

John 2:13-22

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[0 : 0 0] John 2, 13 through 22, would you please stand for the reading of God's Word. The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons and the money changers sitting there. 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. And he told those who sold the pigeons, take these things away.

Do not make my Father's house a house of trade. His disciples remembered that it was written, zeal for your house will consume me.

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

[1 : 1 7] The Jews then said, it has taken 46 years to build this temple. Will you raise it up in three days?

But he was speaking about the temple of his body. 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. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

You may be seated. You may be seated. I'm curious to know what you make of verse 22.

When, therefore, he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this. It seems that John, the writer of the gospel, has a definite belief in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

[2 : 3 8] I mean, you're only in the second chapter of John and the cat's out of the bag. John believes in the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

And, he wants you to believe the same thing, too. So, I'm curious to know what you make of verse 22.

Martin Gardner's novel portrays the flight of Peter Fromm. It's really a narrative that displays the spiritual digression of a student who came to the city of Chicago, in particular, the neighborhood of Hyde Park, to attend the University of Chicago.

And he was a divinity school student. When Peter, Peter Fromm, arrived, he arrived with a decided belief in the resurrection.

But, over time, disillusionment set in. Doubt, disbelief, and eventually, derision.

[4 : 0 8] There's a moment in the book where Peter is at the dinner table with his fiancée, Martha, and her minister father, ironically named Mr. Middleton, always the minister seeking the middle way.

And, Peter says to his father-in-law, I'm curious to know what you think actually happened. Did the body of Jesus really rise from the dead? Middleton leaned forward to carve his cigar's ash into the ashtray on a small table near him.

I seem to like this man already. He says, I don't think that this is the time or the place, Peter, to discuss such questions.

Why not? You must have some opinion about what happened. Please, Peter, Martha called out from the other end of the room, do let's talk about something else.

Of course, of course I do have an opinion, but the question isn't a simple one. It would take a long time to make my position clear. I don't think I could do it now without being misunderstood.

[5 : 28] But the question is simple, Peter persisted. There's nothing complicated about it. Either Jesus rose bodily from the dead, or he didn't.

Do you think he actually appeared in the flesh to Simon, Peter, and Thomas, and all the others? Middleton's response, in a spiritual sense, Yes!

Peter uncorked. Do you mean that the disciples had a vision of Jesus while the body was somewhere else? Did they see him with their eyes?

Was there an image of Jesus on their retinas? Please, Peter! Martha pleaded again, her face pale. Please, keep your voice down.

I can't see that it matters, Middleton said, mopping his forehead. The disciples were certainly convinced that they saw Jesus with their eyes, but these are secondary questions. The important thing, the primary thing, is the eternal reality behind the temporal symbol, as my friend Norman Vincent Peale likes to say.

[6 : 36] Who cares what Peale likes to say? Peter broke in. What happened to the body? Did it come alive, or didn't it?

Peter had been pronouncing his words carefully, relentlessly, with great distinctness. Tears were now sliding down Martha's cheeks. Middleton stood silent as a statue.

I don't like the way the question's phrased. It doesn't deserve an answer. Peter moved closer to Middleton so he could shake a finger in front of the minister's face.

Don't you have an opinion about what happened to the corpse of Jesus? Don't you have a suspicion about what happened?

Martha ran over and tugged on Peter's jacket. Peter, please come, sit down. He pushed her urgently aside, and once more, with his index finger, pointed like a dagger toward Middleton's nose.

[7 : 41] In an icy voice, he said, In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, tell us what you believe. Middleton remained immobile, hands behind his back.

Quote, I prefer not to discuss it. I'm curious to know.

What do you believe about verse 22? John, unlike Gardner, is not writing a narration.

Rather, the Gospel of John is an interpretation. He's not concerned with stories of or about Jesus.

Rather, it is the significance, according to John, of the death and resurrection of Jesus for all of history. Which, he's given you that in the text with two fundamentally direct statements.

[9 : 03] Look at verse 17. His disciples remembered that it was written. He's writing from the vantage point of memory. Later on, they came to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead.

Or again in verse 22. When, therefore, he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered. There's another instance in John where the idea of their remembering comes in.

It's chapter 12 and verse 16 at the triumphal entry. And you are made aware that from John's vantage point, he is writing about events that took place prior, but now he sees the significance of them all, and he is writing to convince you, to convince you that you ought to believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, for in his mind, it means everything.

So what do you believe? About verse 22. One thing we can be sure of with John is he's a writer for our time.

He's going to call you for belief, but not without first letting you see, hear, process, and decide. I mean, that's the way the outline really moves.

[10 : 29] Take a look at the text. He's going to show you first what Jesus saw, verse 14. He's going to allow you in on what Jesus both did and said, 15 to 19.

But know, and know this up front, all the while, he is moving you to what John himself believes and wants you to believe.

So let's take a look. What is the first thing that John wants you to process as you wrestle with a decision on the significance of the question, did Jesus rise from the dead?

The setting is established right at the opening, even if we were to look at our preceding verses, 12 and 13. And it's a setting of topography and time.

After this, he went down to Capernaum with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days. The Passover, the Jews, was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

[11 : 39] Topography and time. The topography is he's moved now from the wedding at Cana to Capernaum and now up to Jerusalem.

Capernaum was about 16 miles north and east of Cana. It's on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee.

To go from there to Jerusalem, although I've never traveled and I want to see all these things for myself one day. I'm told it's about 70 miles in a journey and about 2,500 feet in elevation.

So he really is going up to Jerusalem and it's a bit of a journey to get there. The setting also indicates the time of year.

It says the Passover of the Jews was at hand. Lent simply means spring.

[12 : 46] Passover would have taken place on the 14th of the lunar month of Nisan, which would be late March or early April, just about this time of year.

So in these short verses, he's taken you and me back in time. He's walked us into the first century topography of Palestine. He's landed us in the great city of Jerusalem and it is spring.

By the way, I dress today in honor of the changing of the clock. We now get another hour of light after we leave here.

You can go walk on the lakefront. You can ride your bike. You can walk the streets and it is still going to be light when you're done. You don't have to wear black every day, at least for the next six months in Chicago.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. And springtime came and it's Passover and we now arrive at the temple.

[13 : 53] Here's where the great strength of John is there. He allows you to see as a reader what Jesus saw and to watch what Jesus does and to listen to what Jesus says before you're confronted with what John himself actually believes and will call you to.

So what does he see? Three headings. Verse 14. First he sees the temple and the temple courts. At one time the temple stood at the center of all of Jewish life.

Initially, during the nomadic days of Moses, it was nothing more than a tent, a tabernacle. It was something that was pitched and portable. Yet it was important.

It carried a connotation in Israel that this is where God speaks as well as the place where the substitution for sin is made.

So when David comes along, he thinks it's absolutely ludicrous, absurd, that a living God would dwell in a tent like this and so he makes designs for the temple.

[15 : 09] Solomon, his son, will become the builder in all of its glory, but eventually Israel would lose its grandeur in the world. The temple itself would be destroyed in the 6th century under Babylon, only to be reconstituted later by Zerubbabel in the rebuilding years on a smaller scale that never attained the previous glory.

So that by the time of Herod in 19 B.C., there is no center for Jewish religious life. So there's this great public and private initiative in play.

Public funds meeting with faith-based initiatives where Herod determines to build a great temple for Jewish life. And he does so on a great and grand scale so that the temple that Jesus sees is actually Herod's temple.

Josephus tells us many, many things about it and its grand construction, its courts, its porticos, its porches, its altar, the Holy of Holies.

There's a Jewish book of measurements which actually details the size and the strength of it. There's a moment in the Talmud where we read whoever has not seen Herod's temple has never seen a beautiful building.

[16 : 27] So that when John tells you that Jesus is walking into the temple courts, he is there in that great place with its history all the way back through Zerubbabel and to Solomon and to David and to Moses and to the voice which came from heaven that said here is where I will speak and here is where substitution for sin is made.

He's there. What else does he see? According to the text, men selling cattle, sheep, and doves. For you and me this seems to be a strange list.

But if you're familiar with the Hebrew scriptures, it's a common list. These are all things that would be connected to the Old Testament sacrificial system.

And there are lots of them. So you can almost smell the context and hear it with its noise.

A Jewish historian of the day claimed that no fewer than 256,500 lambs were sacrificed at Passover at the time of Cestius.

[17 : 39] That is a lot of lambs. That is a lot of lambs. Josephus would say that in this time of the year, the city itself might actually swell to almost two million occupants.

This is a mammoth movement. And Jesus is here at that time. He saw all of this. What else did he see? Not only the temple courts, not only the animals for sacrifice, but the text says he saw others sitting at tables exchanging money.

It just reminds me of trying to go into Westminster Abbey or St. Paul's Cathedral or any of the old places. There's always this exchange of funds that seems to be going on.

And you place your money here and you go there and perhaps you came from a distance to sacrifice and you needed to exchange money to do that. They had all of that set up perhaps at interest or not.

The text does not say. And all of this clamor and clatter and sacrifices and smoke and fire and smell, it's all in place. So much for what he saw.

[18 : 52] Let me see what Jesus did and said. Verse 15 And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple with the sheep and the oxen, and he poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables and told those who sold the pigeons, take these things away.

Do not make my father's house a house of trade. Now, if you were British, you would say that whatever he did, it was over the top.

If you're a Chicagoan, you might simply say, I was at the temple today, out in this very public place, outer court, 35 acres worth, people all over doing their own thing.

There was a guy comes out of nowhere, he lost it. that's what he did. He lost it. I don't know how else to put it.

And think how strange this would have been for the disciples. I mean, do you remember the previous passage? The wedding at Cana? Quiet, nice Jesus, my hour has not yet come.

[20 : 02] Oh, okay, I get it. We're going to do this thing quietly. You're going to fly under the radar for a while. We're going to break it in slow.

That's a good game plan, you know, good wine, good guy, bring all the people along. Got it! And all of a sudden, this whirlwind comes out of him.

Not under the radar anymore. That soft light that found its way on the forest floor of Cana is without warning blazing, volatile, fire-engulfing activity that would take out a whole forest.

I don't think we can blame the Jews for reacting the way they did given what we merely know. Verse 18, they said to him, what sign do you show us for doing these things?

What a great question. Let me see if I can paraphrase it. Hey, where do you get off doing this? Where are your papers?

[21 : 12] Who died and left you in charge of the temple? Where are you coming from? Who do you represent? We're doing a thing here, and the whole country's coming because this is where God speaks, and this is where sacrifices for sin are made.

What are you doing? Basically, they want his permit. They want to know the department it came from. Jesus' answer doesn't help much.

Verse 19, I'm talking about an enigmatic reply. You want my papers? Hey, destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it up.

No wonder they say, are you out of your mind? It took 46 years to build? What are you talking about? You're not answering our question. What you say is absurd.

At best, it's evasive. No one's going to take them up on it. At worst, it's disrespectful for the very center of Jewish life.

[22 : 21] And in the past, I think Christians read texts like this, and we step in so quickly to defend him. We'll cite a passage from the Talmud that will say, on one occasion the price of pigeons was run up to an enormous figure of a gold denar.

Therefore, he was right in acting this way. Or we'll mention that the high priest's family at this time was that of Annas, who, according to Josephus, was known to be, a great hoarder of money.

And so we then imply that he's doing all of this for that. And there may be some credence to it, but John's text is silent on the rationale from that perspective.

All you really get from John's text is that nobody there at the time knew why he was doing what he did. It didn't make sense. Certainly his disciples didn't.

And according to John, he didn't expect the first readers to get it. or you. It all, according to John, required an interpretation after death and resurrection.

[23 : 37] So let's make a couple of observations from no longer what we see him seeing, what we watch him doing, what we hear him saying.

Let's go outside of the event to the interpretation. What does John believe? Verse 21 and 22. But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

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.

Let me make a couple of observations. The first we've already hinted at. This gospel is an interpretation, not a narration.

John is not content to run a narrative through history that we would know that Jesus was.

[24 : 47] Rather, who he believes Jesus to be. Second observation I want to make is that the timing of this event is incredibly unclear.

I mean, Mark gives it to you, as does Luke and Matthew, the clearing of a temple at the very conclusion of the ministry of Jesus, three years down the road. John gives you this right at the outset, which may be either indicates that there were two clearings and there are arguments that those who would harmonize that would put forth, or there might be that there was just one, and for theological reasons or literary construction reasons, composition reasons, John wants you to know before he ever gets going how big Jesus is going to be, and he throws that event right here.

One could make the argument either way. But, the main idea of the story becomes clear, and that's the goal of John.

By retelling it, he's trying to produce faith. John's claim is that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the interpretive center for all that God was doing, in what we call the Bible, back to Genesis 1-1, and of all that God is doing in human history.

That's John's belief, that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the center, the gravitational center for everything that God is doing in history.

[26 : 35] In other words, that the temple, Herod's temple, which Jesus associated with the house of the Father, by the end, is equivalent to the very tabernacled flesh of His person, so that in Him, you have God speaking, and in His death, substitution for sin, and in His resurrection, victory over it all.

He's the King. He's the ruler. He's the fulfillment. He's the Christ, the anointed one, who every person is to follow.

If He doesn't rise from the dead, you move on. You'll be in these pews for a few weeks and then back out the door. If He did rise from the dead, if John is right, if He rose from the dead, doesn't that change everything?

It would mean that not all of humanity is subject to death ultimately, or the curse finally. In Christian teaching, it would also mean that those who place their faith in Him somehow find their way into a union in His death and His resurrection and an entrance into God's house or final abode.

So what do you believe about verse 22? According to John, when Jesus came into the world, the old way of relating to God goes away.

[28 : 33] The purification jars at the wedding, goes away. The very temple itself as the place where we relate to God and find sacrifice for sin goes away.

What you're going to see next in John 3, the old covenant and the way will give way to the spirit, the old goes away. What you're going to see in 4, the woman at the well who thought we relate to God by a place of kind of geopolitical space and place goes away.

Four narratives in a row where Jesus replaces the way you relate to God. what you'll do with it, I don't know.

But what John wants you to do with it is to believe. I preached this years ago from this Holy Trinity pulpit, the notion of the resurrection from the dead.

I got a call later that week from a man who attended. He said, as I was listening to you preach on the resurrection from the dead, I thought, and these were his words, what the hell, I believe that.

[30 : 10] Now what he meant by the first part, I don't know. What he meant by the second was more easily explained. But what it said to me was, there was a surprising moment in a man's life, sitting in seats where you sit, where he suddenly felt, I believe it.

I believe he rose from the dead. And the consequence of that belief, sets you on a course of a different order.

Not the digression of faith on these streets, but the installment of faith upon these blocks.

For Jesus is the way we relate to God. Now, as you walk through Lent, ■, is also shifted and is everything.

And so my Lent walk is one of joy because I am waiting for the consolation of Israel, the redemption of Israel, for the death and resurrection of Christ in which I live and move and have my being.

[31 : 47] For indeed, He temples in me, for I am a temple for Him.

Give your life to Him in holiness and in fear. Our Heavenly Father, we pray that as we see this replacement and we walk toward Easter, may we come with great confidence knowing that You have changed fundamentally how we relate to You in Christ.

Strengthen many here in that belief. For those who doubt, draw near. For those who have never believed, bring faith. For those who have faith, may we understand the implication of it.

For the welfare of the name of Christ in this neighborhood, we commit it to You in Jesus' name. Amen.