

Signs at the Temple

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[0 : 00] Well, often churches and even some temples have signs out the front of them. Sometimes the signs are very simple. For example, on the next slide, it's just a simple sign that says no shoes.

So you take your shoes off to go to the temple. Sometimes they're a bit longer and it consists of a warning. So at another temple in Thailand, on the next slide is a warning. It says, beware the scammer in this temple.

Apparently, there's a well-dressed gentleman who scams tourists, so much so that they've had to put up this permanent sign. They can't get rid of him, it seems. And then sometimes churches don't quite think about the signs they put up.

Like on the next slide, don't let worries kill you. Let the church help. I think people need a bit more coffee. That was a very slow release then.

Or the next slide, God is the potter, not Harry. I didn't show that one in the morning because I didn't think. Or I didn't see this sign.

[1 : 02] I read it, but I couldn't get a picture of it. It was advertising its sermon series. So on the next slide, morning service, Jesus walks on the water. Evening service, searching for Jesus. Sometimes the signs are more clever than that.

So on the next slide, God wants spiritual fruit, not religious nuts. I thought, oh, yeah. And on the next one, forbidden fruits create many jams.

I thought, that's true, isn't it? It's true. Well, today we come to the second part of John chapter 2 and some signs at the temple in Jerusalem.

But they were not written signs. They were enacted signs and spoken signs. But they still tell us a message, and in particular, a message about Jesus.

That he is the king who brings right worship. And so if we want to worship God rightly, we need to trust in Jesus completely.

[2 : 05] Before we get to all that, John gives us some background in verse 13. If you've got your Bibles there, have a look at verse 13. When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Now, it's just one verse, but it's just setting the scene and reminds us of what's happening. So it's the Passover feast, which is about remembering how God rescued Israel from Egypt.

He passed over the Israelite houses, but then judged the Egyptian houses, and that forced them to release Israel and let them go. And this Passover was meant to be celebrated at the temple, because at the temple was where God was supposed to dwell.

It was where his name was. It was where they were to make sacrifices of thanks for saving them from Egypt and worship God. So on the next slide, in Deuteronomy chapter 12, this is what Moses said to Israel.

He says, You must not worship the Lord your God in their way, that is the way of the nations around them at the time, but you are to seek the place the Lord your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his name there for his dwelling.

[3 : 15] And to that place you must go, and there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts. There in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice.

Now, of course, that place that God put his name that they were to go to became the temple in Jerusalem. And by Jesus' day, it looked like something on the next slide. So as you can see, that's the temple in the foreground.

It's not just the thing in the middle. It's the whole rectangular landscape thing. And behind it is the city of Jerusalem. And you can see just by looking at the photo that the temple dominated the city.

In fact, it took up 20% of the city's land. One fifth was devoted to the temple, a huge amount of real estate. And its size was meant to remind the people that God was to be at the center of their whole lives, their whole existence.

And it also had to be big enough for people to gather together, to worship and rejoice in the presence of the Lord, as Deuteronomy said. And now the Jews could go to the temple whenever they liked, but they had to go three times a year for three festivals, one of which was the Passover.

[4 : 30] But it wasn't meant to be a burden. It was meant to be a joy, remembering how God saved them, rejoicing, eating together with family in the presence of God, remembering that you are precious and God's people.

So that's what's happening in verse 13. But the other bit of background I need to give you is that because Jews had to travel some distance to get to the temple, or some of them did, it was really hard to take all your animals that long distance for sacrifice.

And so instead of lugging Lenny the lamb all the way from home to the temple, the Jews could stop off on their way to the temple to pick up a lamb from the sheep sellers.

Now, usually the market was on the next side, on the Mount of Olives. So here's a map. The hard black line is the wall of Jerusalem. The gray bit is the temple. And you can see on the right-hand side with the red dot, that's the Mount of Olives.

That's usually where the market was set up. And here they could also change their coins into temple coins. Temple coins had more silver in them, so they were purer.

[5 : 32] They also didn't have the head of the Roman emperor on it. And so it was a much more appropriate and honoring gift for God. The point is, these sheep sellers and money changers were helpful for the travelers.

They were like a 7-Eleven store, which gave you what you needed on your travels. And so their business was not the issue. Rather, it was where their business was that was the issue.

And so with that background in mind, we're at point 1 now and verse 14 in your Bibles. In the temple courts, Jesus found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money.

And 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.

And to those who sold doves, he said, get these out of here. Stop turning my father's house into a market. Do you know where the market was? Not on the Mount of Olives, but in the temple.

[6 : 38] Now, we know from Jewish history that the high priest Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, you might have heard of Caiaphas, Annas was very greedy, very greedy man. So we think he was the one who allowed the traders into the temple courts under his supervision so he could get a cut of the prophets.

And they were set up in the court of the Gentiles. So on the next slide, I'll have a closer look at the temple. So the court of the Gentiles is the more open area. And that's where the market was.

And this was more than just a petting zoo, right? It was a massive Middle Eastern market for thousands upon thousands of Jews who had come for Passover. And it showed a great religious hypocrisy in two ways.

At first, this market actually prevented people from the nations, the Gentiles, from worshipping God. Because what's in their space to worship God? Well, a market's there.

In fact, this is what Jesus highlights when he clears the temple a second time a few years later. This happens early on in his ministry. But a few years later, he clears it again. And in Mark chapter 11 on the next slide, we read Jesus saying, Is it not written, my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations, Gentiles?

[7 : 56] But you, Jews, have made it a den of robbers. And so Jesus particularly highlights the fact that these Gentiles from the nations cannot worship God because they've put a market there.

And this is hypocritical because the Jews said that God ought to be worshipped by everyone. And yet they say that with their mouth and then with their hands, they prevent people from worshipping God all for the sake of money.

It was religious hypocrisy. But second, they also showed great contempt for God's name. This is what Jesus highlights for us here in John. And so if you look in verse 16, the comment Jesus makes is, You've made my father's house into a market.

In other words, he's saying the temple is my father's, it's God's house. But where God has put his name. And so to move a market into God's house is incredibly disrespectful.

I mean, instead of the joyful worship of God, there was the bellowing of cattle. Instead of the murmur of prayer, there's a bleating of sheep. Instead of the reverent awe, there was a clinking of coins as they all did their business. And where do you think the animals did their business?

[9 : 04] On the floor of God's house right in front of him. Imagine if someone brought animals into your house where they did their business on your floor. How would you feel about that?

And yet this was the house of the holy God. He was their worship of God corrupted by their religious hypocrisy. For they claimed to worship God with their mouths, but showed contempt for his name with their hands.

And even prevented people from worshiping him as God deserves to be worshiped. And so Jesus clears the temple, which is the first sign we have here, really.

It's a sign of judgment on their religious hypocrisy. After all, making a whip and overturning tables is hardly an act of politeness, is it?

It's an act of righteous anger, of judgment. And it shows us what drives Jesus. It shows us that he is zealous for God's name to be honored.

[10 : 06] It shows us he is zealous for God's name to be worshipped rightly. Now, this is the conclusion that the disciples draw in verse 17. Verse 17, his disciples remembered, once they saw Jesus in action, that it is written, zeal for your house will consume me.

Jesus is concerned to see God's name worshipped rightly. It's more than concerned, he's passionate about it. But there's actually more than just that going on here.

Verse 17 is a quote from Psalm 69, which is on the next slide, I think. It's on the next slide, Psalm 69. It was written by King David, who was God's chosen king.

He too was zealous for God's house. We read that here. Zeal for my house consumes me, he writes. And it consumes him so much so that he ends up being mocked for being zealous for God's house.

He ends up being persecuted. In fact, at the top there, he's even rejected by his family. He's treated as a foreigner to his family because he's so concerned to see God's name honored and right worship done.

[11 : 19] But now this psalm is applied to Jesus here in verse 17, isn't it? And it's a sign that Jesus is now King David's greater son, if you like.

The next, the ultimate chosen king. The Christ who would come from David's family line. For just as David was zealous for God's house, so here Jesus is zealous for God's house.

And so the implication is Jesus is now the chosen king, just like David was. And just like David was mocked and persecuted and rejected, so too will Jesus be.

One of the scary things about parenting, which most of you will know here, is that you see your kids grow up and act like you. It's okay when they do good things.

But the other day we were in the car and one of them said, oh, come on, when a car cut in front of us. And I immediately knew where they got it from, Michelle. It's me, me, sorry.

[12 : 27] Their behavior was like a sign that they were now like me, you see. And here, Jesus' behavior, being zealous for God's house, was a sign that he's now like King David, his forefather.

And as the psalm is applied to him here in verse 17, it's a sign that Jesus is now the chosen king, just as David once was.

And like David, he too will be rejected. In fact, if you just go back a slide right to the psalm again, when David writes his psalm, do you notice the third line down?

The word consumes. It's what tense is it? It's present tense, isn't it? But have a look in your Bibles. What has John done to the tense in verse 17? It's future tense, isn't it?

Will consume me. And John's done that because he knows Jesus' zeal for God's name will continue to drive Jesus all the way to the cross. So that he might die to pay for our sins.

[13 : 35] To take the judgment for our religious hypocrisy. And so that we might be able to come to God and worship him rightly. Indeed, now that Jesus has driven all the sacrificial animals from the temple and only he is left there with the Jews, it's as though he is the last sacrificial animal.

Because what was Jesus called twice in John chapter 1? The Lamb of God. You see, the application of this psalm to Jesus in verse 17 is a sign that Jesus is the Davidic king, the chosen king in David's line, who will be consumed at the cross.

So that we might worship God rightly and bring him honor as he deserves. In the end, that's what's happening here. It's actually a picture of what we saw in our first reading where the Lord comes to his temple.

Do you remember Malachi? The Lord comes to his temple to purify it so that we might be able to offer acceptable worship to the Lord as in days gone by. Of course, I doubt the disciples understood all this at the time and the Jews certainly didn't.

Instead, they say, who does this guy think he is? And so they ask for another sign to prove his authority. Point two in your outline, verse 18 in your Bible. The Jews then responded to him, what sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?

[15 : 02] Jesus answered them, destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days. The Jews want a sign from Jesus to prove he is from God, that he has God's authority to do this, to clear the temple.

And Jesus says, sure, here's the sign. You destroy the temple and I'll rebuild it or raise it in three days. Now, the Jews thought Jesus was talking about the physical temple, which is understandable.

And not even the disciples understood what Jesus was talking about at this point. And I don't think I would have either. But Jesus was talking about another temple. You see verse 21? John tells us, but the temple he had spoken of was his body.

In other words, the sign that he offers them is his resurrection. He's saying, you destroy my body, which they will do when they crucify him. And I will raise it three days later.

And then you'll know I'm no ordinary person. And then you'll know I'm God's chosen king who has authority to judge. Of course, this is still an odd way for Jesus to talk about his body, isn't it?

[16:10] As a temple. But I think Jesus deliberately does this because he has come not just to judge the religious hypocrisy at the temple, but he's also come to replace the temple and the priests and the sacrifices, the whole old religion, to replace it with himself, a person.

And that has huge implications for us. Just one of which is that if we want to now come to God, we can only come to him through Jesus. We can't come through another temple in Jerusalem.

We can't go through other priests. We can't go through other. It's all through Jesus. It's been great to hear Andrew and Claire three times. It's probably nicer for me to hear you three times than you hear me three times.

But I don't know if people here know that CMS's vision statement, it's on the next slide actually, their vision statement is a world that knows Jesus.

Now, why didn't they put God, a world that knows God? Or why didn't they put the spirit? Why talk about Jesus? In fact, I've had people from our church talk to me.

[17:16] Why do you always talk so much about Jesus? Why not the spirit? Why not the father as much? And so on. Well, there's a number of reasons for this. But one of them is that Jesus has replaced the temple as a place we go to to know God.

Jesus is the one who reveals God to us. Jesus is the one whose death pays for our sins so that we can come to God in the first place. In fact, the spirit points us to him.

We worship God by following Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the linchpin, you see. And so CMS is right to have their mission statement as a world that knows Jesus.

Because it's by knowing Jesus that the world will come to know God. It's all about Jesus, you see. But Jesus' words not only signal that he's the new way to come to God, the new temple, but they also point to his resurrection as the sign that proves he is God's king.

For God promised in places like Psalm 16, which I think is on the next slide, or maybe not. Is it on the Psalm 16? No, Psalm 16 says that God will not let his holy one abandon him to the grave, nor let him see decay.

[18:32] In other words, God would not let his chosen king stay dead. He will raise him. And so as Jesus is raised from the dead, then it's a sign that proves he is God's holy one.

He is God's chosen king, who has authority to both clear the temple and even replace it. I told the Wednesday at 2 congregation last week a story about one of my kids, who some time ago was upset with me because I told them they had to go to their room.

She then said, you don't have any authority over me, Dad. She used the word authority. Apparently only her teacher does. And when I said, yes, I do, she replied with, well, prove it.

I thought, well, jolly well will. And so I picked her up, put her over my shoulder, carried her room, plonked her down and said, see, I do. I'm picking her up, taking her to a room was a sign that I had authority as her father.

But here, Jesus's resurrection was a sign that he had authority as the king. Not just to judge their corrupt worship, but to replace it all with himself.

[19 : 39] Of course, the disciples didn't understand this at the time, but they later did and believed. So verse 22. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples record what he had said.

Then they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. Like verse 17, the disciples again remember, don't they? At this time, they remember that Jesus said he would rise from the dead.

And they respond by believing. And not only the Old Testament scripture, like Psalm 16, but Jesus's word in verse 20, that he's the new temple and would rise three days or be raised three days later.

And this belief in Jesus and his word is the kind of belief or trust that John wants us to have. A genuine faith that trusts in Jesus and his word.

And we know this is the right response because John immediately contrasts this genuine faith of the few disciples in verse 22 with the fickle faith of the many people in verse 23.

[20 : 44] See verse 23. Now, while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover festival, many people saw the signs, the miracles he was performing and believed in his name.

Sounds good so far. But, verse 24, 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.

The Passover festival lasted seven days, during which time he did lots of other miracles. People saw these signs and believed or trusted in his name. But it seems their trust is not genuine.

Because, verse 24, Jesus does not trust them in return, does he? Rather, he knows their faith is fickle. It says he knows what is in each person's heart.

I'm sure they may believe now because of the miracles. But before long, Jesus will know they'll stop believing because of his word. In fact, four chapters later, on the next slide, we read this.

[21 : 54] On hearing his teaching, his word, many of his disciples said, This is a hard word. Who can accept it? After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed Jesus.

You do not want to leave too, do you? Jesus asked the twelve. Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God. You see, Jesus had many so-called disciples at the start of his ministry who believed because they saw the miraculous signs.

But their faith was fickle. It didn't last. For they did not continue to believe his words. They were not like the few disciples in verse 22 who genuinely believed in Jesus and his word.

To put it differently, they were fans but not followers. And so the question for us this morning is, what sort of faith do we have in Jesus, if any?

[23 : 01] If you are here this morning but don't trust in Jesus, then do realize that without him, you cannot worship God rightly. In fact, you cannot please God.

You could do all the good works there are in the world, outstrip Mother Teresa in terms of good works, but if you do not know Christ, they will not please God. For Jesus is the king who was consumed at the cross to make us acceptable to God.

And he is the king who has authority to replace the old religious ways with himself so that we must come through him if we want to come to God. So do you have faith in Jesus?

For us who say we do, then is our faith like the genuine faith of the disciples in verse 22 that continues to believe in Jesus and his word? Or is it more like the faith of the many in verse 23, which is fickle and does not believe his word when it's too hard.

Do you remember what they said? This teaching is too hard, too extreme, too zealous for us and for our culture. And to get a little controversial for a moment, given that the Mardi Gras was on last night and the issue of same-sex marriage was back in the media again, the Anglican Church here in Melbourne officially upholds the biblical view, but there is growing pressure even from ministers to change that.

[24 : 34] I even read a college lecturer who tried to reinterpret Jesus' word on marriage to say it doesn't apply to us anymore. I hear people who call themselves Christians and yet do not believe Jesus' word because it is a hard word to accept in our day today.

I wonder what sort of faith you think John would say they have. On the other hand, I know of Christians who struggle with same-sex attraction and yet they continue to believe Jesus' word on marriage, so much so that they resist their desires, even though it's hard.

I wonder what sort of faith John thinks they have. We are to have a genuine faith in Jesus and his word, even when it's hard.

For some of us, when we suffer, it's hard when Jesus says, you know, I'm still working for your good and you're thinking, how? This is painful. But genuine faith is faith in Jesus and his word, even when it's hard.

But second, a genuine faith in Jesus as our king will mean we share something of his concern, his passion, his zeal for God's name to be honoured, honoured in our lives.

[25 : 56] After all, that's what we pray for every time we pray the Lord's Prayer. I mean, what's the line after our Father in heaven? Hallowed. Your name be set apart, made holy, honoured.

That's what we're praying for, that God's name might be honoured in our lives. In fact, Paul writes on the next slide, in Romans chapter 12, he says, and never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour serving the Lord.

The word zeal is not one we use much these days, is it? And if it is used, often it's used in a negative sense to describe extremists and the like. And so it's not a comfortable word for us, particularly in our middle class, eastern suburbs or upper middle class.

And yet if we follow Christ, then it means what drives and directs him ought to drive and direct us, which is concern for God's name to be honoured in our lives.

There's a guy at Five O'Clock Church who Mark told me about, I don't think it was last year, I think it was the end of the year before, he just finished university and he was looking for work, he needed work to live, obviously.

[27 : 10] And he said to Mark at the time, he said, I've actually decided not to pray for a good job in terms of money, but I've decided to pray for a flexible job with good hours.

Jobs with good money make you work long hours, but he said, I've started praying for a job with flexible hours so that I can still serve at church. And in the end, God gave him both a flexible job with good money.

God won't always answer our prayers like that, for the record. But the point is, he was more concerned, more zealous for serving God than for making money.

And thirdly and finally, a genuine faith in our King will mean sharing something of his zeal or passion for God's name to be honoured, not just in our lives, but in the lives of others too. As many of you know, Billy Graham died last week.

He was known as a man who was zealous to see people saved and honoured, sorry, and God honoured. Now, obviously, there was only one Billy Graham. I'm not suggesting we have to be all Billy Grahams.

[28 : 16] But are we concerned enough for God's name to be honoured by others that we might continue to pray for our non-Christian family and friends and perhaps even look for opportunities to talk with them?

One person from 745, every time they go to hospital, which has been quite a bit lately, in fact, I've got to visit them again this afternoon, but every time they go to hospital, they'd always leave their Bible with every day with Jesus or daily bread or something like that on the tray in their room.

One, because they read it often, but two, to provoke conversations. I remember one time visiting him in Box Hill and he'd already worked out that one doctor and two nurses were already Christians and he'd talked to two patients that had cycled through his room about Jesus already.

I don't think I was that late in visiting him, but it was incredible. It reminded me of a lady I think I've told you about before, Florence from our old church. She used to do the same thing, except she added, and the best thing about hospital evangelism, Andrew, is they can't get away.

Well, the signs at the temple of John chapter 2 that day show that Jesus is the king. He was consumed with zeal for God's honor, so much so that he went to the cross for us, that we might be forgiven and made acceptable to God, that we might be able to worship and honor God.

[29 : 41] And he is the king who by his resurrection proves he has authority to replace the old way of religion with a person himself. Which means if we want to worship God rightly, we must trust in Christ completely.

Let me finish with one last church sign. It's on the next slide. It says, people used duct tape to fix everything. God used nails.

How true. Let's pray. Gracious Father, we thank you for this reminder this morning of who Jesus is and what he came to do. Father, we thank you that he is our king who died for us and rose again, who has replaced the old way of religion with the new way of relationship through him.

Father, we ask that you would help us to keep fixing our eyes on Jesus. Help us to worship you rightly by trusting in him completely. We ask it in his name.

Amen.