

LESSON #5 CHAPTER 2:12-25

The Word Manifested to the World – Jesus Cleansed the Temple

Divine Attribute: Zeal of the LORD

Theological concept: God's temple

Geographical location: Jerusalem

Chapter Structure

2:12-22 The temple in the eyes of Christ

2:23-25 Beware of superficial faith

Spiritual Principles:

P1 Knowing God's attributes empowers us to keep trusting in Him

P2 The Gospel of Christ is a Gospel for Holiness

A. Today's lesson...

In the last lesson, we saw the Eternal Word manifesting himself to His chosen disciples as the Promised Messiah by performing a miracle at a wedding in Cana. From this lesson onwards till the end of chapter four, we shall see the Eternal Word manifesting himself to the world, first in Jerusalem (2:13-3:18), then in Judea (3:19-36), Samaria (4:1-42) and finally back to Galilee where he performed the second miracle at Cana (4:43-54).

Today, we shall see Jesus (1) went to Jerusalem to keep the Passover as the Law stipulated, and there he cleansed the temple for the first time; (2) he was not swayed by the multitude of followers.

B. 2:12-22 The Temple in the eyes of Christ

12 After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days..

Capernaum was located on the northwest shore of the Lake of Galilee. It was the hometown of Peter, and it became Jesus's headquarters for a large part of his Galilean ministry (according to the Synoptic Gospels records). Jesus regularly preached in the synagogue in Capernaum (Luke 4:31). There he gave the sermon on the Bread of Life (John 6:35-59) "*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day*"; there he expelled a demon from a possessed man (Mark 1:21-27), raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead (Luke 8:41-53) and cured the servant of a Roman Centurion who had helped build the synagogue (Luke 7:3).

Yet the Lord Jesus lamented for Capernaum, "*And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.*" (Mat 11:23 NKJV) because Capernaum did not repent despite having received such rich spiritual blessings. Capernaum was desolate after the first crusade in the 11 century and existed no

longer. Today, on the tell of Capernaum stands the village of Nahum. Archaeologists have uncovered the ruins of two ancient synagogues of Capernaum and an early Christian gathering place.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us be reminded not to take God's grace for granted and to receive His spiritual blessings in vain. Stop giving in to our sinful desires. Do not think it is okay to sin because *"where sin increased, grace increased all the more"* (Ro 5:20), for grace does not give us the license to sin. Rather, *"to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more."* (Luke 12:48)

1. *Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover* vv.13

13 The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Though the God-man Jesus is above the Law, he abides by the Law since he was born under the Law. This is what he meant by *"to fulfil all righteousness"* earlier when he subjected himself to the baptism of John the Baptist even though he was sinless (Mat 3:15). According to Leviticus chapter 8, before a priest was installed for service, he must receive the washing of the body before the anointment of oil on the head. This is why the Lord Jesus received the baptism of John the Baptist before he began his public ministry of the Great High Priest for God's people.

Today, we are born under grace, not under the law. So let us not position ourselves above the Law. Let us obey the Bible's teachings because they are God's revealed will so that we may be holy and acceptable to Him. As we are justified by faith, all the more should we imitate Christ and live an overcoming life to glorify God.

Verse 13 leads us to a deeper question: By what identity did Jesus enter Jerusalem at this time?

Jerusalem and Cana were starkly different cities. Cana was a Galilean city of ordinary people. In the eyes of the Jewish leaders, the Galileans were Law-ignorant and theologically untrained. They were geographically far from the temple and, therefore, were 'tainted' by Graeco-Roman culture and thus non-pious. But the Gospel books show us that many farmers and fishermen were spiritually poor and thus blessed with simple faith. They were willing to listen to Jesus's teaching.

On the other hand, Jerusalem enjoyed the full privileges of sitting on the mountain of Yahweh, having the temple of God, and being a religious and political centre of Israel. The people of Jerusalem saw themselves as people who were near to God, knew the Law, were theologically sound, and thus were the representatives of God's people. Nonetheless, Jesus lamented for her, *"it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!"* (Luke 13:33,34) Whoever offends the religious people of Jerusalem would be treated as a heretic. In the history of Israel, only one city dared to kill the prophets of God because she thought she was right with God.

The Lord Jesus knows he is the Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, and the Word became flesh. But he did not have the appearance of majesty, of a lawyer, a politician, or a militant. He did not have social backing, financial backing, or theological degrees. Therefore, Jesus would not be respected by Jerusalem, for they were not able to reckon that the Nazarean carpenter is the root of Jesse and the Holy One of Yahweh because they judge people by the wealth of the fallen world.

Even so, "*Jesus went up to Jerusalem*", because he moved according to the Holy Spirit, not according to man's expectation. "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me*" (Luke 4:18). The Lord was not afraid of offending the powerful and the wealthy in Jerusalem. He went to the temple of God and cleansed the religious legacy that Jerusalem prided herself on most. Dear brothers and sisters, our Lord started his Galilee ministry at Cana with a miracle, but for religious Jerusalem, he started his ministry by cleansing the temple! Jerusalem has distorted the Way (of eternal life) entrusted to her. The utmost thing she needed was repentance. Cleansing the temple is a great act of the age. Unfortunately, Jerusalem did not realise her fatal error, and she continued to be blinded by her law. She was hostile towards the Son of God and eventually crucified the Eternal Word!

2. *Jesus Cleansed the Temple* vv.14-16

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."

Instead of a sacred place, the temple's outer court became a marketplace. Even though the trades provided convenience for worshippers who came from afar to offer sacrifices, every seller sought to profit from the trade. We can assume without prejudice that the religious authorities also enjoyed a share in the profit since they granted permission to set up a marketplace there. The Lord Jesus saw their greed and rebuked them outright, "*Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade.*"

The cleansing act of Jesus reminded us of two prophecies in the OT,

Malachi 3:1 "*Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.*"

Zechariah 14:17, 21 stated that on that day, all the people of the earth will go to Jerusalem to worship the Lord of hosts, "*And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day.*"

According to NT authority, Prof F.F. Bruce, the only place within the temple precincts open to people of all nations (gentiles) was the outer court, also called the court of the Gentiles. If this area was taken up for trading, it could not be used for worship or praying. This is one reason why the Lord protested, "*My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robber*" (Mat 21:13, Mark 11:17, Luke 19:46)

The synoptic Gospels had a similar record of Jesus cleansing the temple in the week when the Lord went to Jerusalem for the Passover before his crucifixion. The Passover in the Gospel of John here, however, was the first Passover since the Lord began his public ministry. This does not mean that the bible is inaccurate. Rather, under the premise of "The bible is inerrant and infallible", we know that these were two separate incidents, i.e. the Lord cleansed the temple twice, one at the beginning of his ministry and one at the end. (Traditionally, it is believed that Jesus went through four Passovers during his three-and-a-half-year ministry, even though only three were recorded in the four Gospel books)

The temple was built by King Herod, also known as the third temple, and was the biggest temple in the history of Israel. But we ought to know that the temple of God should not be a tourist spot. The temple is the place God designated for man to communicate with Him, pray to Him, and worship Him. Though it is an earthly tabernacle, everything in it is *“copies of the heavenly things...copies of the true things”* (Heb 9:23,24). Therefore, the temple, from the outer court to the innermost sanctuary, is to be consecrated and set apart for the worship of God, and thus it should be a place of utmost sacredness and awe.

Dear brothers and sisters, do we carelessly set up a marketplace in the church? Do we profit from the needs of others and the church, or do we give gifts to one another out of love, as Paul taught us? Let us be careful not to turn the church into a profit-seeking trading place out of our passion.

Verse 15 *“And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen.”* If we had seen how shepherds move cattle about in a busy town's streets or open spaces, we would understand why Jesus had to improvise a whip to drive the animals out of the outer court marketplace. He was not using force on the animals because we know that *“a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.”* (Isaiah 42:3)

Dear brothers and sisters, even when we do not understand God's act, we can still trust Him and wait for Him if we know who He is. That is why it is important that we learn to see God's attributes when we read the Bible.

P1 Knowing God's attributes empowers us to keep trusting in Him

3. *Jesus was zealous for the Temple* vv.14-17

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

In the OT, two words are being used for 'temple', sometimes interchangeably. One is *bayith* (bah'-yith) which means “divine dwelling place” or “house or household of God”. On his way to Haran, young Jacob dreamed of a ladder that led to heaven, and God spoke to him from the top. When he woke up, he was filled with awe, and he said, *“How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”* (Ge 28:17). The word used here is *bayith*.

Another word for temple is *hekal* (hay-kawl'), which means place of worship. For example, Jonah worshipped God in the fish and said, *“When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.”* (Jonah 2:7). The word he used here is *hekal*.

This shows that in the OT, the temple was not only a place of worship but also regarded as the house of God. Dear brothers and sisters, how wonderful it is that now, in the NT, God's household and sanctuary become one in Christ —the church is not a building or a club.

Verse 17 is a quotation from Psalm 69:9, written by King David: *“For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.”*

Note that when it was quoted in verse 17, the verb was changed from present to future tense: *“Zeal for your house will consume me”*. Again, this is not an error in the bible. The change has regard to the perspective of the cleansing action. The zeal for the house of God which Jesus manifested in this occasion is yet to come - his crucifixion, as the second part of the psalm indicates: *“the reproaches of*

those who reproached you fell on me". The Lord carried our sins and purified us with his blood, so that we may become a temple holy and pure for His dwelling – *"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"* (1Cor 3:16)

So, let us constantly examine ourselves in two aspects. Firstly, since the blood of Christ has cleansed us, can we continue to tolerate sins in our new life? Secondly, how zealous are we towards the church, which is the house of God and the temple of God? May all of us be like Jesus one day and pray willingly, "O Lord, the zeal of your house consumes me!"

Reflection: O Lord, I feel ashamed, for I expect the church to care for me and have never thought about how I could care for the church! Even weekly offerings and monthly tithing, I do not give willingly! Forgive me, O Lord! Please help me always to remember your zeal for the church. Amen!

4. **The challenge of the Jews vv.18-22**

18 So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?"

The Jews here are members of the temple authorities. They asked Jesus by what authority he did this., Show them a sign from God if his authority is higher than theirs!

The Lord answered them, *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."* Jesus was referring to his resurrection from the dead.

Years later, when the Sanhedrin tried Jesus, someone testified against him, *"This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'*" (Mat 26:61) We thank John for writing down what Jesus said, that we know that their testimony was false.

In verses 14 and 15, the Greek word for temple is *Hieron*, referring to the temple complex. When Jesus rebuked them for destroying the temple, he used the word *naos*, which means the dwelling place of God. As Jesus said, he was not referring to the material temple but his body. The Word became flesh is Immanuel – God manifested in the flesh. Jesus already knew that they would kill him at this point, but he would be resurrected on the third day.

"The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?"

The construction of the Herod temple began in 19 BC. Dear brothers and sisters, our Lord is also called "the faithful and true witness" (Rev 3:14, 19:11). His yes is yes, and His no is no. There is no falsehood, ambiguity, twists and turns on his lips. Let us be like the Lord, with no glib speech but words that build our hearer up.

C. 2:23–25 Beware of superficial faith

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.

People generally love to watch miracles (for this reason, magic show is always popular). Many of us have said to God before we were converted, "God, if you are real, show me a miracle, and I will believe" Some of us probably put our faith in Jesus because of a miracle we experienced. We ought to be discreet in believing miracles when we testify for them. The Bible tells us that even the sorcerers of Pharaoh could turn their staff into serpents. Didn't Satan strike Job with loathsome sore? He could perform miracles too.

This passage reminds us that many believed in Jesus because of the benefit his miracles offered them. Jesus knew who they were. After Jesus performed the miracle of five loaves and two fish, many people came and looked for him. But Jesus told them, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves."* (6:26) Many saw the power of Jesus to work a miracle and hoped to obtain good things for this life from him, and yet failed to see His power to forgive sin, to set man free from sin and to grant man eternal life. A sinner's greatest and utmost need is not the good things in this life but the forgiveness of sin. The purpose of miracles is to show that Jesus can forgive sin, as illustrated in Matthew 10 when Jesus healed the paralytic. He told the unbelieving spectators, *"But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins."* So he said to the paralyzed man, *"Get up, take your mat and go home."* (Mat 9:6)

Those who believe in Jesus for the good things in this life have superficial and shallow faith. As in the parable of the Sower, the gospel seed fell on the heart of rocky ground, the man received it with joy immediately, yet has no root; such faith lasts only for a little while, and the man will soon forsake the Lord because whoever follows the Lord has to carry his cross. Were not many from Jerusalem who received Jesus at the city gate with the exclamation, *"Blessed is He who came in the name of the Lord!"*? Yet a few days later, they shouted, "Crucify him!" because of the benefit they got from the religious leaders!

Dear Brothers and Sisters, please keep in mind that while we do personal evangelism, if you relate a miracle that you experienced, you should strive to let your hearer recognise that what he should be pursuing is not the wonderful things in this life but the forgiveness of sin and life eternal. God will provide for the needs of our present life. Miracles performed by Jesus are to be a sign of God, revealed to man so that man may know that God has come to His people to save them from sin and eternal death!

Jesus can read our thoughts, emotions, motives, and purposes like an open book. When we come near Him, we don't have to hide or pretend. God is pleased with sincerity and truthfulness.

The Lord Jesus knows whose faith is real and is truly His own. He is well aware of the motives and purposes of everyone who follows Him. For those who follow him for the benefit of the present life, he does not move by their money, flattery, or power. For those whose profession is true, he teaches them the truth of life and illumines them with the Holy Spirit. In Chapter 3, we shall see how Jesus leads such a man to receive eternal life.

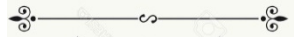
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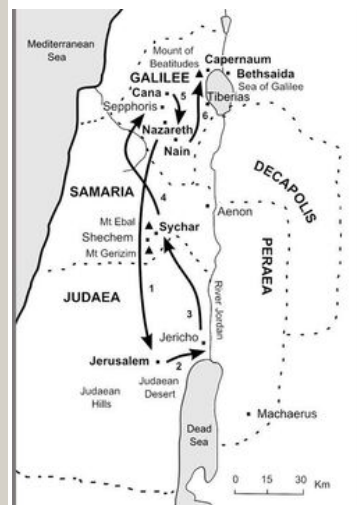
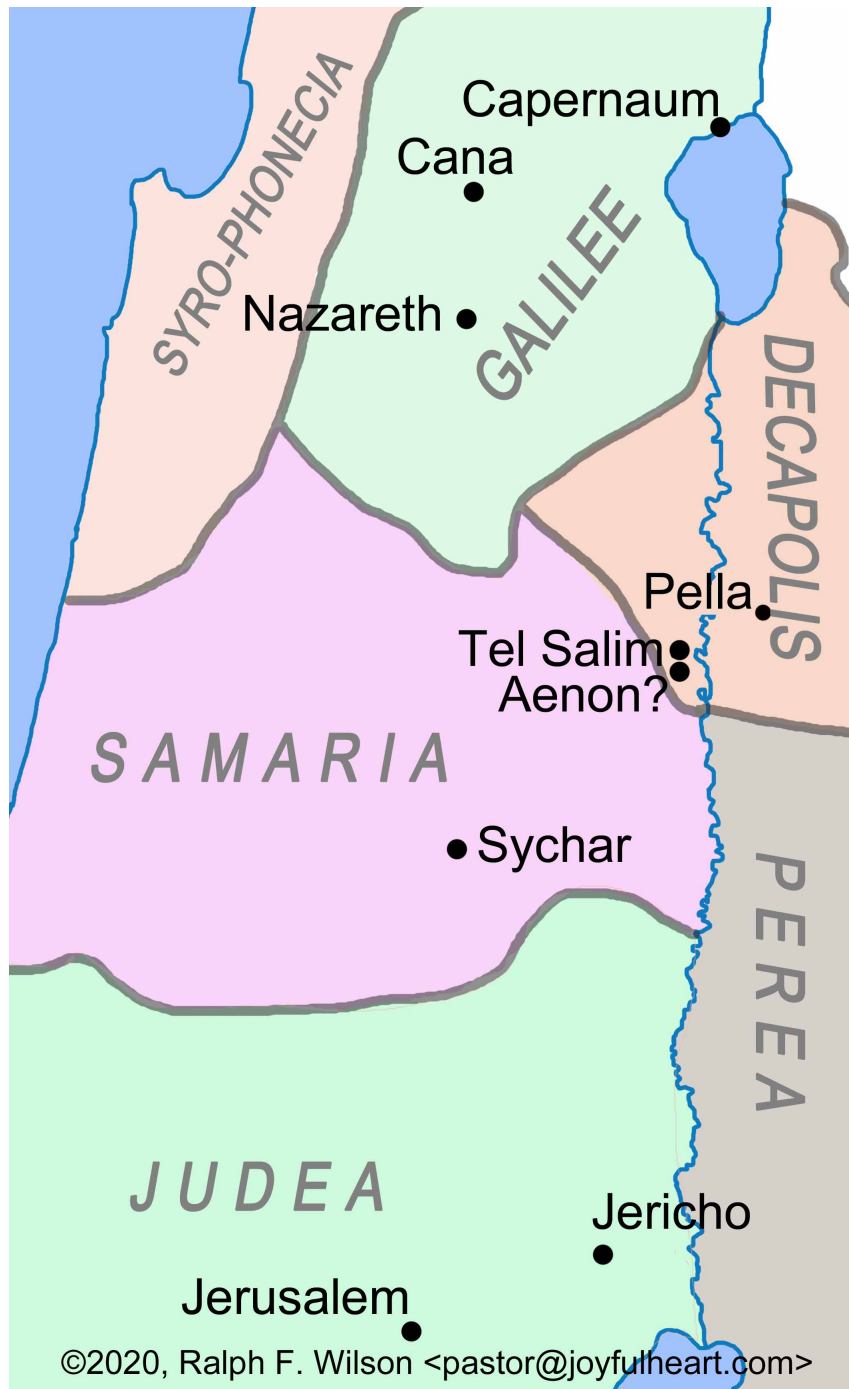
Interestingly, Jesus purposefully cleansed the temple at the beginning and end of his ministry. His zeal for the house of God speaks to us.

In Ephesians 5:26-27, Paul tells us that today Christ is cleansing the church with His words so that the church will be ready for him when he returns in glory, *"that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."*

How, then, can we neglect to keep the church pure and blameless? Let us be serious about the holiness of the church. Do not let the depraved culture of the world seep through the crack of the bonding of love. In our personal life, fellowship life, and ministry work, we ought to be sensitive to sin and nip sin in the bud before it grows and snowballs. Therefore, it is important to evangelise; it is also equally important to learn to lead a holy life. A holy life is a testimony to the power of the Gospel. The Gospel of Jesus Christ empowers dying man to turn from sin and turn to God.

P2 The Gospel of Christ is a Gospel for Holiness







Archaeologists uncovered an early Christian home in Capernaum thought to have been the home of Peter. Jesus cured Peter's mother-in-law here (Matthew 8:14-16) and is thought to have lived in this house while in Capernaum. This is the site where Christ cured a paralytic who was lowered in through the roof (Mark 2:1-12). After Jesus' death the home became a place of worship.



Ruins of the ancient Great Synagogue at Capernaum (or Kfar Nahum) on the shore of the Lake of Galilee, Northern Israel