

Jesus clears the temple

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[0 : 00] frame. Now, again, can you turn in your Bibles or your device, if you have, to John's Gospel, chapter 2, and we're going to read from verse 13 to 22.

We're asking the question, who is Jesus? Looking at these seven signs that John chooses to record in his Gospel. So, we come to the second of these signs, which is Jesus clearing the temple.

So, John chapter 2, and at verse 13. When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts, he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and others sitting at tables, exchanging money. So, he made a whip out of cords and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle. He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves, he said, get these out of here. Stop turning my father's house into a market. His disciples remembered that it is written, zeal for your house will consume me. The Jews then responded to him, what sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this? Jesus answered them, destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days. They replied, it has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you're going to raise it in three days? But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scriptures and the words that Jesus had spoken. Amen. And we'll leave our reading there. There are times in history when barriers have separated families. One example was the Berlin Wall. We thought about that a little last week.

Another example was the demilitarized zone that was established after the Korean War between North and South Korea. And that zone and the Berlin Wall effectively divided in a moment hundreds of thousands of family members from one another. I was reminded this week of the government deals that went on in recent years between North and South Korea, moving towards bringing some of these families together. I think the last time it happened was maybe 2018, when 89 Korean families were reunited for the first time in 68 years. Children and parents spending some time together just for three days. And one father, as he was expressing his thoughts on it, he said, tears came before anything. The moment we met, tears rolled down. Can you imagine 68 years? This barrier that separates families.

Then a very real sense takes us to the second sign of Jesus. When he is clearing and replacing the temple, he is proclaiming to Gentile people, to us today, if we're not Jewish, that we can have access to God. That faith in this Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, brings us hope of a joyful reunion with God as our Father. And not just for three days, but to enter into a loving relationship that lasts for this life and into eternity.

[4 : 02] This is a profound sign, and it's good news for each one of us today. So, let's get right into it. Let's notice how Jesus clears the temple. In contrast to the fairly, I suppose, quiet sign of Jesus turning water into wine, this is an extremely public and extremely dramatic sign. What do we read Jesus doing in verse 15 and 16? He makes that whip to drive out the animals? He's turning over tables. There's money scattering everywhere. And why is Jesus doing it? Verse 17, the disciples understand his motivation, zeal, passion for God's house, for his Father's house. That's why he clears out this part of the temple.

So, we need to ask ourselves, why is it that Jesus would get so worked up that this zeal would erupt within him? And so, to help us to get there, to the point of the clearing of the temple, we're going to go via some cones and a carnival and some cloud. We'll see where we're going in a moment. Cones, which speak of no access. Where is all this taking place? Verse 13, Jesus has gone up to Jerusalem, and he's now in the temple court. So, the temple, large, very large structure, had an outer area where non-Jewish people could worship. So, Gentiles could come to that place, and they could worship.

That was always God's plan and design. God's plan was to bring blessing, that Jesus would be good news for all nations. God says through Isaiah, it'd be too small a thing for Jesus just to be Savior for some people. He needs to be a Savior for all peoples, for all nations. And so, there was provision there in the temple. Now, let's picture ourselves for a moment as a first-century pilgrim.

We have perhaps traveled hundreds of miles from another country. We've heard of the God of Israel, and we believe he is the true God. And so, at great cost to ourselves, perhaps with great danger, we are making our way to the temple in order to worship. But when we get there, what do we find?

We find a marketplace instead of a place of worship. So, what's going on there? For someone who was coming to worship at Passover time, or for any of the great festivals, it was necessary that you brought an animal sacrifice with you. But recognizing that it was a really hard thing to bring an animal a journey of some distance, there was a service provided for worshipers, that you could come to Jerusalem and you could buy an animal there for sacrifice. And that was okay.

[7 : 03] That was a provision for worshipers. And then there's the bit about the money changers. So, again, people would come to Jerusalem from all the four corners of the nation, and they would all have their own distinct coinage, different currencies. But you had to pay a temple tax. So, you'd come from north, south, east, west, you would come. A money changer would make sure that you had the right exchange, you could bring the appropriate temple tax in. And again, that was a service to worshipers.

So, there's no problem with that. The problem is where it's all happening. It's all about location. So, previously, if this is where the temple was within the city, all the action would be taking place on a hill on the other side. You'd deal with your tax issues, and you'd find your animal over here, and then you'd go into Jerusalem. But now, probably for convenience, the market has moved right inside the temple courts. So, you're the first century Gentile worshiper, and it's as if you find the temple has been coned off to you. It's as if you find a no-access sign across the road. Now, if you have spent any time in Edinburgh, especially as a driver, you will know that this is something we are very familiar with. No access, no entry signs. And it's frustrating. Of course, it is. But it's not a big deal. There's usually another way. But to say no access to the temple at the heart of Jerusalem is massive. Because you're effectively saying, you cannot now meet with God. You cannot enter into

God's presence. And that matters because you and I were made for that. We were made to know God personally. So, Jesus comes and He clears His Father's house so that you and I might know God as Father.

That by putting our faith in the Lord Jesus, we would know and enjoy this relationship that we were made for. Let's move from the cones to the idea of carnival. Again, for the last couple of weeks, maybe if you've walked to church through the meadows, if you've been through the meadows, you'll have noticed the American carnival is on. And if you come back to church this evening and walk through the meadows, it's really, really noisy, which is not surprising. There's lots of people, there's excitement, there's whooping, there's cheering. It's fun over there. But if we were to bring that atmosphere into church, well, it would be a disaster for worship, wouldn't it? But that's exactly what's happening in verse 14. Picture the scene. People are coming to worship, but what do they meet? They meet people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. Come to the temple and you want to pray. You're hearing sheep bleating. You're hearing an auction going on. You want to hear God's words being read and taught. You can't hear anything over this huge racket. And so Jesus clears the temple because of the mess of this temple sacrifice system is not letting people worship God. Remember his motivation in verse 17, zeal for your house, passion for God's house and passion for God's glory. The disciples see what Jesus is doing and they connect it with Psalm 69. And they connect it with King David. King David, in his day, he was really passionate for God's glory, for God's house. And so he stood for God and that meant that David often, you read Psalm 69, you find that he often was then despised by people, rejected by people, which of course anticipates what will happen to Jesus as he becomes the suffering servant. But think about the transformation.

So now, same first century Gentile worshiper approaches the temple. Now there's quiet. Now there's an opportunity to hear from God, to meet with God, to worship God and to give God glory.

[11 : 15] Clearing the temple is a big deal. Because one of the central commands that God gives to all people is that we worship Him. That we give God the honor that He is due. Because He created us. Because He rules over us. Because He will judge us. And because He has acted in Jesus to save us. And so we discover that Jesus is passionate that you and I worship God and worship God properly.

Let's move from the carnival to think about clouds. And again, if you've spent any time in Edinburgh, you will know this is a common feature. So on Thursday, so one of the things I like to do when I can find some time is to go up. So we live quite near Blackford Hill. I like to go up Blackford Hill because it's a brilliant place to pray for the city. Because from there, you can see everything on a good day. So on Thursday afternoon, I went up to Blackford Hill expecting to have these sort of reminders of here's these different types of people and different areas to pray for. But what happened? The cloud rolled in. The har rolled in. Visibility was zero. It was a wasted journey.

Well, in verse 13, just to remind ourselves when this is happening, we are told by John writing his gospel that it was almost time for the Jewish Passover. So the Jewish Passover was one of the great, the great religious feast for the people of God. It was a time of great thankfulness. As they looked back to the story of the book of Exodus, as they looked back to God through Moses, through the plagues, showing his glory over Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt and setting them free to become the people of God. And they looked back to the Passover and the Passover lamb, recognizing with thankfulness that God had made a way that his judgment might pass over his people and fall on the lamb instead. They looked with thankfulness, recognizing that the price for their freedom was paid, and that price was the blood of the lamb. And so this festival that people were coming to was a clear indicator of

God's plan of redemption. But what's happening, because there's all this chaos in the courtyard, it's almost as if that good news is going to be clouded over. How can you see God's purpose when it's just a marketplace and it's manic? This vision of the good news of the Lord Jesus as Savior is in danger of being lost, and so he comes to clear the temple. In chapter 1 at verse 29, Jesus is introduced by John the Baptist as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Ultimately, Jesus wants people to look at him and to recognize he is what the Passover points forward to. So in this sign, what are we getting? As Jesus clears the temple, we're getting a glimpse into the heart of Jesus.

[14 : 27] We're getting indicators. What motivates his mission? We're getting an indication of three priorities for all of us here today. The priority that we might draw near to God, that we could have access to the living God.

The priority that we worship God in the right way and give him the glory he deserves. And that we would see the need for sacrifice as a way of escaping God's judgment and enjoying freedom and new life with him.

And wonderfully, what Jesus points forward to in this clearing, he also promises when he says he is the true temple.

So Jesus clears the temple, but then he says he replaces the temple. And this takes us to verses 18 to 22.

We said last week that the symbolism of the water being turned to wine was a clash of the old era of the Jewish religion and the new era of Jesus bringing in the kingdom of God.

[15 : 42] And it was as significant and more so than when the Berlin Wall came down and communism began to collapse. Well, what we see again is King Jesus, as it were, taking a sledgehammer to the temple system, which is being corrupted and is not pointing people towards Jesus and is not leading them into true worship.

He's met with cynicism and skepticism. At this early stage, we see the beginnings of opposition to Jesus. In verse 18, the Jews responded, what sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?

Who do you think you are, Jesus? What gives you the right? And the sign that he points to, destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.

A temple destroyed and raised in three days. No one gets it. Verse 20, those listening, those Jews listening, they don't get it. They're thinking physical temple.

They're thinking, this building's magnificent. It took 46 years. Jesus, it's impossible for you to tear this down and raise it in three days. The disciples, they don't get it at the time either, but there is a time when they will understand.

[17 : 07] Verse 21, the temple Jesus had spoken of was his body. So John, our gospel writer, he gets it. After Jesus was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he'd said.

Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. They get it. They get the point. They get the sign. And what is the sign? Jesus' body is the true temple.

Jesus fulfills what the temple represented. And Jesus then is making three promises about himself as the true temple.

That stands as a reminder to you and me today that Jesus must be at the center of our life, at the center of our faith, and the center of our church. First thing Jesus is saying about himself is that Jesus is the one who gives access.

He. He is how we draw near to God. So Jesus is doing nothing less than sparking a revolution in worship here. As he reveals that meeting God is no longer going to be tied to a place, not tied to the temple.

[18 : 17] Now it's going to be tied to a person, to the person of Jesus, the Son of God who is Emmanuel, God who is with us, the God who is present, the God who draws near.

And this point is made very dramatically. So this is the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. It's made very dramatically at the end, when Jesus died on the cross.

So Jesus dies on a hill outside of Jerusalem. But what happens inside the temple? At the same time as Jesus dies, the great curtain was torn in two from top to bottom.

As if God the Father is announcing judgment on the temple. Don't come and find me in this place. You need to meet me in Jesus, my Son whose body was torn in two for my people.

There is that great announcement that Jesus is the one who gives access. So there's no need for pilgrimage for us anymore. It's a wonderful promise that Jesus comes to live in our hearts by faith, by his Spirit.

[19 : 22] Jesus never leaves, never abandons his people. And this access and this privilege isn't just for some. This is open to all.

All can know Jesus, Creator and King. All can have the privilege of calling God our Father in heaven if we come to Jesus in faith.

Binds us together as the global church. Wonderful promise. Our faith in Jesus makes us brothers and sisters with people all around the world.

Remember Jesus described the temple in verse 16 as my Father's house. Our Father, holy, eternal God, by ourselves.

We have no right to access his house. But who is Jesus? Jesus is the Son. And with Jesus, he has the key. He is the key to open the door and to bring us in, all the way in, to our Father's presence and to life with him.

[20 : 24] It's the goal of the temple. Not just that people would have an hour of worship, but that we'd live all our lives knowing and enjoying relationship with God.

And this isn't just for now. Again, you can turn to John 14 and think about the words of comfort that Jesus brought to his disciples. When they knew, the night before Jesus would go to the cross, Jesus wanted to bring comfort.

What does he say? He says, my Father's house has many rooms. If that were not so, would I have told you that I'm going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place, I will come back and bring you to be with me, that you might be where I am.

Heaven is our Father's house, and Jesus has made a way for us to go there. So, if you're here today and you're seeking God, you're here today and you want to know God better, what do we need to do?

We need to trust in Jesus. We need to come to Jesus. To know him is to know his Father and to have access to him.

[21 : 38] Next thing we can say is that Jesus is teaching us that worship is Jesus-centered. So, again, I think there's important imagery for the people in the Old Testament.

If you remember that when they came out of Egypt and there was the tabernacle that was constructed where God was said to dwell, and that dwelled in the midst of them, and then the temple was built, and the temple was at the center of the life of Jerusalem.

What was that saying? It was saying that everybody needs God at the center. We need God at the center of our lives, God to be directing our will, our obedience, our loves.

But the problem then, the problem now, is that because of sin we worship in the wrong way. We are all made as worshipers.

We are all made to worship the one true and living God. But because of sin, our worship gets misdirected. There will always be someone or something that we are looking to say, this is the thing that gives me meaning.

[22 : 47] This is what's going to shape my identity. This is the one thing I can't imagine life without. And that takes on so many different forms, depending who we are. For some people, it's a job.

For other people, it's a football team. Some people, it's our expertise or our bank balance or our families. But the point is, our lives will always revolve around something. And if that something is not Jesus, then we are robbing God of glory and we're robbing ourselves of our deepest joy.

We have not put first things first. We've made a good thing into a God thing. What the Bible calls idolatry.

And the other problem with our worship, and we see it here especially in this text, is that we often perhaps even find ourselves trying to worship God, but we can do it in the wrong way.

Again, our sin can get in the way. Two things on that have practical implications for how we do church. One is that we always want our worship to be guided by the Bible.

[24 : 01] We want to do in worship what God instructs us to do. We don't want to be guided by our culture or cultural trends. Because the important thing is that God is honored, that God has given glory.

And so we want to be directed by the Word of God. But it also makes it essential that our worship is Jesus-centered. That it's gospel-centered.

That we are always presenting the good news of salvation that is found through faith in Jesus. That the message of the cross and the resurrection is central to our life and identity as a local church.

That the uniqueness of Jesus is something we declare and defend. That He is the Son of God who became one of us in order to die as that substitute.

And that sacrifice, paying the price for our sins to bring us to God. And we must defend and declare that as a church. It's important for us to recognize how important worship is to Jesus.

[25 : 10] It's what motivated the temple clearing. What is He doing there? He's effectively making sure that the noise is cancelled out. That the din, the stuff that's getting in the way is removed.

So that people might meet with God. And that is what Jesus would do for us today. That's what He wants for us. That we would worship God with all of our hearts, with all of our lives.

That's what we should pray for others. What we should pray for ourselves. To get rid of so much noise. So that we can hear from and meet with God. Last lesson that we will get from this is that Jesus is the true temple.

And Jesus also makes the ultimate sacrifice. So remember in this temple clearing, Jesus is showing what life is meant to be about. That we are made to know and to give God glory.

We are made to enjoy His presence and worship Him. But the problem, the problem is our hearts. The problem is our sin. That there is a barrier between us and a holy God that is bigger and more hard to penetrate than the Berlin Wall.

[26 : 21] That we buy ourselves. We could never break it down. What do we need? We need God to break it down. We need God to change us. To clean us. To forgive us. And that was the point of the sacrifices.

That's why whenever they came to the temple, they brought sacrifices. And here's the good news. Jesus is the true temple. And in the temple of His body, Jesus makes the ultimate sacrifice.

Jesus is the Passover lamb. The judgment falls on Jesus that we deserve so that it does not fall on us. Our freedom is secured because Jesus is the Lamb of God whose blood is shed to cover our sin.

To make things right between us and God. Sometimes the heart of our faith can get clouded over, can't it? Sometimes it can get lost sight of.

Even within the church, but certainly outside of the church. All kinds of misconceptions. It gets clouded over. The Christian faith is not about being good or being religious. It's not about social justice or being a good neighbor.

[27 : 35] Though those are all really important. The heart of our faith is John 1.29. Behold Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. It's John 3.16.

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. Jesus is doing a profound thing in clearing the temple.

A really remarkable thing in replacing the temple. He's given this sign that you and I, through Jesus, can know God personally. That through Jesus we can worship God properly.

Because Jesus has come to take our sins penalty. Can you imagine how that would have changed the lives of those first century Gentile pilgrims as they were able to come to God?

It remains great news for each one of us today. So, as we move to a close, let's think very briefly, how should we respond to this great sign?

[28 : 42] Well, remember John tells us why he writes each of these signs. John 20, verse 31. These are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.

Believe in Jesus and come to know life. That's our first and primary response. Let me suggest another response to this is that we should think about in our lives, how can we cut out some noise for ourselves?

Maybe check our diary, check our schedule, reflect on our phone and internet habits. Am I making room to meet with God?

To hear from God in His Word? To pray to God? Are there changes that I can make so that I can enjoy that one privilege that ultimately I am made for, to know and to be in the presence of my Father?

And the last response, the response of our hearts is that we would enjoy worship. Not just on Sunday mornings and Sunday evenings, though, that that is obviously an important part of this, but that all of our lives, we would live with that incredible privilege.

[30 : 17] I know God. When I pray, God hears me. When I read the Word of God, He speaks to me. He has built me into His family here on earth.

But I get to enjoy His love moment by moment. That we get to meet with God is the great privilege of our lives. So let's ask God for help to truly enjoy that privilege.

And let's close by looking forward. Let's close by anticipating what's still to come. In the book of Revelation, Revelation chapter 21, we have this wonderful, beautiful image of the new heaven and the new earth.

You get the picture of the wedding. Jesus and His bride, the church, now united together forever in a world set free of sin and curse. And in verse 22 of Revelation 21, we are told, I did not see a temple in the city because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

In the new heavens and the new earth, there will be no temple. Why? Because the temple was only ever a sign pointing to a greater reality.

[31 : 34] That reality that God would be present with His people. And in eternity for the people of God, that sign becomes permanent reality. God will live among us and we will enjoy life together with Him.

So Jesus and His sign in John 2, He's preparing us. He's preparing us for a glorious reality still to come. Let's pray.