

# Fit For Glory

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Preacher: Darrell Johnson

[ 0 : 00 ] Scripture lesson this morning is the second half of John chapter 2, verses 13 through 22. If you are able, will you stand for the reading of the Word of God? John 2, beginning at verse 13.

And the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And he found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated. And he made a scourge of cords and 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 to those who were selling the doves, he said, Take these things away. Stop making my father's house a house of merchandise.

His disciples remembered that it was written, Zeal for thy house will consume me. The Jews therefore answered and said to him, What sign do you do, seeing that you do these things? Jesus answered and said to them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews therefore said, It took forty-six years to build this temple, and you will raise it up in three days?

[ 1 : 15 ] But he was speaking of the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he said this, And they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.

Spirit of the living God, we believe that you inspired John to write these words down hundreds of years ago now. Will you now in your mercy and grace, take these words off the page, and cause them to come alive in our hearts and minds as never before?

For we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. There is a growing consensus among New Testament scholars that this event, the cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem, needs to be understood in conjunction with the event that preceded it, the turning of water into wine in Cana of Galilee. The two events, revealing different aspects of the character of Jesus Christ, go together like two sides of the same coin, or like two hands of the same person.

Together, these two events depict and encapsulate the full scope of Jesus' ministry in the world. Cana. He comes to transform and make all things new.

[ 2 : 37 ] Jerusalem. It's going to involve some deep cleansing action. As a faithful witness, John is recording these events in the order in which they took place.

But he is not merely recording events. He is making a statement in the way he records these events. Cana. The beginning of his sign, says John. Beginning not only in the sense of first in a series, but beginning as representative of what is to come.

Everything else Jesus does is molded after this turning water into wine, touching the old and causing new life to flow and emerge. Jerusalem.

In order for this new wine to flow, he needs to rearrange the furniture. In some cases, to throw the furniture out. This new wine cannot flow with all of this stuff in the way, so he comes to remove it. Cana. He reveals his glory. He manifests his very essence as the creator, come into our broken existence with his transforming glory. Jerusalem.

[ 3 : 44 ] He manifests the fact that now he is going to work to make his broken creation fit for glory. Before we try to understand this event today, let me make two preliminary observations.

First, John intends for us to watch this event through the lenses of what he said in his prologue. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, tabernacled among us.

And we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Everything that Jesus does and everything that Jesus says is for John, glory full of grace and truth. Jesus standing in the courtyard of Herod's temple with a whip in his hand, this is glory, this is grace and truth. Second, I need to speak to the apparent conflict between John's record and that of

Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

The three synoptics, as they are called, tell us that Jesus cleansed the temple at the end of his public ministry, after entering the city of Jerusalem to the shouts of, Hosanna, Hosanna.

[ 5 : 00 ] John is telling us that Jesus cleansed the temple at the beginning of his public ministry. Indeed, it is the first great public deed on Jesus' part. Which of these gospel perspectives is the correct one?

Well, I believe they're both correct. That is, I believe that Jesus of Nazareth cleansed the Jerusalem temple twice, both at the beginning and the end of his public ministry.

I observe in the synoptic text that Jesus' actions are more severe and his words are more angry than in the John text. I also observe that the synoptic text tell us that the religious leaders reacted to Jesus' words and deeds very swiftly as though they had been waiting for him in light of something he had done before.

The reason the first cleansing did not get greater press, the reason the first cleansing did not get Jesus in greater trouble is that he came on the scene as a relatively unknown figure.

I would guess that most of the people that day simply dismissed him as a misguided reformer who would, like other people before him, simply disappear. The fact that Jesus had to cleanse the temple courtyard twice is testimony to the fact that moral and spiritual reform comes hard and it comes slow, especially when buildings and money are involved.

[ 6 : 26 ] Having to cleanse the temple twice is a testimony to the tenacity of idolatry, to the tenacity of the human tendency to create God in our own image.

Having to cleanse the temple twice warns us. It warns us that institutional religion has the capacity to rot and to become resistant to the renewing work of God.

Not long after Jesus rearranged all the furniture, it was back in place and he had to come and do it again. What's amazing to me is not that he cleansed the temple twice.

What's amazing is that he didn't do it every time he came to Jerusalem. Now, what are we to make then of this intense, even violent scene? What does this manifestation of his glory mean for us today?

Some background. This event takes place during the Passover. That is, it takes place now during the central moment in Israel's history.

[ 7 : 29 ] An equivalent time for us would be for a Christmas Eve service or an Easter morning service. Can you imagine him doing that at one of those services? Although every Jewish male within 15 miles of the royal city was obligated by law to attend the Passover, people gladly came and gladly came from long distances.

The population of Jerusalem at a normal day was about 30,000. During the Passover, it swelled to over 3 million. Now, all of the festivities are then centered in the temple.

Built under the administration of Herod the Great, it was a magnificent structure. And there were four principal areas of worship in the temple. There was the Holy of Holies in the center, where only the high priests could go, and only once a year at that, on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

And then there was the holy place, just outside the Holy of Holies, where the daily animal sacrifices were made. Only priests and male Jews could go on that place. Then outside that was the court of the women, so named, because that was as far in as the female Jews could go.

And then outside of that was the court of the Gentiles, so named, because that was as far in as Gentiles, non-Jews, could go. On that particular Passover, the court of the Gentiles was filled with people.

[ 8 : 48 ] They'd come to offer sacrifice for sin, and they'd come to pay the temple tax, which made the work of the priests possible. The court was also crowded and jammed full of the animals that were going to be sacrificed, the sheep and the oxen and the pigeons in their cages.

The noise in that place, a place set aside for worship, must have been deafening. Now scattered throughout the crowd are two other groups of men. One group is busy selling these oxen, sheep, and pigeons, and the other is seated at tables with coins in the nice, neat stacks piled high in front of them.

Now they are there for legitimate reasons. That is, legitimate reasons according to the institutional religion of that day. Many of those pilgrims who had come had come long distances, and because of the long distances were not able to bring their own animals to sacrifice, so the temple authorities allowed people to sell animals in the temple.

We've got to make religion convenient to the people after all. Those who were well off would buy the sheep and the oxen. Those who were not as well off would buy the doves and the pigeons. Now as often happens when there's an opportunity to make a buck, some of those sellers were charging a huge fee, a really huge fee, up to ten times what the animal would have cost at home. Now many of the religious pilgrims also met the problem when they came to pay the temple tax. The problem was, they had coins that were Roman or Attic coins that were unacceptable to the authorities.

[10:20] They were unacceptable because they bore the image of the emperor or a pagan god. So the temple authorities allowed some men to set up this exchange of coins, taking those coins, exchanging them for the Tyrian coins, which were more acceptable because of their purity of silver.

Now the authorities would allow the small fee to be levied for this service, but some exchangers were charging up to 12.5% for this religious assistance. Thank you. Get the picture?

The very place set aside for the sacred act of worship, the very place where all peoples, Jews and Gentiles, male and female, were to be able to connect with the living God and that place is filled with noise and chaos.

It's filled with deception and exploitation. John says that after Jesus entered the temple precincts, verse 15, he made a scourge of cords.

He made a scourge of cords. John chooses his words carefully and these words paint the picture of Jesus slowly making his way through the crowds, periodically bending over, picking up the rushes that were used for bedding for the animals, and slowly weaving those rushes into a whip.

[11:34] That's the picture that creates. And once Jesus got it to a place where it was strong enough, he raised his arm and he cracked that whip. One of the tables goes sailing across the floor.

The coins go everywhere and running all over the place. Another crack, another table, another crack, another table, another crack. The ox and the sheep start running and the merchants behind them. Another crack and everybody starts running.

Then Jesus starts giving orders. Get these things out of here. And then he yells, you are not going to make my father's house a house of merchandise. Then silence. That awkward, thick kind of silence.

And what amazes me about this is that no one tries to reprimand Jesus. No one calls for the Roman police who are always stationed outside the temple precincts. None of the merchants or money changers fight back.

Were they stunned into silence? Or were they, as John Calvin said, struck with astonishment at what seemed to be the hand of God? Now what does all of this mean?

[12:38] John says that the Jews, by this term Jews, John means the Jewish authorities. The Jews answered Jesus. Had he said anything up to that point of significance?

They answered Jesus saying, what sign do you show us given the fact that you did these things? Now you only ask for a sign when someone makes a claim about himself.

Had Jesus made claims about himself that required some kind of miraculous verification? Yes, he had. He had made a number of claims about himself.

For one thing, his actions were an implicit claim that he had the right to do what he did. Notice how he speaks. He comes in and just starts giving commands. Not recommendations.

Not requests. Just commands. Get these things out of here. Who is this guy? Notice that he makes no appeal to a higher authority. When the prophets, Jeremiah for instance, or Isaiah, spoke a word to the people of God, they always introduced their word with, thus saith the Lord.

[13:43] The prophets knew that they had no inherent authority and that they had to appeal to a higher other authority. Not so Jesus of Nazareth. He just comes in and says, get these things out of here. He comes into the central place of Israel's life during the central feast of Israel's life and starts giving orders as though he owned the place.

What signs do you give for doing this? He had made a big claim. The way he spoke of his relationship with the father heightened things even more. Stop making my father's house a house of merchandise.

My father's house. Not our father. Not the father. But my father. No one. No one in the first century ever spoke that way. That's because no one could speak that way.

No one by nature enjoyed that kind of relationship with the living God. No one by nature enjoyed that kind of relationship with God the father. Jesus teaches us to pray our father.

But the our is on our lips not his. He is uniquely the son of God. He is the only natural son of God. Which is why he feels so intensely about what is going on in the temple that day.

[14:54] He knows the father's heart. He has come from the father's heart. He knows what the father wants for that place of worship and for every other place of worship. Stop making my father's house.

What sign do you give for this? They knew he was making a big claim. But there is more. The religious authorities heard in Jesus' action a huge claim.

And I'm surprised that when he said the words he said he wasn't thrown out of the temple. For Jesus' action in the temple that day brought to first century minds all kinds of Old Testament prophetic texts.

There is a text in Jeremiah for instance where the priests of that day are warned that the temple of that day is in danger of being destroyed because they have made it a place of merchandise. There is a text in Zechariah where it is promised that one day in Jerusalem everything will be holy and quoting Zechariah there will no longer be any merchant in the house of the Lord.

And then there is that text made famous by Handel's Messiah the text from the prophet Malachi. Listen. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple but who can endure the day of his coming who can stand when he appears for he is like a refiner's fire he is like a launderer's soap he will purify the sons of Levi he will refine them like gold and silver so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness.

[16:21] In his dramatic action Jesus was making a claim alright he was making a claim to be the Lord of the temple himself. He was making the claim to be the Lord of the temple come into the temple to cleanse it of everything that keeps it from being what he wants it to be.

His claim was here is glory himself not now in a cloud not now in a pillar of fire but now in person. Now the disciples do not recognize this right away but I think they had a hunch because John says that as they watched Jesus act their mind went to Psalm 39 verse 9 zeal for thy house will consume me.

They recognized in Jesus this zeal now zeal is a technical term Paul Jewett put it this way the zeal of the Lord is simply his ardent devotion to his own honor and glory.

The zeal of the Lord is his ardent devotion to his own honor and glory. It's also his holy indignation with which he is moved when his name is blasphemed his covenant broken his commandments transgressed and his honor impaired.

The zeal of the Lord is reflected in zeal for the Lord zeal for thy house will consume me. And the disciples recognized that day that here was the presence of glory zealous for holiness.

[17:42] Jesus is the Lord of the temple himself. Come now to cleanse the temple of everything that displeases him. But he comes to do more than cleanse the temple and this is the big thing that John is after in this text.

He comes to do more than cleanse. Raymond Brown in his great commentary says this in driving the animals out is Jesus only protesting against their presence in the sacred place or is he rejecting animal sacrifice altogether?

The answer of course is yes. In his actions he's rejecting this whole sacrificial system. Why?

Because he comes not only to cleanse the temple he comes to replace the temple.

I'm going to say that again. He comes not only to cleanse the temple he comes to replace the temple. To put it more boldly Jesus Christ comes not only to reform religion he comes to replace religion with himself.

What sign do you show us since you've done these things? Jesus answers destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again. What's he getting at? You want a sign?

[18:58] Try this. You destroy the temple and in three days I will rebuild it. Now if they had destroyed Herod's temple and allowed Jesus to rebuild it that would have been a great thing to validate his claim but are those authorities going to try this?

Are they going to take him up on this? Are they going to call his bluff as one commentator said? No. Clearly then Jesus is speaking about something else. This temple destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days.

Was Jesus pointing to himself to his own body when he said that? Although no one understood it right away Jesus was claiming now to be the new temple.

Jesus was claiming that all of this temple stuff was now fulfilled in him. His own body first destroyed and then raised from the dead is to be the true temple to be the house of prayer for all nations. In his body the new temple the ultimate sacrifice would be offered making all the other sacrifices obsolete. In his body the true temple all people can now meet the living God in all of his glory in all of his grace and truth.

[ 20 : 09 ] Now had the religious authorities understood this at that point I'm convinced they would have thrown rocks at him. He was blaspheming. What a claim to make. God and humanity are not brought together by all the things going on in this brick and wooden building Jesus is saying.

They're brought together in me and what makes this connection possible is not the sacrifice of these animals but the sacrifice of myself. Destroy this temple. Go ahead destroy it and I'll raise it up in three days.

Jesus of Nazareth is the new temple. He's the new dwelling place. He's the new meeting place with the living God. He is where peoples of all nations now meet the living God in all of his glory.

Well the question for us then becomes if he's replaced that old temple and his body has become the new temple where do we find his body? Where do we find his new temple now?

Ready? The new temple is still the body of Jesus Christ. Well then where do we find his body right now? Right here. We are that body.

[ 21 : 18 ] We his disciples are members of his body which means that we now constitute the temple of God. The apostle Peter who was at both of those cleansings of the temple.

Said of people scattered all over the world you also as living stones are being built into a spiritual house. The apostle Paul understood this great fact.

In his letter to the Ephesians he says of Jews and Gentiles who are in Christ you are God's household built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole building being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord in whom you also are being built together in a dwelling place of God in the spirit.

Whoa! Paul asked the Corinthians do you not know and the word you there is plural do you not know that you are a temple that the spirit of God dwells in you?

And then he asked the Corinthians individually do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit whom you have from God and that you are not your own? Man alive!

[ 22 : 33 ] In Jerusalem's temple that day Jesus was shaking the very foundations of the religion of that day though few knew it. He, the Lord of the temple was replacing that revered structure and all of its ritual with a new temple and the new temple turns out to be himself and those who belong to him.

Now what we need to realize today from this text is that the zeal manifested by Jesus in that old temple is the same zeal he manifests in the new temple.

The zeal of the Lord is his ardent devotion to his own honor and glory. It's also his ardent devotion to our wholeness. Jesus Christ the Lord of glory loves us just as we are.

That's the gospel, right? But Jesus Christ the Lord of glory loves us too much to leave us just as we are and that's the gospel too. Zeal for my house will consume me.

This text is saying that Jesus Christ will not tolerate anything that gets in the way of our being whole in him. Isn't that good to know?

[ 23 : 42 ] This text tells us that he loves us so much that he is not afraid to use a whip. It was Saint Jerome who said the greatest anger of all is when God is no longer angry with us when we sin.

When God is not angry with us when there is no zeal it means he's indifferent. This text says he's not indifferent. Zeal will consume him.

In his grace he accepts us just as we are. That's the gospel. And in his grace he disciplines us and that's the gospel. The writer of the book of Hebrews puts it best.

My child do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord nor faint when you are reproved by him for those whom he loves he disciplines and he scourges every child whom he receives.

Scourges. That's a tough word. It's the same word John uses of Jesus' action in the old temple. The Lord of glory scourges his new temple so that we will shine with his beauty and with his glory and so that the new wine can flow.

[ 24 : 56 ] I think you can see then that this text John chapter 2 helps us understand what Jesus Christ is doing with his church in our time. I submit to you that what he is doing big time is he is rearranging the furniture and he is not going to let up until we are all that he makes wants us to be.

He is coming to remove all of the stuff. Much of the turmoil in the church today we can attribute to the turmoil in our society but I submit to you it is mostly due to Jesus Christ himself come into his temple.

And he is not only doing that with us as individuals freeing us from our fears and freeing us from our addictions. He is doing that with us as a corporate body. He is freeing us from faulty understandings of what it means to be his people.

As I see it for instance he is freeing us from a faulty view of ministry. The faulty view of ministry is that ministry only happens when the ordained clergy are present.

That has kept the church from moving forward for centuries. It has choked the flow of the new wine and I submit to you that he is coming into the temple and he is cracking that whip on the bottleneck to set the wine free.

[ 26 : 18 ] He's taking all the living stones and he's making us into the priest that he intends us to be in the temple. I could use an amen there. As I see it he is also freeing us from a faulty view of Christian living.

A faulty view of Christian living. If I see it right most Christians today think of Christian living as following principles and values. It's not.

Christian living is a matter of living in intimate relationship with a person who has some principles and who has some values but the principles and the values are not the point. The person's the point.

And what he is doing is he is constantly constantly constantly calling us to himself. He is not just our model to live by. He is not only just our savior. He is our life and this text says that anything that gets in the way of our experience in him as life he will drive out.

Oh. As I see it zeal for thy house will consume me. As I see it he is also freeing us from a faulty view of who does the saving around here.

[ 27 : 32 ] Hear me on this. Liberal Protestantism Liberal Protestantism fell into this trap earlier on in this century when it drank too deeply of the wells of the enlightenment where man is the measure of all things and where man can build a new society.

I submit to you that modern day evangelicalism has drunk at the same wells and even more subtle ways evangelicals are just as secular we're just as humanist we only look to the resources that we can see with our eyes and provide with our hands we too fail to throw ourselves on Christ and Christ alone we aren't any different than the liberals but thank God he's freeing us from that he's showing us that Christ didn't come into the world just to make nicer people for goodness sake he came into the world to make new creations who are alive with a new power supernatural power and his renewing work in us at times becomes so difficult because in order to live that new power we have to die and we have to die to the old ways of living this text tells us that Jesus Christ will not settle for anything less than his temple operating in the full power of the Holy Spirit crack the whip Lord and free us from such idolatry I can't save anyone you can't save anyone Jesus Christ can and as I see it he is freeing us this last one for now anyway boy you can tell I feel that I really mean that and so we have counseling sessions where the counselor is not allowed to pray in Jesus name what is that you the counselor are not going to free that person you see what I mean how secular we are I'm not putting counseling down in that thing in that statement but you aren't freeing anybody and I'm not don't put that weight on yourself so when I make statements like

Jesus Christ is present in the city he can make a difference what happens is we translate that and it comes out we can make a difference I didn't say that we can make a difference but it's because of him not because of us am I harping on this too hard you see you see how subtle this is that's what I meant by we're just like the liberals and the rest of the denomination here's another example of what I'm meaning people are all worked up about next year's presidential election rightly so that's an important thing don't misread me that's an important thing but an election does not save a nation no don't you get it don't we get it I think elections are right I think we ought to do that kind of thing I think it's right to get the right people in the White House get the right people in Congress right people in White House right people in Congress does not save a people Christ saves a people and he's freeing us from this idolatry that we drink that we drink of zeal for my house will consume me as I see it there's one more thing that he's freeing us from

I'm going to stay on that I'm going to stay on that we're not getting it we're not getting it we're not getting it the church is not the savior of the world Christ is thank God because sometimes I can't see how we could possibly save the world now last thing he has freeing us from a faulty view of why

we the church his temple are even here you know once you meet Christ why doesn't he just take us home why are we here he is helping us see he's helping me see that we are not here for us we are here for this city comfortable that word is used in the old temple we want programs and worship services that make us feel comfortable effective is the word used in the new temple we want programs and worship services that make us effective disciples that make us effective witnesses in the world we are not here for us we are here for this city so this text is telling us that Jesus Christ is coming to the temple and he's rearranging the furniture and he will not let up until we are everything he wants us to be zeal for thy house will consume me and it did consumed him all the way to the cross where he took upon himself in his own person the indignation against our sin and broke the stranglehold of sin and that zeal still consumes him for his new temple and will until we shine with his glory let me conclude with a reading from C.S. Lewis

[ 33 : 36 ] I've read this a number of times for you already I'm probably going to read it many many more times in the time I have with you I want to read this paragraph because it captures for me the message of John chapter 2 listen imagine yourself as a living house God comes to rebuild that house at first perhaps you understand what he's doing he's getting the drains right stopping the leaks in the roof and so on you knew those jobs needed doing so you're not surprised but presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense what on earth is he up to the explanation is that he is building quite a different house from the one you thought of throwing out a new wing here putting an extra floor here running up towers making courtyards and here's the line you thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage but he is building a palace and he intends to come and live in it himself you