

Signs at the Temple

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Date: 04 March 2018

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[0 : 0 0] Father, we do thank you again for your word. Please be with us now that we might be encouraged by it, to keep living no longer for ourselves, but for Jesus who died for us and was raised again.

We ask it in his name. Amen. Well, often churches and even temples have signs out the front of them. Sometimes they are quite simple.

So, for example, on the next slide is a sign outside a temple which says no shoes. So that's a quite simple one. Just take your shoes off. Sometimes they're a bit longer, like this next one outside the temple in Thailand.

It's a warning saying, beware the scammer in the temple. And apparently it's so bad that they've had to write up a really long warning and establish it as a permanent sign there. Sometimes they put up signs that they're not quite thought through what they say, so don't let worries kill you. Let the church help.

You've got to wait for my cue, otherwise you'll just take the thunder from me. And there was another one I saw, but I didn't get a photo of it. It was about a preaching series.

[1 : 1 2] So on the next slide it says, Morning service, Jesus walking on water. Evening service, searching for Jesus. I don't think they quite realised what they said in that one either.

Sometimes they're clever. So on the next slide, this one is, God wants spiritual fruit, not religious nuts. That's alright.

And then on the next slide, Forbidden fruit creates many jams. That's true, isn't it? That's true. Well, today we come to the second part of John chapter 2, as I said, and some signs at the temple in Jerusalem.

Now these signs were not written signs like we just saw, but they were acted, enacted signs and spoken signs. Yet they still tell us a message, and in particular they tell us about who Jesus is and what he's come to do.

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

[2 : 2 1] That's what we'll see today. But before we get to all that, John gives us a bit of background in verse 13, which I'll flesh out for us. So verse 13 in your Bibles, When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Now this is John just setting the scene for us, because you see the Passover feast was always celebrated at the temple in Jerusalem. Now you remember the Passover was to remember how God rescued Israel from Egypt by passing over the Israelite houses, but judging the Egyptian houses, so that they would be forced to let Israel go.

But the Jews would celebrate this Passover festival at the temple in Jerusalem, because that's where God dwelt. That's where his presence was supposed to be. That's where they were to offer sacrifices and to worship God.

In fact, that's what the law of Moses had told them to do. So on the next slide, in Deuteronomy chapter 12, we read Moses saying, You must not worship the Lord your God in their way, that is 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.

To that place you must go. There bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts. There in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your family shall eat and shall rejoice.

[3 : 47] Now, this place that God put his name was, of course, the temple in Jerusalem. By Jesus' day, it looks something like this on the next slide, with the city of Jerusalem in the background.

This is a model that's over in Israel at the moment, which they're pretty sure is accurate around the time of Jesus. As you can see, the temple in the foreground takes up a large chunk of the city, doesn't it?

20% of the city it took up. One-fifth of the land surface. It was massive and its size was meant to remind the people that God was to be at the centre of their lives.

It also had to be big because people were gathering from all over Israel three times a year to worship God. So they had to fit them in. Now, the Jews could go to the temple to worship God any time, but as I said, they had to go at particular times, three times a year.

They had to go for three different festivals, one of which was the Passover. It wasn't meant to be a burden. It was meant to be a joy of gathering together, together, feasting and remembering how God saved them and made them his people.

[4 : 51] Now, the other bit of background you need to know is that Jews lived all over and so some of them had to travel quite a distance to bring their sacrifice to the temple for these festivals.

And so instead of lugging, lending 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 Mount of Olives.

So on the next slide, I think, is a map. And so the temple is in that grey bit with the other colours. And then to the right, to east of the temple, is the Mount of Olives. And that's usually where they set up the market.

They also had money changes there to change the coins into temple coins because the temple coins were of more pure silver and they didn't have the head of the Roman emperor on them.

So it was a much more fitting and appropriate honouring gift to God. But the point is these sheep sellers and money changers were helpful. They were like a 7-Eleven store which sold what you needed when you're travelling.

[5 : 53] And so their business wasn't the issue. Rather, it was where they were doing business. That was the issue. And so we're at point one now and verse 14. Have a look at verse 14. In the temple courts, Jesus 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, overturned their tables. To those who sold doves, he said, Get these out of here.

Stop turning my father's house into a market. Now the market, where was it? In the temple, verse 14.

Now we know from history, Jewish history, that the high priest Annas was a very greedy man. And so we think it was he who allowed the traders into the temple courts under his control so that he could get a cut of the prophets.

And they were set up in the court of Gentiles, which on the next slide is the larger open area of the temple. And it was more than just a petting zoo there.

[7 : 01] It was a massive Middle Eastern market for thousands upon thousands of Jews who had come for Passover. And this showed great religious hypocrisy in two ways. First, this market actually prevented people from the nations, the Gentiles, from worshipping God.

Because what's in their area, the only area they can be in in the temple, the market is in their area. And this is what Jesus highlights when he actually clears the temple a second time a few years later in his ministry.

So on the next slide, in Mark chapter 11, Jesus says, I'll just read to you. Is it not written, my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations, but you have made it into a den of robbers?

You see, while these Jews said that God ought to be worshipped, they were actually preventing people from doing so, all for the sake of money. It was religious hypocrisy, you see. But second, they also showed contempt for God's name.

And this is what Jesus actually highlights here in John chapter 2, because verse 16, he says, you've made my father's house into a market. In other words, the temple was God's house, where God put his name, and they've turned it into a market.

[8 : 18] It was a gross act of disrespect. And so instead of joyful worship of God, there was the bellowing of cattle. Instead of the murmur of prayer, there was a bleating of sheep. Instead of the reverent awe, there was the clinking of coins, as they did their business.

And where do you think the animals did their business? Right in front of God, on the floor of his house. Imagine if someone did that to your house.

How would you feel? And yet this is 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 prevented God from being worshipped by the nations, all for the sake of money.

And so Jesus clears the temple, which was really a sign of judgment on their religious hypocrisy. This is the first enacted sign we see here, if you like.

He makes a whip, overturns tables. I mean, all that is hardly an act of politeness, is it? Rather, it's an act of judgment, of righteous anger, on their religious hypocrisy, of their corrupt worship.

[9 : 30] But it also shows us what drives Jesus. It shows us that he is zealous for God's name, that is attached to God's house. It shows he is zealous for God's name to be worshipped rightly.

This is the conclusion that the disciples draw in verse 17. You see there? His disciples remembered that it is written, zeal for your house will consume me.

See, Jesus is consumed with zeal to see God's name honoured and worshipped rightly. But there is more going on here than just that.

Verse 17 is a quote from Psalm 69, which I think is on the next slide. It was written by King David, who was God's chosen king. And he too was zealous for God's house, for God's name, to be worshipped and honoured rightly, so much so that he's actually mocked and persecuted for it.

In fact, you can see at the start, at the top there, that he's even rejected by his family because he's seeking to worship God rightly. But now, in verse 17, this psalm is applied to Jesus.

[10 : 45] The disciples apply it to Jesus. And that in itself is a sign that Jesus seems to be now the new Davidic king, the new chosen king, the Christ who would come from David's family line.

For he's doing just what his forefather David did, being zealous for God's house. And just like David was mocked and persecuted and rejected, so too will Jesus be.

One of the scary things about parenting is seeing your kids act like you. It's okay when they're doing good things. But the other day, we were in the car and one of my children said, Oh, come on!

When a car cut us off in front of the road. And I immediately knew where they got it from. Michelle. No, no, no. Me. Me, me. And their behaviour, though, was like a sign that they were descended from me.

They were the new me, if you like. And this is what's happening here. Jesus acting the way he does and the disciples applying the verse they do is a sign that Jesus is now God's chosen king who is zealous for God's house.

[11 : 58] And just like his forefather David, he too will be rejected. In fact, if... Sorry, Barry. If we can just go back to Psalm 69 for a moment.

Sorry. Thanks. If you notice on the screen, do you notice the tense of the word consume? This is one that David wrote. It's present tense, isn't it? It consumes me.

But if you look at your Bibles at verse 17, what has John done? He's changed the tense, hasn't he? Verse 17, it's will consume me. Future tense. Because John knows that Jesus' zeal for God's house will continue to drive him right up to the cross.

Jesus' zeal for God's house is not only a sign that he is the king, but it's indicated that he will be consumed and rejected ultimately at the cross.

For at the cross, he will pay for our sins and take the judgment for our own hypocrisy. That we might be free to come to God and worship him rightly.

[13 : 06] Indeed, now that Jesus has driven all the sacrificial animals from the temple, and it's just him there, well, what's he called in chapter 1 twice? The lamb of God.

It's as though he is the only sacrificial animal left who takes away the sin of the world. You see, the application of this psalm to Jesus in verse 17 is a sign that Jesus is the king from David who will be consumed at the cross for us that we might worship God rightly as he deserves to be.

In the end, what's happening here really is a picture of what we heard in our first reading from Malachi where the Lord comes to his temple, do you remember? To purify it, to purify us so that there might be able to be offerings acceptable to the Lord as in days gone by.

That's what Jesus is doing here. Of course, I doubt the disciples understood all that at the time and the Jews certainly didn't. Instead, they say, well, who does this guy think he is? And so they come to Jesus and ask for another sign to prove his authority.

Point to verse 18. And 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.

[14 : 29] The Jews want a sign, don't they? That proves Jesus is from God. That proves he's got God's authority to clear the temple like this. And Jesus says, okay, well, here's a sign.

You destroy the temple and I will rebuild it in three days. Now the Jews thought Jesus was talking about the physical temple, which is understandable. Even the disciples thought that.

But Jesus was talking about another temple. You see verse 21? But the temple he had spoken of was his body. In other words, the sign he offers them is his resurrection.

He's saying, you destroy my body, which they will when they crucify him, and I will raise it three days later. Then you will know I'm no ordinary person.

Then you'll know I'm God's chosen king and have authority to judge. Of course, it is an odd way for Jesus to talk about his body, isn't it?

[15 : 30] As I said, the Jews understandably thought he was talking about the physical temple. And yet Jesus seems to deliberately call his body the temple. Why? Well, to show that he not only came to judge the hypocrisy at the temple, but also to ultimately replace the temple with himself.

In other words, Jesus' words here are a sign that the old way of religion with its priests and sacrifices and temple is about to be replaced with the new way of Jesus.

Now, this has huge implications for us, which we can't draw all of them out, but we can at least mention one and that is we now come to God not through religion but through a person, Jesus.

It's been great to hear twice now from the Livingstons this morning and to hear how God has worked through them in Lausanne. And I don't know if you know, but the CMS vision statement on the next slide is a world that knows Jesus.

Now, why come up with this vision statement? Why not mention God or the Spirit? In fact, a number of people at church asked me, why do we talk so much about Jesus and we don't mention the Spirit much or God the Father much?

[16 : 48] Well, there are a number of reasons. One of them, though, is the fact that Jesus has replaced the temple as the place we are to go to to know God. For Jesus is the one who reveals God.

Jesus is the one whose death pays for our sins so that we can come to God. And Jesus is the one that the Spirit actually points us to. In fact, we worship God by following Jesus.

He is the linchpin, you see. That's why we talk so much about Jesus. And so CMS is right to have their mission statement or vision statement as a world that knows Jesus because it's through Jesus that the world will come to know God and worship Him rightly.

But Jesus' words not only signal that He is the new way to come to God, that He's replaced the old temple and so on, they also point to His resurrection as the sign that proves His authority.

Remember, that's what the Jews were asking for. That proves His authority as God's King. For God promises in places like Psalm 16, which I think might be on the next slide, that He would not let His Holy One or abandon His Holy One to the grave and would not let Him see decay.

[18 : 09] In other words, God would not let His chosen King stay dead. That's what the Psalm promises, Psalm 16, written by King David as well. And so if Jesus is raised from the dead, then it proves He is God's Holy One because God has not let His body see decay.

It proves that He is God's chosen King who has authority to both clear the temple and even replace it. Last week, I was speaking at the Wednesday at 2 congregation as I do and I gave them a story about one of my children some time ago.

They were upset with me because I told them they had to go to their room. She actually said, you don't have authority over me, Dad. Apparently only her teacher did and when I said, yes I do, she replied, well prove it.

I thought, well, jolly well, we'll prove it. So I picked her up, put her over my shoulder, took her to her room and plonked her down and said, see, I do. Now picking her up and taking her to her room was a sign that I had authority over her as her father.

But here, Jesus' resurrection was a sign that He had authority as God's King. He had authority to judge the corrupt worship. He had authority to replace the old system and temple with Himself.

[19 : 31] Now again, the disciples didn't understand that at the time but later they did and believed. So verse 22, after He was raised from the dead, His disciples recalled the words that He had said and then they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

like verse 17, His disciples again remember something, 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, perhaps Psalm 16 that we saw a moment ago but Jesus' word in verse 20 that He is the new temple and would rise in three days' time.

And this is the kind of faith or belief that John wants us to have. A genuine faith like His disciples that trusts in Jesus as King and believes His word.

And we know that John is wanting us to have this kind of response because he then contrasts it with a wrong type of response. He contrasts the genuine faith of the few disciples in verse 22 with the fickle faith of the many people in verse 23.

Have a look at verse 23. Now while He was in Jerusalem at the Passover festival, many people saw the signs, the miraculous signs He was performing and believed in His name.

[20 : 56] Oh, it sounds good 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.

And now the festival lasted seven days during which Jesus did more miracles and people saw and believed, we're told. But Jesus' response tells us that something is wrong with their belief, with their faith.

It seems that their trust is not genuine because, verse 24, Jesus does not trust in them in return, does He? Rather, He knows what's in the heart of a person.

He knows their faith is fickle, that it won't last. Sure, they may believe because of His miracles now, but He knows before long they'll stop believing because of His words.

In fact, four chapters later, on the next slide, John chapter 6, we read, On hearing His teaching, many of His disciples said, this is a hard word.

[22 : 06] Who can accept it? And there's a bit of back and forth and then 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 disciples as 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. This is the first year of His ministry, you remember, who believed because they saw the miraculous signs, but their faith was fickle.

It wasn't going to last, for they did not continue to believe His words as well. And they were not like the few disciples in verse 22 who believed in Jesus and the word He spoke.

And to put it differently, these here in verse 23 are fans of Jesus but they're not followers of Jesus. And so the question for us this morning is, what sort of faith do we have in Jesus?

[23 : 14] If any. If you are here this morning but don't trust in Jesus, then do realise that without Him you cannot worship God rightly. In fact, you cannot even please God even if you do lots of good things today, pick up papers around the church, actually people do that, the church doesn't need it, out down the street or wherever it is, if you don't trust in Jesus, it's all for nothing.

It won't please God. For the signs at the temple this day tell us that 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. And so now we have to come to God through Christ. And so do you have faith in Christ?

And for us who say we do, then is our faith a 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 kind of hot and cold and a bit fickle?

Particularly when Jesus' Word says something that's a bit hard to stomach, a bit hard to accept, a bit extreme for our culture today.

[24 : 35] And I will be a little controversial. The Mardi Gras was last night and the issue of same-sex marriage was in the media again. And while the Anglican Church here in Melbourne has rightly and officially upheld the biblical view, there is growing pressure even from some ministers in the Melbourne Diocese to change that view of the diocese.

I even read a college lecturer who lectures here in Melbourne write an article and try and reinterpret Jesus' Word on marriage. So they said it doesn't apply to us anymore.

Here are people who call themselves Christians and yet do not believe Jesus' Word simply because it's hard to accept today. So what sort of faith do you think John would say they had?

On the other hand, I know of Christians who do struggle with same-sex attraction and yet they continue to believe Jesus' Word on marriage and so they resist such desires.

What sort of faith do you think John would say they have? You see, a genuine faith in Jesus means we continue to trust in Him and His Word even when it's hard to accept.

[25 : 52] Even to use a more common example, even when we're suffering and we don't know why, but His Word tells us that God is still working for our good. I mean, that's hard to accept, isn't it?

But that's what genuine faith does. It continues to trust in Jesus and His Word. Secondly, though, a genuine faith in our King will mean sharing something of His zeal or passion for God's name.

For God's name to be honoured. We pray that it would be every time we say the Lord's prayer, don't we? Our Father who art in heaven, what's the next line? Yeah, your name be made holy, set apart, honoured.

That's what we're praying for, that God's name might be honoured. And so we need to share something of our King's zeal to see God's name honoured. In fact, on the next slide, Paul writes in Romans chapter 12, he says, never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour serving the Lord.

Now I know we don't often use the word zealous or zeal, do we? And if we do, it's usually in a negative way because zealous for God sounds like an extremist person, especially for our comfortable middle class eastern suburbs.

[27 : 09] And yet if we follow Christ, then it will mean what drives and directs him should drive and direct us.

That we should seek God's name to be honoured in our lives. There's a guy from 5pm church, I actually think it was not last year, but the end of the year before, he finished university, he was praying for work, he needed income, and he was talking to Mark, I told me this story, and he was saying look, I've decided not to pray for a good job that pays me lots, because that means I have to work too many hours, I'm praying for a job with reasonable hours so I can keep serving at church.

I thought, this is from a young adult, just finished uni, eager to make a name, earn money, but the point is he was more zealous for serving God than making money, and God's name was honoured.

And thirdly, and finally, a genuine faith in our king will mean sharing something of his concern 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, and he was known as a man who was zealous to see people saved and God's name honoured. Now obviously there's only one Billy Graham, but are we concerned enough for God's name to be honoured in the lives of others that we might continue to pray for our non-Christian family and friends, and perhaps even look for opportunities to talk with them.

[28 : 48] For one person at our 745 service, every time they go to hospital, which has been quite a bit recently actually, he always leaves his Bible on his tray out in public, not just because he reads it regularly, but also because it provokes conversation.

I remember visiting him once, and he'd already worked out, three of the staff were Christian and he'd shared his thoughts on Christ with two of the patients that come in and out of his room. It's incredible.

It reminded me of an old lady from my other church who was in hospital one time and she did the same thing, but she added, and the best thing about hospital evangelism, Andrew, is they can't get away.

Well, the signs at the temple that day show that Jesus is the king who was consumed at the cross for us, that we might be forgiven and made acceptable to God.

And he is the king who by his resurrection proves he has the authority to judge and replace the old way of religion with himself a person.

[29 : 52] Which means if we want to worship God rightly, we must trust in Christ completely even when his word is hard to accept. Let me finish with one last church sign.

It's not funny, but it's quite thought-provoking. So on the next slide, it says people used duct tape to fix everything. God used nails.

Let's pray. Gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this reminder this morning of who Jesus is, that he came to replace the old way of religion, with the new way of himself a person.

We thank you for the signs at the temple that day that prove he is the king who is zealous for your name, so much so that he went to the cross, that we might be forgiven and brought to you to honour your name.

Father, we pray that you would help us therefore to do that, that we may worship you rightly by following Christ completely. we ask these things in his name.

[30 : 57] Amen.