

THE BETTER TEMPLE

John 2:12-25

RESTORATION FROM CORRUPTION

13 *The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*

The Passover was one of three pilgrim feasts where Jews were required to come to Jerusalem to observe and celebrate the Passover. This meant that three times a year, the normal population of Jerusalem (about 100-150 thousand) would swell to close to a million people.

Passover commemorated that pivotal time in Israel's history when God used Moses to deliver his people from slavery through a series of 10 plagues. On the final plague, Moses told Pharaoh that the Angel of Death was coming to kill the firstborn son in every home in Egypt. The only way of protection was to take the blood of an innocent lamb and paint the door frame of their house — thus marking them for protection. And because that night marked the birth of a nation and their emancipation from slavery — they were to remember that night each year.

14 *In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there.*

The Temple Complex is massive. Just before the birth of Christ, King Herod had taken the modest Temple Plaza and built it up into an impressive complex. It was 10 stories high and measured 144,000 square meters (over 1.5 million square feet) — the equivalent of 30 football fields. His renovation project made the Temple in Jerusalem the largest sacred site in the Roman Empire.

In the Court of the Gentiles, Jesus saw merchants selling oxen, sheep, and pigeons as well as money changers. These animals were used in the sacrificial worship at the Temple. And for people traveling long distances, it was nice to be able to buy the sacrificial animal in Jerusalem as opposed to bringing it with them from afar where it could get injured or blemished on the journey. The animals had to be kept spotless in order to qualify as a sacrifice.

And the money changers are there because each year at you were required to pay the temple tax. The money-changers converted your foreign currency into the approved currency with a small charge for their service.

15 *And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. 16 And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."*

Jesus isn't harming and whipping people in fury of rage. That kind of scene would've got him arrested by the Roman Guard stationed at the Temple. This isn't a leather whip or anything like that. It's a quick makeshift whip of cords from what he could find. It's enough to drive out the animals and get people's attention, but not to physically harm people. At the same time — He is not casually asking people to clear the area. He's stirred and provoked with with a righteous and holy anger. And he intends to make a dramatic statement.

Now that's shocking to us because we usually think of anger as categorically and always wrong. But anger isn't categorically wrong. Sinful anger is wrong. Holy anger or righteous anger is not wrong.

Let's define anger — Anger is an emotional response to a perceived wrong that demands justice.

Another way to say the same thing is this: Anger is love in motion to protect what you love. It's love in motion to protect what you love.

So that means — righteous anger responds at the right time, with the right proportion, and for the right reasons.

Sinful anger responds at the wrong time, with a disproportionate response, motivated by the wrong reasons.

The Bible tells us that Jesus lived a perfectly sinless life which would include sinful anger. There's lots of verses that confirm this, but I'll give you two for the sake of time.

Hebrews 4:15

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

1 Peter 2:22

He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

So Jesus gets angry at the Temple at the right time, with the right proportion, for the right reasons.

So that begs the question — what's provoking him?

It's not that the sale of sacrificial animals to pilgrim worshippers was sinful. It's not that exchanging your currency was sinful. It's not even that the merchants had to charge a fee for their services. Jesus doesn't take issue with these valuable and much needed services.

His problem is that they've turned his Father's house of worship into a marketplace.

D. A. Carson writes, "Instead of solemn dignity and the murmur of prayer, there is the bellowing of cattle and the bleating of sheep. Instead of brokenness and contrition, holy adoration and prolonged petition, there is noisy commerce."

This area was supposed to be a place of worship and prayer. It was a place to prepare your heart as you drew near to the actual Temple.

See when you lay down an animal on the altar to be sacrificed, you should be thinking — this should be me. For my sin, I deserve death. That's the whole point of the sacrifice. The animal takes your place. The sacrifice receives the punishment. Justice is served on it — instead of me.

You should be thinking of all the ways you haven't loved God with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. You should be thinking of all the ways you've failed to love your neighbor as yourself. And you should say — the lamb was slain — in my place — and now I'm spared.

Not only that, it was the only place the Gentiles could come to worship since they weren't allowed inside the Temple Court. To take the only place where the Gentiles are allowed to come and worship and turn it into a noisy, disrupted marketplace is insensitive at best and religious arrogance at worst.

The prophet Isaiah says that the Temple was to be a house of prayer for all peoples.

Isaiah 56:7

...for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."

And in his holy zeal — one man among thousands — says ENOUGH! People and animals head for the exit. Tables are flipped over, money is flying around as Jesus restores order in his Father’s house.

This scene should challenge our conception of Jesus as the meek and mild, soft spoken, guy who just goes with the flow. He is the gentle lamb who gives His life to take away the sins of the world. But He is also the Lion of Judah.

In C.S. Lewis’s Chronicles of Narnia Series, there’s a scene in the Voyage of the Dawn Treader at the very end. Lucy and Edmund are walking in a grassy field and in the distance they see a lamb cooking breakfast. The Lamb invites them to eat and they start talking with the lamb about how to get to the land of Aslan. And as the lamb starts to explain, a marvelous thing happens.

...as he spoke, his snowy white flushed into tawny gold and his size changed and he was Aslan himself, towering above them and scattering light from his mane.

Lewis is beautifully showing us the truth of the Bible — that the Lamb is the Lion and the Lion is the Lamb. Like a lamb he is gentle and meek — but — like a Lion He is also regal and ferocious. The Bible doesn’t pit those against each other. In Christ, they perfectly meet.

As the lamb, he comforts us and takes away our sin. As the Lion, he disrupts and calls us to action.

Pastor Tim Keller writes,

If Jesus Christ comes into your life, he will, on the one hand, sometimes fill your table with a feast and other times, he will turn your table over and spill everything on the ground. If he has the ability to fill your table, he has to have the right to overturn it. How can he be the Lord of the wine if he’s not Lord of the whips?

The Temple had become corrupt and noisy. Jesus restored order through judgment.

REQUEST FOR CREDENTIALS

18 So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” 19 Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

What happens next is exactly what you’d expect. The Jewish Authorities show up and start asking questions. They want some see some credentials — some kind of authenticating sign to justify this display of authority.

If the leadership had eyes to see — if they were willing to spend a moment in reflective prayer — they would know that they already witnessed the sign. The clearing of the temple was the sign.

Remember, in John’s Gospel, signs are public works of Jesus that show that Jesus is the one in whom we are to believe so that we might live.

The Temple is massive — and the court of the gentiles is a huge area. It would have been filled with thousands of people and animals and merchants. And Jesus clears them all out. It wasn’t the whip — it was his authority. It was the way he carried himself. They should have seen that display of power and authority and said — there’s something about this man and his desire for restoration. There’s something about his passion and zeal for the Lord that’s genuine. Jesus isn’t going to give them another display of his power and glory.

20 The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” 21 But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

Now it's clear from their response that they miss what he's saying. They think Jesus is talking about the massive Temple Complex where they're standing. What took nearly 5 decades to build cannot be rebuilt in 3 days. Not to mention the thousands of laborers it took to build it.

John then gives us the editorial comment that Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body.

Jesus is basically saying – if you missed the sign I just performed, then the next sign you will receive is the one of my death and resurrection. It's the ultimate sign that authenticates who I am and why you should believe in me.

RESPONSE TO CHRIST

22 When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

So Jesus said – destroy my body and in three days I will raise it up. And then John adds that after the resurrection of Jesus – the disciples remembered what he had said and they believed the Scriptures and the words Jesus had spoken. Jesus predicts his death and resurrection – Jesus is crucified – killed – and buried. Then on the 3rd day – He rises from the grave. And when that happens – all the signs make sense to the disciples.

The sign of the resurrection becomes THE authenticating sign for them and their belief deepened and matured and the course of history changed forever.

No matter what you believe about the resurrection – true or false something incredible really did happen 2000 years ago. Either the biggest movement in history maliciously spread like cancer on a fabricated lie that people knowingly died for...or the God of the universe really did come down and enter into humanity to take on our sin, die in our place, and rise from the grave.

Everyone one of us at some point in our life is going to have to make a decision about what we believe about the resurrection. It either happened or it didn't.

There's a historian named Tom Holland, a British scholar who has for years dismissed Christianity. Yet in recent days has began rethinking Christianity because of how impactful it has been in shaping the world for good. Despite being attracted to aspects of Christianity – he has yet to take that step of faith to believe.

In an interview he said...

I find the notion of an all powerful deity like the God of Israel, suffering the death of a slave, the most moving idea the human conscience has ever come up with. And that as an idea seems to me so profound that I am able at certain times like Easter, or when I listen to music or visit an ancient church – there are times when I feel like that is true. And I feel fluttered at the sense of joy of it...Perhaps there is still a faint guttering flame of faith that is there to be tended and may become a more fuller flame in due course.

Don't settle for mere intellectual curiosity.

Something happened 2000 years ago that changed history. And on this side of history there's no shortage of excellent and approachable books that you can read to begin considering the resurrection of Jesus.

Here's three...

Surprised by Hope (NT. Wright)

Raised: Finding Jesus by Doubting the Resurrection (Jonathan Dodson and Brad Watson)

Who is Jesus (Greg Gilbert).

There's even a great podcast I would recommend called Hinge where a former pastor and an atheist work together to ask the question — Who was Jesus Christ?

Don't be intellectually dishonest either. If you've never seriously considered the claims of Christianity, then to dismiss it without honest investigation and make bold assertions based on other people's claims — well — that's the definition of intellectual dishonesty.

Jesus deserves more than our intellectual curiosity and dishonestly — and quick frankly — so do you.

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.

The Jewish Leadership in general miss the signs and therefore they miss Jesus. John's Gospel will show that they not only miss who Jesus is — they despise him. They reject him and eventually — they will seek to have him killed.

And John tells us that during this Passover Feast — which was a week-long affair, Jesus did do other signs in Jerusalem and many others believed in his name. See — it's not that Jesus didn't want to do signs and give people opportunity to believe in him.

But he doesn't do signs on demand. He doesn't perform signs for those who have already made up their mind about him and who aren't interested doubting their doubts, suspending their disbelief to give him an honest look.

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.

John ends by saying — Jesus did not entrust himself to those who believed after seeing the signs.

So what's going on here? John says that just because people gave early evidence of putting their trust in him doesn't mean that Jesus entrusted himself to them — because he has the ability to see what was in man.

John is saying — some people saw the signs and even made public expressions of trust in Jesus — but Jesus could see the nature of their faith...He could see the authenticity of their faith...and apparently...their faith was only superficial. And therefore Jesus didn't trust himself to them like he did to his other disciples.

John is not merely saying that Jesus was intuitive or had a knack for reading people. John is filling out more of the details from his prologue where he identifies Jesus as the God-man — who possesses all the divine attributes.

Here we see that Jesus knows what is in man — Jesus knows the authenticity of our faith. He knows the motivations of our heart. And He knows who truly believe in him.

This passage ends on a sober note. It should cause us to ask — is my faith genuine? Am I pursuing the real Jesus — who is both the Lord of the Wine and the Lord of the Whips?

On that day in the temple, Jesus was filled with passion and zeal for his father's house. John says that when the disciples say Jesus in action, it brought Psalm 69:9 to their minds...

“Zeal for your house will consume me.” — John 2:17.

On that day Jesus was filled with zeal for his Father’s house and he was consumed by passion.

But on the day of his death — the passion of Christ literally consumed him. His zeal for true worship — His zeal for us to have our corruption restored, led him to the cross to be consumed. He is the lamb who was slain — for our sins — in our place. In Jesus we have a better lamb — who gives his life once and for all.

And when Jesus cleared the Temple — he was making a bold statement. See the temple was where God and believers would meet...where God would accept believers because of a bloody sacrifice. That temple has been replaced by the better temple. Now in Christ — we have access to the presence of God anywhere.