

The Heart of Worship

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, two weeks ago, we got this invitation to come and see. We have found the one, said Philip.
- His friend Nathaniel says, it can't be. Come and see, says Philip. Come and see who he is for yourself. So now, here we are, coming ourselves to see Jesus.
- And John is guiding us around his gallery of photos, as it were, shots he's captured at the scene, snapshots of who Jesus truly is.
- And last Sunday, we saw a shot that he took at a wedding. We watched Jesus turn water for ritual washing into the very best wine.
- And it was the first sign, John says, in which he revealed his glory. We saw in that snapshot a glimpse of the glory of the loving and faithful bridegroom, God himself.
- [1 : 0 8] Come to save his unfaithful bride, his people, to give us life and to bring us home to him. And so now John leads us on to the next picture, a scene of Jesus in the temple at Passover.
- And he gives us a chance to see Jesus from another angle, in a different light. But these are not separate and unrelated pictures.
- No, John is a master of patterns. And if this wall of his gallery had a title, it would be, the old is gone.
- The old is gone. Not in the sense that the old was bad or wrong, but in the sense that it was only the overture to the full opera.
- The appetizer to the glorious main meal. That's a pattern John has prepared us for back in chapter 1, verse 16, when he says of Jesus, Out of his fullness, we have all received grace in place of grace already given.
- [2 : 1 4] Grace upon grace. Grace and truth in place of law. In our last scene, we saw Jesus bring the true grace of God's kingdom.
- In place of the old grace of religious washing. And so in this scene, we see Jesus stripping back the old house of God.
- To reveal the true house of God, the true temple. Where does God live? Where do we come to worship God?
- Well, as we peer into the scene and the temple in Jerusalem, let's see how Jesus leads us to grace and truth. He does that in two ways. Firstly, through the worship war.
- The worship war. Now, Jesus clearing out the temple is the stuff of legend, isn't it? And chaotic Sunday school dramas.
- [3 : 1 3] And endless internet memes. But before we get there, read with me again from verse 12. After this, that is, at the wedding day, Jesus went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples.
- There they stayed for a few days. And when it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. So you see there's a continuous string of days between these two events.

Last week's passage and this week's passage. And in fact, if you were to look back through chapter 1, verse 29, then verse 35, then verse 43, then chapter 2, verse 1, and then verse 12, you'd see that nearly every day since nearly the beginning of John's testimony is accounted for.

Now, that's worth seeing for two reasons. The first is that John has clearly set out to write history. Yes, he zooms in on certain important days.

But he wants us to know that they stayed there in the village in between these important days. John's gospel has sometimes been called the spiritual gospel ever since pretty much it was written because his writing style is more reflective and symbolic than the other gospel writers.

[4 : 41] If the other gospel writers seem to have their feet firmly planted on the ground of history, John seems to have his head in the clouds of lofty theology.

But John's whole point in writing this gospel is that theology is pointless if it's not grounded in history. Some of us know one of our students, Callum, is studying a degree in history with theology.

Well, John would smile if he knew that such a degree existed because for him, theology cannot be separated from history. And so this gospel is not either spiritual or historical.

Now, its spiritual value depends on its historical validity. But those few days are also significant for another reason, because of what happens next.

Now, people have questioned why John puts this scene here at the beginning of his gospel because it sounds suspiciously like something that Jesus did that the other gospel writers is put at the very end of his ministry.

[5 : 57] So which is it, people ask? Did it happen at the beginning or did it happen at the end? Did John get his timing wrong? Or did he purposely shift the timing around to make it work for his gospel, his plot line?

Well, that's not unheard of. John insists, doesn't he, that it happened at this time, a few days after the wedding. Writers disagree why this difference exists, but the simple answer, the most obvious answer, is that Jesus did the same thing twice.

Two different occasions. There are similarities between the two, but there are also differences. Jesus says different things, for instance. You can look that up later in Mark chapter 11 if you like.

So Jesus clearing up the temple, it is the stuff of legend, but the point is it very much happened. And I would argue twice. This is the first time.

John is still acting as that faithful witness for us. This photo, this scene has not been through Photoshop. It was taken at the scene of the sign.

[7 : 12] So what does John want us to see in this scene? Well, let's lean into the picture together a little. In the temple courts, Jesus found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, others sitting at tables, exchanging money.

So he made a whip out of cords and drove them all from the temple court, sheep and cattle. He scattered the coins of the money changers overturned their tables. To those who sold doves, he said, get these out of here.

Stop turning my father's house into a market. This is not the storybook Bible, Jesus, is it? This is not Jesus meek and mild.

No, we could say here, Jesus flew into a rage, but not in an uncontrolled way. It's not a toddler tantrum. Because his rage was pointing in one direction only.

He makes a whip to drive farm animals away. He pours coins over the floor. He smashes tables where foreign currency could be exchanged. He shouts the dove merchants out.

- [8 : 22] He's angry. He's angry. He's angry. He's angry specifically with the cottage industry that has grown up in the courts of the temple. See, Jesus hasn't lost control of himself.
- It's controlled rage. That's a paradox for us. It's hard for us to get our heads around, isn't it? Controlled rage. Like furious whitewater rapids rushing through a tight funnel in a rock.
- Anger perfectly directed. Rage perfectly in proportion to the offense. That's partly why I think we struggle to get to grips with this particular angle on Jesus.
- Because if we're honest, this is not what anger feels like to us. It's so rare to see anger expressed fairly.
- Or to feel anger that is tailored perfectly to the offense not too big, not too small. So be very careful, brothers and sisters, if you're ever tempted to think, I'm not wrong to get angry because look, Jesus got angry.
- [9 : 42] He threw furniture and shouted and caused chaos. Or press pause there. Can you really hold yourself up to the one sinless perfect man and compare your anger positively with his?
- Can we possibly come out of that context with any reason to feel proud of ourselves? Folks, in any comparison with Jesus, we all have an anger problem.
- So be careful before drawing that straight line between him and you. Yes, he did get angry. And so he is able to sympathize with us in our anger, even in the very real temptation to lose control of that anger.
- He forgives our angry sins when we come to him. He makes us gentle and self-controlled when we submit to him. But he never lost control.
- He doesn't know what that's like. His anger was only ever right and good. He never let a grudge turn his heart cold.
- [10 : 56] He never let the slow burn of hate eat away at his inner being. He never crossed the line in his anger. And so at seeing that, coming to Jesus like that, this scene of destruction is incredible because his level of anger must fit the offense perfectly.
- So what was the offense? How great must that have been? What could these traitors have possibly done that provoked Jesus to such righteous rage?
- Well, it's not their business or their sales strategy or their ethics. Okay, on those counts, these guys actually provided a good service.
- See, at Passover, everyone needed to bring an animal to the temple for sacrifice. But if you were traveling for days on foot from your village in the sticks, there's no way you could bring a cow or sheep or dove with you.
- So instead, you could pick up an animal on offer when you got there. So that's what all these animals are doing. They're all for sale and for sacrifice. The money changes.
- [12 : 12] They were providing a good service to you. They're changing coins from all different currencies into what was called temple coinage. A special currency made of pure silver coins used by the priests.
- So in theory, what these traitors were doing was acting as a firewall, keeping profane things out of the temple system so that what came in was only what was pure and fit for the worship of God.
- Now, that was the theory. But in practice, these guys had totally lost touch with the reason that they were there. And with their reason for being with the worship of God, because they had brought their business into the heart of the temple itself.
- Outside the gates or in the city or on their way in would have been one thing. But they'd set up their stalls inside. See, that's the problem Jesus has with them in verse 16.

Those who sold doves, he said, get these out of here. Stop turning my father's house into a market. The issue is not so much what they were doing, but where they were doing it.

[13 : 33] Notice what Jesus calls that place. My father's house, where his father lived. The one building in the world that God promised, he gave his word that he would live there permanently.

That is where he was to be found. That is where he gave sins through the blood of sacrifices. That is where people could come freely to worship him at the festivals.

The temple is the closest that the Bible gets to the idea of sacred space. A space set apart in the world for coming to God, to be right with him again.

But more important than what the temple did is what it was. See, there's an intimacy in what Jesus says there, not between us and God, but between him and God.

Not even the most religious or spiritual Jew would ever have called God my father, or the temple my father's house. When Jesus calls God his father again, in chapter 5, verse 17 of John's gospel, they try to stone him for blasphemy.

[14 : 51] But we know, don't we, from John's introduction that Jesus did have a special, unique relationship with God. He is the one and only son who is himself God and is in the closest relationship with the father, father and son, face to face from eternity.

And so it's as if Jesus has turned up at his father's door, at his father's house, to find a mob of vandals dressed as tradesmen, graffitiing the walls and smashing the windows.

And for his father's great name and fame, he must chase them away. This is a question of honor. See, the second time around this happens in Mark's gospel, the issue is more that people can't get through to God because of the mob.

Jesus says this house was to be a house of prayer for all the nations. But here, the first time, the issue for Jesus is simply that it is his father's house.

And at the very heart of that house, these vandals have replaced love and worship with trade and business. That is why Jesus' anger is right and good and true.

[16 : 13] Now, what does this have to say to us? There's a thousand things, okay, that it's not saying. Jesus is not commenting here on what should go where or what should and shouldn't happen in a church building.

He's not talking here about buying and selling on a Sunday, nor is he saying that the details of our worship are unimportant compared with simply being in the presence of God.

He's not saying any of those things. And we know he's not saying those things because the temple is not a blueprint for our church buildings or worship services.

Okay, we're going to see in a minute what it is a blueprint of truly. Those other things are a conversation for another day because Jesus is pointing out something more basic here.

And it's this, that the problem to which he is the solution is a problem of worship. A problem of worship.

[17 : 24] When we think of worship, maybe we think of singing or church or Sundays, but at heart biblical worship is recognizing and acknowledging who God is and what he has done.

Okay, recognizing him, seeing him for who he is, that God is God and acknowledging him, that is praising, thanking, loving, living to him, speaking of him all throughout our lives.

and the problem in the temple that day is that that was not what was happening. That recognition and adoration, that worship had been replaced with something else.

A minister a long time ago called Thomas Chalmers preached a sermon called the expulsive power of a new affection. It sounds complicated, it's not.

Okay, the idea at the heart of that sermon is this, that our hearts are never empty, our hearts are never a vacuum. And so if you want to get rid of something in here, you have to put something else in its place.

[18 : 35] There has to be something going in before something will come out. Now the problem on that day in the temple is that animals and coins had gone in and pushed the worship of God out.

about it doesn't have to be animals and coins pushing out God's worship from our hearts. It could be anything. Image or reputation, busyness, relationships, stress, even comfort and rest, dreams, despair.

Infinite numbers of things can take the place of God's worship in our hearts. In the words of John Calvin, the human heart is a factory of idols. See, the real worship war isn't what style of music we have or what version of the songs we use.

The real worship war is in here, in our hearts. Perhaps you know you have a worship problem today.

Perhaps you're not yet a Christian and you know that God isn't who rules your heart and your life. Perhaps with some of us those idols are buried deeper, even if you've been a Christian for a long time.

[20 : 00] Follow the symptoms. What do we get unrighteously angry about? What is it when it's threatened turns us sour?

What, when we lose it, sends us into a rage? What are the idols that push our buttons? Because none of us has a pure and a holy heart.

Christ has taken the penalty for our sins. He's broken the power of our sin, but sin still has a presence in us. And sin at heart is a problem of worship.

Jesus loves his father's name and fame. Seeing him that day, his disciples remembered what was written in Psalm 69, zeal for your house will consume me.

He has a burning passion for his father's worship. He got angry when it was missing. So what can we do about our worship problem?

[21 : 06] Well, Jesus goes on to show us that it's not actually what we can be, but what he can do about it. Because next we see that his passion for God's worship led him to restore our worship.

Secondly, we see worship restored. Worship restored. Understandably, the guys in the temple that day were pretty shocked at what Jesus had just done, and they want to know who on earth he thinks he is to come and do that.

They say in verse 18, what sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this? Jesus answered them, destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.

They replied, it has taken 46 years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days. How can Jesus prove that he had the right to clear idols out of the temple?

Give us a sign, they say. Now, I promised last week John is going to show us seven signs that lead us to Jesus. And Jesus keeps doing signs clearly.

[22 : 19] We see that in verse 23. Many people saw the signs that he was performing. But this isn't one of them. Or at least it's not a sign yet.

It's a kind of deferred sign. A sign kept for the final play, when at last they will see and know who he truly is. Destroy this temple, he says, and I will raise it again in three days.

That would be quite a sign, wouldn't it? Nobody would be able to doubt that Jesus can call the shots in the temple if he could rebuild it by hand in the space of three days.

But the Jews have a hard time believing he can do it. 46 years we've been building this thing, they say, and you are going to raise it again in three days? How can he do that?

How can we take his word for it? That he could indeed rebuild the temple, that he could put our broken worship back together purely and holy? Where is this temple?

[23 : 24] Where do we go to worship God rightly? Well, John tells us, doesn't he, in verse 21, where this temple is. The temple he had spoken of was his body.

What, Jesus, what was he saying when he said he could rebuild the temple in three days? He wasn't talking about stones and bricks, he was speaking about his own body.

He's making a claim about who he is, his identity. Who are you, they asked, to come and clear these people out of the temple? Well, he is the true temple, the living house of God, where God dwells.

He speaks of himself as a temple. The word became flesh, we read, and lived among us. That's why the temple isn't a blueprint for our church building or our worship service, because it only ever served as a blueprint for the Lord Jesus himself.

He is where we come into the presence of God. He is where God promises to forgive our sins. He is where the Father is found.

[24 : 46] Remember Philip's words later in chapter 14, Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us. Whoever has seen me, said Jesus, has seen the Father.

Surely, he is the house of God. Surely, he is the gate of heaven. Where do we go to worship God?

We go to Jesus. We go to Jesus. In him, there is no darkness. In him, there is no distraction.

In him, there are no idols. There is nothing in him that is not holy, that is not fit for God. And so it is in Jesus that we come and worship God truly.

We recognize God for who he is, and we acknowledge him in our hearts and in lives, renewed by him for true and right worship. Be it Jesus Christ himself who fixes our worship problem.

[25 : 56] He wins the worship war raging within us, not by taking away every idol and sin of our hearts yet, but by bringing us to God now, washed clean, clothed in his perfect righteousness, veiled in his holiness, you and me, as we are if we trust in him.

So whoever we are, however we have sinned, however we still sin, we can come to God freely and worship him rightly, right now through Jesus, because he is the living temple of the living God.

Where is the proof for that, you might ask? Well, verse 22, after he had been raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said.

Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. After he had been raised from the dead, there is the evidence, that's the sign they wanted.

Destroy this temple, he said, and I will raise it again in three days. And they did destroy that temple. They did beat him and curse him and crucify him.

[27 : 21] They killed him. But true to his word, he rose again on the third day. So that is how we are able to know that he is able to save completely, to the uttermost, all who draw near to God through him, because he is the living house of God.

And so, brothers and sisters, this then is how we worship. Yes, we worship God when we come together on a Sunday, but when we walk out of the doors of the building, our worship does not end, because Jesus himself is the house of God.

if we live in Jesus, we never leave the temple. We never leave the presence of God. Our whole life becomes one of worship, because he personally fulfills the function of the old temple.

He has come with grace and with truth. And so, if you're a Christian today, to use an old Latin phrase, you live coram deo.

You live before the face of God. That is a life-transforming truth, isn't it? That our place in God's presence does not depend on how spiritual we feel one day, or how holy our lives are, or whether or not we have ticked the boxes this week, because our place before the face of God depends only on Jesus.

[28 : 59] us. So, if we believe in him, our whole lives are lives of worship. Jesus knows what's in us.

He knows our sin. He knows our unbelief. He knows the lesser loves that cling to our hearts. Verse 24 tells us that of those in the temple that day, Jesus would not entrust himself to them.

But he knew all people. He did not need any testimony about mankind for he knew what was in each person. He's not blind. He knows the sin that lives in each of us.

But that is why he came. He came and lived and died and rose again so that we, being what we are, coming as we are, could belong to God, who come near to God and know him truly and love him and worship him in spirit and in truth.

Perhaps you have never come to God that way before in and through Jesus. Perhaps you hold back because you feel that you're not worthy of him, or like you've made too much of a mess of your life.

[30 : 19] But if that's you, let me say this is why Jesus came, so that sinful people like me and you could love and worship God rightly.

If you know him, come near to him before his throne of grace, enjoy him in his living presence. He is here for you this morning, if you would come to him and have life in his name.

Whoever we are, we need Jesus to worship God rightly. He is the true temple, he who was destroyed, but in who three days was raised again, and who lives, and who stands today to welcome anyone who would draw near to God through him.

So let's come to him together now in prayer. Let's pray. God our Father, we thank you and praise you for the undeserved privilege of prayer and of worship.

We confess, our Father, that none of us is worthy to come before you. For none of us, Lord, in our hearts and minds and lives is pure and holy, we thank you for Jesus, that you sent him in love, that he came in love, to be the temple, to be the house of God where we might know you and come to you freely.

[31 : 54] Lord, help us in our hearts to do so. Lord, when our doubts cling to us, when we question whether you will accept us, when we wonder in fear whether you will forgive us again.

Lord, by your Holy Spirit, convince our hearts that you will indeed receive us, for we come to you not in and of ourselves, but in and through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Help us and be with us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.