

# PM John 2:13-25 Cleansing the Temple

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] I read from the Old Testament section of the Bible, God's Word, and we're going to begin a little bit before the advertised reading, but it's still on page 433, and it's 2 Chronicles, and it will start at chapter 6, verse 41.

Now, this is, chapter 6 is Solomon's great prayer of dedication of the temple, and we're going to pick it up at the very end, and then read into chapter 7, down to verse 10.

So, 2 Chronicles 6, verse 41. And now, O Lord God, arise and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might.

Let your priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, and let your saints rejoice in your goodness. O Lord God, do not turn away the face of your anointed one.

Remember your steadfast love for David, your servant. As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple.

[ 1 : 3 4 ] And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house. When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord on the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement, and worshipped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Then the king and all the people offered sacrifice before the Lord. King Solomon offered as a sacrifice 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep.

So the king and all the people dedicated the house of God. The priests stood at their posts, the Levites also, with the instruments of music to the Lord, that King David had made for giving thanks to the Lord, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Whenever David offered praises by their ministry, opposite them the priests stood trumpets, the priests sounded trumpets, and all Israel stood.

And Solomon consecrated the middle of the court that was before the house of the Lord, for there he offered the burnt offering and the fat of the peace offerings, because the bronze altar Solomon had made could not hold the burnt offering and the grain offering and the fat.

[ 2 : 5 6 ] At that time Solomon held the feast for seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great assembly from Lebo Hamath to the brook of Egypt. And on the eighth day they held a solemn assembly, for they had kept the dedication of the altar seven days and the feast seven days.

On the 23rd day of the seventh month, he sent the people away to their homes, joyful and glad of heart for the prosperity that God the Lord had granted to David, and to Solomon, and to Israel, his people.

Amen. Now we're going to sing again, this time from Psalm 69.

We're going to sing verses 7 to 14. It's on page 88, Psalm 69, verses 7 to 14. For your sake, Lord, I must endure derision.

My face is covered with contempt and shame. Even my brothers do not recognize me. Two mothers, sons, a stranger I became. Psalm 69, verses 7 to 14.

[ 4 : 08 ] Let's stand and sing. Read again from the Bible, this time the New Testament section of God's Word.

John chapter 2, and we're going to read verses 13 to the end of the chapter, page 1070. John chapter 2, verses 13 to 25.

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons and the money changers sitting there.

And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple with the sheep and the oxen. And he poured out the coins of the gum and the sheep and the sheep and the children of the sheep and the sheep and the sheep and the sheep and the sheep.

And he told those who sold the pigeons, take these things away. Do not make my father's house a house of trade. His disciples remembered that it was written, Zeal for your house will consume me.

[ 5 : 31 ] so the Jews said to him what sign do you show us for doing these things Jesus answered them destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up the Jews then said it has taken 46 years to build this temple and will you raise it up in three days but he was speaking about the temple of his body 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 now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast many believed in his name when they saw the signs he was doing but Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them because he knew all people and he needed no one to bear witness about man for he himself knew what was in man Amen

Now one of the schools that tried to educate me was the Royal School in a provincial town in Northern Ireland called Dungannon some of you from Northern Ireland would know exactly where it is it's a way out in the wild west it's called a Royal School because James I of England James I of England but he was also James VI of Scotland he decided that he would send over lots of people to Northern Ireland in what's called the Ulster Plantation we were all crooks and horse thieves and rustlers and he wanted to get rid of us keep the wild Irish at bay and part of us to civilise us was he founded these Royal Schools six of them in fact and the school I went to the one in Dungannon was founded in 1614 and it was the second of them and while I was at the Royal School in Dungannon one of the prizes that was handed out annually was one for the pupil who was best behaved most respectful and immaculately tidy now when I attended the Royal School in Dungannon in the early 1970s it was an all boys establishment so no self respecting pupil wanted to win that prize it was social death your street cred went into free fall and made the chances of getting the attention of a young lady from the all girls Dungannon High School which was next door to the Royal School practically zero if you won that prize and in case you're wondering

I never came close to winning it but some people did win it and it was really social death now there are people who think that Jesus would have been the perpetual winner of that award their image of Jesus is spawned by a children's hymn that I learnt in Sunday school the first line of it gentle Jesus meek and mild he's someone who would never say boo to a goose he's someone who was always pleasant and docile and really nice and kind all the time and the passage I want us to look at tonight to John 2 13 to 22 really the story that Jesus in which Jesus cleanses the temple I think kind of blows that urban myth about Jesus out of the water this was no impulsive outburst this was an act of premeditated aggression

Jesus strides into the court of the Gentiles the outer area of the Jerusalem temple complex and he starts to overturn the tables of the money changers and to drive out all the animals that are being sold there and what is even maybe more shocking to us is that Jesus was prepared to use a certain level of violence to back up what he was doing if any animals were slow to move the whip he was wielding encouraged them to get a move on and the whip also encouraged anyone thinking of trying to stop him doing what he was doing to think again and Jesus aggression doesn't stop with his actions what he says is equally uncompromising when he's challenged by the Jewish religious authorities about what he has just done Jesus is totally unapologetic you know he wasn't like people who just today said oh I'm sorry you must have misunderstood my actions

Jesus didn't say anything of that at all his tough not in the slightest way sorry answer so infuriated the Jewish religious authorities that three years later at his trial they would drag it up and use it as a pretext for having Jesus condemned to death so what is going on here well this incident is the second of the seven signs that John records in his account of Jesus life some commentators don't think that it is one of the seven signs as no miracle was immediately performed but for reasons I don't have time to go into I beg to differ those of us who are drivers know that there are different types of signs there are signs that warn us there are signs that inform us there are signs that tell us what to do there are signs that give us directions all signs but different types of signs and although this is a different type of sign from all the other six signs

[ 11 : 50 ] Jesus didn't perform a miracle immediately Jesus cleansing the Jerusalem temple is nonetheless still a sign and it's as much a pointer to who Jesus is and what it means to follow him as the ones in which he performed an immediate miracle such as turning the water into wine that we looked at this morning so this sign is like the sign we looked at this morning it's going to tell us about who Jesus is and what it means to follow him so what will it tell us about that well here's the first matter to which this cleansing sign of cleansing the temple points it tells us that Jesus is the God who seeks intimacy with us that Jesus is the God who seeks intimacy with us to see that we have to go back and ask ourselves this question what was the function of the

Jerusalem temple and we don't have to guess because God has made it clear why he wanted the Jerusalem temple to be built it was so that there he could meet with his people and enjoy fellowship with them you see God is a God who seeks intimacy with his people he doesn't simply want to have a people who he calls his own he desires a people who will be with him and with whom he can have a personal relationship he wants them to be his people and he wants him to be their God and God had told his people that he would dwell in the temple at Jerusalem and that three times a year they were to come to Jerusalem for various religious festivals and there they were to meet with him and in verse 13

John tells us that Jesus cleansed the temple at Passover time and Passover was one of those three annual blocks of time when God had stipulated that his people were to come to Jerusalem and to enjoy fellowship with him so the background music you know if you were watching this on film or on live stream or something the background music wouldn't be sinister hard music the background music to the cleansing of the temple is a love song God seeks intimacy with his people and he set up a place for this fellowship meeting the Jerusalem temple and he's set up the space for this fellowship meeting a religious festival the Passover now we know that from a human point of view in human relationships enjoying intimacy requires many factors but one of them is quietness our closest relationships are with people with whom we spend quality time but quietness for quality time was non-existent at the

Jerusalem temple and here's why worshippers at the Jerusalem temple were required they needed an animal to sacrifice and most of them had travelled long distances to be there so buying an animal on site rather than bringing one with you made sense you know there were no extra overheads like transportation and food costs and besides that only animals that were approved by the Jewish religious authorities could be used as sacrifices and they always refused to approve animals people had brought with them so if you if you bought an animal on site from one of the official authorised on site outlets you knew that your sacrifice would not be turned down and originally the animal sellers had set up their stall across the road from the temple complex however over time they had moved into the temple complex and set up shop in the court of the

Gentiles and worshippers also had to bring a gift of money however that gift had to be paid in special temple currency and that means that worshippers had to change their foreign currency into temple currency and this provided of course a lucrative business opportunity for money changers who charge great levels of commission and interest to change the money so you see here the Jerusalem temple had become a marketplace a middle eastern souk if you like full of noise and hustle and bustle and it was definitely not a place of quietness a place that was free from distraction where people could meet with God and enjoy fellowship with him here's how one commentator puts it instead of solemn dignity and the murmur of prayer there was the bellowing of cattle and the bleating of sheep instead of brokenness and contrition holy adoration and prolonged petition there is noisy commerce and to be honest most of the worshippers who came to the

[ 18 : 05 ] Jerusalem temple they didn't care about this lack of quietness theirs was a mechanical go through the motions type of religion as long as they offered the sacrifices paid the money that was all that mattered to them yes of course they whinged and complained in Jerusalem's airbnbs about the obscene cost of buying a sacrifice from the official money animal sales sellers and the over inflated commission they had to pay to the money changers however they just held their noses did the religious bit and went home whether they had met with God really wasn't on their radar screen at all so intimacy facilitating quietness in the temple complex it didn't really matter to them but it mattered a great deal to Jesus there was no chance of intimacy with God happening in the middle of the hullabaloo that was going on at the

Jerusalem temple so Jesus strides into action he clears the court of the gentiles of all the animals he sends the money changers cash flying let them do their business somewhere else they might think they were providing a necessary service but let them do it across the road he's restoring the Jerusalem temple to its original purpose a place where God could meet with his people and enjoy intimacy and fellowship with them and folks we need to pause here for a moment and remind ourselves that Jesus is still the God who seeks intimacy with us but I wonder are we not often like the worshippers

Jesus startled that day when he cleansed the temple they were happy to worship in a mechanical way to make a sacrifice bring their money and then go home like them is it not true that sometimes we just simply go through the motions when we worship doing all that the Bible tells us to do yes because we are good Presbyterians and we like things done according to the Bible but we do it in a kind of a mechanical way we gather to worship but we have no real expectation of meeting with God we read the Bible but we have no expectation of hearing God speaking to us by his spirit through his word we say our prayers but we have no real expectation of actually engaging with God and that he will answer our prayers we sing God's praises but we have no expectation of lifting up our hearts to in praise and engaging our minds and motions as well as lifting up our voices we can become very mechanical in our relationship with Jesus can we not it's so easy for us to slip into the rut of simply going through the motions and thinking that we've done all that's expected of us and this sign pulls us up short and jolts us because it reminds us that Jesus is the God who seeks intimacy with us and then the second matter that this sign of cleansing the temple tells us about who Jesus is and what it means to follow him is this

Jesus is the Lord who requires devotion from us he's the Lord who requires devotion from us the animal sellers and the money changers were not the only people who were taken aback by Jesus activities and actions that day we're told in verse 16 that his disciples were taken aback they'd never heard Jesus raise his voice in anger before but now he was shouting get these out of here how dare you turn my father's house into a market they'd never seen him actively acting aggressively towards anyone before but here he is driving animals scattering coins overturning tables what's going on then they remember psalm 69 verse 9 which we sang a few moments ago something that had been predicted about the coming of the messiah it says zeal for your house will consume me the coming messiah would have such a passionate all consuming devotion to

God and his worship in his house that he would be prepared to go out on a limb to see God worship properly and as they watched Jesus cleansing the Jerusalem temple the disciples put two and two together and came up with the right answer Jesus is the promised messiah with this psalm 69 verse 9 like devotion to God many conclusions were drawn that day about Jesus but what struck the disciples that day was his devotion to God and again we need to pause here and ask ourselves are we devoted to God I'm not asking if we are prepared to do more and more religious stuff because in the context of John 2 12 to 22 that's not what devotion to God is the sign of cleansing the temple points that devotion to

[ 24 : 39 ] God is allowing Jesus to get rid of anything that prevents us enjoying intimacy with God devotion to God is allowing Jesus to get rid of anything that prevents us from enjoying intimacy with God let me explain there's a huge contrast between the Jesus of the first part of John 2 and the Jesus of the second part of John 2 in John 2 1 to 12 Jesus adds something he turns water into wine something that was not there before is now there however in John 2 13 to 22 Jesus subtracts he cleanses the temple getting rid of stuff something that was there is now no longer there do you see the difference and what's the reason for this difference well at the wedding reception in Cana

Jesus is a guest in someone else's house but when he cleanses the temple Jesus is the lord of his own house and as lord of the temple he gets rid of anything that hinders fellowship with God and this is what happens when Jesus is lord of our lives and we give him the devotion he requires he begins to get rid of stuff that causes us not to have fellowship and intimacy with God anything that creates a barrier to us having fellowship and intimacy with God Jesus gets rid of and that's how we can know if Jesus is our lord or we're just treating him as a guest inviting him into our lives from time to time to get us out of a jam is Jesus subtracting any things from our lives that's when we know he's lord you see if

Jesus is not doing that in our lives if he's not getting rid of stuff that hampers our devotion to God that stops us from having intimacy with God then we're actually not following the Jesus of the bible we're following an imaginary Jesus and not a real Jesus the real Jesus is the lord who requires devotion from us and that involves decluttering our lives of all the spiritual junk that stops us experiencing intimacy with God I was trying to find this afternoon a quotation from Tim Keller that people had put up a lot on Facebook but Tim Keller was basically saying if we have a Jesus who always gives us what we want never tells us that's the wrong way of thinking no that shouldn't be there we've just got an imaginary

Jesus a Jesus that we've constructed because any God that people construct from their own imagination is always a nice guy never does anything that would cause any inconvenience to us but the Jesus of the bible the real Jesus is a God who calls on us to get rid of sin to deal with sin to deal with anything even legitimate that stops us knowing intimacy with God he declutters our lives of spiritual junk and this is what this sign is pointing to about who Jesus is and what it means to follow him so he's the God who wants intimacy with us he's the Lord who requires devotion from us and then in the third place this sign tells us that Jesus is the saviour who looks for faith in us he's the saviour who looks for faith in us now once they had regrouped the Jewish religious authorities launched their counter offensive verse 18 what sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this they demand and Jesus replies destroy this temple and raise it up in three days and Jesus has

Jesus response is the Jewish religious authorities scoffing in cynical laughter it's taken 46 years to build this temple and you're going to raise it in three days and because they thought that Jesus was speaking literally they think I'm not sure if this is a Scottish expression but folk from Northern Ireland understand it they think that Jesus is having them on he's pulling their leg but they don't have a clue what Jesus is talking about here and neither did his disciples it was only later that they grasped that Jesus was not speaking literally but spiritually he was talking about his death and resurrection Jesus does give the Jewish religious authorities a sign but not the one that they demanded nor the one they expected and not one immediately and although the sign was given three years later nevertheless it was a sign the cross and the empty tomb proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus is who he says he is and so he could do what he did now we mustn't step over what Jesus says here because it's rather cryptic because he's saying something very significant by his actions

[ 31 : 01 ] Jesus cleanses the temple however in his words Jesus goes way beyond this and says that he is actually replacing the temple he's the fulfillment of all for which the Jerusalem temple stood and that's a staggering claim for example we've already noticed the temple is where God was when Solomon dedicated the original Jerusalem temple as we read in 2nd Chronicles 7 God's glory filled the temple God was with his people at the Jerusalem temple so when Jesus says that he is the temple he's claiming that he is God with his people he's setting out his stall once again to be God but there's even more to what Jesus is saying it's not that Jesus replaces the temple in some general vague way it's his crucified and resurrected body that replaces the temple and here's another feature of the

Jerusalem temple it was the place where sacrifices were made so that the worshipper could approach God there was a gap between God who is holy and pure and the worshipper who is sinful and impure and the gap could only be bridged by a priest offering a sacrifice and when Jesus refers to how his crucified resurrected body will replace the Jerusalem temple in the cryptic statement destroy this temple and raise it up in three days he's saying that he is that priest and that his death is that sacrifice which alone can bridge this gap and bring God and sinners together again and folks it's this that makes Christianity different from any other religion and self-help program knocking around today all other religions and self-help programs say something like this if you want to reach

God live a good life carry out all the rituals properly and seek after all the positive experiences that you can experience they tell us to look inside ourselves they tell us to look at our performance they say that we have got what it takes to bridge this gap between God and ourselves but Jesus jumps in and says no no no my death alone is the sacrifice that brings you to God and he instructs us to look outside of ourselves to him Jesus doesn't say here is what you have to do to reach God he comes to you and me and he says

I will bring you to God because I am God in a real human flesh I have done everything necessary all the heavy lifting all you have to do is to have faith in me Jesus is the one whose crucified and resurrected body is the only bridge between God and us Jesus doesn't tell us to try harder he doesn't tell us to do better he doesn't tell us to take part in more and more religious stuff he calls on us to trust in him and to trust in him alone to look for faith in him and when we find that faith and trust in him to live for his glory and that's what the sign is pointing out about who

Jesus is and what it means to follow him I don't know if you've seen the film it's an old film now 1998 film Saving Private Ryan it's one of the films starring Tom Hanks he plays the part of Captain John H.

[ 35 : 38 ] Miller it's set in the Normandy landings of June 1944 and it was US government policy that no family should lose all its sons in the war so Miller and his special unit are sent to find Private James Ryan the only survivor of four brothers who had fought on D-Day and the film tells of all the sacrifices that were made in order to save Private Ryan and at the end of the story sorry spoiler alert if you haven't seen it Miller is fatally wounded and his dying words to Private Ryan are earn this earn this this sign of the cleansing of the temple flags up the incredible sacrifice that Jesus will make in order that we might experience intimacy with God and live lives that are devoted to him it will cost him his life the destruction of his body on the cross and when his body was raised three days later

Jesus' resurrection proves that his death did achieve what it set out to achieve to bridge this gap between God and us but Jesus doesn't say to us earn it try harder do better be more religious instead he says receive my salvation as a gift have faith in me I wonder have you done that have you come to Jesus and placed your trust in him if you haven't do so today you'll discover his grace and his lavish kindness and love and mercy and forgiveness for you and many of us have already done that but are we still looking to him and trusting him day by day because the Christian life starts off by us having faith in Jesus and trusting in him and it continues right to the end on the same principle of us looking to

Jesus and trusting in him and resting on his promises and resting on what he has done and living to please him that's what will motivate us to live for his glory and praise it is Jesus and faith in him alone that will keep us going and preserve us to the end and lead us safely home and that's what these signs are telling us look to Jesus trust in him and keep on trusting in him let's pray for a moment will he and the minutes will throw him over and that will come and his cent range in