

# Sitting in the Gap Study Guide – March 4, 2018

## [John 2:13-22](#)

(Click on scripture above to link directly to the passage on biblegateway.com.)

### **Suggested Study / Prep**

1. Read the passage in several different translations and/or paraphrases
2. Reflect on the provided questions
3. Generate your own questions and “wonderings”
4. Read the provided commentaries below
5. Visit and explore some of the additional resources links (and/or explore your own commentaries, resources, etc)

### **Reflection Questions on John 2:13-22:**

1. This story occurs also in the other gospels (Matthew 21: 12-17 , Mark 11:15-19, & Luke 19:45-48), but with some significant differences. Compare and contrast these various versions. How do you make sense of the variations in the telling of this story?
2. Think about where you experience God, and where you have come to expect God’s presence to be recognized. Can you imagine the disruption this act would have had for the “average” Jew for whom Temple worship and sacrifice had become a primary way of recognizing and experiencing God? How can we think about balancing the felt spiritual needs of “the people” with the often disruptive movements of justice, truth, and ideological purity? Are you a “fan” of what Jesus did here, or does his action bother you? Why?
3. In verse 18, Jesus is asked to provide a “sign” for why he did what he did. In other words, what gives Jesus the right (or the authority) to raise Cain in the Temple like this? From the standpoint of a 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian who has already accepted Jesus as the Christ, this may be a moot point. But try to imagine the question from the standpoint of a 1<sup>st</sup> century Jew. Is the event itself a sign? Or does it only have meaning in the context of the larger body of Jesus’ life and work?
4. What contemporary parallels can you draw or imagine for such a scene? Where in today’s world do you wish Jesus could show up and “clean house”? Are there places in your own life and/or culture where you suspect Jesus might “overturn some tables” if given the opportunity?

**What questions do you have?**

**What do you “wonder” about when reading these passages?**

## Commentary on John 2:13-22

(From the *Homiletics* archive; "Jesus Puts Business Out of Business" – March 11, 2012)

The account of Jesus' cleansing of the temple is a familiar one from the synoptic gospels. John's version here in 2:13-22, however, is quite distinct in terms of its placement within the larger gospel and is worth examining in comparison to the synoptics' accounts in this regard. The most obvious difference between John and the synoptic versions of this pericope is its placement here at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, rather than at the end.

Commentators on this text have long struggled to explain this overt inconsistency. In the synoptics, Jesus' brazen action of taking on the religious establishment in Jerusalem serves as a fitting impetus for his impending arrest, trial and crucifixion. John's placement of this event at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry thus seems odd, given that the gospel's audience has scarcely been introduced to the protagonist before he takes this daring step to incite leading religious authorities. Solutions to the problem of John's placement of this incident have centered around three possibilities: 1) that the cleansing occurred at the end of Jesus' ministry (as in the synoptics), 2) that the cleansing occurred at the beginning of Jesus' ministry (as here in John), and 3) that there were two such temple-cleansing events, one at the beginning and one at the end of Jesus' public ministry. While the third option has been largely called into question, commentators remain divided between the first two possibilities. If John's placement of this incident is accepted, the Fourth Gospel is the only one of the gospels to include three separate Passover celebrations (2:13, 6:4, 11:55), and it is from these distinct Passovers from which the dating of Jesus' public ministry to three years is typically calculated.

The issue of the pericope's placement aside, the details of this Johannine account warrant exploration on their own terms. The qualifier in 2:13 that the Passover was of the Jews may be a subtle clue that the evangelist was a part of a Christian community which no longer took part in this major Jewish festival. On every occasion of the mention of the Passover in the synoptics (15 in all), the festival is never qualified as a specifically Jewish practice. However, both here and in 6:4, John makes clear to his audience that Passover is an explicitly Jewish custom, apparently distinct from the Christian practices with which he is familiar.

While the thrust of much of John's narrative here is remarkably similar to that of the synoptics, his vocabulary is distinct. The word translated "money changers" in verse 14 (κερματισταί) appears only here in all of the New Testament. However, in verse 15, John switches words to adopt the term for "money changer" (κολλυβιστών) which is used in Matthew (21:12) and Mark (11:15). Likewise, while the Synoptics use only one word for "temple" (ιερόν), John switches from the use of this word in verses 14-15 to another (ναός) in verses 19-21 when Jesus enters into debate with his Jewish interlocutors.

John's accounting of this incident is also unique from the synoptics in its addition of animals. Where Mark and Matthew make mention only of those selling doves (and Luke omits animal references altogether), John includes oxen and sheep among the wares of the temple peddlers. However, despite this addition, the Johannine Jesus treats the mammal vendors differently than the bird vendors. While the former are driven out by his makeshift whip (v. 15), the latter are merely issued a verbal warning to vacate the premises (v. 16). In fact, this warning in the Greek makes use of a creative play on the word "house," which is unfortunately lost in many English translations. Literally, Jesus tells the dove merchants, "Do not make the house of my father a house of market (οικονεμπορίου)!"

The report in verse 17 that Jesus' disciples recall the text of Psalm 69:9 (68:10 LXX) likely refers to a later, post-resurrection memory. Three times in the gospel, John notes that the disciples remember words about or by Jesus (2:17, 2:22, 12:16), and two of these occasions are found in this pericope. The disciples are always the subject of this verb, and it always appears in the simple past tense. Here in v. 17 where the disciples are credited with specifically recalling the text of Psalm 69:9, the quoted text does not exactly match its septuagint counterpart. The Psalm text makes use of a past tense verb ("has consumed," κατεφαγεν) whereas the quoted text here uses a future tense ("will consume," καταφαγεται).

The change in tenses leads some commentators to suggest that the quotation of this verse may be a foreshadowing, even here in the second chapter of the gospel, of the death that will eventually consume Jesus because of the very sort of zeal which he displays in this pericope. Although the synoptics seem to use this event as a segue into Jesus' arrest, John may be using it as an early hint of things to come.

John's placement of the following dispute with the Jews is unique to the fourth gospel as is the reference to the 46 years of construction on the temple. Commentators as early as Irenaeus in the second century have wondered if the figure 46 may be a veiled reference to Jesus' age. The criticism by Jesus' Jewish interlocutors in 8:57 ("You are not yet fifty years old") could also seem to support such an idea. Clever as this alleged allusion may be, however, pressing it too hard for historical information about Jesus' age may be a mistake.

Following this brief dispute with the Jews, John again reports an instance of the disciples' remembering, this time making it clear that their memory is triggered after Jesus was raised from the dead. The passive verb here ("was raised," *ηγεροθη*) is common in the New Testament's references to Jesus' resurrection and may be considered a divine passive which understands God the Father as the implicit subject responsible for the raising of Jesus. In any case, it is noteworthy that even here so close to the beginning of the gospel, the Evangelist is already giving his audience a hint at what is to transpire in the contentious ministry of Jesus which will conclude with his crucifixion and resurrection by the end of the gospel.

## Additional Resources

- [“The Text this Week”](#) – a huge archive of commentaries, blogs, sermons, etc. Note – this site collects resources related to ALL of the lectionary texts for this week...not all will relate to the Matthew passage we are studying, but many will. You will have to sift!
- Check out the commentaries and additional resources available for this Sunday (and others!) at [WorkingPreacher.org](http://WorkingPreacher.org).