

Jesus' Passion

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[0 : 00] How do you know if you know a person well? How do you know if you know a person well?! I guess there are different measures, but surely one of them is that you know what they are passionate! So I have a good friend who is passionate about photography, walking, Christian mission, and playing the ukulele. But I have another friend, and I hang my head in shame when I say this, I don't really know what he's passionate about. And that's my fault because over the years I've never asked him. How well do we know Jesus? How well do we know Jesus? One way to measure how well we know Jesus is to ask ourselves, what is he passionate about? What is he passionate about?

When it comes to my friends, I don't have to be passionate about the things they are. I've got no interest in ukuleles and photography. Likewise, my friend's not really interested in football or running, things that I like doing. That's okay. It would be a very strange thing if two friends were clones of each other. But when it comes to Jesus as growing Christians, we want to be passionate about the things Jesus is passionate about. We want to be like him in the things which interest us most. Now, the account of Jesus cleansing the temple here in Luke chapter 19 shows us those things about which Jesus is passionate. As Christians, the more we come like Jesus, which is after all our ultimate aim, the more passionate we need to become about these things. In our passage, we find at least three things about which Jesus is passionate. First, Jesus' passion for the glory of God. Then, Jesus' passion for the people of God. And then, Jesus' passion for the Word of God. The glory of God, the people of God, the Word of God.

First of all, Jesus' passion for the glory of God. You know, I find it intriguing that when Jesus entered Jerusalem, he didn't make for Herod's palace, the place of kingly rule. As we saw last week from the story of the triumphal entry, he had no interest in being crowned an earthly king. Neither did he make for the Antonia Fortress, the massive Roman garrison in Jerusalem. He had no intention of raising a military rebellion. Jesus consistently turns his back on civil and military power. When he entered Jerusalem, he makes straight for the temple. This was the place he knew best.

[2 : 57] Every year, it would seem, from Luke chapter 2 and verse 41, Jesus and his parents had made a pilgrimage to the temple at Passover time. Remember, it was there at the age of 12 years old. His parents found him sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

And when they said to him, Son, why have you treated us so? Jesus replied, Did you not know that I must be about my father's house? You see, for Jesus, the temple wasn't just a building. It was his father's house where he felt most at home in the world. And now he returns and he finds a very sorry state of affairs. The place is filled with merchants. They're exchanging money and they're selling animals, which would later be used as sacrifices. From the other gospels, we learn that they had set up stalls in the court of the Gentiles, the only place non-Jews were permitted to come and pray to the God of Israel.

Jesus was horrified and we read, Began to drive out those who sold, saying to them, It is written, My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it into a den of robbers.

Quoting from both Psalm 69 and from the prophet Jeremiah, Jesus expresses, what shall we call it, his grief? His anger? These merchants have no place at the temple. The temple is set up for the worship and praise of God, for the offering of sacrifices so that the people could have their sins forgiven, their relationship to God restored, for the word of God to go out and give light to the nations.

The temple was all about God. It's like Jesus has returned home and found it in his absence. Squatters have come in and wrecked the joint. We'll find out more about that next week in the parable, or two weeks' time in the parable of the wicked tenants. The point is, the temple was designed to be the place where people make peace with God, not make money. It was designed to

be the place where spiritual business was conducted, not financial or any other business. Jesus calls them robbers, not just because these traders were fleecing the people, but because ultimately they were robbing God of his glory. In the Old Testament, the glory of God was seen chiefly in his presence in the temple.

[5 : 39] It was a magnificent structure, filled with gold to befitting the king of majesty. Its ornamentation, artistic and delicately beautiful. Its rooms carefully furnished to provide all the room necessary for God to receive the sacrifices, the sacrifices, the prayers and the devotions of his people. But these traders had turned the temple into a fancy retail park, an expensive shopping mall. They were robbing God of the glory of his worship and the people of their joy in being reconciled to God. The first and the ultimate passion of Jesus was for the glory of God. His entire motivation in life can be summed up in his prayer in John 12, 28.

Father, glorify your name. Everything Jesus did from his humble birth to his humble death, from his righteous life to his righteous sacrifice, from his powerful miracles to his powerful resurrection, was with a view to this one single object. The glory of his father. The chief motive behind our salvation from sin and death. The ultimate passion of his heart in saving us was the glory of God. That's the heart passion of Jesus, which is why he drove these merchants from the Jerusalem temple. If we want to align our passions with those of Jesus, we must make this our chief passion also. The glory of God.

Why are you here today? You've come to Crow Road. What is your ultimate aim in being here? Have you come to meet your friends? That's good. Have you come to get out of the house, have some company? That's good too.

Have you come to sing? That's good. Have you come to hear someone preaching the Bible? That's good too. Have you come to solve your guilty conscience? That's good. Have you come to find yourself a life partner? That's good too. But the challenge of this account of Jesus' cleansing of the temple is to make the glory of God your chief and ultimate aim in coming here.

our service always intentionally and deliberately begin with the words, let us worship God.

[8 : 14] We do not say that out of habit, but because that is why we are here, not for ourselves, not for what we can get out of this, but for him, to give him the worship, the praise, and the glory we owe him.

Our fathers wrote, man's chief end, his primary purpose is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. That is our primary purpose in coming here because it was Christ's primary purpose in going to the temple that day. Anything that replaces that purpose draws forth the anger of God.

Okay, so it's all too easy to apply this by saying we shouldn't conduct commercial activities in this church. That goes without saying. It's more searching to ask ourselves the question, why am I here?

Why am I here? If it is for personal gain of any type, any other reason than the glory of God, then we are in danger of following in the footsteps of the merchants in the temple.

If it is for the personal gain of reputation and status, if it's so that we can be a top fish in a small barrel, if our minds are focused on self rather than God, of what can I get out of this rather than how best can I worship God, then we run the risk of drawing Christ's righteous grief and anger.

[9 : 38] We'd best drive this selfishness from our hearts by the Holy Spirit or Christ will do it for us. So a practical application of this is to pray, not just every Sunday morning, but every morning.

Lord, make my heart like the heart of Jesus. Make my ultimate passion this day the glory of your name. Make my ultimate passion this day the glory of your name.

Jesus' passion for the glory of God. Second, Jesus' passion for the people of God.

It was said of Jesus, the common people heard him gladly. Common people heard him gladly. As I've already said, when Jesus came to Jerusalem, he didn't go to Herod's palace to meet with the king.

He didn't go to the fortress of Antonia to meet with the Roman proconsul and all his generals. He went to the temple. He went there to meet with common people who had gone there to offer sacrifices and to worship God.

[10 : 44] It was they who he had come for. Yes, even at this stage, there were some higher-ranking members of society who were following him, like Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus, the high-ranking Pharisee.

But the vast majority were common people, like the disciples. In the eyes of the rich and famous, Jesus himself was a common man. He was a carpenter from far off Galilee. Perhaps common people followed Jesus because they had no pretensions to grandeur. They were less tempted to pride. I don't know. Part of the reason Jesus was so grieved and angry at what he saw happening in the temple was that it was a situation where the rich were exploiting the poor. There was only a certain type of coinage that could be used to buy sacrifices. Jews coming from distant nations had to change their money into the correct currency. And of course, to this, there was a cost involved. Likewise, it was unlikely that Jews coming from a distance would take their sacrifices with them. They'd buy them when they got to Jerusalem. [11 : 56] Again, there was a cost involved. It's like going to London, where in the city center, the cost of everything goes up, from coffee to buses, from hotels to food.

In Jerusalem, those changing money and selling sacrifices were getting rich off the back of the disadvantaged. The economy of Jerusalem was booming thanks to their trade. It was supply-demand capitalism at its worst. And although it wasn't illegal under civil law, it was disgusting to Jesus. Common man was being denied access to the presence of God on account of how little money he had. It was an economic class system. And all because these merchants and their desire for money.

Jesus, forever passionate about people, was righteously angry and grieving. Access to God is for all, especially the poor. [13 : 00] As the passage goes on, there's a sharp divide between the scribes and the Pharisees and the common people. The common people were hanging on every word Jesus was saying, verse 48.

Whereas the scribes and Pharisees, verse 47, wanted to destroy him. Common man, it was clear, was on the side of Jesus. But only because Jesus was first on their side.

I'm going off-piece here a wee bit. I hope you don't mind. Who is the common man in today's Glasgow? Who is the common man? Generation or so ago, it was easier to answer.

We in Britain here lived in a class system. Upper, middle, lower class. Some still think in those terms. Although the class system, by and large, is gone. But once we thought of as working class, it's far larger than it once was.

When the government talks of budgets favouring the working class, they may mean those on lower incomes. But the truth is that the working class, the common man, reaches from what we once used to call the lower class, up into the higher echelons of the middle class.

[14 : 14] The working class used to mean those who were not higher educated, those who worked largely in manufacturing and industry. But now the true working class is anyone who works for a living.

Or given a certain set of circumstances, could work for a living. Common man is virtually everyone. Given that in Britain, the vast majority of people are working class, with only small percentages on either side.

In Jesus' day, the situation was extremely different. There was a tiny, tiny upper class. There was a comparatively small middle class.

There was a huge lower class. We can't compare his society and our society in any meaningful way, except perhaps to draw principles about the identity of the common man.

When we talk of the working man, we must not reduce this to what was once called the lower class. It's too easy to give ourselves a guilt trip about, as a church, about our seeming inability to reach them.

[15 : 24] We must focus on them, yes, but we must also focus on the masses who in our day and generation are increasingly receiving the message of Jesus with gladness. I recently heard of the cattle service in All Souls in London.

There were two and a half thousand people present at that cattle service, with an overfilled queue of people snaking around the nearby London streets. Common man hanging on every word. Today's equivalent of fishermen and carpenters, beggars and tax collectors, slaves and free men. Not saying we shouldn't reach out to the poor, but we must face fact and reach the common man, which in our case is the large working class.

Nothing we should do should exclude anyone from being with us. We must intentionally welcome everyone who comes through our doors, because Jesus' passion was for all people.

People are way more important than buildings. One human soul is worth more than all the cathedrals in England put together. We must not favor doctors over the unemployed.

[16 : 31] We must not favor the addict over the accountant. The church must be the great social leveler, a place where the common man is welcome, feels at home, whoever she is and whatever she does or does not do, for a living.

Jesus' passion was for people, all kinds of people. Jaded ministers, I'm sure you've heard them say it. I've never said it, but maybe I have, I don't know. But jaded ministers sometimes say, the church would be a great place if there were no people.

But of course, they'd never mean it, because the church, a church with no people isn't a church. Nevertheless, the way some Christians act may give us pause for thought.

But then we say, well, I'm just not a people person. You may not be a people person. You may be seriously introverted. But I suggest that even if you're not very good at talking to people, a bit introverted, maybe you could pray that God would make you passionate about people.

Passionate at least enough to pray for people. If Jesus hadn't been passionate about people, if he hadn't loved people, he would not have become incarnate of the Virgin Mary.

[17 : 47] He would not have made his way to Jerusalem, where he knew that he would suffer and die on a cross for all kinds of people. He did all this for people, for the common man, take his sins away and give him eternal life.

Jesus is passionate about you, about you. Perhaps then we should add to our daily prayer, Lord, make me passionate about my fellow human beings, just like Jesus was.

Jesus' passion for the glory of God, for the people of God, and then third and lastly, for the Word of God. Jesus' passion for the Word of God. We've agreed to know someone requires that you are passionate about what they're passionate about, rather that you know what they're passionate about.

We read in verse 47 that Jesus was teaching daily in the temple. So the whole of Luke chapter 20 and 21 are a summary of what he was daily teaching in the temple.

It includes teaching us to the authority of Jesus as the Son of God, our human need to devote our lives to God, and most powerfully, and most powerfully, Jesus' prophecies regarding the destruction of the temple and of the coming of the Son of Man.

[19 : 05] And in the fullness of time, God willing, we'll consider these. But it's in the temple, up this time, he was teaching these things. The common man was hanging on every word he was saying.

The temple in Jerusalem, the scene of so many critical moments in the history of Israel, is for a few short days fulfilling in its entirety the purpose for which it was built.

God himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, is proclaiming his word, teaching his people about himself, about themselves, and about what they must do to be saved.

It is reminiscent of the prophecy of Isaiah 2.5, the word will go out from Mount Zion. Jesus, the Son of God, God himself, is home.

And from the greatest pulpit in the world, he is preaching the word of God. King Jesus is passionate about the glory of God, and the people of God, and the word of God.

[20 : 11] After all, it is the word which speaks about him. Would you not have given your right arm just to have heard him teaching, to hear his voice, to get his understanding, to look into his eyes, and worship him there and then.

Jesus is passionate about his word, and about the teaching of his word. The word of God, the Bible, is not to be left to gather dust on a shelf.

It's not a superstitious token. It's presence in a house promising good luck. It is to be opened. It's to be read. It's to be studied. It's to be understood. It's to go from being word written in a book to being word written on our hearts.

Jesus is passionate about his word, for without his word, there is no gospel message to proclaim to the common man, and there is no worship that can be offered to God.

If Jesus is passionate about his word, that it should be taught, distributed, and preached, then we too must be passionate about his word.

[21 : 21] That is why in reformed churches like ours, the architecture of the building is designed so that the pulpit is central. We do not have an altar, nor is the worship group central.

