

# WHIPS, WORSHIP, AND THE WAY OF JESUS

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### A. **Growing up with WWJD bracelets**

B. Assumes that we know, more or less, how Jesus would act  
In a given situation.

### C. ***But what about those times when...***

***Jesus doesn't seem to act very "Christ-like"?***

- Impatient and ill-tempered
- Refers to a foreigner as a "dog"
- Calls people "brood of vipers" and "children of hell"
- Or waves a whip and upturns tables

### D. ***Messes up our usual Anabaptist strategy***

***Of deflecting difficult passages by saying:***

***"But Jesus..."***

### E. ***The Cristo-centric hermeneutic doesn't work as well***

***When Jesus is the one raising hell!***

### F. ***Can't be ignored — All FOUR gospels include this account!***

### G. ***Before What Would Jesus Do?, now in our context...***

*We should ask:*

***What Was Jesus Doing?***

## 2. JOHN 2—IN HISTORY (VIOLENT)

A. According to Andy Alexis-Baker, the temple incident:

***"...has been one of the most popular episodes of Jesus' life,  
inspiring Christians from across the centuries to reflect on the scene."***

B. **Princeton University's Index of Christian Art—**

Lists 77 examples of artwork depicting this scene from the 6<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> Century

El Greco alone painted a handful of versions!

C. *Unfortunately, most have a similar feel and intensity to them*

D. **Rembrandt's (1626)—**

- Angry Jesus, whip raised
- Elderly woman, scampering out of the way
- Money changers trying to protect their faces from the whip

E. This was a typical depiction...

F. *As you can imagine, interpreting the passage in this way*

*Makes it easy to justify Christian use of force and violence*

G. *Which, tragically, is exactly how this passage has often been used*

*(Since the 5<sup>th</sup> Century)*

- **Augustine**— Used John 2 as a rationale for how to treat heretics

*“So we find... Christ a persecutor... [who] even bodily persecuted [others] with whippings.”*

- **Bruno of Segni**—

*“...if we want to imitate Christ... then we must violently evict simoniacs from the church.”*

- **John Calvin**— References John 2 against his critics:

In defense of his role in burning Michael Servetus at the stake

H. *This passage has had a sordid history!*

I. *Interestingly, though, the earliest and oldest readings of this passage*

*Look very different from the Rembrandt Jesus.*

*“The tradition that interprets Jesus’ activity as nonviolent is older than that which uses it to justify violence.”*

### 3. JOHN 2—IN HISTORY (NONVIOLENT)

A. John 2 — Variety of clues point in this direction

D. **First, highlighted in a story from Southeastern Turkey (598 A.D.)**

- Synod in Constantinople in (394 A.D.)
- Rabbula cites John 2 to justify hitting priests:  
*“Our Lord also struck people in the temple.”*
- Theodore of Mopsuestia rebukes him
- Jesus used words for people, cords for the animals

E. Greek grammar points in the direction of a nonviolent reading:

- **NRSV, NIV** – *“He drove them all out, the cattle and the sheep.”*

F. **Second**, the text (in context) also supports this:

- He speaks with those selling the doves after “all” are driven out

G. **Third**, if Jesus had used the whip on people:

- He would’ve been resisted and overcome
- The Roman garrison would’ve been there immediately
  - Roman military functioned to quell riots/rebellions (Acts 21)
  - Uprisings at Jewish festivals so common—extra soldiers sent

H. *Lastly, besides Greek grammar*

*Besides the textual/historical context*

*That make the “violent” reading of this passage so implausible*

*The early church simply saw it as contrary to the character of Christ*

I. **Origen—Spiritualized Reading**

*“... in Origen’s reading, the violent whip becomes nonviolent speech.”*

- *This was the “literal” reading for Origen*

*If the surface reading is implausible*

*Then it warrants a deeper, spiritual reading.*

J. The early church CLEARLY read this passage NONVIOLENTLY

The more you dig in, the more obvious that is.

K. *WWJD? — What was Jesus Doing (nonviolently)?*

#### 4. JOHN 2 — SELF-SACRIFICE

A. Seeing this scene, the disciples remember **Psalm 69:9**—

*“Zeal for your house consumes me...”*

B. If reading this passage with physical violence in mind,

Those words sound like uncontrolled, righteous anger.

C. *But that Psalm has the opposite meaning:*

*It’s about the Psalmist experiencing persecution because of loving God*

*Not about zealously loving God and then persecuting others who do not.*

*“Zeal for your house consumes me... the insults of those who insult you fall on me.”*

D. *John 2: NOT about justifying “righteous violence” toward others*

*It’s about conscious self-sacrifice for others.*

E. Each of the gospels—but especially John—

Links this episode to Jesus death.

***“By what authority do you do these things?”***

***“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it in three days...”***

F. Jesus knew such actions could precipitate his death;

yet he does it consciously, willingly, intentionally.

G. ***Jesus had been to the temple before!***

***Probably MANY times before!***

***And this probably wasn't a new practice.***

H. ***Jesus had his wits about him***

***He knew what he was doing.***

***This was a conscious, prophetic, self-sacrificial act.***

## 5. THE TEMPLE SCENE — LOVE

A. **Other gospels — *“My house shall be called a house of prayer...”***

**Quoting Isaiah 56:** About God gathering in ALL nations/peoples

***“My house shall be called a house of prayer for ALL people.”***

B. This passage takes place in the outer courts of the temple

The only place on the temple grounds where Gentiles could worship.

C. The Second Temple—

- Inner section for Jewish men
- Lower inner section for Jewish women
- Outer court for the Gentiles — Where the “cleansing” takes place

D. This separation was marked with signs:

***Gentiles who cross do so at risk to their lives.***

Probably referenced in Ephesians 2 as: ***“the dividing wall of hostility”***

E. ***For Jesus, the issue wasn't that these services***

***Were being offered for temple worshippers...***

F. ***The issue was the distracting/displacing location!***

***They were crowding/commercializing the worship space of the Gentiles.***

## 6. CONCLUSION

### A. *So WWJD — What Was Jesus Doing?*

- He was making room for ALL God's children to worship together
- He was offering his very BODY and LIFE

To create a NEW TEMPLE, A NEW PEOPLE, A NEW CREATION

### B. *But what about today — What Would Jesus Do?... Now?*