

# Cleansing the Temple

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 07 June 2026

Preacher: Jonathan de Groot

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I don't know if you follow football at all, but footballer Anthony Gordon moved from Newcastle United to Barcelona last week. And the fee for his move was \$69.3 million.

And Gordon, Anthony Gordon, in his Jordi accent, he spoke of the excitement of his move at his Barcelona unveiling. And as he spoke, he surprised everybody when he just flipped into fluent Spanish speaking.

And so he was asked, why do you speak Spanish? Nobody expected it. And this is what he said. He said, I wanted to speak Spanish because as a kid, I believed I would play for Barca.

Believe it or not. I have a physio in Newcastle and we spoke every day and I told him one day, I'll play for Barca. So I want to learn Spanish.

So that's why. So he learned Spanish because he believed as a boy he would play for Barcelona, one of the best teams in the world. And now he does, in fact, play for Barcelona.

[ 1 : 06 ] And I don't know how much Anthony Gordon had a clear sense of his future footballing destiny, but he thought and wanted to play for this team.

But as we come this afternoon and we continue our studies in the Gospel of John, it is very clear that Jesus, very clear that Jesus had a clear sense of his destiny.

He knew his future. He knew what would happen. Because Jesus is the Messiah. He's the Son of God. And here we read that he knew he would die and then that he would rise to life again.

And so in this passage, John chapter 2, verse 13 to 25, we see that Jesus cleanses the temple. And John records this straight after he has recorded the sign of Jesus turning the water into wine.

And both of these, the water into wine and the clearing of the temple, both of these signal that the old order is being replaced by the new in Jesus, the Messiah.

[ 2 : 14 ] And so today's passage tells us that Jesus will replace the temple with himself. And so we see Jesus' authority and how we must respond to it by believing in him.

And so we're going to look at this passage this afternoon under three headings. First of all, Jesus destroys false religion. Secondly, Jesus declares his authority. And then thirdly, Jesus demands genuine belief.

So firstly, Jesus destroys false religion in verse 13 to 17. We see this as Jesus brings his judgment on the temple. Now, the temple was in Jerusalem.

We read that, verse 13. When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And that's where the temple was. And he went to Jerusalem for the Passover.

And the Passover was celebrated every year for the Jewish nation. And the Passover began way back in Exodus. It was the beginning of the Exodus.

[ 3 : 18 ] In Exodus chapter 12, where a lamb was sacrificed. And the blood of the lamb was painted on the door frames of the people's homes. And it was called the Passover because the angel of death passed over all those homes with the blood painted.

And would kill the firstborn in the other homes. And so this all enabled the Jewish people to escape from their slavery in Egypt into freedom. And so Jesus, because he was a faithful Jew, like every other faithful Jew, would honor this feast, this festival of Passover every single year by going to Jerusalem.

Now, we should note that this is the first reference to the Passover in the Gospel of John. And it follows hot on the heels of this reference. We saw in John chapter 1 that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And so there's a hint at the beginning of John's Gospel that this is the future of Jesus. He is going to fulfill the Passover. He's going to be the Passover Lamb who would be sacrificed for the sins of his people so that the judgment of God could pass over them.

Okay, so what does Jesus find at the temple in Jerusalem? Well, look at verse 14 and 15. In the temple courts, he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money.

[ 4 : 48 ] So he made a whip out of cords and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle. He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.

Cattle, sheep, doves were sold in order to be sacrificed at the temple for worship. And money was exchanged so that the obligatory temple tax could be paid in the approved currency.

But the temple wasn't a center for trade. The temple was a place of worship. It was the most important building for the Jewish people.

It's where God wanted to meet with his people and where God wanted his people to meet with him. But it was impossible for sinful people to dwell in the presence of a holy God.

And that's why the Old Testament part of the Bible is all of these sacrifices that took place in the temple. And it was simply a reminder that sin needed to be atoned for if God was to be able to meet with his people.

[ 6 : 01 ] But here we see that the temple was used as a marketplace. And that's why Jesus was so angry. And so he judges Israel for their abuse of the temple.

The temple was meant to be a place of prayer, a place of worship, but it had become a place of false religion. It was no longer fit for a purpose.

That's why Jesus judges it. Now it's thought that all of this trading that we read about here took place in the court of the Gentiles.

Now in the temple, the court of the Gentiles was like the outer courtyard of the temple. And it was the only place that Gentiles, in other words non-Jews, were allowed to enter so that they could pray to God.

They couldn't come any further than that outer courtyard. And yet what we see here is that the space that enabled Gentiles to connect with God had been turned into a market.

[ 7 : 04 ] It was the center of trade rather than being the center of worship. And so they couldn't get in. I guess to put this in modern terms, just think of a church with a massive car park outside.

That's not our church, by the way, because there's no space to park anywhere. But think of a church with a huge car park. Out the front. But the church leaders decide that what they'll do to make a bit of extra cash is on a Sunday morning to allow car boot sales to take place in the car park.

And so the church members, who are all insiders, they know the way into the church. They can come in through the side door. And they can still have their meetings, their worship services. But the car park is so full of people selling stuff for profit that the front door is inaccessible to outsiders. They just can't get in to the place that's designed to be a place where they can come to worship God. And so it's no wonder that Jesus is incensed by what is happening in the temple.

And so he drives out all the traders because it had become a place of false religion instead of true worship. The people had defiled God's holy temple.

[ 8 : 24 ] So verse 16 tells us, To those who sold doves, he said, Get these out of here. Stop turning my father's house into a market. And then we read verse 17.

His disciples remembered that it is written, Zeal for your house will consume me. It's clear, isn't it, that Jesus is angry. You see it by his actions.

But remember, this is not some kind of uncontrollable, fly-off-the-handle sort of anger. The kind of anger that we as people tend to be prone to.

No, this is a righteous, a controlled anger because Jesus is driven by a burning zeal for his father's house.

His father's house is the temple. And that's why his disciples remember these words from Psalm 69. The words are, Zeal for your house will consume me.

[ 9 : 23 ] Now back in the Old Testament, Psalm 69 is a psalm of David, King David. And David is in distress because he is under attack from his enemies.

But David is enduring all of this opposition for the Lord's sake. And it's because, for David, he had zeal for God's house. And his concern was for true worship in God's house rather than the mere sacrifice of animals.

And so Jesus fulfills this psalm with his zeal for true worship in his father's house. And in addition to this, to Psalm 69, every Jewish reader would have known that at the very end of their scriptures, the

Old Testament, in the book of Malachi, it said there, Malachi chapter 3, that the Lord would suddenly return to his temple and he would cleanse it.

It says that he would come like a refiner's fire in an act of judgment. What would he do? He would purify it and he would restore true worship.

And here is Jesus. He's coming like a refiner's fire to purify the worship of God at the temple, fulfilling what the scripture said he would do and what would happen.

[10:47] And so the Messiah came to judge and to cleanse, to destroy false religion and to restore true worship. Now, as we apply this to ourselves, we must surely recognize and realize that Jesus is no less angry today at what gets in the way of the true worship of God.

But false religion, fake religion should be judged and wiped out. Because buildings might look like churches and they might smell like churches.

I was in here with a guy last week who'd never been at church for years. And as soon as he came in the door, he said, smells like a church. And it may look like a church, it may smell like a church.

But if no true worship of God takes place in that building, then it's a disgrace. And so just in case we think these words here are for other people and not for us, remember that Jesus' judgment here is on the people of God, on Israel.

Because there was something seriously wrong when those people who professed to worship God had actually lost the heart of what worship was all about.

[12:14] They were more interested in the buildings and in this particular building, the temple, than what that building stood for. And it can happen today, can't it?

That people can be more interested in just simply going through the motions. Go to that place. And you do all of this religious stuff. And then you leave.

And then you get on with the rest of your life and forget about it until the next Sunday. And it can happen. Going through the motions. Professing some kind of false, fake religion.

Because if we are filled with the spirit of Jesus, then surely we too will have a zeal for the glory and honor of God.

We ought to have a burning desire not only to worship God ourselves, but to see that nothing gets in the way of or prevents the true worship of God.

[13:20] And not simply for our sake or even for the sake of our fellow believers in Christ, but also for the sake of those who don't know Jesus. Because we want them to come in and have access to the good news about him so that they can meet him too.

I wonder if Jesus needs to judge and to cleanse our hearts and our lives of all the noise and all the nonsense that we just fill them with all through the week.

Because it's clear here that Jesus will not stand for false religion. And that's why we see Jesus declare his authority. So our first point, Jesus destroys false religion.

Our second point, Jesus declares his authority. There in verse 18 to 22. So Jesus has pronounced his judgment by cleansing the temple.

And obviously his behavior didn't go down too well with the leaders of Israel who were responsible for what happened in the temple. And so they demand a sign of his authority.

[14:27] Verse 18, the Jews then responded to him, What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this? Just notice, they are not interested in tackling the matter of the abuse of the temple.

That's kind of overlooked them. All they care about is where does this man, where does he get the authority to act in this way? And so they want him to prove his authority by giving them a sign.

Because the real conflict wasn't over what was allowed in the temple, or what was prohibited in the temple, the real conflict was who had the ultimate authority. And so just listen to Jesus' response.

Verse 19 and 20, Jesus answered them, Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days. They replied, It has taken 46 years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days.

Sounds like a challenge, doesn't it? Even a dare. Jesus says, destroy this temple. And I will raise it again in three days. And so those who speak and challenge Jesus, they're taking his words literally.

[15:40] Because the temple had been 46 years in the making. And so it was absurd to think that this temple, this beautiful building, could be knocked down and built again in three days.

But interestingly, when Jesus says, I will raise it, the word raise that he uses is a resurrection word. Raise. And it's used to speak of Jesus' resurrection throughout the New Testament. And it contrasts that word in verse 19, raise to the word build in verse 20, which is a construction word.

Which is a construction word. Indicating that Jesus is talking about his own resurrection, rather than the reconstruction of the temple.

That's why John adds this qualifying statement. There in verse 21. But the temple he had spoken of was his body. Jesus was talking about the temple of his own body.

[ 16 : 45 ] He's referring to himself as the temple. As a new kind of temple. Where the destruction of the temple is a reference to the death of Jesus.

Jesus knew his opponents would eventually kill him, destroy him. And the raising of the temple is a reference to the resurrection of Jesus.

Because Jesus also knew that his body would be raised from the dead. Three days later. And so John here in his gospel, he's just given us this first sign of the water turning into wine by Jesus.

And here in Jesus' own words, we're being pointed to this last sign. And the greatest sign in the gospel of John, which is the sign of the resurrection of Jesus.

And it's the ultimate sign that declares the authority of Jesus. Jesus rose from the dead. Telling us that he is the long promised Messiah that God said would come.

[ 17 : 56 ] He's the son of God who would suffer and who would rise again. I noticed John's comment here. This all made sense to the disciples after the resurrection.

So there they are in the temple. And it didn't make sense to them then. But after Jesus had risen, they realized, ah, he has all power and all authority.

Verse 22. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. So they took what was written in the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken, and they put them together.

And that's why they believed. They added it all up, and it all made sense to them. And so whether seeing Jesus clear the temple or hearing Jesus speak about the temple, as well as seeing the risen Lord Jesus after his death, all of this convinced them to believe in Jesus.

And the resurrection is still today the ultimate proof of who Jesus is. He said he would die. He said he would rise.

[ 19 : 18 ] And he did. And it confirms his authority. He is trustworthy. You can take what Jesus says and believe it to be true, because he's proved it.

And so all of this comes together at the temple in Jerusalem for a reason. Okay, so the cleansing of the temple, alongside this talk of the destruction of the temple, and then the raising of the temple, is all telling us something significant and something special about Jesus.

What it's saying to us is that Jesus is the full and final expression of what the temple is all about. John has already told us in his gospel at the beginning, that the word, meaning Jesus, became flesh, and made his dwelling among us.

Saying the Son of God came to earth to dwell here with us, to walk about as one of us, a human being and yet God.

And now remember, what's the temple for? Well, the temple was built so that God could dwell with his people here on earth.

[ 20 : 41 ] And so we're being told that Jesus is the fulfillment of everything that the temple was designed to be and to do. So Jesus is claiming to be the ultimate temple.

The true and better meeting place between God and human beings. And so Jesus pronounced his judgment by cleansing the temple because he replaces the temple and fulfills its true purpose with his resurrection body.

So Jesus is the one in whom you and I can meet with God. So Jesus is saying here that the temple's days are numbered.

It was the place to go to to meet with God. But it's no longer needed. Because Jesus is now the place to meet with God.

And it was the place where all of these sacrifices were brought year after year, day after day, to atone for the sins of the people. But it's no longer needed.

[ 21 : 53 ] Because Jesus himself was the once for all sacrifice. Who atones for the sins of his people. And all of this, of course, was symbolized by the temple's curtain being ripped in two from top to bottom when Jesus died on the cross.

What was the curtain in the temple there for? Well, it was there to separate sinful people from the presence of a holy God.

It barred the way from the place into the holiest of holies in the temple. The holiest place. And so when Jesus died, this great barrier between God and human beings was ripped open. And God was declaring through the death of Jesus, the sin that separates us from him has been dealt with. So we can now enjoy a relationship with the God who made us. And that's why the temple and the need for all of these sacrifices has been completely abolished in Jesus Christ. Now the temple was actually destroyed.

[ 23 : 09 ] But it was obsolete anyway. And so here, Jesus cleansing the temple in Jerusalem speaks of more than just a protest against false religion.

It indicates to us that Jesus brings an end to religion altogether. Because true religion isn't found in a building, even a really nice, ornate, massive, spiritual building. True religion is not found in a building because it's found in a person. The person of Jesus Christ. And so now the temple in which God is to be worshipped is Jesus himself. Jesus is saying, God is worshipped exclusively and uniquely through me. Which means there's nowhere else in this world where you can go to meet with God. There's no temple. There's no temple. There's no building. There's no place. There's no religion that enables you to meet with God.

[ 24 : 23 ] Only Jesus. He's the only way that you and I and everyone else throughout the history of the world can know God.

You can't know God or be in a relationship with God apart from Jesus. And that's why we must believe in Jesus.

Which takes us to our final point. First, Jesus destroys false religion. Second, Jesus declares his authority. Third, Jesus demands genuine belief. That last section, verse 23 to 25.

Five. You'll notice that this section basically concludes Jesus' cleansing of the temple. But it also introduces us to this conversation that Jesus has with Nicodemus that comes next.

And what these verses are saying to us is that Jesus demands genuine belief. Do you remember John's purpose in writing? John chapter 20, verse 30 to 31.

[ 25 : 27 ] He says, Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

And that by believing, you may have life in his name. John 20, 30 to 31. And what we see here are two different responses to Jesus.

Because in wanting us, John the gospel writer, in wanting us to believe in Jesus, John not only shows us what genuine belief is. Of course, he shows us that.

But he also shows us what it isn't. And that's what's happening here. And so first of all, there's the belief of the disciples. As they watch and as they listen to Jesus, their faith is growing and it's developing.

They followed Jesus. They believed in Jesus when they saw the sign. They listened to Jesus. They believed what the Old Testament scriptures said about Jesus. They believed.

[ 26 : 33 ] John's saying they believed. Genuine belief in Jesus. But secondly, there are other people who begin to believe in Jesus.

And yet there's a difference. Let's read those verses again. Now, while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name.

But Jesus would not entrust himself to them. For he knew all people. He did not need any testimony about mankind. For he knew what was in each person.

So the disciples have genuine belief in Jesus. But there's also a fake, a false, a phony belief in Jesus here.

Well, many people believed when they saw the signs, were told that their faith was inadequate. And Jesus knew it was shallow. He knew it was superficial.

[ 27 : 35 ] And he knew it would be short-lived. Because their belief didn't get past this initial excitement in seeing Jesus' miracles. And yet that is not enough as far as Jesus is concerned.

So they didn't have a genuine belief in him. And so Jesus saw through their response. Because we read that Jesus would not entrust himself to them.

Now, isn't that astonishing? John actually uses the same Greek verb twice. First in verse 23. And then again in verse 24. But it has a slightly different meaning.

In verse 23, he says that Many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name. Then in verse 24, he says that Jesus would not entrust himself to them.

Believed, entrust, same verb. And so the people believed in Jesus, essentially. But Jesus didn't believe in them.

[ 28 : 44 ] Jesus was conscious that while they believed in him, they did not want to fully entrust their lives to him. They may have been impressed by his miracles, but they weren't willing to give their lives to him.

And so Jesus would not entrust himself to them. Because we're told that Jesus knew what was in each person. So despite seeming positive on the outside, Jesus knew what these people were like on the inside.

Basically, you can't fool Jesus. You can't escape his piercing and his searching examination of your heart and your life.

Jesus can see right into our hearts. And he knows what we are really like. He is well aware of whether we genuinely believe in him or we don't.

And it really matters because Jesus, you notice, won't entrust himself to people who are not willing to give themselves fully and unreservedly to him.

[ 30 : 06 ] And so a wee bit of enthusiasm is never enough for Jesus. Jesus demands and he deserves far more.

Because as the true temple, Jesus is the only way to God. And Jesus came to die for us and to rise again to give us access to God.

And so we must fully and gladly and willingly entrust our lives to him. And as we do so, there is this beautiful thing that happens.

And it is that Jesus entrusts himself to us. He commits himself to us. He is for us and with us.

It's a bit like handing this steering wheel of our lives over to Jesus. So instead of wanting to keep control ourselves, we fully trust Jesus to lead us, to drive us, to take us wherever he wants us to go.

[ 31 : 20 ] Because when we do that, we can be sure that the one who loves us and the one who died for us will be with us.

He'll be with us now and forever. And he's the one we need. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.