



Widow in the temple: It feels like being rescued.

John 2:13-22

Inspiration for You:

I'm going to give you an image, okay? I'm going to give you an image and yes, I know it's the wrong season. I want you to think of the movie A Christmas Story. Remember? They show it 24 hours straight on Christmas day. Ralphie wants a BB Gun from Santa Claus and begins a campaign to make it happen. Then the bully who has tormented Ralphie and his brother and all the kids of the neighborhood nails Ralphie with a snowball right in the face and Ralphie, at his wits end, begins to cry...the bully laughs...Ralphie's friends run. Randy, Ralphie's little brother runs to get mom.

The bully is laughing....

Randy is going for help...

His friends have disappeared....

Ralphie is crying...

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And then...

[NOTE:] If this is a sermon...pause here. Let people remember. You can even comment....”Yeah I can see it your faces.”

Ralphie loses it.

Now let’s leave that image there for a moment.

The story of Jesus driving the money changers from the temple occurs in all four gospels. It is the time of the Passover. This is the big celebration for the Jewish people. Imagine our local mall at Christmas time with 3 to 4 THOUSAND people wandering around. PLUS live stock. People would bring their bulls and cows and sheep and goats for the sacrifice.

The Pharisees were offended. They knew how to worship, where to worship, how long to worship, what to say, how to kneel, and how much it cost. The Pharisees were the rule makers and the rule keepers and the finger pointers. They would have been inside the temple showing people how it’s done and letting them know if they didn’t do it right. Then there’s a noise from outside the temple...

The people were awakened.

The Disciples thought this was the beginning. Some of them thought Jesus was going to take over and their people would be in charge. So far...all he had done was tell some stories. Even during his best moments he would say, “Okay, you know that whole blind people getting sight thing? Let’s keep that between us.”

But this MOMENT was like the disciples standing behind the chain link fence watching Ralphie beat up the school bully. They thought...THIS IS IT! THIS is the beginning!

And Jesus was saying “This is the beginning...of the end.”

Back to the temple...the Religious Leaders of the time would have taken their cut of whatever the money changers were taking in.

If you didn’t have livestock you could buy a dove.

But inside the temple they would only take local money.

So in the temple courtyard you had people who would trade your money for the proper temple currency so you could buy a dove for the sacrifice. But the ones making the trade would often cheat people. Sort of like a currency exchange...but they were the ones that set the rates...and the rates never went down. No, on big holidays they would just keep going up.

Does this mean we shouldn't let the youth have a bake-sale in the lobby or narthex? No. Jesus was upset that people were being cheated in the name of worshipping his Father. Jesus was upset that the people coming to the temple were being ripped off and didn't have a way around it. Jesus was upset that the one thing that was supposed to make us closer to God was being used to cheat people. They made worship dirty. There's a reason the event is often called the "Cleansing of the Temple."

A whole lot of people had a whole lot of time and money and reputation invested in keeping the system working just as it was....then along comes Jesus.

Jesus says, no. Not anymore.

Jesus is saying God is going to do something brand new and he is going to do it through Me.

This is the announcement that says, God has not given up on you.

Stop going through life like a zombie wandering around in a mall.

Jesus is saying "Wake up!" Jesus is calling each of us to "Wake up!"

That lot in life they told you was yours and you just had to live with it...Jesus says "No. No, you don't."

Greed and power and rules and corruption and intimidation have no power....not anymore...we're going to do something else.

But...

When you challenge the system.
When you call on people to do things in a way they have never been done.
Sometimes you have to pay for it.
Sometimes it's with your own blood.

People believed they had to endure suffering in order to get rewards later.

Jesus is saying "THIS body" is coming back. I will raise "THIS temple."

Jesus wasn't talking about the building.

The woman in the video says she wasn't afraid watching Jesus...she says it was like being rescued.

Jesus tears down the old and builds something new. Jesus gave her and us a new understanding about God.

If you read the Old Testament it's: Plagues, Locusts, Floods, Wandering. There's an entire book of the Old Testament called Lamentations. Do you know what that book is? YES, an entire book of Lamenting.

Jesus says, "Not anymore. We're going to do something new.

I remember playing monopoly with my brother one time and he owned the majority of the board. I was getting by landing on Chance and Community Chest and then all I had to do was get passed GO and I'd collect 200 dollars.

Jesus comes in clears the board and tells you to pass GO. These money changers are taking everything you have. I'm giving you relief. I'm giving you a new start. Everything you thought you knew is gone. This is where it starts.

This is about reassurance. When you've hit bottom. When you can't take any more. Jesus says, "Destroy this temple and I will rebuild it."

Resurrection is about now.

Information for you:

For this widowed, single mom, that day in the Temple felt like she was being rescued. The reason she and most likely a couple of million other people were in Jerusalem and on their way to the Temple was to celebrate the greatest rescue in the history of the Hebrew people to that point. They were in town to celebrate the Passover holiday that remembered how God had rescued his people from slavery in Egypt so many centuries ago.

The scene the widowed woman referred to is known as the “Cleansing of the Temple.” While all four of the gospels retell this story, the version she is referring to that identifies Jesus not only turning over the money tables and pouring the coins on the ground, but also using a whip to drive out the animals and corruption, is found in John 2:13-22. This episode made quite an impression on all who were in town for the Passover that year.

¹³The 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. ¹⁵And 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.” ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

¹⁸So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” ¹⁹Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” ²⁰The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” ²¹But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²²When 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.” John 2:13-22

It cannot be overstated how central both the Temple and the celebration of the Passover were to the people of God. N.T. Wright suggests, “The temple was the beating heart of Judaism. It wasn’t just a church on a street corner. It was the center of worship and music, of politics and society, of national celebration and mourning....But, towering above all these, it was the place where Israel’s God had promised to live in the midst of his people. It was the focal point of the nation, and of the national way of life.”

The fact that our story takes place during the week of Passover meant that the city of Jerusalem and the Temple itself would have been heaving with people. Pilgrims from all over would have been crawling around the countryside trying to be a part of this annual celebration of the rescue of the people of God from Egypt in the events of the Exodus. The laws stated that those who lived within 15 miles of Jerusalem had to return to celebrate each year. Because the Jewish people were spread throughout the entire populated world by this time, it was customary for all Jews to make at least one pilgrimage back to the focal point of their heritage during their lifetime; back to Jerusalem, back to the Temple, back to bring a sacrifice, back to worship.

During the time of Passover it is estimated that over two million people would flock to the city to celebrate. With this in mind, our text begins by letting us know that Jesus was in town for such a time as this.

“¹³The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there.” John 2:13-14

Without getting into too much detail, the Temple was divided into different sections that enabled different groups of people different levels of access depending on race, ethnicity, and gender. When initially walking through the gates of the Temple walls, one would enter a general area known as the Court of the Gentiles. In this gathering space both Jews and Gentiles, men and women alike could find access and acceptance.

Those traveling to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover would have a destination of the Temple to offer a sacrifice and to give a monetary Temple offering. Because there were different qualifications for what made a sacrificial animal acceptable and what kinds of coins could be used for the Temple offering, kosher animals and appropriate coin exchanges were set up in the Court of the Gentiles to make it more convenient for people to participate in their ritual acts of worship. Thus we see the animal vendors and money changers. They were there to provide a service so that a person's worship was up to acceptable kosher guidelines.

What had started as a service of convenience opportunity had turned into a scummy corruption orgy. God's Temple and God's glory had been stained by the vile practices of usury and crooked business practices in the name of religion. The outer courts had even become a short cut through to the other side of town for some people. The reverence and awe of God was waning within the people who were into religious and ritualistic

rhythms. For many, it was about keeping a bunch of rules without really having a heart toward God.

When Jesus entered into the outer gates of the Temple courts, the first thing he smelled was the stench of animals. The first thing he heard was the clatter of unscrupulous business practices. The first thing he saw was his Father's House being turned from a place of prayer and worship into a den of robbers and thieves. The people of God needed rescuing again from the evil that had taken up residence in the House of God.

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." John 2:15-17

The righteous anger began to rise inside of Jesus. The people who had come to worship were being fleeced by those who were working the system; and the religious leaders of the Temple had endorsed it and were in on part of the take! This was injustice. This was oppression. This was unacceptable. And this made Jesus' blood boil.

Although the text states that Jesus took or fashioned a whip to drive out the chaos of animals and money-changers, the early Christian biblical scholar, Jerome, thinks that the very sight of Jesus may have made the whip unnecessary. He wrote, "A certain fiery and starry light shone from his eyes, and the majesty of the Godhead gleamed in his face."

Jesus not only was cleansing the corruption from the Temple, he was making a statement by his actions. Many scholars believe he was making a Messianic statement and fulfilling prophecies of old. Some scholars even suggest the way Jesus acted with such demonstrative fashion was akin to a kind of "street theater" that conveyed a prophetic message in the moment justice.

Such prophecies that come to mind with Jesus' actions as a Messiah cleaning the House of God are as follows.

Jeremiah 7:1-15

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ² "Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the LORD. ³ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. ⁴ Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.'

⁵“For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, ⁶if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, ⁷then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.

⁸“Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. ⁹Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, ¹⁰and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—only to go on doing all these abominations? ¹¹Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD. ¹²Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel. ¹³And now, because you have done all these things, declares the LORD, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, ¹⁴therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. ¹⁵And I will cast you out of my sight, as I cast out all your kinsmen, all the offspring of Ephraim.”

Amos 5:21-25

²¹“I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. ²²Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. ²³Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. ²⁴But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. ²⁵“Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?”

Isaiah 66:1-4

“Thus says the LORD: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? ²All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. ³“He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood; he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations; ⁴I also will

choose harsh treatment for them and bring their fears upon them, because when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, they did not listen; but they did what was evil in my eyes and chose that in which I did not delight.”

These passages and others would have come to the minds of those in the Temple on that day and in reflection upon what took place by Jesus’ actions. When Jesus was cleansing the Temple in this matter he not only was removing corruption, but also was announcing in his actions that he was the long awaited Messiah. This is tied into what verse 17 states about the disciples remembrance.

“His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” John 2:17

The passage quoted in this text is from Psalm 69:9 which recall the following words written by King David.

“For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.” Psalm 69:9

In the minds of his disciples, the Messiah was in their midst. The Messiah was turning over more than just tables, he was returning purity to the intent of the Temple. The Messiah was making a statement. The Messiah was making his move to right all the wrongs that unjustly had been imposed upon his people. He was about to rescue and lead them into a new day of victory.

Yes, this felt like being rescued. But Jesus was doing so much more than the people present could possibly understand. He was removing all barriers for all people of all tribes and all nations. Soon there no longer would be a need for ritual in the worship when relationship with God was possible. From widows to wise men, all were about to have access to God because of the Messiah that would lay down his life as the ultimate sacrifice and pay the ransom price for their sin debt that separated them from Holy God.

Jesus’ actions caused a disturbance, but not enough to mandate the Roman authorities to come and settle the people into peace. Only the religious pick pockets had come to see who was disrupting their money making scam.

¹⁸So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” ¹⁹Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” ²⁰The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” John 2:18-20

Jesus had drawn a line in the sand. The Jewish authorities and religious leaders wanted to know by what authority he had done such a thing. They wanted a sign. Jesus gave them himself and a statement of foreshadowing that they could not wrap their minds around in the moment.

To destroy the Temple that King Herod had started and took 46 years to build could not possibly be rebuilt in three days. This Galilean teacher must be mad. And his crazy talk drove the authorities insane on the inside to the point that they wanted to kill him. However, Jesus' popularity would cause a mob scene that quickly would involve the Romans if things got out of hand. Thus, they bided their time. But they did not forget this moment. They would form new schemes; not for money extortion, but for this pseudo-messiah's extinction.

Thus the wheels began to be put in motion to make sure Jesus would be removed from the scene and strung up for all to see before being put away in the tomb and out of site once and for all.

They thought, "The Temple will not fall, but Jesus will." And thus without knowing it, they were fulfilling the prophecies of old to bring forth the final rescue of all people from sin, death, Satan and hell.

²¹But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²²When 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." John 2:21-22

Hindsight is twenty-twenty. The passage of time brings understanding and clarity. Jesus was not talking so much about the stone and rock of the Temple; he was talking about himself. Destroy the lamb of God as the substitutionary atonement sacrifice once and for all, and three days later, by the power of God, he will be raised back to fullness of life. The only way truly to cleanse the Temple was to become the Temple. The word became flesh. The Temple became flesh. He dwelt among us. By His Spirit we now live by His power. No matter how many times Jesus told his disciples what would happen and how clearly he would convey it, they would not understand until after all was said and done. But now they understand; and so do we.

There is no Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free, and in a sense: married or widow. We all are one in Christ who have put our faith, hope and trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins. Once we have received his forgiveness, mercy and grace, we are a new creation in Christ Jesus.

He has brought down all barriers to worship him in spirit and in truth. There are no "off-limits" when it comes to approaching God in worship with our lips, gifts, and lives. All are welcome to come near who call upon his name; especially widows who need to feel like someone has rescued them too. Because he has rescued them and given them hope to live a new life because of his death and resurrection.

God came near to his people. All can draw near in his name. Worship is accessible because Jesus made God approachable. A rescue from a system to a Savior is for all to experience from now on. We have indeed been rescued.