

# Greater Than the Temple

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, as you're turning to page 887 in your Bible, the second half of John chapter 2, I understand that there's a football game going on today, named with typical American humility, the Super Bowl.

And someone, I didn't know, actually I didn't know it was on today. And Dan was explaining this to me earlier. It used to be one game played on one day and now it's two weeks of palaver and hoopla and merchandising and the whole thing has changed purpose, I understand.

And they're playing in a stadium, is it in Phoenix, which is a massive temple built to consumerism. Is that alright? All those in favour? No, no, no, no, no.

The reason I say that is that's kind of a picture of what happens today in the temple in Jerusalem with Jesus. We started into John's Gospel and last week we had this really lovely, happy passage of Jesus turning water into wine.

I mean, he's the dreamed of guest at this wedding. We saw that it was a sign and a picture of the newness and the goodness and the fullness that Jesus has come to bring. Well, the second sign is just a little different, bit of a change of pace.

[ 1 : 24 ] We go from this private happy ceremony to this public confrontation where Jesus is out in public. And instead of being the guest you always want to have, he makes trouble.

He's controversial, confrontational, creates a crisis. He makes a whip, drives out the market from the temple. The reason I mentioned last week, apart from the fact that I'm sure you all remember it, is we've got to keep these two signs together.

The sign of the water into wine is the sign of the transformation that Jesus brings to us, this newness. This second sign in the temple is how God will bring this life and this newness to us.

Is my microphone going in and out? It's just me. I don't know what to say about that.

I think if Jesus is God in the flesh, if he is the word made flesh, if all the fullness of God dwells in Jesus, as Dan said to the children who are going to Sunday school, where they're going to receive popcorn, cupcakes and pudding, I say that in case sermon gets dull, you would like to go, it can't get dull.

[ 2 : 47 ] If Jesus really is God in the flesh, you would expect something disruptive to happen, wouldn't you? I mean, you would expect him to disturb the facade of business as usual.

I mean, he does when he comes into the life of any person, but he's come into this world as the son of God and all the fullness of God and the glory of God will not share space with darkness and death.

So there are two little paragraphs here. We need to ask the question, so how is this beautiful life, this fullness and newness going to come to us that was pictured last week in the wedding feast? How is the life and joy going to come into this world and come into our lives? And the answer of the two paragraphs in this passage is that it comes by substitution, by an exchange.

And there are two scenes, what Jesus did and what he said, and both of them involve a substitution and both of them involve Jesus' body. So first, I've called the first one a body to be consumed, what Jesus did, and that's verses 13 to 17.

[ 4 : 03 ] Now, like all good Jewish men, Jesus went up to Jerusalem to the Passover. Once a year. And John's gospel tells us that he went up three times, which is why most people think he had a three-year public ministry.

The other gospels tell us that he went up at the end of his life, just before his crucifixion, and cleansed the temple. And John tells us that he went up at the beginning of his ministry as well. And what he finds is the same sort of thing you'd find at the Phoenix Stadium today. That the Jewish authorities have converted the temple, they've transformed the temple into a shopping mall.

And the details of what Jesus does and what he says here are very different than the cleansing at the end of the life. And I want to say it this way, it's a kind of more moderate cleansing, if I could say it that way.

So the whip of cords, verse 15, is not a leather whip. It's made of straw and other things that he's grabbed his hand onto.

[ 5 : 02 ] And he's not whipping people. He's moving cows and sheep, like any country person would, out of the sacred site. And this lovely little eyewitness detail that he tells the pigeon sellers to carry them out, carry them out in cages, of course.

Now, of course, he does overturn the tables of the money changers. And there is righteous anger in what he's doing. But we've got to look hard at this, because this is not just a condemnation of corrupt religion.

Jesus is not, this is not just a concern for justice. This is a picture and a prelude of the transformation and how Jesus is about to bring it about. And it happens in the temple because you couldn't have a place that has greater meaning and significance for any Jewish believer than the temple.

I mean, those sheep, those cattle, those doves, they're going to be sold for sacrifice. Their lives are going to be given for sacrifice. And people come from all over, not just from Israel, but from all over the world once a year to offer sacrifice, to have the priests offer sacrifice, to have access to God.

And do you remember in the Old Testament when the first temple was built and God came down in glory, in the glory cloud, and took his dwelling there as the place where he would speak and people would have access to him?

[ 6 : 24 ] And do you remember that temple was destroyed? And those of you who were very wonderfully with us through the Ezekiel series will remember that 500 years before Jesus entered the temple, the glory of God departed and left.

It hasn't come back. And they're doing this massive big building project, but God's glory has not come back. And the Old Testament finishes with the promise, the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple, but who can endure the day of his coming?

Because he comes as judge. How he started the service. This is not a bad hair day for Jesus. He's not annoyed. This is not, he's not grumpy.

This is the Lord suddenly coming to his temple. And what's made him angry is not price gouging or extortion. It's this, he says it, that you've made my father's house a house of trade.

You've converted this holy space into a place and expression of consumerism. And the word trade is the word emporium.

[ 7 : 38 ] They've made the temple a supermarket, an emporium, a mall. And why do we create emporia? It's so we can make consumers.

See, they've taken the holy gift of God and they've converted into some sort of a thing for consumers, which is the absolute opposite of true worship.

Because what happens with the whole consumer mentality is I put myself at the centre. I want to say this carefully, but I think, don't you think being consumers is the perfect picture of what it is to be sinful?

And I know it's trendy to be down on consuming, but the basic instinct of my heart is not to honour God and give God thanks. It's to exchange the glory of our immortal creator for something else. And that's what lies at the heart of consumerism. There has never been a time when we've been so religious in our commitment to consumerism. And I'm not just talking about building shrines to a silly game of football or an important game of football.

[ 8 : 48 ] But I'm saying we raise our children to be consumers. We think about us, we define ourselves by what we consume and how we consume, our social identities, our control by brands.

And it controls us at the level of our spiritual ambitions and preoccupations. We desire stuff because we think that stuff is going to make us more desirable. We think the good life is good if we have more goods.

We work more and we worry more and we're more stressed and disconnected from each other. I want you to think that there's something a little bit deeper going on here because consumerism affects our relationship with each other and with God.

Think about it. The basic consumer calculation does wretched damage, not just to the environment or to poor laborers in other countries. It does wretched damage to our relationships.

If I put myself at the center, think about your relationship with God and with others. See, God's value to me becomes in what he can give me instead of thanks and worship and praise and walking in communion with him.

[10:01] My question for God is, what's in it for me? I want to use him. Or in our relationships with each other, instead of love and serving and generosity, I want to know how much you're going to cost me, whether you're worth investing time in.

Don't you hate that language? And I think the closer and more important the relationship, the deeper the injury of consumerism. Just think about a marriage.

A marriage is woeful if one partner sees the other partner as the dispenser of sexual goods and services or recreational goods and services.

You know, am I getting a good deal here? I'll stay as long as you meet my needs and acceptable cost. My happiness depends on the quality and price of your product. It's just awful.

So how does Christ bring change and transformation into our hearts committed to consumerism? How does he bring this new life? And the answer is very simply, a very simple substitution.

[11:04] In verse 17, we read, his disciples remembered that it was written, zeal for your house will consume me.

See, the only thing with the power to stop our greed and our selfish consumption is one infinitely selfish, selfless action by the Son of God.

Do you want me to say that again? The only thing that has the power to stop our self-focused consumption is one infinitely selfless act by the Son of God.

The only way for us to put in, you know, putting everything through the calculation of cost and benefit is by the Son of God paying the full cost for us. This is a quote from Psalm 69 where the King of God, the Messiah of God, is suffering, drowning in waters of trouble and Jesus takes them to himself, zeal for your house will consume me.

He's not being consumed by zeal. That's not what it means. But his love for God and his love for people means that he will be torn apart, he will be consumed, he is speaking about his death.

[12:19] If Jesus' passion is so strong that God would dwell with us, it will literally tear him limb from, well, it will kill him on the cross. It will eat him up, it will swallow him into death utterly.

And that's substitution. That's an exchange. We've taken the holy things of God and we've converted them into consumables to bring us back into the presence and the life of God.

What Jesus does is he leaves heaven bodily so that he is consumed for us so that we will not be consumed by consuming so many things.

And all the newness and all the goodness and all the fullness God has for us will only come to us as he gives over his body to death.

He is consumed in death so that we need not be. It's wonderful, isn't it? That's the first exchange. But there's a second exchange. And we move from what Jesus did now to what he said in verses 18 to 22.

[13:26] Now, you'll have to agree that this action of Jesus is probably not the best way to win friends and influence others. You know, going in and clearing out the temple.

But the response of the authorities show that it's a minor miracle. I mean, if he was a hooligan and just came in and started whooping things or if he was deranged, they had the whole temple guard with pointy swords to come and arrest him.

And if two of the money changers took exception to what Jesus did, they could quite easily stop him. We haven't had this much at St. John's, but the last church I worked in in Sydney, we had this a lot.

And there are some very good stories that I'll keep for another time. However, I think the question the authorities have is fairly sensible.

I mean, it shows they have a sense they're dealing with something greater here. They say to Jesus in verse 18, what sign do you show us for doing these things?

[14:31] In other words, they're aware that he's got some form of authority, maybe a prophet. They discern behind Jesus this threat to them. But instead of giving them a sign, Jesus does something.

He gives them more than they bargained for. He explains. And I want to read these words. They're remarkable. Verse 19, Jesus answered them, you destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.

And the Jews then said, it's taken 46 years to build this temple. Will you raise it up in three days? But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

There are two words for temple. One is the general, all the courts together. That's the word that's been used so far. But now when Jesus speaks about the temple, destroy this temple, he goes to the Holy of Holies.

Jesus is not saying that he's going to destroy the temple. He says, you destroy the temple, I'll rebuild it. I will raise it up. It's the resurrection word in three days.

[15:32] And it's an utterly astonishing statement. The irony is that the authorities take him up on this and they do literally destroy his body. But Jesus is going to do something even more impossible than putting back that massive edifice in three days.

He is going to raise his body from the dead. And this is one of the two places I can think of where Jesus says that he will raise himself from the dead.

It's usually the father that raises him from the dead. You see, Jesus is saying, my physical body is the temple. He's replacing the temple.

And I'm going to put this temple, my body, through a process called resurrection. And I just want to say, I think this is very difficult for us.

You know, we're fine with bricks and buildings and things that we can see. And I think we're fine with spiritual ideas. But we're not fine with what Jesus is saying here. Jesus is not talking about a spiritual temple.

[16:41] He's talking about replacing the physical temple with his physical body. Jesus' human flesh and bones are the resident dwelling of God and will always be the resident dwelling of God.

It's permanent and eternal. And throughout the Old Testament, God continued to speak and continued to act in such a way where he could dwell with his people. That's what happened in the Garden of Eden.

That's what happens in the desert with the pillar of fire and then the tabernacle and finally, and especially in the temple. But when Jesus was incarnate, when the word became flesh and dwelt among us, all the fullness of God became bodily present in him.

And I think the reason this is difficult for us is we find it next to impossible not to separate what's spiritual and what's material. Sometimes they are.

But I want to say that in the material, physical body of Jesus Christ, what is spiritual and what is material become eternally one.

[17:52] Is everyone with me so far? That was a very disappointing response, just to say, are you with me so far?

They're tracking with me. I can start again. Well, let me try and take it from a slightly different angle. When Jesus died, he died truly.

And three days later, when he rose again, he rose with his flesh and his bones in a transformed resurrection body. And that new body is both spiritual and material together as it was before.

This is what all good Anglicans believe. It's time for the prayer book. I wonder if you would take out this wine-coloured prayer book and turn to the 39 articles.

page 699. If you're new, if you want to know what Anglicans believe, these 39 statements, these 39 articles cover it pretty well.

[19:13] And article number four, at the bottom of 699, is of the resurrection of Christ. Let me read this for you. Christ did truly rise again from death and took again his body with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven and there sitteth until he returned to judge all men at the last day.

In other words, God's presence is no longer mediated to us through priests and sacrifices and sheep or going to certain places and procedures, but it is through the body of Jesus Christ.

Let's put the prayer books down. I don't want to tempt you to read more there. Now, God's presence comes to us directly through Christ who died and rose again and is now seated at the right hand of the Father.

And he sits at the right hand in his resurrected body, transformed through the resurrection, and now he is the source of eternal life for us. Which is why when we come to the end of the Bible, it says, in heaven, in the new city, there is no temple because its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb.

Now, this has vast implications as I'm sure you've already, you're thinking about, but let me just mention three that you can take and meditate on. The first implication is that it is not Jesus' incarnation on its own that brings us life and glory.

[ 20 : 54 ] But it is incarnation together with his death and resurrection. You see, the great exchange where the temple of Jesus' body becomes active for us is the death and resurrection.

Jesus doesn't just stand up and say, I am the temple. He says, destroy this temple and after three days I will raise it up. Because it is through his death and resurrection he becomes our temple. Let me put it another way. If the word of God became flesh in the body of Jesus Christ and if he has taken that body to the Father's side, the fullness of God is always available to us in him because he died and rose again.

And when he ascended into heaven for the first time ever, part of our creation was taken into the new creation, into the heavens and seated at the right hand of the heavenly Father.

So the incarnation is absolutely crucial but it's incomplete without the cross and the resurrection. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, the incarnation finds its meaning and becomes available to us now.

[ 22 : 09 ] God's life and we've talked about this before. You see, if Jesus became flesh, that's fantastic bringing the presence of God for people who are alive then.

But it's only through his death and resurrection and ascension that that presence and life become available to us now. So that means that the focus of our joy and the focus of our worship and the focus of our prayers is Jesus Christ at the Father's right hand.

That's the first thing to think about. The second thing and most obviously is that this has radical implications for our worship. I don't mean to keep anyone awake but in the Old Testament worship was tied to particular places and times and procedures.

If you wanted ongoing access to God you had to go to the temple and you had to have priests make sacrifice on your behalf. But since Jesus is now the temple that's all turned inside out.

There are no more holy places I know we call Israel the holy land but Israel is no more the holy land than is Whistler or Australia or Langley.

[ 23 : 32 ] Worship is now not something we come to do between the hours of 11 o'clock and 12.30 on a Sunday morning. Worship is all of life because we always have access to God through Jesus Christ.

That's what Paul means in Romans when he says present your bodies as a living sacrifice it's daily that is your spiritual worship. In Romans later on Paul says that when we speak to Christ speak to others about Christ and when we pray for others pray to Christ for others that also is a form of sacrifice and worship.

When we give money to Christian causes that also is worship. worship is a style of singing and it's not even something you do for the whole gathering.

You know the musicians stand up and say now let's have a little time of worship and they play a particular kind of music. But you see you can't restrict worship if this is true you can't restrict worship to a particular time or a particular activity.

It's everything it's how we are in our families it's how we are ethically it's what we do with our time and our priorities. When we gather and worship corporately it is a very good thing but we're not starting to do something that we're not doing the rest of the week.

[ 24 : 54 ] In fact the quality of our corporate worship is directly related to the quality of our individual worship. And I think there may be some of us there may be many of us who still have a sort of an Old Testament view of worship where we're fixed on procedure and proper style and those kinds of things.

We need priests between us and God because priests are particularly holy. And I need to tell you we're not. And I give us my exhibit A Dan Gifford.

I'm not saying that forms are unimportant. I think they are. If we worship Jesus in spirit and truth forms can help us keep staying the truth. But it's the reality of where our hearts are at and whether we bring our worship from the weak here and through Christ that true worship is the overflow of thanks and gratitude to God.

That's the second thing. And the third thing and finally is the supreme power and beauty of substitution. last week we saw Jesus turning water into wine.

Remember? And we saw that he came to reverse the normal order of things. The normal order of things in human life is from life to death, decline, decay. and that in the kingdom of God Christ has come to bring Jesus reverses that from growth and goodness into life.

[ 26 : 30 ] And in the temple and in this passage we learn that the way in which the new creation reverses the normal order is through substitution and the reason for that is that substitution is the ultimate act of love.

This passage is part of what goes on in chapter 3 as we come to that most famous of verses. 316 God so loved the world, he loved the world that he gave his only son that all who believe in him should not perish but have eternal life.

That's the reverse of consumerism. I mean all of you who are parents know God loved and he gave. Jesus is not trying to make a profit out of us.

He's not using us. He doesn't charge us a fee for services rendered. I mean we're not a very good investment anyway. What's great about this is that ongoingly in the Christian life we need to learn this every day.

It's ongoing in the Christian life we don't treat God with an economic exchange. He loves us, he gives to us, he loves us, he gives to us and we keep thinking no no I've got to do something. Well you do have to do something but not for the sake of his love, not because to base his love on.

[ 27 : 53 ] He comes not to consume but to be consumed. He comes not to use the temple but to give himself and to be the temple. He came, Jesus came not to live life to the full but to give his life so that we could have the abundance of life.

love. So what Jesus does in substitution is the opposite of that economic exchange. He gives himself in love. He pays the price in his own blood.

He takes the debt that we owe. It's what we're celebrating in the Lord's Supper. It cost him absolutely everything. He comes to supply us what we couldn't pay. He comes to give us a life we could never create.

And that is why those who follow Jesus are not called consumers, they're called disciples. And our relationships as we follow him closer become more about giving than getting.

And more about serving than being served. And since Jesus came as God in the flesh to be consumed, all the blessings of God are available to us in him.

[ 28 : 58 ] He is the true temple. He is the true lamb, the true vine. He is the true bread from heaven. He is where we meet with God. And our worship, therefore, is not just God centred, it is Jesus Christ centred.

Luther's wonderful words, he says, if anyone now seeks God apart from Christ, you should know that you'll miss God. Without Christ, there is no God. Amazing statement, isn't he?

So as we come forward today, we do so because one died, who gave himself, once offered, a full perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

And when we receive the bread and the wine, we feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving, as we worship him in spirit and truth. Amen.