

John 2:13-22

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[0 : 0 0] Father, we thank you for the time we have together today. May our hearts be opened as your word speaks to us. In Jesus name we pray. Amen. Please have a seat. Good morning. My name is Shia! Ting and I am an artisan apprentice at St. Peter's Fireside, an Anglican church in downtown Vancouver. I'm also a student at Regent College. I'm glad to be here with you all today at St.

John's talking about this great passage from John. So chances are if you've grown up in the church the first image that may come to mind when you think about this passage would be an angry Jesus driving out cattle and merchants with his whip of cords. For me, because I'm of a certain age, something that comes to mind is the AI generated image of Jesus doing a backflip over the tables in the temple, which was the hilarious outcome of someone inputting this scripture into chat GPT.

So jokes aside, we're going to take a look at this scripture today, which is a familiar piece that we'll look at a little deeper. Here we encounter a Jesus that is not meek or mild. As the hymn says, on the contrary, we see a Jesus that is powerful, fueled by righteous anger.

What was the meaning of his actions and the sign that he gave the Pharisees? How does it apply to us? My sermon today is titled Purity and Prophecy. There will be two main points. The first half of the sermon will focus on Jesus' zeal for the purity of worship. And the second half will focus on Jesus' prophetic sign in being the new temple. Again, Jesus' zeal for the purity of worship and his prophetic sign in being the new temple. First, Jesus, being the incarnate son of God, was zealous for the purity of worship to God. For some, hearing the words worship and purity together may bring to mind the ritual purity of worship in the Old Testament, ceremonial cleansing, immersion in water, etc. But the purity here has a different meaning from that. Here, Jesus is primarily concerned with the purity of our attitudes in worship. In this passage, we see how the elements of greed and exploitation drown out the opportunity for real worship. So growing up, my encounters with this passage were pretty one-dimensional.

It was a scripture that talked about human greed and how wrong it was to mix the commercial with the sacred. This is well-meaning, but it's also richer and deeper than that. So what exactly was wrong with selling animals for sacrifices in the temple? What would Jesus have been reacting to at that time, in that place, with those practices? Let's take a deeper look.

[3 : 2 3] It was nearly Passover, a time where all pilgrims would be coming up to Jerusalem to make sacrifices at the temple. Unlike our churches today, which is scattered all over the city, a first-century Jew or Gentile couldn't simply walk and find a temple near them. The Jerusalem temple was the only space for them to offer legitimate worship, and many pilgrims were coming from far away.

A Galilean Jew would have to travel around 120 kilometers by foot, whereas diaspora Jews would have to travel a few hundred kilometers. So imagine walking from Seattle to Vancouver.

At 24 kilometers a day, an average traveler would take at least a few days or even a few weeks. And we can't forget that animal sacrifices were required.

Can you imagine bringing an animal along? Taking that into account, the presence of animal sellers in the temple would not have been strange at all. They were needed for the people to purchase and make sacrifices. But what was wrong was where they were positioned and how that blocked the opportunity for people to worship.

So Herod's temple consisted of the altar courts, which is the court of the Gentiles, the inner courts, which is the court of Israel, and then within that, the altar and the Holy of Holies.

[4 : 58] And the biggest space in the temple would have been the Gentile courts. And it is certain that the merchants and money changers were doing business there. As its name suggests, it was also the only space where Gentiles could come and worship.

If the area was taken up by stalls, there would be no space for them to worship. They would have to worship among the throng and the crowd of the marketplace, the livestock and the bothering merchants. So these merchants, who had the purpose of aiding worship, were now making it impossible for people to worship.

And additionally, did you notice in the passage that Jesus rebuked the bird sellers in particular? If we look at verse 16, it says, To those who sow doves, Jesus said, Get these out of here. Stop turning my father's house into a market.

Of all the animal sacrifices, pigeons and doves were the primary sacrifice that the poor would have purchased. According to Jewish historical records, the prices of birds had risen to exorbitant prices.

A pair of doves were purchased for the equivalent of 25 days' worth of salary. In fact, this price was so inflated that a rabbi later reduced the number of obligatory sacrifices, reducing the price of a pigeon to a hundredth of what it was.

[6 : 36] So this fact, along with the merchants occupying the court of the Gentiles, showed that this system, which was fueled by greed and extortion, snuffed out the opportunity for real worship.

In Mark's account, Jesus' words are potent. He says, It is written that my house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers.

This is actually coming from Isaiah 56, where God says, Even those, referring to eunuchs and foreigners, I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar, for my house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations. So it was God's heart for the nations to worship, and for the poor, that fueled Jesus' zeal for the purity of worship.

Anyone who obstructed or exploited worshippers for the poor was worthy of his wrath. So this is the first point, Jesus' zeal for the purity of worship.

[7 : 52] So now, let's move on to our second point, prophecy. In verses 18 to 19, we read the exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees.

The Jews then responded to him, What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this? Jesus answered them, Destroy the temple, and I will raise it again in three days.

The temple he had spoken of was his body. So Jesus called himself the new temple, and the temple was where people could come to worship God, to commune with God.

It was the only place that they could receive forgiveness of sins, and we see this actually throughout Jesus' ministry. Jesus forgives the sins of people, while those around him exclaim, Who is this who forgives sins?

And when Jesus calls himself the new temple, he is effectively saying, I am where people can come to be forgiven. I am where people can come to commune with God.

[9 : 07] So communing with God was no longer through a single building in East Jerusalem. It was through Jesus Christ. So in the Gospel of John, the temple-clearing passage is in Chapter 2, which is right at the start of Jesus' ministry.

This is a very intentional way that John has composed his Gospel. So some scholars compare John's Gospel to an eagle, which symbolizes a bird's-eye view of the mystery of Christ.

In Chapter 1, Verse 14, John writes, The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

So we see here that temple language has already been applied to Jesus. When Jesus tabernacles with us, God himself tabernacles with us.

One commentator puts it this way. He says, John puts the temple passage right at the beginning of his Gospel, showing compellingly that Jesus is in utter control and completely aware of his eventual destiny.

[10 : 24] In this, John shows a perfect example of 20-20 hindsight, while at the same time, leaving events in their original life setting in the earthly ministry of Jesus.

Additionally, for readers of John's Gospel, it would be much more poignant, because when his Gospel was first written, it is likely that the destruction of the literal temple in AD 70 was still lingering fresh in people's minds.

So John would have wanted to point people back to Jesus as the new temple. For us today, this passage is a call to re-examine our hearts in worship.

Jesus' zeal for the purity of worship is a reflection of God's heart for all, the poor, the foreigners, so that all can come to worship him.

And we are reminded that true worship is not found in a place, but in the person of Jesus Christ. So as we come to a close, I'll just leave us with two reflections about the nature of worship.

[11 : 39] First, worship is for everyone. Some of us may be in a season where faith is taking a backseat in our lives. It's there, like the temple, but maybe we are much more concerned with our own matters, our goals and visions for the future, including our finances.

These, like the merchants selling sacrificial animals at the temple, have a good purpose. But greed has located them in the space of worship, and it has blocked out the proper space for us to actually worship God.

How can these come into its proper place and priority in our lives so that they can instead contribute to worship and communion with God? And is there any way that us, that we may be blocking other people from worshipping God?

Secondly, we worship a person, not a place. Jesus being a new temple is a reality for us. Worship is no longer contained in a single place.

It is located within a personal relationship with God. So if coming to church has been feeling dry, which happens to all of us from time to time, the reminder is to come to Jesus himself.

[13 : 03] May we encounter God, the Word become flesh, through receiving his forgiveness, worship, prayer, and the Word in our daily lives.

God became flesh so that he could be with us. That's a tremendous reality. Let us pray. Dear God, thank you for your Word and your heart for your people to be able to worship you.

Thank you, Jesus, for being the way that we are able to commune with you, no longer through animal sacrifices or through traveling a long way. You have opened up a new and better way for us.

So, Lord, refresh and draw us close to you. In your name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Thank you.