

John 2:13-22

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[0 : 00] Father, may the words of my mouth and the many meditations of our hearts and minds be open to you and pleasing before you.

! And may you speak to us by the power of your Holy Spirit through your word.! So, we are in week three of a sermon series on the Gospel of John called Encounters with Jesus.

So, we're looking at stories of different people who encountered Jesus for the first time, what they learned about him, what they received from him, how their lives were changed by him.

And up to now, in the first kind of chapter and a half of the Gospel of John, Jesus has been doing his work in kind of mysterious, hidden ways. Abundant grace has been sneaking in beside people. But now, in the second half of John chapter 2, Jesus goes big and bold and public and launches his ministry in the most dramatic of ways, on the most dramatic of days.

[1 : 16] So, Jesus chooses the biggest event, the biggest religious festival, in the whole year in order to go public. It was Passover. When the Jews remembered that God had rescued them with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm from Egypt, tens of thousands of people would have made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

It would have been a bigger event than a Taylor Swift concert. Can you imagine that? People would have been buying animals to offer sacrifices. They would have been exchanging money to offer tithes.

They would have been entering the temple courts to offer prayers and praises. And Jesus marches straight into the middle of the temple, clears it out, and then claims that he's replacing it with something better.

It's hard to conceive of a bolder way to start one's ministry. It doesn't exactly win over the crowds, but it definitely surprises people and leaves a lasting impression.

It's a bit like somebody walking into the Vatican on Easter Sunday, clearing it out and claiming to be the new Vatican. Or somebody walking into the Parliament building in Ottawa on Canada Day, clearing out all the government officials and then claiming to be the new Parliament building.

[2 : 29] It would have been as confusing as it was shocking for everybody that was there. And so I want us to take a closer look at this big and bold passage.

The first five verses, verses 13 to 17, are about Jesus clears the temple. And then verses 18 to 22 are about Jesus replaces the temple. So let's begin with the clearing.

And I'm so glad, any of you who are youth who are in the service with us, I'm so glad you're here for this one. Look at verses 14 to 16. John gives us lots of juicy details.

So Jesus goes into the temple. He kind of scopes things out. He sees what he sees, hears what he hears. He goes away. He spends time making a whip out of cords.

Because you need a whip in order to drive out big animals like oxen. He goes in. He drives out everybody in the temple, including their sheep and oxen. He flips over the tables of the bankers.

[3 : 28] He takes their bags full of money and pours out all over the floor. And then he tells the people to get their pigeons out of there. I love that part. I just love that the last thing is he's telling off the people with the pigeons.

Because none of us like pigeons anyways. I mean, you simply can't make this stuff up. This is no gentle Jesus, meek and mild. This is Jesus big and bold and public.

It's a public statement that he's displeased. So what's the deal? What's going on here? Did Jesus just lose his cool? One time when I was 16 years old, my brother and I were in a bit of an argument. And sometimes when that happened and things got so heated, we were chasing each other around the house. And the meeting point came his doorway. And I was trying to push his door open with all my might to get into his room.

And he was trying to push his door closed with all his might to keep me out of his room. Until suddenly we heard a tear. And we realized that we had torn the door and its hinges out of the door frame.

[4 : 35] And we slowly stopped and put the door down and leaned it against the wall. And we had realized that we had let our anger get too far and get the better of us. Our mother came up and just went, yeah, just wait until dad gets home.

I mean, is that what's going on here? Is Jesus just becoming unhinged? Is he someone just like the rest of us who sometimes loses his temper? He's like the Incredible Hulk.

He has a lot of strength but doesn't always know how to control it. You see, in the Gospels, one of the surprising things is that Jesus actually does get angry. Multiple times where we see this.

And in John chapter 11, we're going to see it even more clearly. Jesus' anger over the death of a friend. Jesus is angry at death. But we never see a moment where Jesus is not in control of his anger.

In other words, Jesus' anger is always principled and righteous. It's never unwieldy and unpredictable. He's always angry at the right things, at the right time, in the right way.

[5 : 37] And never in a way that we could call sin. And by the way, we don't really want a God who never gets angry. I think some of us think we do, but we don't actually. Because a God who never gets angry is actually not a God who's good and just, but a moral monster.

That would be a God who could look at all the evil and suffering and atrocities that are in the world with cool, calm, collected indifference. But distant, indifferent, uninvolved is not good, loving, and holy.

And that's not the Jesus that we see here. Jesus marches straight into the temple and he gets his hands dirty, so to speak. And the big question is, why is Jesus angry? And why is he clearing the temple on the Passover?

And the answer that we're given is actually quite simple. His zeal for his father's house. His passion for the true worship of his father.

So when Jesus goes into the temple, he discovers that the temple courts have become a marketplace. They've become a farmer's market. Now, don't get me wrong, I love a good farmer's market. And Vancouver is a great city to live in for that stuff.

[6 : 46] It's wonderful. But that's not the purpose of the temple. The temple was supposed to be a house of prayer and praise. And so when Jesus walks in, he is not pleased.

Something that was once built by faith and filled with prayer and thick with the presence of God has now devolved into a banking and business building. And Jesus clears it out.

Now, the important thing to realize here is it's not that these things are bad in and of themselves. There's no sense in this passage that what's happening in the temple is morally wrong. But what's happening in the temple is in the wrong location.

So it's kind of like the housing market in Vancouver. Location, location, location is everything. It's a bit like that here. We have a visual picture of a spiritual reality.

The heart of the nation had become consumed with business rather than holy adoration of God.

The people of God had become distracted with much busyness rather than humble petition.

[7 : 54] And so the issue that Jesus is confronting is not just like social injustice, but I think it's spiritual distractedness. Does that make sense?

Spiritual distractedness. And so what's foremost on Jesus' heart as he begins his public ministry?

The clearing of the temple teaches us that he wants people to worship God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength.

He doesn't want people to be distracted from the goodness and the glory of his father. And he has a passion for his father's honor and glory and praise.

And he wants the temple to be devoted to that and not devoted to anything else. Now we'll see that this is one of the main issues for Jesus throughout his whole ministry. He has come to glorify his father and to restore the honor of his father in the hearts and minds of his people.

And that's why when you look at verse 17, this is actually so telling verse 17, which is a quote from Psalm 69. His disciples remembered that it was written about him, a quote from Psalm 69.

[9 : 01] Psalm 69, zeal for your house will consume me. This is interesting. In Psalm 69, as somebody's suffering at the hands of their enemies, they are being dishonored because they are seeking to honor God.

And so one of the ironies of this passage is that it's Jesus' zeal for his father's honor that causes him to clear out the temple. And in the Gospel of John, it is that same zeal for his father's honor that is going to cause him to die on the cross in dishonor and shame.

And so there's this great irony here that even at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, we are seeing the passion for his father that is going to lead him to the end of his ministry, where he lays down his life out of love.

So, Jesus clears out the temple, not because he's seeking to bring revolution to the city streets of Jerusalem, but because he is the suffering servant who came to lay down his life for his friends and to honor his father.

But Jesus doesn't stop there. He gets even bolder. He claims to replace the temple. And this is the second point. If you look at verse 18, notice how the Jewish leaders respond to Jesus.

[10:20] They come up to him and basically say, Can you show us your credentials for doing this? Like, who gave you the right to do this? And in what world do you have the authority? And in the Gospel of John, whenever the Jewish leaders come up and ask for a sign from Jesus, it is a sign that they do not believe Jesus has the authority to do what he's doing.

So, they say, what sign are you going to show us that you have the authority to do these things? And Jesus responds really cryptically, like he often does, and tells them about his resurrection. Look at verse 19 with me. Destroy this temple, said Jesus, and in three days I will raise it up. Then the Jews said to him, It has taken 46 years to build this temple, and you will raise it up in three days?

Like, who do you think you are, Jesus? Look at this. Verse 21, But we're told he was speaking about the temple of his body. So, look at what Jesus is doing here.

Jesus doesn't just clear out the temple. He is saying that his resurrected body is going to replace the temple in Jerusalem. In other words, Jesus is saying, I'm clearing out the temple because there's a new temple in town.

[11:30] And this new temple is a person. It's not a place. It's human flesh and blood. It's not brick and mortar. And this will have massive implications for the faith of every single person who follows Jesus from that moment on.

And here it is. You don't need to go somewhere to draw near to God and be close to God. You only need to go to someone to draw near to God and be close to God.

And that has two massive implications for us. The first is this. We can draw near to God and worship him anywhere and everywhere through the person of Jesus Christ.

So, you could find yourself in a jail cell, in an office cubicle, in a library desk, at a hospitable room, at a dining table.

You could find yourself anywhere. You could find yourself wishing alone and wishing that you were with people or with people and maybe wishing you were alone.

[12:32] In any and every place that you find yourself, it can become a place and a house of worship. Where you taste the glory of Jesus' grace.

And you know his presence with you. And you sing his praises to him. Because drawing near to the holy presence of God now happens through a person, not just a particular place.

And the second thing that we learn is that we can draw near to God's presence and worship him anywhere and everywhere, only through the person of Christ. Notice I added the word only.

You may be able to catch glimpses of God's beauty in the green mountains of Vancouver or the blue waters of Greece. And if you have the luxury of going to those places, it's wonderful. You may be able to sense something of God's peace if you're on the golf course or if you're in the spa.

You may be able to marvel at traces of God's beauty through the microscope or up at the sky through the telescope. But you will never be able to draw near into God's personal and holy and saving and satisfying presence without Jesus.

[13:42] And ultimately, that's what each one of us has been made for. For God to draw near to us. For us to draw near to God. And one of the marvelous things about the fact that Jesus is the new temple instead of a temple in Jerusalem is that we can draw near to the holy of holies in all the day-to-day ordinary stuff of our life.

This is why I love the title of that book by Douglas McKelvey called Every Moment Holy. A series of prayers for different aspects of life. Or why I love that little red book in the pack of your pews.

It's called The Book of Common Prayer. Because it takes this very seriously. It's got prayers for students and teachers and fisheries and those who've experienced the loss of a child. Or those who are beginning a marriage. Or those who are anxious and having a tough time going to sleep. And in every one of those moments it says, Christ is with you. You can draw near to God. This moment can become a moment of communion. And worship. And praise. Because Christ is the temple of God. Now, I want to end by returning to a theme that we talked about last week briefly.

[14:57] The theme of what does real faith look like? What is belief and how does it grow? So, interestingly, last week's passage and this week's passage both end on that same note.

So, look at verse 22 with me. Verse 22. When, therefore, Jesus 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. Now, if you scan your eyes up to verse 11 in the same chapter, notice some of the similarities.

This, the first of his signs, changing water into wine. Jesus did at Cana in Galilee and manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him.

Now, notice what John is doing here. John does this all over the place. Throughout the gospel, he is trying to build layer upon layer of our understanding of what belief and faith is as the gospel develops.

[16:01] And in verse 11, he shows us that faith is enabled by seeing Jesus' glory. In other words, faith is not just a blind leap into the dark.

It's not just a strong will. It's not just intellectual certainty. Faith is seeing the glory of Jesus and being drawn to trust him more and more and more.

Which means the way you grow in faith is not by just willing it to be so, but is by seeing more and more of the glory of Jesus. Now, when we get to verse 22, John adds a layer to this.

In other words, he says he wants us to see that our faith grows and is enabled not just by seeing a general glory of Jesus, like he can change water into wine and has dazzling might and power.

Rather, our faith grows as we see the specific glory of Jesus' resurrection. It's his resurrection. His saving mercy and his life overcoming death power that has the power to grow faith in us.

[17:07] So, a couple nights ago, Susie and I finished watching the first season of a new murder mystery. For those of you that are younger and not yet married, be careful if you marry somebody with British blood, because you will find yourself watching murder mysteries.

And that is where I find myself in life. And this new murder mystery has come out. It's a classic whodunit. Except instead of the murder being solved in one episode, this took eight episodes to solve one murder.

It took place in the White House during a state dinner. And the lead detective, who's this marvelous character, when she finally cracked the case, the Congress brought her in to have her testify about how she did it.

And, you know, in the States, these sorts of things tend to be big deal on news. So, she was before Congress. And they asked her, when did you know who did it?

And she responded saying, I don't know. One moment I did not know. And the next moment I did know. It was as if I saw the case for the first time.

[18:20] Now, she'd been working this case for a whole year. And it wasn't until the very end that she got it. But the way she described it is, she didn't crack the case because of a stroke of personal genius. She cracked the case because she had a moment of epiphany.

Or she saw reality for the first time. And I think this is how it was for the first disciples as they were seeking to follow Jesus. And I think how it often is for us in our own lives.

We don't actually get Jesus the first time we see him. We don't understand the riddles of his words all the time. It takes time, sometimes even years, for us to understand the significance of something that Jesus is saying to us or doing in our lives.

And sometimes the penny only drops when we finally get what Jesus' death and resurrection means for us. And this, I think, is part of John's point.

He's saying that we only start to grasp the meaning of Jesus' words when we first see the beauty of his death and resurrection for us. And this is key for our understanding of the Christian faith.

[19:26] Because it means that Christian faith is not just believing that Jesus died and rose again for your sins, although that's absolutely essential. But part of Christian faith is coming to believe that

because Jesus is the one who died and rose again for my sins, I can trust that his words are full of goodness and truth.

And I can place my life in his words. And I think this means two very practical things for us. And I'll finish with this in the next minute or so. Number one, we can never separate the words of Jesus from his passion and his resurrection.

Otherwise, they will lose their power and their joy and their hopefulness and their truth for us. They will not be words full of grace, but a new law. I think this was the tragic experience of Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy.

Anybody familiar with his long, meandering novels? A great novelist who lived a very anguished life. But he was utterly convinced at one point in his life that Jesus is a genius.

He thought, this guy is the wisest and greatest teacher that you'll ever find. And he actually took Jesus' words so seriously that he tried to do them meticulously and to a T.

[20 : 45] He tried to give up all his riches. He tried to pray all the time. He tried to do everything Jesus said. And yet, he found himself slipping into wave after wave of despair when he realized he could not keep the words of Jesus.

In other words, he had grabbed hold of the absolute truth of Jesus' words without trusting in the absolute grace of Jesus' death and resurrection. And so Jesus' words did not liberate him.

They just led him to further despair rather than faith. And that's one of the things that I think John wants us to get is that we can never separate Jesus' words from the death and resurrection.

You can never separate his absolute truth from his absolute grace. And the second thing is that Jesus' death and resurrection will deepen your faith in Jesus' words and the Bible more broadly.

Let me explain what I mean. I don't know if you've ever had this experience. I've had it before in my life. But there are times or seasons when it feels like the words of Scripture are falling on deaf ears or they're falling flat.

[21 : 53] Or they're just failing to move your heart. And whether you've been a Christian for two months or for 20 years, 40 years, you can have these seasons. And if you're in that situation, I want to suggest to you that you would be wise to return to the recordings of Jesus' passion and resurrection.

Because it's at that place that we are reminded of who it is who speaks to us in Scripture. It is the Lord who loved us, gave himself for us, but is alive forevermore.

The one who speaks in Holy Scripture is alive. And so the words that we read are not the wish dream of a now dead man.

They are the words of a resurrected man who sits at the right hand of God and rules in power and glory and is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. Meaning every word he speaks radiates with the energy and the vitality and the grace of God.

Everything is a living word from the living God to his living people so that they would have a living faith in the glory of his living grace.

[23 : 05] And so when we remember the words of Scripture as the disciples here did, when we remember the words of Jesus, we do not remember the words of a dead man but of someone who is more alive than we are.

He is present, he is near, he is holy, and he speaks to us so that we might believe. And that as we believe in him, we might have abundant life.

And as we have abundant life welling up within us, we may have eternal hope and that we may see more and more of his glory and enjoy more and more of what he has come to offer to us and to the whole world.

So brothers and sisters, Jesus goes big at the temple on Passover at the beginning of his ministry. We're confronted by his grace. We're shocked by what he does and who he is.

But it is so that we may see that the new temple is in town. He is risen from the grave and his words are the words of eternal life. So I speak these things to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

[24 : 15] Amen. Amen. Thank you.