

## A Religious Cleansing

Series: Conversations with Jesus  
Brad Bailey - February 25, 2018

### John 2:13-25 (NLT)

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Intro

How many like to be confronted? ...like it when someone confronts you about something they see in your life? (No hands)

How many believe that such confrontation can be healthy and even loving? (Most hands went up)

Good...because today I want to **invite us to be confronted by Jesus.**

We are **continuing our series...** "Conversations with Jesus"...

These **first weeks** have been **marked by the launch** of Jesus' ministry.

The **calling of his first followers...** Then last week as they began their travels... a wedding in which the first sign of his nature unfolded when the wine had run out.... Creating social disgrace... and he turned water... to wine. Now they travel on... and we read...

### **John 2:12-25 (NLT)**

After the wedding he went to Capernaum for a few days with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples. <sup>13</sup> It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration, so Jesus went to Jerusalem.

<sup>14</sup> In the Temple area he saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices; he also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money. <sup>15</sup> Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep and cattle, scattered the money

changers' coins over the floor, and turned over their tables. <sup>16</sup> Then, going over to the people who sold doves, he told them, "Get these things out of here. Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!" <sup>17</sup> Then his disciples remembered this prophecy from the Scriptures: "Passion for God's house will consume me." <sup>18</sup> But the Jewish leaders demanded, "What are you doing? If God gave you authority to do this, show us a miraculous sign to prove it." <sup>19</sup> "All right," Jesus replied. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." <sup>20</sup> "What!" they exclaimed. "It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you can rebuild it in three days?" <sup>21</sup> But when Jesus said "this temple," he meant his own body. <sup>22</sup> After he was raised from the dead, his

disciples remembered he had said this, and they believed both the Scriptures and what Jesus had said. <sup>23</sup> Because of the miraculous signs Jesus did in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration, many began to trust in him. <sup>24</sup> But Jesus didn't trust them, because he knew human nature. <sup>25</sup> No one needed to tell him what mankind is really like.

Rather intense scene...

(We have seen a lot of pictures of Jesus holding a little lamb and surrounded by children... but I **don't recall any Hallmark cards with this image.**)

It is a confrontation...what could be understood as a **religious cleansing. Recently there has been a wave of every possible physical cleansing...A Juice Cleanse... A Liver Cleanse...A Colon Cleanse...and countless ways to clear or bodies from impurities. Jesus is calling for a cleaning of the soul.**

**It begins with the context...**

**John 2:13 (NLT)**

It was nearly time for the Jewish **Passover** celebration, so Jesus went to **Jerusalem**.

The Passover was a time of **remembering** ... but also of **renewal... of restoration**. **Of cleansing**.

**It recalled** when God provided a way for **His judgment to pass over the Israelites**. (God had called on Pharaoh of Egypt to free his people Israel from enslavement... and Pharaoh would not relinquish his control of them...and God's judgment came and the provision was the blood of a sacrificial lamb.)

God's instructions included the **removal all the leaven** from their homes before that first Passover evening. [1] Over the years this commandment of God had become an integral part of preparing one's home and heart for Passover. In order to be "kosher" for Passover one's home had to be thoroughly cleaned up from top to bottom. **What is leaven a type of? It is symbolic of sin. We read of how** "a little leaven leavens the whole lump." Referring to how sin will spread. (I Cor. 5:6)

So, Jesus is headed to Jerusalem at the time when people would be normally be **cleaning up their homes and their lives**. They would be doing their best to get rid of any type of physical or spiritual leaven that would be considered unclean or unholy. They were to use this time to wisely to prepare themselves to fully celebrate Passover.

This sets the **backdrop** of what Jesus is **about to do and declare**.

He is going to rid the house of God of sin in preparation for the Passover.

**John 2:14 (NLT)**

**In the Temple area he saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices; he also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money.**

**The scale of activity that is at hand in Jerusalem and the temple is hard to imagine. Some estimate that the permanent population of Jerusalem at that time may have only been about 80 thousand people...but during the Passover festival there were 300 to 500 thousand who came from all the surrounding regions. [2]**

**Coming from foreign lands had two practical needs ... animals and currency.**

These people were **coming in from all over the Roman Empire** and it was **not practical for them to bring their animals** with them for all that distance. So they sold animals that could be used for sacrifices. In addition to that the Old Testament **required that each one pay a temple tax** of half a shekel and it had to be paid with a certain type of acceptable coin. Therefore for the many who came from outside the city... there was a **need to change their money into Temple currency...** and a **growing service to do so. [3]**

There was **a certain legitimacy** in what they were doing. But **the spirit behind what was going on** was anything but legitimate. These **priests and merchants had a monopoly** on all this business. The **animals had to be inspected and approved** by the priests before they could be offered. All the priest had to do was reject animals that people may have brought from home and it forced them to go to the merchants for an “acceptable sacrifice.” **Exorbitant prices** were charged for animals. **Exorbitant fees** were charged for exchanging the money.

**Not only that, they had actually moved their businesses into the courtyards of the temple!** The temple's **massive outer court** was the **Court of the Gentiles**. The **Court of the Gentiles filled an area of about fourteen acres**. It represented the very call of Israel to be a blessing to all nations.

Instead of the Court of the Gentiles being a place where the nation of Israel was a blessing to all peoples, **it became a disgrace**. Why had God chosen Israel and blessed her as a nation? So that through Israel, all the nations could come to know God and be blessed. Israel has lost sight of her calling and purpose. Instead of reaching lost Gentiles with the message of the one true God—they are ripping them off even as they try to come to God. The **common people knew** they were **being ripped off** but there was nothing they could do about it. (Drawing upon Richard Tow and Michael Trask)

The temple took on an almost **State Fair appearance**; complete with advertising vendors and stinky display barns. All of this infringed and overtook the very purpose of prayer and spiritual devotion.

**What Jesus saw... he was not seeing for the first time.** Throughout his life Jesus had been to Jerusalem during such times... no doubt with an **ever increasing grief for what He saw**. In obedience to the Father He held His peace. His time had not yet come. But now He has been anointed by the Spirit for His Messianic ministry. **Now is the time** for Him to reveal heaven's intentions. So we read...

### **John 2:15-16 (NLT)**

**Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep and cattle, scattered the money changers' coins over the floor, and turned over their tables. <sup>16</sup> Then, going over to the people who sold doves, he told them, “Get these things out of here. Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!”**

**He suddenly appears in the temple, makes a whip** probably from the ropes used to restrain the animals and drives the moneychangers and animal merchants out of the temple.

This is **dramatic**. At the height of activity and crowds he physically used force to clear away animals... to turn the tables of money exchange that sent money flying...and turned the tables on the religious leaders who were in authority over it all.

What is Jesus doing?

**He is confronting the ultimate corruption... using God's provision for personal gain...using religion for personal profit or power.**

**As much as we might hope that such corruption would be long gone... this potential may sound all too familiar.**

Some make the nature of the church akin to the Temple in the day of Jesus... and that pastors of churches and leaders of Christian ministries can **use religion for personal profit or power.** Should that concern you? Absolutely.

**You shouldn't have complete trust of me.** (I do not trust myself.) We always need to search our hearts and check our choices.

**A few weeks ago... prayed over a new elder...** and the central charge to him was that he serve and protect the good of the community over what simply serves him or his preferences. That is the heart of being entrusted with communal authority... one is being entrusted to serve not simply their self-interests..

**I don't emphasize** this because **I have an unusual distrust...**in fact I believe we are quite strong in being able to ask the questions which provide real integrity...and protect real integrity...but the point is...**the challenge always exists.**

**What we must realize is that what Jesus confronts in this exchange... he confronts in in all of us.**

**Many today** say they **don't trust institutional religion.** And that can make sense given that institutional power provides wide abuse. But the **heart of the issue is not the institution...** but the nature that runs through **all of us.**

In the former days God dwelt among his people in the temple, but **with the coming of Jesus,** it is **no longer through the temple that we approach God.** It is through Jesus that we pray, through Jesus that we receive forgiveness and atonement.

So where is God's house in our time? Some make the correlation with church buildings; there is the common view that church buildings are the modern version of the temple. But that's not true. In truth the temple of today, the place wherein God dwells, is you and me. [4]

**I Corinthians 3:16**

***"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's Temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?"***

The passion that Jesus had for the temple that day...he has for us...every day.

We recently began what is traditionally been known as the **Lenten season.**

It is a season of preparing us to join Jesus whose life culminated when just before he was taken away and crucified... he prayed....

**Luke 22:42 (GNT)**

***“Father,” he said, “if you will, take this cup of suffering away from me. Not my will, however, but your will be done.”***

It is the culmination of his life... which we are to follow. He had prayed Father...if this suffering can be avoided...please remove it...but NOT MY WILL BE YOURS BE DONE. This is what he seeks to form in us.

When his disciples asked him to teach them to pray... to align their lives in the profound way he did... he ultimately shared a model of such prayer ...which began...

**Matthew 6:9-10 (ESV)**

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*

*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

If we understand that prayer is about allowing our souls to become aligned with God...with reality...we will appreciate that it begins with declaring that God’s name should be kept holy... which means related in a fitting manner... it means distinct from all else.

**The holiness of God is about God being God.**

We can equate holiness as a scary concept used by people to put a guilt trip on them.

When I hear someone shout **“Be holy?”** ... it can seem a **little freaky.**

**The true nature of holiness is not about religious sentiment but about reality...about honoring God’s true nature and the God given (“sacred”) purpose of every aspect of life.**

Holiness is about honoring what is as it is.

More like someone’s relationship to **gravity. Regardless of whether you agree with it... or choose to regard it... it is what it is.**

**If we drive a twisted road we don’t decide to drive straight because we like it that way. We submit our likes to the reality. You don’t make demands on the road... the road makes demands on us.**

**So... True holiness is true wholeness. The person who is truly holy is truly whole ...because they are aligned with reality.**

And what reflects our relationship to such reality... is whether we relate to God as the center...or ourselves as the center?

Another way to put it: **Are we attempting to use God ...or be used by God?**

**We either try to use God... and become evil in a thousand subtle ways... or we allow God to use us... and become increasingly good and true in countless ways.**

**[5]**

Now what is **helpful to not miss...**is the **legitimate appearance** of what was going on.

**The issue of trying to reduce God to serve our own interests is not only a matter of obvious religious frauds...it reaches deeply into our hearts.**

The corruption which Jesus encounters becomes an opportunity for us to consider the ways in which our own self-serving desires can compete with the work of God. Some may consider this situation and think it is only an indictment of those who might set up shop in the church. But there are **many ways in which may bring our self serving desires** to compete with the glory of God... and it's access to all people.

I believe that we generally come with good desires... to bless God and others. But I also know how many other desires... perhaps small and subtle... can begin to find their way into the Temple of our lives.

**Do I come to worship to honor God being God... His supremacy... His sovereignty?**

Most of us have realized that our own personal preferences ...which are natural in themselves ...can be given space in the Temple of our lives where they don't belong.

When worship becomes more about what we like...

The temple is serving the wrong purpose.

The temple has lost it's center.

The holiness of God.... is being debased by becoming merely a means to serving ourselves.

**Perhaps we begin to look for a little profiting of our own... a chance for attention... and we get frustrated when we don't get the attention we wanted.**

**Some here may just exploring the reality of God...** even then... you must consider is the answer going to simply reflect what you WANT... what serves your will?

**Jesus seeks to cleanse us of whatever is corrupting us... to restore us to our holy and whole purpose.**

**That is his purpose and his passion.**

**John 2:17 (NLT)**

*Then his disciples remembered this prophecy from the Scriptures: "Passion for God's house will consume me."*

Some translations use the word "zeal"... here they use "passion."

**Passion reflects becoming fully given to something. It reflects a freedom.**

The disciples remember the part of verse directly related to Jesus' zeal. But the Psalm is a song about Messiah suffering for God's glory, about the passion of the Christ!

**Psalms 69:7-9 (ESV)**

*"For it is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that dishonor has covered my face. <sup>8</sup> I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's sons. <sup>9</sup> For zeal for*

*your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.*

**The Psalm suggests** the very burden he would choose to bear... that **the reproach of all** towards God... would **FALL ON HIM**.

So when the religious leaders have been confronted so **they ask him what authority he has**. He was doing what was expected that the Messiah might do... so what sign could he offer to presume such authority?

Jesus was doing far more than responding to the corruption he saw. **Jesus is challenging the very system of the temple itself**, its religion, its authority, and its worship. So he tells them of the ultimate sign he will bear... that **the true temple will be destroyed and raised in three days**.

**They naturally think of the stone temple** and find this absurd. It's offensive to speak of it's destruction and it took over 60 years to build. But of course Jesus was referring to himself... as the new temple.

**He Embodies and Fulfills what the Temple represented.**

#### **John 2:19-22 (NLT)**

*Jesus replied. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."<sup>20</sup> "What!" they exclaimed. "It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you can rebuild it in three days?"<sup>21</sup> But when Jesus said "this temple," he meant his own body.<sup>22</sup> After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered he had said this, and they believed both the Scriptures and what Jesus had said.*

Through his death Jesus fulfills what the temple only pointed to... the potential for human life to relate to God. Jesus would become the **final sacrifice**... after which there would be **no more need for temple** sacrifice.

Jesus would become **the means for human life to meet with God**.

No longer does the temple represent the presence of God – from now on Jesus represents the presence of God.

**His temple would be raised** ... as will every temple in which God dwells... if we invite him to dwell within us.

Jesus now makes it possible for God to dwell in all as he would send the Spirit by which he would bring new birth to us... and dwell in us. God is **no longer dwelling within buildings** (including church buildings) but **rather within bodies**. The place wherein God dwells, is you and me.

**His indwelling presence seeks to work** out God's holy **reclaiming and restoring in us**. That is what it means for us to become holy.

It could never be won by our obedience to the law or our sacrifices. It is by his fulfillment of the Law and his sacrifice. But now **he seeks to change our hearts**.



Long before this incident at the temple of Jerusalem... God had predicted this through the prophets.

### **Malachi 3:1-2 (NIV)**

*"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire .....*"

**Jesus Christ has come just as God foretold.**

**God sent a messenger in John the Baptist... who suddenly declares that the Messiah has come.. the one hoped for... and who now bears a new covenant. But those who cling to the old will not be able to stand. He comes to bring change. He comes to refine.**

**So what is he trying to tell us / teach us?**

About himself... he is saying that you believe that you can enter because of your sacrifices and ritual fulfillments.. but he is the priest, the temple, the only means. Anyone who tries to get close to God knows how hard it is... Churches are full of cranky people because the nearer you get the faultier you feel... the smaller you feel... the more unholy you feel.

One of the great inventions of the education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century... was the curve. It can seem to work fine... until you get a curve buster... who hits it so far beyond us... their above and beyond us nature causes us to face our reality... the self image gets a jarring heck... and God is our curve buster of holiness.

**If you try to get near the real God... you will face and feel your true nature.**

**Jesus is our refiner.** He has zeal for the purity of God's glory and goodness which now dwells within all who receive him. It means **we have to choose to face the impurities and embrace the fire** that refines us.

**Everyone goes through the furnace.** It creates conditions in which the purities and impurities cannot exist together. We become more wise, more courageous, more noble. Our attachment to various things have tried to live together... but then we feel the heat.

Choose this day who you will serve. The choices for right ways to have relationships... to operate in business... become a choice. The true self and false self begin to separate. We fear such a process. But what we fear losing are never the true ligaments... they are tumors and malignant growths. **Becoming holy is really a matter of becoming whole.**

**Closing / Prayer:**

Perhaps you have come here today and you've heard about Jesus, you know some things about Him, but you're not too sure that you actually know Him. Today, He wants to come into your life and make Himself known to you. You can know Him by simply humbling yourself and asking Him to come into your life as Lord and Master. He is bigger than the sins you have

committed. If we will confess our sins and turn from them He will forgive us and cleanse us of all unrighteousness. Will you ask Him to do that for you right now? Come Jesus... and indwell us by your Spirit. Come make us more whole....reveal what you want to do.

### **Closing Song** – Jesus, Lover Of My Soul

#### Chorus

It's all about You, Jesus,  
And all this is for You,  
For Your glory and Your fame.  
It's not about me,  
As if You should do things my way;  
You alone are God,  
And I surrender to Your ways.

#### Verse

Jesus, Lover of my soul,  
All consuming fire is in Your gaze.  
Jesus, I want You to know  
I will follow You all my days.

#### Bridge

For no one else in history is like You,  
And history itself belongs to You.  
Alpha and Omega, You have loved me,  
And I will share eternity with You.

**Resources:** I am also grateful for the great thoughts of so many who I may draw thoughts from. I will usually study the text and form my own shape to the points and structure. In the process I may insert various ideas and statements from others (commentaries and messages related to the same text) which are related to the points I have developed. I do not use these notes as a manuscript that is either memorized or read... but rather as a guide for the thoughts I offer. If I actually read or quote another I will refer publicly to the source. This message I drew thoughts from including Tim Keller, Richard Tow, Derek Melanson and Michael Trask.)

#### **Notes:**

1. Exodus 12:15 (ESV) - Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.

2. The Temple in Jerusalem [http://www.jesuswalk.com/john/05\\_cleansing.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/john/05_cleansing.htm)

The first temple was built by Solomon on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem about 950 BC to replace the tabernacle that had been Israel's portable place of worship, first in the wilderness at Sinai and for the next several hundred years at Shiloh. Solomon's Temple was destroyed in 587 BC when

Nebuchadnezzar's army destroyed Jerusalem. The next temple was built when the Jews returned from exile under Zerubbabel in about 515 BC. It was damaged, plundered, and desecrated by Greek conqueror Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BC and later by Roman generals Pompey in 63 BC and Crassus in 54 BC. Herod the Great destroyed some of the temple walls as he stormed Jerusalem in 37 BC.

Herod the Great, now King of the Jews under the Romans, began to rebuild the temple in 20-19 BC, a process that continued for most of the next decade, with further ornamentation continuing perhaps through the 60s AD (cf. 2:20). Since Herod's Temple was constructed over the foundation of the temple built under Zerubbabel in 515 BC (though greatly expanded), it is known by Jews today as the Second Temple. Remnants of this temple are still visible today in the Wailing Wall at the base of its Western Wall.

The temple grounds consisted of several courts surrounding the central temple structure itself. **Court of the Gentiles** was the outermost court, paved with stone and surrounded on three sides by porticos, each about 45 feet wide supported by two rows of marble columns some 37 feet high. Jesus and his disciples -- and later the early church -- met under Solomon's Porch on the east side of the temple complex (10:23; Acts 3:11; 5:12). Gentiles as well as Jews were allowed to be there. This was the location where sacrificial animals were sold and money exchanged.

3. Regarding the nature of tax and coinage...

(from [http://www.jesuswalk.com/john/05\\_cleansing.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/john/05_cleansing.htm))

Jews came to the Temple from all over Israel, indeed from all over the known world. Most of the time, they couldn't bring animals with them to sacrifice.

Moreover, Passover was the time that people paid the annual temple tax (Matthew 17:24-27; Exodus 30:13, 26). In Jesus' day, many kinds of coinage were circulating. The Romans, of course, had their own coins, but so did many kings and city-states across the empire. The various Herodian kings issued coins, as did the Phoenicians, Aegeans, Corinthians, and Persians. If these were voluntary offerings, perhaps, coins from these various countries and kingdoms might have been accepted. But this was a tax, not an offering. So, probably because of its exact weight and good alloy, Tyrian coinage (from Tyre) is specified in the Mishnah as the only coinage acceptable for the temple tax.<sup>[74]</sup> Of course, there was a fee to exchange one's coins for the Tyrian coins. The chief priest controlled the entire enterprise of money-changing and sale of sacrificial animals -- and got his percentage of the gross.

The sacrificial animals and money-changing tables were located in the Court of the Gentiles within the temple grounds. So the place designated for believing Gentiles to pray and worship was cluttered with the clink of coins, the braying of animals, and the sounds of commerce -- hardly a place of peace wherein to seek the Lord.

In this prophetic act Jesus was declaring two things. First, He is declaring His Messiahship. This is a fulfillment of Malachi 3:1-3. Jesus as the Messenger of the Covenant has suddenly appeared in His temple. Second, He is declaring His divinity. And the Apostle John wants us to see this. Notice in John 2:16 Jesus does not say "our Father's house." He says "My Father's house" and in doing that claims a unique relationship as the Son of God. [Richard Tow cites - Leon Morris, Reflections on the Gospel of John, p 81]

4. Regarding being the temple of God's Spirit, see also:

1 Peter 2:5 – “you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 6:16 “For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

To have our lives reflect being the “temple” of God’s Spirit is more than simply being a “house.” As stated well: “As Christian’s bodies are God’s temple, we are to use them to glorify God. If God meant simply to convey the idea that the Spirit lives within the believer, He could well have used words such as “home,” “house,” or “residence.” But by choosing the word “temple” to describe the Spirit’s dwelling, He conveys the idea that our bodies are the shrine, or the sacred place, in which the Spirit not only lives, but is worshiped, revered, and honored. Therefore, how we behave, think and speak, and what we let into the temple through our eyes and ears becomes critically important as well, for every thought, word and deed is in His view. -

<https://www.gotquestions.org/body-temple-Holy-Spirit.html>

5. "Good men use the world to enjoy God; bad men use God to enjoy the world."

-Augustine, De Doctrina Christiana, 22:20