unacceptable. So the big question is, why, when Jesus arrives inside the temple courts, does he get angry, turn over the money-changer tables, and tables with animals being sold? Biblical Scholar, William Barclay, writes: "What enraged Jesus was that the pilgrims to the Passover, who could ill afford it, were being fleeced at an exorbitant rate by the money-changers. It was a rampant and shameless social injustice - and what was worse, it was being done in the name of religion...to purchase an animal inside the temple to sacrifice would cost as much as fifteen times more than if bought or purchased outside the temple... Here again was bare-faced extortion at the expense of the poor and humble pilgrims, who were practically blackmailed into buying their victim from the Temple booths if they wished to sacrifice at all - once more a glaring social injustice aggravated by the fact that it was perpetrated in the name of pure religion."³

Another interesting fact, possibly contributing even more to Jesus' intense anger, was where all this money-changing and animal sacrifice was taking place, the Court of Gentiles.⁴ The temple was built with a series of courts leading into the temple's Holy Place. First, the Court of Gentiles, then the Court of Women, then the Court of the Israelites, and lastly the Court of the Priests. All the buying and selling that was taking place was happening in the only place a Gentile might come. Beyond this court no Gentile could go.⁵ If there was a Gentile

Pre-Article Questions:

1. If you met with your prayer partner from last week, do you have any thoughts, questions, or comments from last week's study?
2. Have you ever been inside a church building that inspired you to have a greater sense of reverence for God, think about Him, or pray? What specifically inspired you about it? The architecture, colors, windows, silence, music etc..?

1. TNIV Commentary

2. Barclay, William, The New Daily Study Bible Volume One: The Gospel of John

3. Barclay, William.

4. Carson, D.A.

5. Barclay, William.

whose heart had been touched by God, who was coming into the court to pray or meditate, it would have been impossible on that day.

"Jesus' complaint is not that they are guilty of sharp business practices and should therefore reform their ethical life, but that they should not be in the temple area at all. Instead of solemn dignity and the murmur of prayer, there is the bellowing of cattle and bleating of sheep. Instead of brokenness and contrition, holy adoration, and prolonged petition, there is noisy commerce."⁶ Neither Gentile nor Jew could show the reverence for God their heart so longed to give without some kind of hindrance, whether it be exploitation or utter chaos. This angered God and rightfully so. God honors and is lifted up on the prayers of His people. Those who pray should not have to come hindered by finances or a flurry of activity.

John 2:12-25, NIV

After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days. 13 When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple courts he found men 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 area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the moneychangers and overturned their tables. 16 To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"

17 His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me." 18 Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous 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 The Jews 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 Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. 24 But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. 25 He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.

Study Questions:

1. In what ways is your view of Jesus affected after reading this account of his anger released in the temple?
2. Is it possible to be angry and not sin, check out Ephesians 4:26?
3. How do Jesus' actions in the temple courts reveal his heart for justice and devotion?
4. All four gospels report the story of the temple cleansing. Please read the other three accounts in Matthew 21:12-13, Mark 11:15-18, and Luke 19:45-46. What are some of the similarities and differences of each account? How do these accounts, when put together, give us a total or fuller picture of Jesus' heart in this situation?
5. Read Zechariah 14:21, Malachi 3:1,3, and Ezekiel 10:15-19; 11:22-23. How do these verses relate to our passage and God's heart for true worship?

Study Questions:

6. What are some barriers we face when we are trying to communicate /pray/worship God? What are some distractions? How does the devil try to exploit us? What are some practical and spiritual steps we can take to overcome these barriers?
7. In the last half of our scripture passage, Jesus refers to himself as the “temple” and talks about his death and resurrection. In what ways is this a powerful and impactful scene having Jesus, the “new temple,” the new way of connecting with God, standing in the temple of the old covenant, answering the teachers of the law?
8. Describe how your relationship with Christ has been impacted over the past year and/or one or two things you would like more of when it comes to connecting with Him personally and worshipfully. How can we encourage one another in our acts of worship and devotion to Christ, our “new temple.”

Prayer Partner Assignment:

Meeting with a brother or sister from your small group over a meal to get to know one another more and answer a few questions:

- Read John Chapter 2:12-25 again
- What does this chapter teach us about Jesus? What does this chapter teach us about Jesus’ Kingdom?
- What specifically from this chapter challenges you and why?
- What questions or comments do you have for Life Group next week about this chapter? (Make note of them to ask at the beginning of next week’s study)

End your time in prayer for one another if possible and set up another time to meet again outside of small group.