

Greater Than the Temple

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[0 : 01] Well, for those of you that are not watching the Super Bowl right now, you've chosen the better lot. So I'm glad you're here with me. Please open your Bibles to John chapters 1 and 2.

John begins his gospel in a unique way. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

Then in verse 14, And our passage that we're going to be looking at at the very end of chapter 2 is Jesus cleansing the temple.

And I think Jesus cleansing the temple is John's way of unpacking for us verse 14 in chapter 1. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

John really wants us to know that Jesus clears the temple and shuts it down in a sense in the first few verses, verses 14 to 17. And then in verses 18 to 22, Jesus declares that he himself is the new temple.

[1 : 20] The Word has become flesh and dwells among us. Now before we dive into the passage, I think it's important that we understand the placement of it just a little bit.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, this temple cleansing thing comes way at the end of the gospel, right before Jesus is betrayed. But what John has done is he's actually taken this story, and he stuck it at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry.

And interestingly, he puts it right on the heels of a very different story, which is the wedding of Cana. So you have a wedding, and you have a temple cleansing.

And the tone and the feel of these stories is really, really different, we have to admit. One is hidden. It's domestic. It's subtle. It's private.

It's intimate. And the other is bold. It's big. It's loud. It's visible. One is about Jesus bringing life and joy and fullness and abundance.

[2 : 21] And the other is Jesus coming in anger and judgment and, dare I say, zeal. One is about Jesus as a sympathetic guest who saves the day at a wedding.

And the other is about Jesus as an indignant judge who comes and shuts down the temple. And so we see these two stories are set side by side in the Gospel of John.

And I think this tells us a very important lesson right at the very beginning. And it's this. We cannot truncate who Jesus is. And we cannot limit where Jesus decides to work.

We can't truncate who he is. We can't limit where he decides to work. And brothers and sisters, this is good news for us. Because we should expect to see Jesus at work in our families, in our homes, in the privacy of the deepest parts of us, in our relationships, in weddings, bringing life and joy and abundance and transformation like we've never known before.

We should expect to see that. But at the same time, we should expect to see Jesus in the most public and bold and visible and political and institutional and powerful places of our society.

[3 : 35] And we should expect to see Jesus doing stuff right there as well. So wherever we go, Jesus is at work. And that's important for us to recognize.

But this week, Jesus is at work in a very public and very busy scene. Look at verse 13, chapter 2. John tells us, The Passover of the Jews was at hand.

Underline the word Passover. Jesus goes up to Jerusalem, the city of Jerusalem, during Passover. Now, it's hard for us to imagine, as Vancouverites, what this would have been like.

I think the best way for us to imagine it is to think of 2010 Winter Olympics and being downtown during the lighting of the torch. It's that intense.

It's that frenzied. Every Jewish male that was 20 years or older had to make the trek to Jerusalem, the pilgrimage, no matter where they lived, for this festival. And if they were rich enough, they would bring their wife and their kids with them.

[4 : 38] And so this town of Jerusalem that was around 50,000 people or so would swell to, some scholars say, upwards of 200,000 people during the Jewish Passover.

So you can imagine this. Just imagine entering into a city where herds of people are pouring into the city walls and the temple courts. The smell of thousands of slaughtered animals being burned and sacrificed and offered to Almighty God.

The sight of a newly renovated temple that would have just been dominated their imaginations. The sound of people seeing each other the one time a year they get to see each other because they live far apart.

The hustle and bustle of friends uniting and bartering and exchanging coins. And the fervor of hope as the Israelites remembered what God did in the past, delivering them from Egypt and saying, maybe one day God will deliver us from Caesar too.

And so there's this sense of weighty hope and expectation when it is Passover. And Jesus goes right into the midst of that scene and he clears out the temple.

[5 : 51] He kicks people out of it and he shuts it down. Look at verse 14. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons.

And the money changers sitting there and making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple with the sheep and the oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.

And he told those who sold the pigeons, take these things away. Do not make my father's house a house of trade. His disciples remembered that it was written, zeal for your house will consume me.

It's breathtaking. Jesus consumed with zeal. Angry. Angry. Outraged. Indignant.

Coming in judgment. What a way to start your public ministry. It's like me getting ordained a year ago and just coming up here and throwing the pulpit at you and pushing Etienne's piano off the stage and kicking Aaron down the stairs.

[7 : 06] Jesus is not trying to gain people's approval. He's not calm and cool and collected right now. He's not Jesus meek and mild.

He is a sympathetic wedding guest who is now the indignant temple judge. And for many of us, if you're anything like me, this sets you on edge right away because you feel uncomfortable with this.

Most modern enlightened Western people don't like this Jesus very much. Why would we? This story sets us on edge.

Now it seems to me that there's a few reasons why it sets us on edge. I think one is that some of us feel like it's a perfect example of exactly what is wrong with the world. I mean, the last thing our world needs right now is more religious violence, right?

So another religious leader to come in with his religious zeal and be violent and we go, oh, I don't need that. I'm going to walk away. The world has too much of that right now. And recent events make us particularly sympathetic to this, sensitive to this, right?

[8 : 16] You think of Paris just a month ago, the shooting of the newspaper magazine. You think of Boko Haram and Nigeria and Cameroon filling our news feeds with abduction after abduction or killing after killing.

I was reading The Economist about a week ago and they had a little cartoon on page seven. Looks something like that.

For those of you that can see that, that's really impressive. I'll describe it to you. I think it expresses our sensitivities in this regard pretty well.

The background is a background of kind of jagged city buildings that have been brought to ruins just heaped on the ground. There are airplanes sticking out of the ruins and tanks and cars.

There's a battered flag in the background as smoke billows into the blue sky covering the sun. And then in the foreground, there are machine guns strewn throughout the ground.

[9 : 18] And not just machine guns, but the victims of the machine guns lie dead and lifeless next to them. And then right in the middle of the picture are two little dogs.

Two cute little dogs wondering what in the world is going on. I tend to think of Vancouver. I wrote this. And the dogs have a little caption above them and this is what the caption says.

It says, It all started with an argument over whose God was more peace-loving, kind, and forgiving. It's devastating, isn't it?

It's utterly devastating. I think it's a bit cheeky too. I think it's a little cheeky, just a few reasons. We can't simply boil all religions down to this one belief.

If you read the basic texts of most world religions, you actually see that they have very different views of God. Most of them actually don't all agree that God is peace-loving and kind and forgiving. Another thing is that we just simply can't forget that some of the gravest atrocities of the 20th century against humanity were actually fueled by atheistic regimes and anti-religious agendas.

[10 : 35] So whether we consider ourselves religious or not, we have to come to grips with the fact that violence comes from religion or irreligion. But the question is, is Jesus yet another perpetrator of religious violence?

It still stands. We still feel it. Is he being violent here? And all we have to do is look at the details of the text because that's the only way we can settle it. So look at verse 15.

Jesus makes a whip of cords. I don't know about you, but when I first read that, I go, holy smokes. I have alarm bells going off in my head and red flags in my heart. One of the things I found out that's really helpful is whip of cords would have been made out of either reeds or straw hay.

Most likely, Jesus probably used the straw hay that was on the ground in the temple because of all the animals being there. So the whip of cords is actually quite weak. It couldn't harm anybody. But the whip of cords is necessary to get the animals out, right?

Oxen and sheep don't just leave by saying please leave. You gotta use something to get them going. Verse 15 again. He drove them all out of the temple.

[11 : 52] Notice Jesus comes into the temple. He pushes people out of the temple. It's as if Jesus is not there to inflict harm on anybody. He's just there to kick people out so that he's the one left standing.

Look at verse 17. This gives us the motivation for why Jesus does this. Zeal for your father's house will consume me. That's a quote from Psalm 69.

And one of the interesting things is that Psalm 69 is a psalm where David is actually being attacked by enemies for being faithful to God. And so the quote of this psalm shows us that Jesus is actually actually like David.

Jesus has come zealous for God and zealous for the worship of his people and that that zeal in the Gospel of John is actually going to mean that Jesus is going to lay down his life.

Zeal for the father's house is literally going to consume him. It's going to crush him on the cross. And so what we get is a very, very different understanding of Jesus.

[13 : 00] He doesn't come to be violent and take people out. He comes, in fact, to lay down his own life, to be consumed so that people themselves would know true life in him.

So we actually see the Gospel in this text, which is quite amazing. Now, if you're anything like me, you go, that's great. I still resist this.

I don't like it. Jesus is angry. And if Jesus is God, then that means God is angry. And I don't like an angry God.

Anybody feel that way? I feel that way often. But it's kind of a curious thing, I think. Because I think to myself, I get angry all the time.

When I hear Boko Haram abducting a bunch of school children, 200 of them, and taking it somewhere, I'm indignant. When I hear of people suffering under the weight of oppression, I'm angry.

[14 : 06] When I hear of somebody being diagnosed with cancer, I'm angry. We know what it's like to be angry, and we should be angry at these things, because they destroy human life.

We should be angry. And the funny thing is, is we can do this weird thing sometimes, where I get angry at something, yet the holy and awesome living God can't be angry at something.

It's as if he needs to be detached. He needs to be distant. He needs to be unconcerned, and cool, and calm, and collected, and out there. But that's not the biblical view of God.

The biblical view of God is that he is intimately concerned with humanity and our ways. And he gets angry when we live in ways that are not for our flourishing and don't give him glory.

So I actually think our revulsion against God's anger lies much deeper. If God gets angry, then we're actually on the hook. God cares about how we live our lives, and there are repercussions if we don't live them well.

[15 : 16] God gets angry. But the question is, what makes Jesus angry? Look at verse 16.

Do not make my father's house a house of trade. Why is Jesus angry? Because consumerism has replaced worship.

Consumerism has replaced worship. They've turned the temple into a market, into a mall, into a bank. It's not that banking is bad, or economic calculation is bad, or buying thing is bad.

But if you're anything like me, you know that all too easily these things can crowd out the awareness and attentiveness to God's holy presence in our lives.

Ceaseless activity can replace genuine spiritual life. Trying to get ahead can replace genuine thanksgiving. Business and commerce can take over our prayer and our worship.

[16 : 23] And brothers and sisters, this isn't just something that happens in the economic and business world. This is something that happens right here in the midst of our spiritual lives. We can come here on Sundays and have a consumeristic understanding of what we are doing.

I come here to hear somebody preach a good sermon and if they don't preach good sermons, I don't like it, I'm going to go somewhere else. I come here to hear Etienne because he's awesome.

He's leaving, sorry. He is awesome. Or I come here because of this certain music and it can go on and on and on and on. That we have this consumeristic understanding of our faith and if it doesn't suit us or fit us, then we will just do something else because it's about me.

But the difference between consumerism and worship is consumerism is me-centered and worship is God-centered. I've been taking a course at Regent on Thursday nights. If you ask my wife, that's the highlight of my week.

I haven't been at Regent for a couple years and I'm really loving being back. And this course is with a 91-year-old professor. He's been thinking about the things we're talking about in class for 60 years.

[17 : 39] It's incredible. And one of the things he talks about is how as human beings we're actually created to worship. He says this is part of our humanity. And he gave this wonderful definition of worship that I want to share with you.

Listen to what he said. He said the purpose of worship is to express gratitude for the beauty and love of the one we worship.

the purpose of worship is to express gratitude for the beauty and love of the one we worship. And he made this daring quote. it is not a better worship leader we need on Sunday mornings.

It is genuine repentance we need on Saturday evenings for true worship. Brothers and sisters, I wonder if that's true of us. I wonder if here what we need is not a better worship leader but we need more repentance repentance from our consumeristic ways and greater greater thankfulness for the goodness and grace of God to us.

That we come here on Sunday evenings just elated to have the privilege of getting to express gratitude to almighty God. Say God you and no other are worthy of the glory.

[18 : 57] Jesus wants to free us and he wants to help us worship again. But this doesn't come without challenge.

Jesus to come in and clear the temple of course he's going to be challenged. This leads us to the next section. Look at verse 18. The challenge comes in a form of a question. What sign do you show us for doing these things?

Basically, Jesus, where do you get the power and authority to do this? You don't. Jesus responds to the counter challenge verse 19. Destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it up.

Verse 20, bewilderment. It's taken us 46 years to build this temple and will you raise it up in three days? And then John explains for us what Jesus meant.

Verse 21. But he was speaking about the temple of his body. destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again.

[20 : 02] I don't know about you guys but when I'm sick I can't even make myself feel better. Just not everywhere and it's bad. I can't even make myself feel better.

And Jesus is saying destroy me and I will pull myself up out of death and give myself life again. elsewhere in the Gospel of John he says this, I lay down my life and I take it up again.

No one takes it from me but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again. It's tremendous power and the point of all this power is Jesus is saying I am the new temple.

I'm the dwelling place of God. It's me. And John signaled this for us. The word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Friends, it would be hard to find any set of words that has sent greater shock waves to the whole of human history than these words. God dwells with us.

[21 : 12] I mean, what could possibly be more surprising? mind expanding, soul bending and life changing than that? I don't want to complicate this very much.

God dwells among us in Jesus Christ and that is tremendous. And so there are two implications of this that I want to point out to you. The first is that Jesus Christ is the glory of God.

All throughout the Old Testament we see that God's glory dwells in the temple. And now Jesus is saying I'm the temple. So now he is the glory of God.

It's kind of interesting to think about. The apostle John had a disciple named Polycarp and when he died Polycarp continued on his teaching and then Polycarp had a disciple named Irenaeus of Lyon who became a big bishop and leader in France area.

And he continued on John's teaching and Irenaeus in the second century had this beautiful quote. He said the glory of God is a human being fully alive.

[22 : 24] The glory of God is a human being flesh and blood fully alive. God yes. Glory of God yes. Human being fully alive yes.

So when Jesus speaks it's God speaking. when Jesus acts and feels it is God acting and feeling and we get to see his glory.

We get to see his glory. Moses longed for this. He said God please show me your glory. David longed for this. Please show me your beauty and now we get to see it.

The word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory. brothers and sisters you were made to behold glory. That's why when somebody goes to the Grand Canyon and looks over the edge they're just like it takes their breath away.

That's why when Susie and I look at the sunset at those really long summer days and you get the blues and the greens and the orange colors we just marvel at the beauty of it.

[23 : 35] I can't explain why it exists. It's just so beautiful. That's why for those of you that know the YouTube video the guy who sees the double rainbow is freaking out.

He's freaking out. There's probably a few other reasons for that. But one of them is that double rainbows are awesome. I've seen one.

It was awesome. We're made to behold beauty and glory. That's how God designed us to be. And as one of my favorite music artists said, his name is Josh Gerald.

Some of you probably know him. Yeah, that's what I'm talking about. In Jesus Christ we see more glory, says Josh, than the world has ever known.

You take all the glory of all the sunsets, of all the grand canyons, of all the mountains, of all the double rainbows and you put them together and it's like a drop in the ocean of the glory of Jesus Christ. God. Because he is infinitely beautiful and lovely and he is God with us so we actually get to stare into the face of God.

[24 : 47] Second implication and this is where I'm going to end. Hold on with me just a few more minutes. Jesus Christ is the gift of God, glory and gift. Friends, God gives himself to you in Jesus Christ.

We're talking about God who for all eternity has dwelt in the perfection of the trinitarian love, perfection of life, perfection of joy, perfection of fullness and he bends down from heaven and stoops down into the weakness and the brokenness and the sin and the frailty of human life so that he can make himself humanly accessible to us.

So that we can receive God himself. Listen to what 16th century Protestant reformer John Calvin said. He said if we're united to Christ by faith, we possess God.

God has given himself to us to be enjoyed in Christ. Listen to what 20th century theologian, Swiss German guy named Karl Barth said.

loving us, God does not give us something but himself. And by giving us himself, giving us his son, he gives us everything.

[26 : 10] He gives us everything. Friends, I really want you to know this in your lives. This truth first sunk into my life when I was 20 years old.

I was visiting my parents for Christmas. They gave me a CD called God is the gospel. I was in university. I was driving from San Francisco to Los Angeles in the middle of the desert, no man's land.

Smells like cows. And in this CD called God is the gospel, it asked me this really, this preacher asked me this really simple question.

He said if you could have all the gifts of heaven without God, would you want it? said if you could be completely restored bodily, if you could have all your friends and family, if there could be no more cancer and all justice over the face of the earth, if you could be perfectly satisfied and belong and have all the community in the world but not have God, would you want it?

And I remember driving on the road going too fast and I just start bawling because I realized my whole entire life I wanted everything God could give me but I hadn't realized that the greatest gift was God.

[27 : 34] Sometimes I worry that we want all the gifts of God without God himself. We want the new creation but we don't want the creator. We want peace but we don't want the press of peace.

Maybe we want love but not the God who loves. security but not the refuge in the rock. Wisdom but not the God who speaks truth.

Healing but not the God who heals. I would love it as the evening service and at St. John's if we at St. John's were a church that people knew I don't know what else they're on about here but one thing I do know they love knowing and enjoying God for who he is and they treasure him above all other things.

So brothers and sisters wherever you're at at life right now whether you're young or old Christian or not weak or strong bold or timid do not live your life rejecting and squandering this gift.

you have a tremendous opportunity to know the living God in Jesus Christ and your heart I guarantee you will be restless and rootless until it finds rest and root in him.

[28 : 54] God offers himself to you tonight to embrace and to love and to enjoy and in receiving him you receive everything. John was right in the beginning was the word the word was with God and the word was God and the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory glory as of the only son from the father full really really really full of grace and truth.

I speak these things to you in the name of the father and the son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.