

How did Jesus Cleanse the Temple?

By Frank Zimmerman

HOW did Jesus cleanse the Temple? Jesus did not exercise judgment by physically beating people. You will find absolutely no record of that in the story. But our carnal reasoning puts in that kind of interpretation because we naturally tend to think that flesh is the greatest force.

Matthew 21

¹² And Jesus went into the temple of God, and **cast out all them** that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves.

How did He cast them out? It doesn't exactly say. But we tend to read into it what our flesh counts as the only effective force: carnal strength. But in the kingdom of God, flesh counts for nothing:

2 Corinthians 10

⁴ The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.

Any man who has struggled against sin, and tried by will power, promises, resolves, self-denials, and personal torments, to overcome sin, knows in himself that these fleshly methods all fail in the end. But simple surrender and unyielding faith, prevail.

The patriarch Jacob, after many long years of consequences, learned to forsake his fleshly ideas and schemes to further God's work. He returned to the land of promise under God's direction, but was concerned about his brother Esau, whom he had unjustly tricked out of the birthright many years before.

As he prayed during the night, he felt the touch of an unknown person, and assuming it to be an assailant or robber, wrestled with him. Though he believed himself to be trusting God's power wholly, his actions in this case revealed that there was still some confidence in his own ability to deliver himself.

So the divine visitor allowed Jacob to struggle. Finally, as the daybreak came, the Angel touched his thigh and it was immediately crippled. Jacob finally realized he was wrestling with a divine agency, and clung to him, pleading his great need:

Genesis 32

²⁶ I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

He refused to relent, and because he came in the right attitude, as one feeling his desperate need, and seeing help in none other but God, he was blessed. Jacob had come to the place where there was no longer any confidence in fleshly power, but only in the word of God. At that point, Jacob knew he was safe against his brother. If God was with him, no earthly power could work against him.

The Christian battle is spiritual. It is a fight against unbelief and the sin which flows from it, and must be won within the human.

1 John 5

⁴ This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.

A man who has nothing between himself and God, is secure to do whatever God wills. He cannot be overcome so long as he maintains his trust in God, and obedience to God's commands. He wins others to God's kingdom not by physical force or fear, but by bringing them the same experience of inward victory that he has experienced. The power which attends him is the power of the Holy Spirit, who convicts people of sin, righteousness, and judgment.¹

On the other hand, the kingdoms of this world who count themselves as "righteous" work this way:

1. First they try negotiation, rewards, privileges, promises.
2. When these fail, then they try threats, sanctions, fines, imprisonments.

¹ *John 16:8*

3. And when these fail, then finally carnal force (guns, bombs, war) are the last resort.

This is how the kingdoms of the world work, because their confidence is in the arm of flesh. That doesn't mean they don't pray. Often they do pray most earnestly that God will bless their efforts and give them success. But so did Jacob before he wrestled with the Angel of the Lord!

But as Jacob learned, and as the nations need to learn, Christ's kingdom is entirely different. The power is in the word of God, and in the presence of the Holy Spirit to convict of sin.

This was the power that Jesus lived by. It was by the word of the Lord that He was protected from Herod, when the angel warned His parents to flee to Egypt; it was by the word that He gained the victory over Satan in the wilderness; it was by the word that He healed the sick; and it was by the word of His gospel that hearts were won to His kingdom.

Luke 4

³¹ And came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days.

³² And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power.

During His ministry, Jesus found a man who also had implicit confidence in the word, and called attention to it:

Matthew 8

⁸ The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.

⁹ For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goes; and to another, Come, and he comes; and to my servant, Do this, and he does it.

¹⁰ When Jesus heard it, he marveled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

Notice that the centurion only asked one thing: “speak the word only.” Only the word. There was no need for doctors, armies, signs or wonders...just “speak the word only.” This is what would heal his servant. And Jesus commended this as “great faith”.

Having established that Jesus exercised His authority by the word of God, we tend to think that in the cleansing of the Temple, Christ had to do “something more.” In this case, we assume, the word alone was not enough. We think that He made a big display of physical strength (like some Kung Fu master in the movies) which so impressed the money-changers that they ran for their lives. But this makes no sense, especially in light of the Bible description of Christ as “harmless.”²

One man, armed with a “scourge of small cords” is hardly a threat to a bunch of greedy financial dealers, nor would it make them run away from their much-loved money. You can test this out. Walk into any bank with a “scourge of small cords” and try to chase them all out. They will either laugh at you, or quickly tackle you to the ground until the police arrive. It was no different back then. These men loved their money, and their business was also supported by all the authorities in the temple. You can be sure there were men there ready to stop robbers and thieves from interfering with the business.

So how did it really look? How is spiritual power exercised? Christ came into the temple and the Holy Spirit so filled Him and convicted those in the room, that they felt as if they were in the presence of the Judge of all the earth.

How do we know this was so? Because we are told that it will be so again at the Second Advent, when the wicked seek to hide in the rocks and caves to hide from His face.³ Please note that they are trying to “hide from His face,” not from flames of fire, or

² Hebrews 7:26.

³ Revelation 6:16.

lightning bolts! In the message to the church of Thyatira, Christ describes Himself as one with...

Revelation 2

¹⁸ ...eyes like unto a flame of fire...

²³ ...which searches the reins and hearts.

Adam and Eve also, after their sin in the garden,

Genesis 3

⁸ ...hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God.

So now those buyers and sellers felt their guilt and could not bear to look upon Him whose eyes searched their inmost secrets. In their overpowering sense of guilt and fear, they forgot all about their money, and fled to hide themselves from the Judge of all the earth.

This kind of authority can only be exercised with the cooperation of the mighty agency of the Holy Spirit, who only has power and authority to enter the minds and thoughts of people.

Revelation 2

²³ I am He which searches the reins and hearts.

1 Corinthians 2

¹⁰ But God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things.

The whip in His hand was a sign of the divine retribution that was hanging over the Jewish nation. He turned over their tables as a sign and warning to them that their corrupt practices would come to nothing in the end. These symbolic warnings were literally fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem, 40 years later.

You can find this same spiritual power exercised in many other places in the word of God. For example:

- What protected Moses from the power of Pharaoh when he went down to Egypt completely unarmed? One simple soldier from the Egyptian army could have cut Moses to pieces at the command of Pharaoh...yet it never happened.

- What killed Annanias and Sapphira when they lied?
- How did Saul become one of the prophets when he came in the influence of the school of prophets?

These are only a few of the many examples of the power of the word and Spirit to overcome error, hatred, and sin. It is much more effective than mere fleshly power.

1 Thessalonians 1 [NASB]

⁵ For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

Now read the description of the cleansing of the Temple again:

Matthew 21

¹² And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves,

¹³ And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but you have made it a den of thieves.

¹⁴ And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple; and He healed them.

Notice that He clearly used the word of God (“It is written...”), which brought conviction. Those who clung to their sins were filled with fear, and fled. But those who were looking for healing did not flee, but instead came to Him, and found what their hearts desired.

Mere carnal force could not have produced such a result, for it would tend to frighten the weak ones more than the strong ones. If Jesus had used carnal force, the blind and lame would have fled first. But thank God, He only ever exercised the power of the word.

*Therefore, come to Him
all you weak ones,
and do not fear.*