

Wednesday, 31 May 2023

Jesus Clears out the Temple

John 2:13-25

Sermon - John 2:12-25 - Jesus clears out the Temple

Introduction

Is anger always wrong? Most of the time anger is probably a wrong emotion. So many things may cause us to be angry. We may be frustrated with something or someone. Maybe we are jealous or prideful leading to being angry.

But anger can often be linked to justice, can't it, and if controlled and vented correctly it can be good to be angry over injustice in the world. Many people have been moved to action because of righteous anger at things that seem unfair.

I came across this image last week, 'Don't Keep Calm and Fight for Justice'. Now, this is probably a little strong but there is some truth.

In Mark 3:5 Jesus is healing a man on the Sabbath and is questioned by some religious leaders and it says "He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts,". He was angry because he had seen injustice in the situation and had the compassion to help the man but instead the religious leaders were too focused on maintaining the law.

James 1:19-20 says 'My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.' Anger from human hearts is born out of pride, and jealousy, filled with sin and leading to harm. Righteous anger from God is born out of holiness, leading to God being glorified.

Context

Last week Roy led us through the miracle of water being turned to wine at the wedding in Cana. After this Jesus goes on to Capernaum and then to Jerusalem a few days before the Passover festival.

The Passover festival was an important time of year of Jews. Commemorating the Biblical story of Exodus — where God freed the Israelites, his people, from slavery in Egypt.

Tell the Story

So what is actually happening in our story? It's quite a dramatic turn of events and seemingly out of character for the meek and mild Jesus that can be portrayed.

Verse 14, imagine the scene, Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem for Passover and has come to the temple. And as he approaches this almighty structure, he is confronted with a hive of chaos and noise. Cattle, sheep, doves and money exchangers. So much is going on here.

He is just starting out in ministry and the temple is being used in such an unholy manner. This raises a wave of righteous anger within him. Something is utterly wrong and unjust, in using the house of God in such a disrespectful way.

He goes on to make a whip, driving out the animals, scattering coins, and turning the tables over. Jesus certainly isn't quiet, meek and mild, scared of confrontation. When something is unjust, Jesus takes action.

He calls out for 'God's house to be respected and kept holy'.

Then the Jewish leaders, question Jesus. What's interesting, is they don't questions his actions, they just ask for his authority to come and act in this way. They almost admit they are wrong in

having a market in the temple and want to defile and question Jesus instead.

There is then this back-and-forth about destroying and raising the temple in three days. A shocking thing to say.

Jesus talks figuratively about his body being the new temple, whereas the religious leaders can only understand the physical structure in front of them.

What I find intriguing here is that John, as the author, almost steps out of the story to clarify the point.

It's almost like breaking the wall in a film and talking directly to the audience. Verse 22, after he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said.

Only in hindsight do the disciples understand that Jesus' body is the temple and was raised after three days.

John goes on in verses 23-25 to talk about Jesus' understanding of people. He confirms Jesus' divinity, which he has spoken about in Chapter 1 and shows that as God, Jesus knows the heart of each individual and whether they truly believe in him.

Teaching Points:

As we come to this passage there are three points I would love to bring out for us today. Firstly, Jesus is Zealous for the Outsider to have access to God, Then, Jesus is the New Way to God, and Lastly, Jesus knows everyone's Heart.

Jesus is Zealous for the Outsider to have Access to God

In verses 13-17, we see the arrival at the temple, the chaotic scenes and Jesus' reaction. At first glance, we might think this seems like an overreaction and out of Jesus' character to get this angry. But, as we've mentioned there is a time and a place for anger. And there are also some really important reasons for Jesus' reaction.

Let me show you an image of the layout of the temple, as it helps us see something important. The temple is divided into certain areas where different people are allowed to go too. The innermost place is where the holy of holies is, where only the high priest can go at certain times of the year. Then you have the court for priests to be in. Then working out, an area for Jewish men, the Jewish women. And then finally the court for the Gentiles. At the end of this Gentile court area, there is a grand pavilion called the Royal Stoa. This is the area that the markets that Jesus stopped would have taken place.

My aunty recently went to Marrakesh and visited some of the Bazar markets. She was telling us how it was a hive of activity, noise and smells. And this is a similar situation that Jesus finds himself in.

Jesus' zealous anger arises because of three things that are happening.

Firstly Jesus is enraged because the market that has been set up is based in the Gentile courts. This is the only place where those who are outsiders can come and have access to God. The only place to pray and worship. Can you imagine trying to pray and worship in the middle of a busy market? Jesus sees utter injustice that those outsiders have no way to access God.

Secondly, Jesus is so upset because not only have the Gentiles been limited in accessing God but the Jewish leaders have started to make money out of those coming to the temple at Passover.

In the 11th to 16th centuries, the Catholic Church practised something called indulgences. Indulgences were a way to pay the church for the remission of sins. So you or a loved one wouldn't have to spend more time in purgatory to sort out your sin before going to heaven. Basically, you'd pay money to the church and they would let you off some of your sins. It was a farce and money-making scheme for the Roman Catholic Church.

This is similar to what the Temple leaders were doing. People would come from far and wide to Jerusalem for Passover. And as part of Passover, you'd bring an animal to sacrifice or have to provide one. So the Jewish religious leaders set up and started a market in the temple to sell animals at an inflated price.

On top of that, you have money exchangers. The temple didn't allow you to use Roman currency to buy things because the coins had Caesar's face on them, so you had to exchange your Roman coins for Temple coins. This again was done at an inflated price.

All of these things were detrimental to Gentiles being able to access God, to come to his temple and worship.

Jesus' third point is seen in verse 17. Where his disciples quote Psalm 69:9, which says 'For zeal for your house consumes me.' Jesus is passionate about the temple, and now the church, being a place where the outsiders can find a home.

Jesus is the New way to God

As we come to the middle of our passage we see a somewhat confusing interaction between Jesus and the Religious leaders about the temple.

The temple would definitely have been on Grand Designs had it been built in our day and age. We saw the image earlier that gave us an idea of the magnitude of the temple's size. On top of this, it took 80 years to fully complete its construction.

So Jesus' claim to destroy and raise the temple in 3 days is extravagant in literal times. But Jesus' focus here is to bring light to the promise made in John 1:14. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling 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."

Jesus has come as God incarnate. God in man. Fully God and Fully Man.

And why has God become man in Jesus? Well, to deal with the problem that the Temple failed to do.

The purpose of the temple was to be a place where God dwelt on earth. As well as the temple being used for the sacrifice of Atonement.

The story from Genesis at the start of the Bible is one of God's perfect creation, followed by humans sinning and being separated from God.

So from Genesis onwards, God and humans need to find a way to be united. The barrier is sin. So what can be done to remove this barrier to allow God and humans to be united?

Well, the sacrifice of atonement is used. Atonement means At One Ment, Being at one with God, united in harmony.

Why sacrifice then? Well, as Romans 6:23 says 'The wages for sin is death'. A debt has to be paid, if sin is to be removed and we are to be united with God.

So the people of God would bring a sacrifice to the temple, as a payment of a debt, to make an atonement for their sins.

The problem with the temple and sacrificial system is that by the time you've paid and made your sacrifice, you've probably already sinned again and therefore your relationship with God is back to where it started.

So what can possibly sort out this problem... Well, this is where Jesus comes in.

Jesus is the new and better temple. Last week we looked at the miracle of Jesus turning Water into wine and one of the important elements of that story is Jesus turns the normal order on its head. Normally you have the best wine first and the cheaper stuff

second. But Jesus turns this around, he brings the best wine out last.

Jesus' miracle here is a prelude to what he speaks about in the cleansing of the temple. The New Temple is better than the Old.

Jesus is the new temple. And not just a new one, but one that is sufficient to achieve what it is designed for.

Jesus is the ultimate atonement sacrifice. Because he is God, because he lived a perfect life, his death is sufficient to deal with all sin in the world.

1 Peter 3:18, Hebrews 10:10, Hebrews 9:27 and many other verses show the fact that Jesus' death was a one-time sacrifice for all sins.

John the Baptist highlights this best of all towards the start of John's Gospel in Chapter 1 verse 29. When John first sees Jesus what does he say 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world'.

What's the main purpose of the temple? To be the dwelling place of God and the place of atonement between God and man.

Jesus does both, he is God dwelt in man, fully God and fully man. He is also the perfect spotless lamb that will be sacrificed, once and for all for everyone who has sinned and believes in Jesus.

This makes him the new temple, the true temple and the sufficient temple that achieves its purpose of creating a way for man to be united with God.

Jesus knows everyone's Heart

After Jesus displays these wonderful truths about himself he goes on to continue the Passover celebration. And we see in verse 23 that he performed signs and miracles with people coming to see him, and responding with belief.

Wow that's great, isn't it, people saw Jesus and believed in him.

But verses 24 and 25 show us something different and it's a reflection of Jesus knowing the hearts of all people, confirming Jesus' deity once more.

Jeremiah 17:10 says 'I search the heart of every man...'. God is omniscient, he is all-knowing, and he knows everyone's heart, what they believe and what they treasure most dear.

If anyone has read through the book Pilgrims Progress, there is a character that comes up by the name of Pliable.

The main character Christian meets Pliable and tells him about the Celestial City in all its glory. Pliable is so excited by hearing this wonderful news that he joins in Christian's journey. Not long after, the journey gets tough, and Pliable just gives up, turns back and goes home.

This is the kind of attitude that Jesus sees in the heart of people in John 2:23-25.

People love the highlight reel in life. Jesus is performing amazing miracles and teaching people new things, people are so excited to believe in him but as soon as the idea of something challenging comes up they quickly scatter.

This is why John says in verse 24 'But Jesus would not entrust himself to them'.

He knows the heart of everyone and can see that many will believe in the wonders of Jesus, they love the highlight reel, but when it comes to a message of repentance and living a transformed life no matter the cost, they quickly run to the next fad and trend.

Application:

As we come to a close this morning, there are some wonderful points we can take away from God's word.

Jesus is Zealous for the Outsider to have Access to God

We can ask ourselves two questions from Jesus' zealous attitude to making God accessible to all.

Firstly, How may we potentially hinder someone from coming to God? We have to be careful in our attitudes and our actions when it comes to unbelievers. You might be the only believer that a non-Christian sees. Do your actions and attitudes represent God well? We also need to be careful of being legalistic. We want to be holy and honest about the truth of the Bible. But it may be easy to impose our own legalistic behaviours on others and hinder them from being involved with Church.

So pray for our sanctification. Jesus is the one changing our hearts. Without praying for God's help we won't grow and could easily end up standing in people's way to God.

How might we help people on the journey to faith? Ask God for wisdom in how you care and how you challenge people. Be compassionate for everyone, not judging. We hold to the truth, whilst giving everyone to have a chance to meet Jesus.

There's also the call of the Great Commission. If we want everyone to have access to God, then help them on the journey. Talk to people, example God in your own life and share the Good News when possible with compassion and grace.

Jesus is the New Way to God

As we mentioned Jesus is the New Way to God. The Temple was insufficient to save people. Jesus offered a new way through his body on the Cross.

So as we speak about the good news to others, we must also be people who rejoice and worship God, in response to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

Romans 12:1 says, 'Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.'

Corporate gatherings and singing together on a Sunday morning are vital. But worship goes even further than that. To offer our bodies as a living sacrifice.

What that means is changing our perspective on all aspects of life. As we are sanctified and changed throughout life, Jesus will teach us to live more sacrificially.

So we must challenge ourselves to think about what can I do to bring glory to God. It might be something as simple as picking rubbish up that someone else has left there. Through too, giving up your time, treasure and talent for other people.

Being a living sacrifice and bringing your true and proper worship starts with small changes to glorify God.

All can be done for his Glory when our hearts revel in him.

Jesus knows everyones Heart

And that is where we came to land in verses 23-25. Jesus knows everyone's heart.

He isn't interested in outward legalistic signs or belief in flashy and dramatic works. He is interested in a heart that is repentant and given over to follow him fully.

Jesus wants to be both your Saviour, through us believing that he is the son of God and he died in your place on the cross, whilst also now being your Lord. If you believe in Jesus he calls you to follow him.

It's like going on a train, if you get your ticket, and go through the turnstiles, you believe that the train is coming but only when you step on board do you experience the journey.

Are we going to make God accessible to others and share him with the world? Do we rejoice in the new and sufficient temple? And do our hearts believe and follow God?