

“He Did Not Trust Himself to Them!”

Does today’s Scripture Reading seem familiar, yet out of place? What day do you usually think of when you hear or read the story of Jesus Cleansing the Temple? I assume a good number of us are remembering the Cleansing happening on Palm Sunday – a week before Jesus’ Resurrection. So, you might ask why I am using our Reading about the Cleansing of the Temple today, instead of on Palm Sunday. To answer that question, we need to compare and contrast what the Gospel of John said about the Cleansing of the Temple with what the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke declared.

Indeed, Matthew, Mark, and Luke included an account of **Jesus’ Cleansing of the Temple**. However, the author of the Gospel of John described this event as taking place much earlier in Jesus’ ministry. Many scholars have tended to believe the Synoptics are more historically correct. Nevertheless, **I agree with John A.T. Robinson, who indicated in his book, The Priority of John, how the dating in the Gospel of John’s account is more accurate than Matthew, Mark, and Luke.** In fact, the Synoptics did not agree among themselves as to the day of the Cleansing. Matthew and Luke claimed it took place on Palm Sunday, during the last week of Jesus’ ministry and life, but Mark reported it happened the next day. **The failure of the Synoptic Gospels to agree on which day the Cleansing occurred may indicate there is a problem with saying the Cleansing took place during the last week of Jesus’ ministry and life.** The truth is the Synoptics only reported Jesus being present in Jerusalem during his public ministry in the last week of his life, so they had no choice but to say the Cleansing took place during that one visit – at the conclusion of his public ministry and life.

Additionally, the proof of the Gospel of John’s historical accuracy is presented within the Text itself. The Jewish authorities indicated in **verse 20, “It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple!”** So, it had taken 46 years to bring the Temple to its then current state of renovation. That date agrees with the timing in the Gospel of John but would make it a couple of years too early for the dating in the Synoptic Gospels.

The Gospel of John also provided much more detail about the time Jesus spent with or near John the Baptist. The Synoptics claimed Jesus immediately went off for 40 days of temptation after his baptism. Whereas, the Gospel of John reported Jesus spent a few days around the Baptizer, gathered some of his disciples, did his first public miracle at the Cana Wedding Feast, briefly visited Capernaum, and then went to Jerusalem for his first visit during his public ministry. **I agree with John A.T. Robinson that Jesus Cleansed the Temple during this first public visit as the Gospel of John declared, instead of on one of those two days reported by the Synoptic Gospels.**

Part of the reason for believing the Gospel of John was more accurate on this subject is it makes more sense to acknowledge Jesus did the Temple Cleansing early in his public ministry, instead of just before his death. It is helpful to note the Gospel of John made it clear Jesus stopped following the Baptizer’s path of focusing on baptizing, judgment, and punishment soon after the Temple Cleansing. For example, Jesus told Nicodemus in **John 3:17**, that God did not send His Son into the world to judge it. Then, in chapter 4 verse 2, the author of the Gospel of John explained Jesus **“did not baptize anyone”**. Jesus alluded, instead, to his fulfilling the Suffering Servant of God role, when, immediately after the Cleansing of the Temple, the religious authorities challenged Jesus to perform a miracle, which would show he had the authority to Cleanse the Temple. Jesus responded to the authorities in **verse 19, saying, “Tear down this Temple, and in three days I will build it again.”** Jesus was talking about being God’s Suffering Servant – which he fulfilled in his Death and Resurrection.

Especially from that point on, the Gospel of John emphasized Jesus' healings and his Suffering Servant of God role. Interestingly, the Synoptics also said it was early in Jesus' ministry when his focus moved to healing and being the Suffering Servant. So, with reference to the focus for Jesus' public ministry, the Synoptic Gospels' choices of timing for the Cleansing of the Temple was in conflict with their own reports of Jesus' emphasis because they placed the Cleansing, which was like the Baptizer's approach, later than when Jesus was doing such things during his public ministry. The core of the problem for the Synoptic Gospels was, their writers were, evidently, unaware of the other trips Jesus made to Jerusalem during his public ministry. That is understandable, since the Synoptic authors were not eye-witnesses of the events. Because the Synoptics did not know about Jesus' earlier trips to Jerusalem, during his public ministry, they could not report something happening during those earlier visits.

Now, let's connect all of this with verses 23-25. First, the Gospel of John did not report a 40 day temptation experience for Jesus, as did the Synoptic Gospels. However, the Gospel of John, describes a number of incidents during Jesus' public ministry, when he faced temptation. One of those moments is shared in today's Reading. The gospel reports in **verses 23-25**, ***"While Jesus was in Jerusalem during the Passover Festival, many believed in him as they saw the miracles he performed. But Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew them all. There was no need for anyone to tell him about them, because he himself knew what was in their hearts."***

Jesus knew the people wanted him to become a great warrior king and to lead them to defeat and rule over the Roman Empire and all of the Jews' historic enemies. Those desires of the crowd remind me of the temptation the evangelist wrote about in **Matthew 4:8-9**, ***"Then the Devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in all their greatness. 'All this I will give you,' the Devil said, 'if you kneel down and worship me.'"*** Verses 23-25 of today's Reading suggest, Jesus knew he could not continue to follow the path, which John the Baptist urged upon him — that of being the world's Judge — for he would be giving into the temptation to rule over all the kingdoms of world. This helps explain why Jesus, soon after today's Scripture, told Nicodemus in **John 3:17**, ***"For God did not send his Son into the world to be its Judge, but to be its Savior."***

This also gives insight into why, shortly afterward, Jesus chose to physically move away from where John the Baptist was baptizing. Indeed, verses 23-25 show us, Jesus was actually rejecting the temptation to give himself to the peoples' desires or to follow the Baptizer's path!

Those verses remind us, we are called to be trustworthy toward Jesus and his purpose by following Jesus' example of turning away from the temptation to build an empire or of setting oneself up as the world's Judge. Some folks give into those temptations, such as, saying certain persons do not belong among followers of Jesus, while they focus on building empires of power for themselves. Clearly challenging such temptations, Jesus said in **John 6:37**, ***"I will never turn away anyone who comes to me, because I have come down from heaven to do not my own will but the Will of Him Who sent me."*** Yes, we are to forsake empires for ourselves! We are NOT called to say judgment is our Lord's message but TO proclaim we are all given healing and salvation through God's Suffering Love for us shown in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Indeed, we are called to follow **Christ's example of being God's Suffering Servants, who embody God's Selfless Love!**

We are to also follow the devotion Jesus showed in the Temple Cleansing. We do that by making worship and service to God more important than our activities and involvement in the world's ways. **Let our Devotion be strong and our positive Good News, bold! Amen.**