

AM John 2:13-25 More Signs

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Preacher: Rev John Sharp

[0 : 0 0] Verse 13, John chapter 2, 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 46 years to build this temple and you are going to raise it in three days?

[1 : 1 4] But the temple he had spoken of was his body. And after he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. And then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people.

He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person. Amen and may God add his blessing to the reading of his word.

Let us pray. Amen. Amen. And gracious heavenly father, as once again we bow in your presence. We ask that your word be our rule. Your spirit our teacher.

And your greater glory. Our supreme concern. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Amen. We live in days when there are many pressures on the Christian faith from our secular society.

[2 : 3 2] Christianity in our land today has been reduced to one religion on a supermarket of religions. Take your pick. It's a degradation of the Christian faith.

And the question is how should we react to this devaluation of our faith. And indeed do we contribute to the degradation of the Christian faith.

We come this morning to a passage in which we find religion devalued. And how Jesus responded to that. The opening section is a well known passage.

Jesus cleansing the temple. And it begins with what I've termed the degradation of religion. Verses 13 and 14. When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover.

Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves. And others sitting at tables exchanging money.

[3 : 4 0] The temple had been built for the worship of God. But what had happened? Oh yes, the temple was busy. It was a hive of activity.

But that activity was far from the purpose for which the temple had been built. And it can be the same in the church today.

Churches full of activity. But not at the prayer meeting. If you were to take Scotland and all the churches in Scotland as a whole.

And the number of people that went to church this Sunday. That would be one figure. And then you took the number of people that went to the prayer meeting and Bible study.

I fear you'd find that would be a much smaller number. Churches can often be full of social events.

[4 : 40] But with few bothered to gather around God's word. My background was in the Church of Scotland. And I have seen Women's Guild's syllabus.

That would be totally indistinguishable from a secular organisation. Totally indistinguishable from a secular organisation.

When Jesus walked into the temple and saw the secularisation of worship. He was clearly horrified. And so he moves to cleanse the temple.

And we read of that in verse 15 and 16 and 17. He made a whip out of cords. And drove all from the temple area.

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. How dare you turn my father's house into a market.

[5 : 47] It's a pretty dramatic scene if you think about it. Here is what has been happening for years in the temple.

Money changers. Shops selling. All sorts of things. And Jesus suddenly makes a whip. Starts driving the cattle out.

Throwing over the tables. It was a moment. It must have been for those who were there of high drama. We often tend to think of Jesus as meek and mild.

And undoubtedly he was. But here we find him roused to action. Here is Jesus. The judge.

The judge condemning what is going on in his father's house. Here is Jesus forcibly ejecting people from the house of God.

[6 : 57] That might seem strange. But that's what Jesus does. He drives them out. Why? Well because their commercial practices were making a mockery of worship. And beyond that Jesus undoubtedly realised that their hearts were far from God.

That they were merely using religion for their own ends. Any worship that was going on was empty and meaningless.

It's reminiscent this action of Jesus with a number of passages. In the Old Testament. For example Amos chapter 5. Where we read the Lord saying.

I hate. I despise your religious festivals. Your assemblies are a stench to me. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings.

I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings. I have no regard for them. And away with the noise of your songs.

[8 : 09] I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river. Righteousness like a never failing stream.

Jesus was clearly deeply concerned. That the purpose of God's house had been lost sight of. Namely that of worship.

And of teaching. And of prayer. And so he acted decisively to call people back to a true worship. An informed understanding and prayer.

In this dramatic act. Jesus offered a new pathway to people. A new beginning. That was not locked up in outward forms of religion.

But in spiritual awareness. A spiritual awareness that focused upon himself. And there is a sense in which this all turns on Jesus himself.

[9 : 11] Because after Jesus has done this. We find that the people request some evidence for what he has done. Verse 18. The Jews demanded of him.

What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this? Now this is continuing the theme in John's Gospel of signs.

And the last time I was here with you. We looked at the first part of this chapter. Jesus turning the water into wine. And there we're told that this was the first miraculous sign that he did. And there's a number of miracles as you go through John's Gospel.

That are signs pointing to who Jesus is. Pointing to why he came into the world. And here again we find the Jews asking.

What miraculous sign can you show to prove your authority? An age old question. Wanting some evidence.

[10 : 09] And today people still ask for proof. Some sort of evidence if they're going to believe in Jesus. I find it interesting that in our wider world.

There was a few years ago particularly. A debate around the theory of intelligent design. The scientists push back the frontiers of our understanding of the fabric of the universe.

They are increasingly confronted by a reality that is complex. And bears all the hallmarks of design. And it's quite interesting that a number of non-Christian scientists have sympathy with the idea of a designed universe.

And we think of Psalm 19 at the beginning. The heavens declare the glory of God. Now when I was studying for the ministry.

One of the books we had to read was a book by a man called Anthony Flew. Who back in the day was the great champion of atheism in the UK.

[11 : 23] But then more recently. A few years ago. But in a BBC interview. Professor Flew conceded that we live in a designed world.

For many years. Flew the leading intellectual champion of atheism in our land. Yet in this interview he announced that a super intelligence is the only good explanation.

For the origin of life. And the complexity of the universe. And in that vein if you're interested in following it out.

There's a lot of good Christian books by Professor John Lennox. Who was the professor of mathematics at Oxford. Some of you may have heard of the Genome Project.

The main goals of that project were to identify the 20,000 to 20,000. 5,000 genes in human DNA. And to determine the sequences of the 3 billion chemical base pairs that make up human DNA.

[12 : 41] I'm not going to bore you with any more technical details. But what I think is relevant for our thinking today is that as that project went forward.

And the more he was aware of design built into the very foundations of life.

And if there was a complex design then there logically had to be a designer. And driven by the evidence of the Genome Project.

The director of that project. A man called Francis Collins. Became a Christian. And at the completion of the project.

As the public was made aware of all this. Francis Collins said. It is humbling for me and awe-inspiring to realise. That we've caught the first glimpse of our own instruction book.

- [13 : 49] Previously known only to God. Now perhaps most of us are not going to understand that sort of evidence. But we can understand the evidence to which Jesus here appeals.
- And to that I would now turn. Jesus doesn't ask us to believe in a vacuum. For example in Acts chapter 2 verse 22.
- We read men of Israel listen to this. Jesus of Nazareth was a man credited by God to you by miracles. Wonders and signs. Which God did among you.
- In Acts chapter 17 verse 31. He has set a day when he will judge the world with justice. By the man he has appointed. And he has given proof of this.
- To all men. By raising him from the dead. In Hebrews chapter 2. At the beginning. We're told that this salvation.
- [14 : 57] Which was first announced by the Lord. Was confirmed to us by those who heard him. And God also testified to it. By signs, wonders and various miracles.
- And gifts of the Holy Spirit. Distributed according to his will. And when Jesus is asked what is authority.
- He appoints to the authority. That will be demonstrated in the sign of his resurrection. Verse 19 in chapter 2 of John.
- Destroy this temple. And I will raise it again in three days. The Jews replied. It's taken 46 years. To build the temple. And you're going to raise it in three days.
- But the temple he had spoken of was his body. And after he was raised from the dead. His disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture.
- [15 : 56] And the words that Jesus had spoken. So Jesus here points to the extraordinary historical event. That was his resurrection.
- Why does the church exist at all? Only because Jesus rose again. Why are we here? Only because Jesus rose again.
- And why is it we worship on a Sunday? As opposed to the Old Testament last day of the week. Because the Sunday was the day of Jesus' resurrection.
- Many people claim there is no evidence for the Christian faith. And that is utter nonsense. It is the rebellion of the heart caught in darkness. There is a well known book entitled Who Moved the Stone.
- Some of you may have read the book. Frank Morrison was a prominent lawyer. And also an atheist.
- [17 : 03] And he actively sought to discredit Christianity. And he and a friend came together. And they thought that the two critical points were the resurrection of Jesus.
- And the conversion of Paul. And one of them was going to go and research the resurrection. Another the conversion of Saul. And they were going to produce books that invalidated these.
- And so Frank Morrison set out to write a book that would prove that Jesus never rose from the dead. Now remember, he is a lawyer.
- He set to work. He weighed and sifted the evidence. And became increasingly disturbed. Because the evidence was driving him in a different direction from the one he sought to go.
- As he examined the evidence, he was driven to the conclusion. That Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. The evidence convinced him. And he exchanged his atheism for a trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- [18 : 18] Lord Darling was at one time the Chief Justice of England. And he said, we as Christians are asked to take a very great deal in trust.

If we had to take all in trust, I for one should be sceptical. The crux of the problem of whether Jesus was or was not what he proclaimed to be, must depend upon the truth or otherwise of the resurrection.

On that greatest point, we are not asked just to have faith. In its favour as a living truth, there exists such overwhelming evidence, positive and negative, factual and circumstantial, that no intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring in a verdict that the resurrection story is true.

Now let me just read that to you. Get this from a man who was at one time the Lord Chief Justice of England. In its favour as a living truth, there exists such overwhelming evidence, positive and negative, factual and circumstantial, that no intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring in a verdict that the resurrection story was true.

The resurrection is utterly basic. Paul, writing to the church at Corinth, says in chapter 15, Now brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and at which you have taken your stand.

[19 : 58] For what I received, I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised in the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve, and after that to me also.

And then he also appeals to 500 who saw that there isn't Jesus. And he's basically saying, If you don't believe me, go and ask them. Here's these hundreds of people that met with the risen Jesus.

And so we are told that many believed, verse 23, back in our passage in John 2. While he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing, and believed in his name.

There was a sign of the water into wine, and there is this sign of his messianic authority in cleansing the temple. And here in John 2, we're told in both verse 22 and 23, that people believed, didn't believe in some sort of intellectual vacuum.

They believed because of the evidence before them. And that continues the theme in John's gospel, of faith based on sufficient reason.

[21 : 26] At the end of that previous story of the changing of the water into wine, in verse 11, we're told this, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee.

And he thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him. Turned water into wine, cleansed the temple, and people believed in him.

Believed in the basis of the evidence before them. And each of these incidents, the water into wine, and the cleansing of the temple, concludes with this note, that people believed on the basis of the evidence.

And at the end of his gospel, John tells us why he writes, John chapter 20, verse 30. Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

But these are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

[22 : 33] So John's saying, I've set before you evidence. There was lots of other evidences, but here's the ones I've set before you in my gospel. That you might trust in Jesus.

And so it seems to me that the story of Jesus cleansing the temple has much to teach us today. It warns us of the danger of losing sight of the primary purpose of the church, which is worship.

And it's always a thought, that the church has many purposes, doesn't it? There's worship, there's mission, one can think of other areas where the church is engaged of, a prophetic function, bringing the word of God to a godless world, and so on.

There's only one function of the church that continues into eternity, and that is worship. The primary purpose of the church is worship.

Everything else is secondary. And that needs to be true of our personal life. True of our life as a church, and within our structures.

[23 : 54] And so the question is simple. Is everything else secondary to worship? And secondly, this story reminds us, first of our primary purpose of worship, and secondly, it reminds us of the foundations of our faith.

That our faith is built on firm foundations. That our faith is not some piece of religious speculation, but a faith that is grounded in space, and time, and history.

A faith that is not some irrational leap into the dark, but rather based on sufficient reason. But we do need to believe.

The evidence is there, but we need to act on it. We need to actively place our lives into the hands of Christ, and to trust him, and walk in his ways, day by day.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for this story, where Jesus reminds us of the primary purpose of the church, namely, worship.

[25 : 13] Coming in humble adoration before you, the living God, to acknowledge who you are, and to commit our lives to you. And we pray, our Father, that you would help us to have confidence in our faith, as we think of the firm foundations upon which it is built.

Principally, that wonderful event, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we gather here, and in whose name we pray.

Amen.