

The True Temple

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 31 January 2021

Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0 : 00] Good morning, church. Our sermon text today is John, chapter 2, verses 12 through 22. Let me invite you to turn there with me. John, chapter 2, verses 12 through 22.

Let me pray for us, and then I'll read the text. Let's pray together. Father, our Father in heaven, we pray that your name would be hallowed, that your kingdom would come, and that your will would be done on earth as it is in heaven.

God, we ask that in this time as we turn to your word, that your Holy Spirit would come and give us the grace of illumination so that we might understand the things that you have recorded for us.

Lord, not just so that we might gather new information, but so that we might see Christ more fully and be more transfigured and transformed into his image, conformed to his likeness.

We pray this in his name. Amen. John 2, verse 12. After this, he, that is Jesus, went down to Capernaum with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.

[1 : 14] The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 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 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. So the Jews said to him, what sign do you show us for doing these things? Jesus answered them, destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

The Jews then said, it has taken 46 years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days? But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he 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.

[2 : 23] Well, one of the wonders of living in the time that we do is that so many of the things that a generation or two ago would have been almost unthinkable have now become incredibly convenient.

For example, if I want a new book, a simple online order will drop it at my door in a day or two. If I need a bag of groceries, I can do curbside pickup, and the store will put it right in the trunk of my car. I don't even have to get out of my car to do grocery shopping. If I want to talk to my extended family, a simple tap of a button on my phone, and I can see and hear their faces from hundreds of miles away.

It's all so massively convenient. And that, in many ways, is a good thing. But convenience can sometimes come with a price.

Social media makes sharing ideas and photos with my friends very convenient, but it also creates, at times, a social echo chamber where I never really meaningfully engage with people outside of my tribe.

[3 : 40] Ordering a book through Amazon puts it conveniently at my doorstep, maybe even the next day, but it also forces many local bookstores to dwindle and perhaps close, and neighborhoods lose places where new ideas can be shared and real relationships formed.

Convenience comes with a price. Now, what our passage today puts before us is a very bracing question. Am I, are we, allowing our worship of God to be marred or even lost?

In the name of convenience. Let me show you from our text what I mean. This event in Jesus' life is often called the cleansing of the temple.

And here, in this episode, we see two things. First, we see Jesus confront convenient worship. And then second, we're going to see Jesus cure convenient worship.

So first, we see Jesus confront convenient worship in verses 12 through 17. Let's look at those verses again. Jesus goes up to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Now, John mentions the Passover a number of times in his gospel.

[5 : 04] And Jesus, in obedience to the law, participates in this annual worship gathering in the capital of Jerusalem. Now, the Passover feast commemorated what?

It commemorated Israel's liberation from slavery in Egypt. The Exodus, the great act of rescue in the Old Testament, where God, remember, judged the Egyptians in a series of judgments called plagues.

And the sort of climactic judgment of all was putting to death all of the firstborn in the entirety of Egypt. And that was a judgment that would have come to the Israelites as well had not God provided a way for that judgment to pass over them.

And that way that God provided for his judgment to pass over was for a lamb to be sacrificed. And in every household, as a substitute for the firstborn, the lamb would die instead and God's judgment would pass over that house.

So this was what the nation remembered year after year after year. And so Jesus goes up to Jerusalem for the annual feast. And the center of worship in Jerusalem, the heart of the festival, was the temple.

[6 : 23] Now, the temple in the Old Testament was the place where God met and dwelt with his people. You know, this longing, this urge to commune with God, you see it in almost every human culture, don't you?

And so in most human cultures, we see temples of some kind. A place where finite humans can try to meet what is infinite and what is transcendent.

A place where finite humans can get in touch with ultimate reality with God. But those temples that are strewn across the ancient world were but shadows and distortions of the real thing.

Do you remember when Paul walked into Athens and Acts and he saw the massive number of idols and altars there and how it broke and upset his heart? But he noticed there that there was one altar dedicated to an unknown God.

And so Paul says, men of Athens, I see that you're religious in every way. But what you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

[7 : 35] People hunger for ultimate reality, for communion with God, but we don't really know how to get it. But the true God, the God of the Bible, has made a way for us to do that. And in the Old Testament, when his people were living in tents in the wilderness after the Exodus, God said, I'll come and I'll live in a tent right there in your midst.

So he commanded Moses to build a tabernacle, which was a tent, where he would dwell in the midst of his tent-dwelling people. And when his people lived in houses in the promised land, after they had settled in the promised land, God said, I'll live in a house right there in your midst.

And so he commanded David and Solomon to build the temple, the house, where God would dwell in the midst of his house-dwelling people. And when in judgment Solomon's temple was destroyed by the Babylonians, and then when in grace God brought them back to the land after the exile, nearly the first thing that God tells the people to do is what?

Build the temple. Build the place that will signify my dwelling right in your midst, your creator and your redeemer. Because that's why I've made you, God says. That's why I've rescued you.

I've made you and I've rescued you to dwell with me. And in dwelling with me to bear my image. And in bearing my image to spread joy and glory through the whole creation.

[9 : 02] So Jesus, on the Passover, goes up to the temple. Now the temple complex in Jesus' day had been greatly expanded.

There's mention of that in verse 20 of our passage, when the Jewish authorities say, it's taken 46 years to build this temple. Now what's being referred to there is the sort of constant construction in Jesus' day that had built and rebuilt the courts and greatly sort of repaired the temple proper.

So the temple was really not just sort of one sort of temple proper, but a whole complex of courts and courtyards and colonnades. So when it says in verse 14 that Jesus entered the temple, it means sort of the temple area or the temple complex.

The massive courts that surrounded the actual sort of temple building itself. And when Jesus enters the temple area, he finds something there that greatly disturbs him.

In the outer court, there are animals being sold. And there are money changers exchanging currency. Now why was that going on?

[10:12] Well, think about it. People had to travel, sometimes multiple days, to get to Jerusalem for the annual feasts.

So rather than sort of take your sacrifice with you on that long journey, this is sort of how I imagine them taking their sheep with them. It's probably not how they would have done it. And you have to feed it, and you have to water it, and you have to clean up after it.

Instead of doing all that, you could just arrive in Jerusalem. You just buy your sacrifice when you got there. And the money changers were also providing, I think, what we would have thought of as a helpful service.

Again, people were coming from all over for the annual feasts. And all these different locations where people were coming from, it wasn't like today where there were like one or two currencies that kind of enveloped whole continents.

No, all these different locations had their own forms of little local currencies. So the money changers would allow you to kind of take your petty little local currency and exchange it into the local money.

[11:12] So you could do all your transactions. So you could pay your taxes and do all that good stuff. So think about it. It was a pretty good setup. People are coming from far away. Don't bother them with bringing their own animals or searching all over to find a currency exchange.

Let's set it up right here. You come to the temple. You buy your sacrifice. You exchange your money. You're good to go. And bonus, rather than any of the kind of modest profit that's made going to benefit someone else, it goes to the temple.

It's a win-win. You get your cows. You get your coins. And the temple is supported. What could be better than that? Why wander the streets of Jerusalem looking for what you need?

Just put it right here in the temple courts. It is the ultimate inconvenience. But Jesus will have none of it.

None of it. He makes a little whip of reeds or cords, and he uses it to start driving the animals out. And if you've ever tried to get an ox to move, you know why Jesus had to build a little whip to get the animals to leave.

[12:25] And he walks up to the money table, and he flips it over. And he goes to the pigeon sellers, and he says, pick up your cages and get out of here. What others saw as this beautiful convenience, Jesus sees as a complete tragedy.

Why? Didn't Jesus want the pilgrims in Jerusalem to be able to offer sacrifices according to the law? Didn't Jesus want people to have the right currency to pay their taxes and get their sacrifices and all that?

Well, Jesus didn't have a problem with any of that, actually. It wasn't the activity that he had a problem with. It was the location. You've made my father's house a house of trade.

The courts are supposed to be places of prayer, of reverence. These courts are meant to be set apart, a place that's set apart for worship.

And instead, you've made it a barnyard and a bank. Just imagine what this would have been like. Now, I know a lot of us like to grab a cup of coffee or a quick breakfast before coming to church.

[13:37] You'll often see the Lauer family at Brueger's around 845 when we're on our way, right? But, you know, we could make it really easy for people if we just set up right in the back of the church, right behind the soundboard, a coffee shop.

You know, right next to Jess, right next to Kevin, maybe where that book's little pamphlets are. We'll just stick a coffee shop, bam, right there. We'll put an espresso machine back there. We'll put a barista there.

We'll put some breakfast sandwiches there. And then after you check in with the ushers, you can just walk right over there whenever you want. Get a coffee, get an egg and cheese sandwich. How sweet would that be? You get your coffee, you get your breakfast sandwich.

Maybe the church gets a little proceeds. Win-win. The sermon starts to bore you. It goes a little long. You can get up and get an espresso and make it through points five and six of the sermon.

How sweet would that be? Not that sweet, right? Not that sweet. Because while we're trying to worship, we'd be constantly interrupted by the whirl of the coffee machine, by the casual conversation of the clients, the rattle of the coffee mugs going into the dishwasher.

[14 : 50] It would be a mess. But think of how much worse it would have been for the worshipers in Jesus' day, worshiping not just next to the aroma of a coffee machine, but next to the aroma of a cattle stall.

Most of us who live in the city don't really know what that's like, do we? But here's the real hitch. This only impacted some of the worshipers.

If you were a Jew, you didn't have to stay in those outer courts with the clinking coins and the bleeding sheep. You were actually allowed to go into the next courtyard and get away from all that stuff.

But if you were a Gentile, if you were an outsider, you had to stay outside in the outer court. You had to pray next to the banks in the barnyard. So do you see what was happening?

Not just had a place reserved, set apart by God, a place set apart by God for prayer and awe, not just had that been turned into a noisy marketplace, but the place where outsiders could actually connect with the true God in a world of idols, the place where outsiders could connect with the true God had been overrun for the sake of the convenience of the insiders.

[16 : 21] The religious folk, the insiders, the haves, had done all sorts of things to make their worship experience easier.

But who paid the cost? The irreligious folk, the outsiders, the have-nots. And that gets right down to the heart of the matter.

However, the impulse to put cows and coins in the courtyard of the temple is driven by a heart that wants to make worship a convenient religion for some instead of a gospel message for all.

So we need to check ourselves. I'm sure that the first person who had the idea of putting a money-changing table in the temple courts was not thinking, you know what will really dishonor God and exclude the very people we're supposed to be evangelizing?

Let's put a money-changing table right here. Let's do it. That's not what they were thinking. They were thinking, what will make it easier for us to worship? And what can be wrong with that, right?

[17 : 36] But it's the wrong question. The question cannot be what will make it easier for us to worship? The question has to be what will honor God and make it possible for them to worship?

Worship isn't about serving my needs, but exalting God and drawing all peoples to Him. And that's what gets Jesus fired up in our passage.

His disciples then and now need to remember that it was written, zeal for your house will consume me. Jesus is passionate about the honor of the Father's name and the gathering of all nations to worship Him.

And if our convenience gets in the way of that, we need to be ready for Jesus to flip some tables. are we in danger of this today?

What things do we do while maybe making it easier for us might inadvertently be making it harder for others to worship? You know, it's easier at times to use kind of insider language or Christian-y jargon rather than attempting to explain things clearly.

[19 : 02] You know, it's a comfort. It can be a comfort to insiders to hear certain phrases thrown around. But that can be kind of confusing for the outsider or the newcomer who has no idea what a hedge of protection is or whatever.

You know, these kind of phrases that we grow up using as Christians. And God certainly isn't honored by empty, jargony phrases. Or it can be easier at times to harp on the shortcomings or the failures of the prevailing culture around us.

It can be easier to just sort of harp on the shortcomings that we see around us rather than at the same time attempting to reform and renew and critique the church's shortcomings.

In other words, it can be comforting for the insider to hear a bold critique of this or that, but it can be confusing for the outsider when it seems like the only social issues that are being critiqued are some and not others.

We condemn this or that. Why aren't we talking about our own shortcomings? It's easier to stick to familiar patterns or rhythms in worship.

[20 : 13] It's more convenient to sing the same familiar songs that's more comfortable to dress in a certain way, to sit in the same spot. It's so easy to slide or drift into doing all the things that will

make it easy and convenient for the already religious folks to practice their religion and go home affirmed in their performance.

It's so easy to do that. But throughout the Gospels, Jesus saves his most stringent critiques, not for the wayward pagan, but for the self-satisfied churchgoer.

I think this might be one reason why John puts his account of Jesus cleansing the temple at the beginning of his Gospel rather than at the end. Matthew, Mark, and Luke recount Jesus cleansing the temple at the end of Jesus' ministry.

But John, perhaps for some thematic reasons, or perhaps because Jesus actually just did it twice, wants to mention it here at the beginning, right here, after the wedding of Cana.

Remember the wedding of Cana that we talked about last week where Jesus, in a very sort of secular setting, rescues a wedding feast. He turns water into wine. And in so doing, He rescues the reputation of a young groom.

[21 : 38] A young groom who is on the verge of total social shame, who gets all the credit for what Jesus did. Remember? The master of the feast comes to this young groom.

What does he say? Did you hear what Jesus did? No, he looks at the young groom and says, you did something great. You saved the best wine until now. And there's the young groom. I'm thinking, what did I do?

He did nothing. And Jesus did everything. And the young man got all the credit. And that's how Jesus treats those who know that they've blown it.

He rescues us from shame and gives us joy without our desert, without doing anything to deserve it. But here in the second half of John 2, we see how Jesus treats those who think they've got it all together.

Who think they can use a religious system for their own convenience. And to the self-satisfied religious folk, Jesus gives them judgment. So which one are you?

[22 : 46] Are you the groom who knows that unless someone else comes to the rescue, you're done for? Or are you trying to find an easy, convenient religion that will tick the boxes?

Do you want to just do the right thing, go through the motions, preferably without too much inconvenience or cost so you can get back to your life? And if we're honest, I think we all, at one point or another, fall into that latter category.

So what do we do? Where do we go? Well, thankfully, Jesus doesn't just confront convenient worship in this passage, right? He also, in a little bit of a cryptic way, points us to the cure.

In verses 18 through 22, Jesus points us to the cure for convenient worship. Now let's look at those verses again, 18 through 22. And the first thing that happens here is that the Jews, now in John's gospel, the phrase the Jews is going to come up again and again and again.

And that almost always means the religious authorities in Jerusalem, not every single Jewish person. After all, Jesus was a Jew. So when John says the Jews, he's talking about sort of the religious authorities in Jerusalem.

[24 : 02] So these religious authorities come up to Jesus and they basically say, what gives you the right to tell us how to do things here? Show us some sign that you have the right to do this.

In other words, you better have a miracle up your sleeve if you're going to start telling us how to do things in this house. And Jesus says, okay, I'll give you a sign.

Destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it up. And of course, they have no idea what Jesus is talking about. And the disciples didn't get it either. It's taken 46 years to rebuild this place, Jesus.

We can do it in three days. But Jesus wasn't talking about the stone temple that was around them. Jesus was talking about the flesh and blood temple standing right in front of them.

His own body. What gave Jesus the right to exercise authority over the temple in Jerusalem? The same thing that gave Jesus the right to stand up in the synagogue and read Old Testament texts from Isaiah or Jeremiah or Moses and say, today, these things are fulfilled in your hearing.

[25 : 15] You search the scriptures thinking that in them you're going to find eternal life. But it's they that witness about me, he'll say later in John's gospel. And just as the texts of the prophets are fulfilled in Jesus, so the temple itself and all that it stood for is fulfilled in Jesus.

The temple was the place where God and humans could meet. where God says, I will dwell in your midst and you'll commune with me.

Remember? God says, you live in a tent, I'll live in a tent. You live in a house, okay, I'll live in a house. But when the fullness of time came, the word became flesh and literally tabernacled among

us.

God's desire to commune with his people reached its climax in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Here, in the body of Jesus, God and humanity meet once for all.

You live in the flesh, I'll come and live in the flesh. So the Old Testament temple, the Old Testament temple was like a shadow cast backwards in time and the one casting the shadow was the Lord Jesus Christ.

[26 : 32] What gave Jesus the authority over the Jerusalem temple? The temple was about Jesus the whole time. It was his. And when he rose from the dead, his disciples got it.

They understood. The penny dropped. In the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, all the things that Jesus said finally had proven to be true. And all the scriptures, all the things that the scriptures had said about the Messiah, well, they proved true as well in him.

And because Jesus is the true temple, the true place where God and humanity meet, it means the cure of our convenient religion.

Why? Well, think about it. The reason why we want to put coins and cows in the temple courts is because we're trying to make it easier for the insiders to fulfill our religious obligations.

We've got to try to lower the bar and help each other out here, right? Let's make it easier to keep the rules. But Jesus drives them all away. Don't make it easier, he says.

[27 : 50] Don't turn my father's house into a place where you can simply execute an easy transaction and go home. If you approach worship like that, you've missed the point altogether. Why?

Because the point of the temple wasn't to lower the bar and make it easier for us to reach the mark. The point of the temple was to show us that we needed someone else to meet the mark and pay the price.

Because when you went to the temple, what did you see? You saw a glorious building that represented God's presence in your midst, and then you saw a closed door and a thick curtain that said, you can't get in here.

And then you would look around and you would see sacrifices taking place morning and evening and monthly and at festivals. But friends, consider what Jesus has done.

Look at the inconvenience of our Savior.

[28 : 59] Yeah? Leaving the riches of heaven, Jesus takes on flesh and becomes poor. Living a life of perfect love and obedience to the law, amidst constant scorn and misunderstanding, Jesus lays down his own life as a sacrifice for sin and rises again to bring life to all who believe.

You see, Christianity isn't some convenient religion that we have to perform. It's news about the one who went to the depths of inconvenience and shame because he loved sinners like you and me and wanted us to have fellowship with God.

At the center of our worship is no longer a temple and a sacrificial system, but the Lord Jesus who is the true temple and the true Passover Lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

You see, friends, you don't have to search the world over to find a temple where maybe you can get in touch with God. The temple came to you. And you don't have to find elaborate rules and rituals and sacrifices to somehow get inside that temple, right?

Because that was the trick with temples in the ancient world. Once you got there, you had to get in. But the temple didn't just come to you. Sacrifice came to you too.

[30 : 22] Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, John the Baptist said. And right there on Passover, Jesus drives out the sacrifices and says, don't make my father's house a house of trade.

Don't make this easier because I'm the one who's going to pay the price for you. We don't meet with God in a place but in the face of a person, the person of Jesus.

And friends, if he is the center of our worship, then the question can never become, how can I make this more convenient for me and for those like me? If the Lord Jesus Christ is the center of our worship, then the question will never be, how can I make worship of Jesus more convenient for me and those like me?

He died for me. The only question now is how can I take up my cross and follow him? He laid down his life for me. So the question now is how can I lay down my life for others?

Am I willing to be a little inconvenienced so the name of Christ can be honored and so the nations can know the joy of entering the kingdom of God? Am I willing to be a little inconvenienced for that?

[31 : 38] Huh! What seemed like an inconvenience before now becomes no inconvenience at all. Like the apostles in Acts 5 who rejoiced that they were counted worthy even to suffer for Jesus' name.

It wasn't an inconvenience anymore. It was a privilege. The apostles were glad to be counted worthy even to suffer for his name for the name of the one who loved us and died for us and rose again in victory.

What are we not willing to do for him? What are we not willing to do so that others might know him? If the church gets a little full are you willing to sit in the overflow?

Willing to be a little inconvenient so that others can know the name of Jesus? If the service starts to fill up would you be willing to be inconvenienced to go plant a church so that others can know the name of Jesus?

But I like it here. I like the stained glass windows. It's so great. Well yeah it's pretty convenient to just walk across town and come to church isn't it? But would you be willing to be inconvenienced so that other people can come and have a seat and hear about the name of Jesus?

[32 : 50] Friends, if the Lord Jesus incarnate, crucified, and risen is the true temple, the true place where God and sinners meet, then we have found the cure of convenient self-serving worship.

And we can be a church that honors the name of God and that exists not for itself or our own comfort but for the good of our neighbors so that they might know God and Christ as well.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, it's right to give you praise. So we praise you this morning.

We thank you that we don't have to travel miles and miles, days and days to find the place where we can meet with you but you've poured out your spirit so that we can meet with you wherever.

You are indeed the place where God and sinners meet, Jesus, and we praise you. Help us to have a growing zeal to see your name exalted and spread.

[34 : 10] We ask this in your name. Amen. Son of a■■■■ A ■■■■.

■ mag Hei announcement