



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

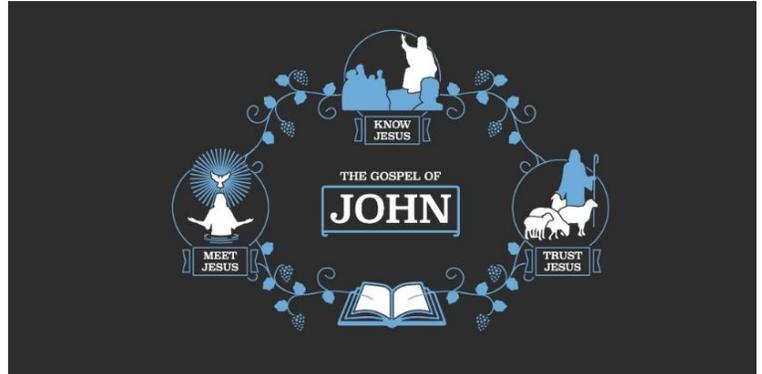
SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Surprise Inspection

The Gospel of John

John 2:13–25

Tim Badal | September 26, 2021



Turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of John. We'll be in chapter two this morning, as we continue in our series looking at this Gospel. In the process, we are learning what it means to meet Jesus, what it means to learn and follow Jesus, what it means to trust Jesus.

This morning we come to a passage of Scripture that gets us a bit troubled. We see a side of Jesus that maybe we don't see so often, and as a result we can misinterpret what John is trying to tell us as God's people—what we need to know about Jesus and what we need to know about ourselves. This is a passage where we see Jesus getting angry. He's upset and frustrated by the state of spiritual affairs in the nation of Israel.

The question I want us to ask this morning is, "What would Jesus say of our spiritual affairs? What would Jesus say if He was a part of our lives? Would He like what He sees? Would He affirm the activities, thoughts and aspirations we have? Or just as He did in the temple, would He begin to knock over things in our lives and call out areas of sin, so there can be a cleansing in our lives as there was that day in the temple?"

Surprise inspections. In the military, your commanding officer will show up unannounced and check how your barracks are, how your personal items have been stowed away as the army has required. In the classroom, the teacher will surprise you with a pop quiz, wanting to determine if you've retained the knowledge and information they have taught you over the past few days. In the government world, whether it's banking or other areas of government work, regulators will come and audit the books. They'll want to make sure everything is in its proper place. In my second job as a caterer, the health department will come from time to time, unannounced, to inspect and make sure everything is being done properly so the public safety is not in peril.

You see, surprise inspections in our lives serve as a way to tell the true picture or story of what's going on. We're creatures of habit, so if we know an inspection is coming, we'll clean everything up. We'll right all the wrongs so we are prepared and have nothing out of place. Surprise inspections give the truest assessment of what normal life looks like.

You see, on that day in Jerusalem, Jesus gave a surprise inspection on the spiritual life of the Israelites. They couldn't clean up in advance because they didn't know, because He came unannounced. They didn't have opportunities to right all the wrongs, so the truest expression of their worship was on display.

Let's be honest: what Jesus saw, He didn't like. He demonstrated that frustration and anger in the process of cleansing the temple. So before us we have a passage that causes us to examine our lives and evaluate as Jesus does inspections from time to time in our lives.

Now as we come to this text, I want to mention a couple things. I want to work through the text, but as quickly as possible, I want to get to the application, because if we just look at this event, the focus will be too much on the people in that one experience and we'll take the onus off ourselves. So let's look at a couple things before we get to our outline.

First of all, if you're a Bible student and you've been studying the Bible for any length of time, you know that the other three Gospel writers record a cleansing of the temple as well. So what's the big deal? This helps us harmonize the Gospels. Here's the problem. In John's Gospel, the cleansing of the temple takes place in chapter two, at the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry. This

is right on the heels of Him calling His first disciples. This is on the heels of the first miracle at the wedding reception in Cana of Galilee. On the other hand, the other three Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—record a cleansing of the temple right after the triumphal entry. It's between the parade on Palm Sunday and the arrest of Jesus on Thursday. Of course, liberal scholars love this, because they say, "This is a contradiction. This shows that the Bible writers didn't have the real story all worked out together." But as we look at the Scriptures, there are a couple ways we can explain this.

First—and this is the view I hold—this wasn't the only time Jesus cleansed the temple. He went to Jerusalem numerous times and it seems as if He cleanses the temple on two different occasions. One was at the beginning of His earthly ministry; one was at the end. This would have been in line with how the prophets did things. They would have an inaugural message at the beginning of their ministry, then they would have a concluding message at the end of their ministry. It would seem that if Jesus was coming in the line of the prophets to be the final One Who would be the spokesperson for God, He would have a beginning statement for the temple and the people of Israel, then also an ending statement.

Another way we could look at it, to help us understand that this isn't a contradiction, is the simple fact of what we learned in week one of this series. That is, John isn't about the what of Jesus' life—the details of His life—as much as he is about the why. This is an important event, but it isn't as important to know when it happened in Jesus' life. What is important is why John recorded it. What application will people take away from this singular event?

Either way, we can have confidence that what we're reading is trustworthy and good, not full of contradictions.

So now let's observe a couple things. First, let's look at our text. Right at the beginning, John wants to put a time stamp on the events that are about to take place. Verse 13 says, "*The Passover of the Jews was at hand.*" As Gentiles in the 21st century, the Passover means nothing to us. For us, this could have easily said, "On Wednesday Jesus was in Jerusalem." But for the Jewish people, the Passover was the most significant time in the entire year. There wasn't a more sacred, more spiritual time than the time of the Passover.

For the Israelites, the Passover was a time to remember what God had done when He delivered them from the Egyptians. Their forefathers had been enslaved for 400 years, then God, by His grace, mercy and power, had given them their freedom. He had done this in the most amazing way, by taking the firstborn in all of Egypt. The Israelites were told to take the blood of a sacrificed lamb and put in on the doorposts, so the angel of death would pass over their home. Through the years, they needed to remember the goodness of God that ministered to them in their hour of greatest need. So the Passover was always a time of remembrance.

It was also a time of repentance. That's why all the Israelites were called to bring sacrifices to the temple. They were to pay the penalty for their sins, to have a "scapegoat" that would lay down its life so the people might live. In fact, the ancient historian Josephus wrote that in A.D. 65 more than 265,000 animals were sacrificed in one year in Jerusalem. It was the way the people got right with God.

Passover was also a time of rejoicing, knowing that one day their Messiah would come. When that happened, they would no longer need to look back, but instead to look forward. They knew the time would come when the Messiah would come to right every wrong. The prophets spoke of the day when He would bring peace and hope, as well as the Kingdom of God would come from heaven down to earth. It was a time of incredible commemoration and celebration, and John does not want us to miss it.

Continuing in our text, it says, "*The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*" This was not just an ordinary day in the capital city of Israel. This was a busy time. As Josephus said, in one year over a quarter million animals were sacrificed. Let's assume that each of those sacrifices involved a family, let's say a family of four. That means that when Jesus arrived, there could have been upwards of a million people in and around Jerusalem. It would have been a place full of bustling activity and excitement. It was the great goal of every Israelite to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem. In fact, many had special savings accounts where they put away money for the opportunity when their family could journey to Jerusalem. There they would be with God's people in this most holy of days. Their goal was the same as Jesus' in this verse.

But Jesus didn't just hang out in Jerusalem. He went to a specific spot. Verse 14 starts, "*In the temple...*" Our translation can hinder us here, because we think He could have been in any part of the temple, but the Greek word refers to the outer court of the temple, called the "Court of the Gentiles." In this area, anyone could come to pay homage to God. It wasn't the most holy place; it was the outer place. We know this because the word here is different from the word Jesus used in verse 19, where He said, "*Destroy this temple...*" There Jesus was talking about destroying the most holy place, referring to His own body.

So the Israelites would make a long pilgrimage to be in Jerusalem, the holy city, during the most holy season, to enter the most holy place. There was no place more sacred than the temple. That's where the people of God could draw near to their God along with other worshipers. It was a time of receiving grace when their sacrifices were received. They could return home with their consciences cleared, filled with gratitude that God remembered their sins no more. It was also a time and place where God would receive His most glory, where people would worship and adore Him.

When Jesus shows up, what does He see?

On that fateful day when Jesus walked into the temple, what did He see? On this most significant day, in this most significant city, what did Jesus see? Verse 14 tells us this: *"In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there."*

Wait a minute. You would have thought, after your journey to Jerusalem to be a part of this most special day, that when you got there it would have been so worshipful. It would have been a time of great reverence. There would be great celebration, but there would also be places where you could quiet your heart and get right with God, communing with your Creator. But when Jesus arrived, what He saw was a barnyard.

Now, let's envision a barnyard for a moment. It's not the most effective place to have quiet times or even celebratory times of worship. Animals do gross things. They smell bad. They do things you don't want to see and they don't tell you they're going to do them. It is a gross experience.

So here is Jesus, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world, and He's in a place that's designed to worship His Father in heaven—and it is a barnyard, with all the sights, sounds and smells that come with animals. Why would that be? It doesn't take a Bible scholar to ask the question why would there be animals in a place of worship? There's a reasonable answer. In Jerusalem, especially if you traveled from far away, you wouldn't bring your sacrifice. It would be too difficult. So you would purchase your sacrifice from one of the farmers along the way. This was convenient. But here's the crazy thing. There were laws within the Talmud that said it was unlawful to charge exorbitant fees for these animals. So the farmers who lived in the Jerusalem suburbs knew it was okay for them to sell animals, but it had to be without extortion.

Here's the problem. When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, He came under the oversight of Annas, the high priest. The temple had a new nickname based on what Annas allowed. They called it the "Bazaar of Annas" or the "Circus of Annas." It had become a place of mockery instead of a place of worship. Picture this. You come from far off with your family. You're making this once-in-a-lifetime journey and you know it's too difficult to bring your prize lamb. You've heard from others that as you approach Jerusalem, maybe in Bethany or Cana or another nearby city, you can purchase a lamb from a fellow Israelite to be sacrificed. So you buy it there. You're all excited. You're on the steps of the temple, about to go into the courts.

Then there before you is a priest. He looks at you; you look at him. He looks at your animal and starts to examine it. Then he says, "This animal isn't good enough." He doesn't tell you why. He doesn't explain the defect. The animal looks totally fine to you, a choice animal to be given to the greatest of recipients, God Himself. So the priest says, "I'm sorry, but that animal isn't good enough. However, today is your lucky day. I have another animal I can sell to you." Historians tell us these animals would then be sold at exorbitant prices. The people were told, "Because you weren't prepared, you now have to pay a higher price. You'll have to pay a convenience fee because we had to get these animals for you." Frustrated, but still wanting to obey God and believing the priest represents God to you, you agree to pay the price for a new animal.

Now there's a new problem. Your money would have come from one of three places in the Near East. It would have come from Egypt, Greece or Rome. Those were the three types of "precious metal" currencies. There were other currencies around, but those were the trade currencies and what most people would have been carrying. So now you're paying more than you planned, but it still is something you want to do in this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for worship. So with a lump in your throat, you pull out your money. Then the priest says, "That's great, but we don't accept Egyptian, Greek or Roman money. That's dirty money from dirty governments and dirty countries. You're a Jew, so we need money from you." There was a minority currency called the "Galilean shekel" that was only in the possession of the priests themselves. Therefore, what the priest would tell you next is, "You've got to go see the moneychangers at the table over there to have your currency exchanged. And because you brought sinful money into the holy place of God, we're going to charge a convenience fee on that as well."

So before the people could ever enter the temple, they had been cleaned out of all their money. This is what made the priests in Jesus' day so rich and powerful. Instead of welcoming the people of God into the worship of God, they were hindering them from getting close to Him.

Listen to me. None of this was in the 613 commands of Moses. There was nothing in the Old Testament law that said you couldn't use other money. In fact, we know that Jesus Himself used Roman money to pay taxes. Regarding these animals, the law stated that the sacrifice needed to be "the best of your flock." It didn't need to be evaluated by the priest. What did Jesus see? Jesus saw people making a mockery of worship, so He got angry and began knocking over tables.

This reminds us that anger in itself is not sinful, if it is done for a righteous purpose. Jesus poured out the moneychangers' coins. He then went to those who were selling the pigeons and said, *"Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade"* (John 2:16). Then His disciples remembered a passage from the book of Malachi that said, *"Zeal for your house will consume me"* (John 2:17). In verse 18, after Jesus has done this, we would think the priests—who are to be concerned about the holiness of God's people—would have said something like, "Hey, we weren't expecting You here today, Jesus. We weren't expecting an inspection. You've pointed out the areas where we need to fix our religion, so we need to take this under advisement." They would then say, "No animal selling at exorbitant fees? Fine. We'll take care of that. Next time You come, it will have been addressed. We won't charge exchange rates that make people paupers and we won't hinder people from worshiping You. We'll do everything we can to help them. We've got this on our list and we'll take care of it." But instead of responding this way, these priests changed the subject.

When Jesus shows up, don't try to change the subject.

It's clear that the priests knew what they were doing was wrong. So in verses 18-21, after Jesus had overturned the tables, they had the audacity, not to agree with Him, but to put Him on trial. They started asking Him questions. *"What sign do you show us for doing these things?"*

It would be like me failing a health inspection in my catering company. There's food sitting out with flies all over it. Maggots are growing...I know this is grossing you out. Then the health inspector says, "This is not how you run a kitchen." What if I respond, "Hey, why don't you tell me the classes you took that enabled you to become a health inspector?" He would say, "Wait a minute. I've got the badge. I'm in authority here. I don't have to tell you why I have the right to call you out. Stop changing the subject." Isn't that what we do when God calls us out in our sin? When God sees things in our lives that need to change and tells us that?

When God first came into the garden after Adam and Eve sinned, do you know what Adam did? He changed the subject. He started blaming Eve and God, "That woman You gave me..." He was saying, "It's not my fault I'm in this predicament; it's her fault and Your fault."

How often do we do this when God calls out our sins? Instead of accepting the blame, we point to other people. "Well, at least I'm not as bad as them." Or, "It's because You put this person in my life, or You allowed these circumstances in my life, that's why I've sinned. You're the problem." Blaming God for our sin goes all the way back to Eden. It's as old as the first century temple. We are prone to do this as well. When God's convicting voice comes, we want to deflect it and change the subject.

When Jesus shows up, listen carefully to what He says.

Jesus then answered them in verse 19, *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."* The Jews responded, *"It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?"* They're not listening to what He was saying. That's the other thing we need to think about. When Jesus shows up, we need to listen carefully to what He says.

We have proof that these Jews did not listen to Him. On three different occasions in the Gospels, we see this very passage quoted. Every time, however, it is misquoted. In fact, it's during the time of Jesus' arrest and trial when the Jews were asked why He should be killed, so they brought a witness who heard Him say this. But the witness' testimony went like this: "He said, 'I will destroy this temple.'" What Jesus had in fact said was that they would destroy the temple. These people weren't listening. He was telling them things they needed to hear, but they weren't willing to really listen.

If you were to do a Google search on this passage using the words "Jesus cleansing the temple sermons," you would see a lot of people who have a low view of Jesus and a low view of Scripture. They'll start pointing fingers at Him. "Why would Jesus get this

angry? It's so unbecoming of Him to be like this." Wait a minute. This passage is really about us examining ourselves. Why are we taking the spotlight off ourselves and putting it on Jesus? I read one sermon that said, "This is one reason why Jesus could not have been the Son of God, because the Son of God surely would never get angry; . God is a God of love and grace. This wrath, judgment and condemnation doesn't fit Who He is."

Do you see what happens when we turn away from the examining eyes of our heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ? We deflect His words. We change what He says and we change what He does, because we don't want the heat. But this isn't what the disciples did. The disciples heard Jesus' words and put them in their memory banks. When Jesus died on the cross and three days later was raised from the dead, then they understood what He had told them. They were therefore emboldened by their realization that even as He began His ministry, He had a plan and purpose and agenda. Everything fell together as it was supposed to because He was God. When Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, He gave us new life in Him.

This text calls us all to examine and evaluate our spiritual lives.

Now, what are we to do with all this? What are we in the 21st century, here in our American lives, supposed to do with this very Jewish passage of Scripture, talking about a Jewish holiday in a Jewish temple? We might be quick to say, "Those losers got it badly wrong. They blew it."

I want you to know that the most important truth you and I can take from this text is the reality that Jesus has authority over our spirituality, just as He did then. If Jesus has this authority, then He can cleanse whatever He wants to in our spiritual lives, just as He had every right to cleanse the temple. Just as Jesus came to inspect the first-century worship, He comes in our century to inspect our worship and our living. He's going to start pointing out things in our lives. How does He do this? Does He physically come in, like a mom would come into her kids' bedrooms, knocking things over and pulling out the drawers of our lives, saying, "This place is a mess"? My mom once did that.

No, Jesus does is a little more subtly. Later in the Gospel of John, Jesus tells His disciples of One Who would come—the Holy Spirit—Who will convict us of our sin. The Holy Spirit, Who resides in each of us, points out certain areas in our lives that need attention.

We know about these areas and we struggle with them often, trying to say no to them. These are things we don't want our spouse, our kids, our parents, our friends, our pastor or our small group to know about. But the Holy Spirit has been telling us about them over and over again. Will we do anything about them?

There's a little interlude at the end of our passage today that goes like this: "

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.

The reason Jesus can do this inspecting work is because He knows us better than we know ourselves. Jesus knows what resides in men and women. So today, God is calling us to examine and evaluate our lives. Maybe today He's doing a surprise inspection and is looking over your life. It's easy to say, "Well, I didn't bring a cow to church and I didn't extort any money today." But maybe this morning you came in here with deceit in your heart, a lying tongue, covetous eyes or a lustful heart. In a group like this, there's no doubt a litany of sins because we all sin and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

So as we enter here today, a place designed to be where God's people gather and receive God's grace, where God can receive glory, where Jesus through the teaching of His Word begins to convict us of our sins, will we stop and examine and evaluate the things God sees?

Let me tell you, I'm preaching this to myself. When God sees the things in my life, will I try to change the subject when He brings them up? Will I start saying, "Well, at least I'm not as bad as that person. At least I'm doing this, that and the other thing, while they're not"? Or will I blame God for my sin?

We live in a culture right now that wants to blame God for sin. It's usually phrased like this: "God made me this way." That's deflection. The Holy Spirit is convicting people of sin, but the response often is, "God, You made me this way, s. o it's not my problem; it's Your problem."

Will you prove your belief in God by allowing the Refiner to do His work, by calling out sin and agreeing with God, through the Holy Spirit? "Yes God, You're right. I do have a problem here. Yeah, I've made a mockery of my walk with You because of this and I agree with You. I agree because You are God and You know me better than I know myself. You're the One Who bought me with a price, so now I am the temple of the Holy Spirit. You have every right, just as You did in the first century, to come into this temple and tell me where I'm blowing it. As a child of Yours, full of the grace and mercy You've bestowed on me and the goodness You've allowed to follow me all the days of my life, I'm going to agree with you. More than that, I'm going to take action to do what is necessary so I can live an upright and holy life until You return."

Let me ask you two questions. These aren't exhaustive, but these questions point to the issues that got the Jews into trouble.

Is my spiritual life full of godly passion or personal gain?

Jesus is zealous for His Father and for holiness, but are you? Or do you see this life as an opportunity to feed yourself, care for yourself and comfort yourself, seeking to live the life you desire instead of the life God desires? That's the problem. Is your life about God and His passions, purposes, and plans, or is it about what you get out of it?

Is my spiritual life full of distractions or devotions?

Jesus was upset because the place of God was full of distractions. The animals weren't sinful; there was nothing inherently wrong with them. They just served as a distraction from what was intended to be done.

Are you having difficulty hearing the interrogations of God because you're so distracted, even by good or okay things that keep you from the greatest thing which is following Jesus? What needs to change in your heart? What needs to change in your life?

Here's the great grace. You say, "A lot needs to change. It seems like every time you get up there, Tim, and you call us out for this stuff," as I'm calling myself out as well. "There are more and more things I need to do. I just can't fix it. Every time Jesus comes into this temple, He finds it in disarray."

Let me tell you something. If you will confess your sins, Jesus is faithful to cleanse you of all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). He wants to forgive you. Maybe this is just another day when you think, "My temple is a mess," but Jesus says, "That's why I came. I came to seek and save that which was lost. I came to make the unholy, holy. I came to make those who are dead, alive." Jesus is saying to you today, "If you will humble yourself and draw near to Me, I will draw near to you." When you do, you will not experience the wrath of God or the punishment of God. Instead, you'll receive the loving discipline, like that of a parent who loves his child and longs for the child to live the best life the parent could ever desire for their child. In the same way, God longs for you to live in holiness and peace, filled with joy. But it means you must agree with Him when He comes and does His inspection. Amen?

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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