

John Series: Jesus Flipping Over Tables

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[0:00] 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.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Well, last week in our sermon series in John's Gospel, we had kind of a strange account. That changing of water into wine, after all, in some ways stands apart from the other miracles of Jesus. This week, we're looking at the account of Jesus cleansing the temple, which might shock us and catch us off guard in its own way. After all, are we not used to the meek and mild Jesus that many of us learned about as kids in Sunday school?

Yeah? Now, that image says something important about who Jesus is, but it's not the whole picture, is it? The popular idea of Jesus goes beyond that, even.

[1:24] Jesus as the nice guy who never offended anyone. Well, that view of Jesus quite simply is an idol, and this week's passage can help us to smash it.

There's a meme that I see circulating on social media from time to time that says this. If anyone ever asks you what would Jesus do, remind them that flipping over tables and chasing people with a whip is within the realm of possibilities.

Yep. Jesus does not always match up to our safe expectations of him. But the real Jesus is so much greater than the safe, inoffensive Jesus that we would be tempted to worship instead.

This week, so, we will be looking at this account of Jesus cleansing the temple. Think about what it means for our faith and for our lives. First, at the outset, I should deal with the challenge that we find in our text.

John's gospel places this cleansing of the temple at the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus. The other gospels place a cleansing of the temple at the end of his public ministry, during Holy Week.

[2:43] What do we make of that? Much ink has been spilled on the subject, if you're curious. I am not the first person to notice that. I can recommend some reading.

But probably one of two things is going on here. It could be that Jesus actually did this twice. Once at the beginning of his ministry, and once at the end of his ministry.

It's also possible that John, wanting to make a theological point, put the cleansing of the temple at the start of his timeline, even though it happened at the end.

If that's the case, John might be deliberately treating all of the public ministry of Jesus as though it immediately leads to the cross. Kind of treating the whole ministry of Jesus like Holy Week, basically.

And the cross is John's focal point, so that would make sense. In either event, we have every reason to believe that this event did happen as John records it here. So let's take a look at it together.

[3:45] Please look in your Bibles with me in John chapter 2. Verse 13 gives us our context.

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. The context is important because throughout John's Gospel, Jesus is identified as the true Passover Lamb.

These festivals tend to highlight something about Jesus, who Jesus is when John mentions them. If you'll remember from Exodus, the children of Israel were instructed to kill the Passover Lamb, to put its blood on the doorposts, and to eat the Lamb.

And they were told that due to the blood of the Lamb, God's judgment would pass over them when he struck down the firstborn of Egypt. Jesus is identified then, and this is no accident, as the Lamb whose blood saves us from God's judgment.

And this is the setting for this sign of cleansing the temple. With the context in place, let's look at what happens when Jesus goes up to Jerusalem for the Passover. We read, In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons and the money changers sitting there.

[5:11] Making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple with the sheep and oxen. He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. Well, we might say that escalated quickly.

What's going on here? Keep in mind, the temple in Jerusalem was the focal point of worship for all of the Jewish people, not all of whom lived in Jerusalem, obviously.

So people would come sometimes from great distances to worship, to offer sacrifices, to pay the temple tax. Not all of them would have brought along animals for the sacrifices, and the currency they would have had on hand would likely not have been the currency that was accepted at the temple.

So what was the solution to the dilemma? Well, I guess it was kind of comparable to installing an ATM machine into the church, right? Clearly, it had become the practice to sell animals through sacrifices within the temple, and to exchange currency there.

And clearly, Jesus did not approve of this practice. He makes a whip, drives the animals out, pours out some coins, and flips some tables.

[6:27] Let's say that it didn't get his stamp of approval. What about you? We see his motivation in verse 16. He told those who sold the pigeons, Take these things away.

Do not make my father's house a house of trade. The point that John records here is really interesting, because what Jesus is getting at isn't that it's bad to sell animals for sacrifice.

His point isn't that exchanging currency for giving to the temple is bad. His point, really, is that these things should not be happening in the temple itself. Jesus is really expressing concern for pure worship as God had prescribed it.

The temple, after all, had been intended by God for his people to offer pure worship as he had commanded, not for there to be birds and oxen and the clinking of coins going on in there.

It's just not appropriate for the place where God said that he would meet with man. And verse 17 expands on that point. His disciples remembered that it was written, Zeal for your house will consume me.

[7:41] Now, we don't know if John is saying that his disciples remembered that before or after the resurrection of Jesus. What we do know is that he's citing Psalm 69, verse 9, which says, Zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.

It's generally agreed that John, when he cites this, is looking towards the cross. Concern for what the temple represented, fellowship between God and man, and right worship of the Father in spirit and truth, would lead Jesus to the cross.

Zeal for the Father's house would consume Jesus, leading him to offer himself even to death.

Now, understandably, the Jewish authorities found the actions Jesus took here noteworthy, and they wanted to understand why he came into the temple driving out animals and flipping tables. They seemed to assume that he was making some kind of prophetic statement, and asked for a prophetic sign of his authority. And his answer puzzled them even further.

[9:00] The Jews said to him, What sign do you show us for doing these things? And Jesus answered them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews then said, It has taken 46 years to build this temple, and you will raise it up in three days.

The authorities missed a few things. The first is that the cleansing of the temple was nothing less than a sign that Jesus is the Messiah that they should have recognized.

The next is that Jesus is making a statement of his authority over the temple and the worship of God's people in his claim to be able to raise up a destroyed temple in three days.

But ultimately, they missed what Jesus was claiming about his identity and about his resurrection. John notes, 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. Jesus, in speaking about the temple of his body, is making a point really about his identity and about the temple.

[10:24] He is claiming that the temple that they knew would become obsolete because Jesus is the true temple. He is the true meeting place between God and man.

He is the true place where God's glory dwells. And the devil and death and all of the sin of humanity, try as they might to destroy the true temple, would not succeed. Now, the temple in Jerusalem is in ruins to this day. I think some of you saw it recently. But the body of Jesus Christ is risen and exalted at the Father's right hand. This morning's passage ends with a transition. We've seen that John likes to use these. Now, when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus, on his part, did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

[11:33] In other words, some saw the signs that Jesus did in Jerusalem at the Passover and developed a kind of superficial faith.

Jesus, being able to read hearts in a way that none of the rest of us can, was able to discern that this was the case. Okay, so, and that really provides us with a transition into chapter 3, which we'll be talking about next week.

So what does this stunning account of Jesus cleansing the temple mean for us? What do we make of this? There are a few things I want us to consider this morning, but we'll start with this.

Jesus, in cleansing the temple, is expressing his concern for true worship. We are called to worship God in spirit and in truth, but in every age and every place, that call to worship God rightly is challenged.

We can find ourselves wanting worship to be catered to our preferences and focused on us instead of focused on God. I mean, that's essentially what had happened in the temple, right?

[12:47] Out of concern for convenience, the house of worship had become a marketplace. That's a problem in our age, too. Bishop Julian, when he was here, preached about how the contemporary church thinks that we have to resort to gimmicks because we have lost confidence in the word of God, right?

And we all, too, often view worship as entertainment. We approach it with this attitude of, what can I get out of it? I saw a great response from Francis Chan, some of you will be familiar with, a while back to someone who said, I didn't really like worship today.

Francis Chan says, that's okay, we weren't worshipping you. In worship, we gather around the word, we gather around the table, we praise God together in word and in song because the scriptures instruct us to worship God in that way.

And it's enough. We don't need gimmicks or shallow entertainment. Fortunately, we don't even need a preacher who is entertaining. I have no idea how much that relieves me.

We just need one who tells the truth. Worship is not primarily for exciting us, for making us feel good.

[14:15] Worship is meant to be God-centered and not man-centered. Next thing I want us to think about is that this passage is particularly helpful to us if we don't want to have a false view of the character of Jesus.

So I alluded to in the beginning of the sermon, if you ask what would Jesus do, you might walk away with the impression that it could include a whip of cords and some turned over tables.

The nice and safe Jesus, whom everyone likes, who never hurt anyone's feelings, who is kind of soft and cuddly, is not the real Jesus. Jesus is full of mercy.

Jesus is full of compassion. Jesus welcomes sinners. But make no mistake, Jesus never hesitated to speak the hard truth, and Jesus never hesitated to confront sin and evil, and sometimes did so forcefully.

In an age of moral relativism like ours, I think that's a problem in every age probably, but we seem to have gotten a double dose of it, we need to be clear about that.

[15:32] There is forgiveness for sinners in Christ Jesus. Thank God for that, or we'd all be in trouble. But how can we know salvation in Jesus? How can we know that we even need to be saved?

If we don't have a clear view of what sin is, and a clear understanding that sin is heinous in the sight of our holy God. If we don't take sin seriously, how will we ever know that we are sinners who truly need a Savior?

Jesus is holy. Jesus stands in utter opposition to sin and to evil. Jesus stands in utter opposition to sin and to evil. This morning's passage confronts us with that reality directly, and thank God that it

does.

So I want to close with what I think the central takeaway from our passage this morning. What it says about who Jesus is.

We've already touched on it a bit, but I don't think that this point can be emphasized enough. Jesus is the true temple. He is indicating that by his actions here and what he says about it.

[16:53] Everything that the temple was meant to be is fulfilled ultimately and finally in Jesus. Think about it. The temple was to be the place where God's glory dwelt.

Well, what has John's gospel already said along those lines? If we were to go back to the prologue, and we could do that a lot as we go through John's gospel, we see that the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory.

Glory is of the only Son of the Father. To approach Jesus is to approach the place where God's glory dwells.

And the temple was meant to be the meeting place between God and man. Right? And Jesus is that in a way that is absolutely glorious, both because he is fully God and fully man, and because in Jesus we can draw near to God.

Now you and I can draw near to the throne of grace. How can sinful, fallen, broken people have fellowship with a God who is holy?

[18:20] The only answer is the true temple, Jesus Christ, who paid the debt for our sins and opened the way to the throne room of God.

Opened the way into his presence. The result is that sinners can have forgiveness and fellowship with God forever.

That's what Jesus as the true temple means. Jesus is the true temple, the meeting place between God and man. And because of who he is, because of his blood shed for us, we who were separated from God by our sins can now draw near.

So this morning, we can draw near and worship because of who Jesus is, the true and perfect temple. Praise God.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.