

The True Temple
These Things are Written that You May Believe Series
John 2:13-25
Pastor Bryan Clark

We are first introduced to Satan in Genesis chapter three, when he appears as the serpent. He is described as being more crafty than any beast of the field, which does raise an interesting question. If he's so crafty, what might be some of his most effective strategies in a 21st century world? I would suggest to you, right up at the top of the list is religion. I would also suggest the Apostle Paul agrees with me. He writes to the Corinthians that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. If you go back and read that text, it is referring to Judaism, to religion. Religion presents God as an angry father that is never satisfied, no matter what, and you're always one step away from getting whacked. It does not present a God who is a loving, heavenly Father that sent His Son to die for your sins in order that you might be with Him forever. So, what happens when the God of the universe takes on human flesh and collides with the religious establishment of His day? That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to the Gospel of John, Chapter 2.

Last week, John revealed to us the first *sign* as he calls it, the first miracle that would identify Jesus as the Messiah. He turned the water to wine. But that miracle is also full of symbolism, as Jesus would take that which was nothing more than symbolic in the old covenant and change it to something that would be the fulfillment of the promise. It would go from that which was mere water, symbolic of cleansing, to the wine of Jesus' blood that would fulfill the promise and set us free. But there is this understanding that that transition from what was, to what will be, will come with a great fight. Chapter 2, verse 13:

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

So, as we read through this story, it's a story of Jesus cleansing the temple, and there's a lot of conversation as to whether or not Jesus cleansed the temple once or twice. If you read the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—they record Jesus cleansing the temple, but it's at the end of His public ministry. It's shortly before He's arrested, and then crucified. John, here, puts it at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, and it creates the conversation, "Did it happen twice or not?"

There are really good faithful scholars on both sides of this. It's helpful to understand that none of the biblical writers were seeking to write chronological history day by day by day, none of them. That's not the point. The Bible is a book of theology. So through the telling of actual historical events, it reveals God, and it isn't unusual that biblical writers move events out of chronological order, simply to fit the theological theme, because their point is not to record just day by day chronological history. So that does happen. There's no problem with that, so that's the question: Did John move it up to this point in his Gospel because of the theological theme here? And that is entirely possible. A lot of the argument behind that is the thought that if Jesus actually came in and did this, there's no way they'd just let Him go. He created too much chaos, and they would figure out a plan. They would arrest Him, and they would get rid of Him, which is what happens in the Synoptic Gospels. But there are many—and I would put myself in this camp—that think that's not necessarily so. First of all, the stories are similar, but they're not exact. They're different in certain ways. Second of all, there's nothing in John's

Gospel in chapters one through five that overlaps anything in the Synoptics. So if this is taking that event at the end of Jesus' life, moving it early, it's the only exception in the first five chapters. So, there ought to be some pretty clear reason why we would think that. In this particular case, Jesus is relatively unknown. He's done His first miracle in Cana, but that's just a small village up north. It would not have been widely known. So, He comes in; He creates this chaos; He probably had some small following, and it's not hard to think that they would have thought it's most expedient to give Him a scolding and send Him on His way. To arrest Him and haul Him off was probably just to create more chaos than necessary. So, I think there are two cleansing's, and I think this is the one early in Jesus' ministry.

The Passover was a once-a-year celebration of when God led the children of Israel out of Egypt and on their way to the Promised Land. The big moment of that is the night when the Israelites were to take the blood of a lamb and wipe the blood on the door frame, indicating that they were under the blood. So, when the angel of judgment—or the angel of death—came, it would pass over those families and they would not experience that judgment. You can hear all the symbolism in that. It was a picture that one day the blood of the Lamb who has come to take away the sins of the world, would be shed in order that those who believe would not experience the judgment of God, but God's judgment would pass over them because they're *under the blood*. So, it's not a coincidence that Jesus is picking this moment to step in and cleanse the temple.

Now we know for sure there were three Passovers in the Gospel of John, maybe four. There's a question about one in chapter five, and we'll talk about that when we get there. But it's the way that scholars date the duration of Jesus' public ministry by the Passovers that He was involved in.

So, **Jesus went up to Jerusalem**. Again, the language gets a little confusing. He's been “up” on a map, in Cana, which is up north by the Sea of Galilee, where much of His ministry will take place. On a map He has come “down” to Jerusalem; He's come south for the Passover, but in terms of elevation He's not come “down”; He's gone “up”—and consistently the Gospel writers referred to going “up” to Jerusalem. So the language gets a little confusing, but that's what it's talking about, and of course for Passover, Jerusalem would have been very busy with multitudes of people. Verse 14:

And He found in the temple those who are selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at *their* tables.

So this **temple** is what we refer to as the *second temple*, meaning Solomon built the first temple—David' son. It was torn down and rebuilt by Zerubbabel, but Herod came along and tore that one down and rebuilt this magnificent temple, mostly to gain the favor of the Jews. So this had the main structure of the temple, which was the Holy of Holies. Outside of that, the holy place, was the candlestick and the showbread and the incense, and then outside of that is a courtyard where the altar was, where the laver was, where the priest would wash before he went into the holy place. So outside of that, then, are multiple courts. One is called the women's court. There's also a court called the Court of the Gentiles; it's part of the larger structure; it's not part of the inner part of the temple. But that's where these vendors set up to do their business. There was a time when they set up in the Kidron Valley that comes into Jerusalem on the site of the Mount of Olives, but by this time they're actually up in the structure of the temple doing their business.

So when someone would come to Jerusalem for Passover, they would offer an animal. But it's not practical that they're somehow going to haul an animal all the way there on foot, and so there were

vendors, and they could purchase an animal and that animal would then be sacrificed. There was also a temple tax that was given at this time, but much of the money that was out there was corrupt. It had all kinds of impure metals mixed in. So the only coin that was acceptable was a Jewish coin that was pure silver. You had to bring whatever money you had, and it had to get exchanged in order to offer a Jewish coin. That's what John's talking about here. Verse 15:

And He made a scourge of cords, and 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 to those who are selling the doves He said, “Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business [literally a place of merchandise].” (Vs. 15-16)

One can only imagine the chaos this creates as He's flipping over tables. The money is flying; the animals are running. He's basically using a scourge to move the animals around and in the midst of all of that, then, He utters the important words in verse 16. Now, first of all, he is identifying the temple as **His Father's house**, and while that may not be striking to us, it would have been to them. He's clearly saying, “This temple belongs to God the Father, and I am God the Son, and I'm here to clean house. So He's making a clear statement that He *is* the Messiah, and He's there to do business with the religious establishment.

Now, again, it's really important to understand this is the **temple**. This is not a church building. This is not one of many buildings. There's virtually no correlation to this temple and a modern-day church building. You know, people get confused and think, “This is the house of God,” like God lives in a building. This is just a building; this is not a temple. God doesn't live here when the building is empty; God's not here. It has nothing to do with whether or not churches are selling something or giving away free pumpkins. (*laughter*) It has nothing to do with any of that. What it does have to do with is the fact that this *was* the **temple**. There was one temple. If you were a Jew and you're dealing with your shame; you're dealing with your guilt; you're dealing with your despair; you're dealing with your hopelessness; you're longing for some sort of a relationship with God, this was the place where God dwelt. God's glory dwelt in the Holy of Holies. At one time that housed the Ark of the Covenant but by this time the ark was long gone. But still, it was a place so sacred that only the high priests could go into the Holy of Holies and even he could only go in one day a year. Outside of that was the holy place where the priest and the priests only entered, and that's where the lampstand and the showbread and the incense were. So, all of this was meant to be full of images and pictures of God and the promise of God. It was to be a place that was holy and sacred, a place where there was wonder and reverence and mystery for the presence of God.

Yet by first century Judaism, all that had been replaced by cold, dead religion. These merchants were exploiting these people for personal gain. Now Jesus does not specifically identify this system as corrupt. On this occasion, He does in the Synoptics. It's not hard to imagine a couple of years previous, which on this occasion, it was equally corrupt. Here they use this as a way to exploit people's need, people's shame, people's guilt, people's despair, people searching for God—exploited for personal gain—and that's what Jesus was talking about. That's not who God is. That's not what the temple was to be about.

This is the problem with religion. When people are dealing with their shame, people are dealing with their guilt, people are dealing with their despair, people are trying to find something to satisfy that God-longing deep within their soul, they're just extremely vulnerable. Religion is about power and control. It's about exploiting people for personal gain.

I have countless conversations with people that have been used and abused and broken by religion. They have believed for years that there's no way they're ever going to measure up, and they feel like they're always one step away from God whacking them. And many just give up and believe there's just no chance for me and, in their minds they think that's the God of the Bible. They have no idea that does not represent the God who sent His Son in any way. Verse 17:

His disciples remembered that it was written, “ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME.”

That's from Psalm 69:9 and a reminder that one thing that would identify the Messiah is He would be zealous for the reputation and glory of God. There would be this zeal for the house of God that would define Him. Jesus, then, fulfilling that statement, verse 18:

The Jews then said to Him, “What sign do You show us as Your authority for doing these things?”

That's a really interesting question. So why not just arrest Him and haul Him off? We know that there were temple guards. This would have been a fairly simple procedure. Why did they ask for a sign? Speculating a little bit, it's likely that Jesus had enough of a following—perhaps people that followed him from Cana and were privy to the first miracle. Perhaps they figured, “If we do that, it's just going to create more chaos, and maybe the more prudent thing to do is just out Him here.” He's claiming to be the Messiah. “If you're the Messiah, give us a sign,” assuming Jesus can't do that and that settles it, and quietly that's the end of the story. Most likely that's the motivation. “If you're the Messiah, give us a sign!”

Now, some would ask, “Why didn't Jesus do that? You know, why didn't Jesus pull a rabbit out of His hat and show everybody?” But what will be evident through the Gospel of John is that Jesus will reveal Himself through miraculous moments again and again and again and again, and they still will not believe. It's naive to think if He'd just done some miraculous thing in this moment, suddenly they all believe, and everything would have changed. So Jesus knows that, and just like with Mary, His mother, He's not just going to do a miracle on command to satisfy someone. He's going to be about His father's business in His time, according to His agenda. Verse 19:

Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews then said, [And again John uses Jews as the religious leaders.] “It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” (Vs. 19-20)

So the temple of Herod, this temple, had been under construction for forty-six years and would continue to be under construction for a couple of more decades. So, it was unfinished and ongoing.

Now this line was so offensive to the Jews that it stuck in such a way that in the trial of Jesus, what was the accusation? “He said He would tear down the temple and in three days, raise it up.” When Jesus is hanging from the cross and the mockers are mocking, what is it they said? “He said He would tear down the temple, and in three days raise it up.” So you get a sense of how deep this line cut in to their brains. But in both cases they misquoted Jesus. Jesus didn't say, “*I* will tear down the temple.” Jesus said, “*You* tear down the temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Verse 21:

But he was speaking of the temple of His body. So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken. (Vs. 21-22)

So John tells us what Jesus meant by that comment. Even the disciples didn't really understand it until the resurrection. Now, first of all, think about this. The religious Jews asked for a sign and Jesus said, "I'll give you a sign." He said, "*You tear down this temple and in three days, I'll raise it up. That'll be your sign.*"

So now John is writing a couple of decades later, and he is identifying what Jesus meant by that statement. So, what was the sign that He was, indeed, the Messiah? Answer, "The resurrection!" The disciples put it together, understood it, and believed.

John is writing well within the lifetime of eyewitnesses to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. That's fairly obvious since he himself was an eyewitness to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Much like Paul in First Corinthians 15, he's just putting it out there. Jesus said, "Here's the sign;" 'Now prove that He didn't rise from the dead, and He's not the Messiah!'"

Yet the Christian church exploded in the first century because this sign was so overwhelmingly evident. If His enemies could have demonstrated He didn't rise from the dead, end of story. John's putting it out there, "There's the sign!" But John was so confident in the evidence for the resurrection, he nails it! Remember, these disciples that believed would go to their death, believing that the story of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus is true. It gives that claim tremendous credibility. But second of all, and more to the point, Jesus is identifying himself as the fulfillment of the temple—and *the Word became flesh and tabernacled [templed] among us.*

Jesus is the fulfillment of the shadows and the pictures of the tabernacle...and then the temple. There was never a plan for a structure to endure. It was only a picture, and the Messiah would be the fulfillment of that picture. Jesus is the dwelling place of God. It's not a building; it's a Person. John says, "The Word became flesh and we beheld His glory. He's the house of God. He's the dwelling place of God!" Religion tries to convince you, "It's about the building...it's about the furniture...it's about the practices...it's about the rituals." Jesus says it's about a Person. It's about a Person who is the fulfillment of the temple. He is the Bread of life. He is the Light of the world. He is the Lamb that was slain for the sins of the world. The Temple is a Person and that's where the glory of God resides.

But religion is determined not to let it go, and so now there's this conflict between Jesus who is the fulfillment and the religious establishment that won't let go of their power and control—and acknowledge the fulfillment has come. Verse 23:

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, [Literally the Greek there is *was not believing*; it's the exact same word as verse 23.] ...for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man. (Vs. 23-25)

Literally, what John says there is, "Jesus was doing more signs, more miracles, and they were believing in Him, but He wasn't believing in them," and then a little commentary, "*because He's God and He knew what was in their hearts.*" Now, what does he mean by that? Jesus was doing miracles.

We aren't privy to what those were. John tells us late in his Gospel, there are lots of things Jesus did that he didn't record. Whatever they were, they were so convincing that the unbelievers were believing. These were not like today, where you have these miracle services in a group of believers, and they're these miracles that no one can really validate or prove. These were miracles in front of unbelievers that were so convincing, the unbelievers were believing.

The blind were made to see! The deaf were made to hear! The lame were made to walk! Whatever they were, there was no question what just happened. This isn't a parlor trick. This was convincing even to the unbelievers. So, what were they believing? They were believing He just did a miracle. They were believing that He had some sort of power. The record will show that as long as Jesus did miracles, the crowds grew larger and larger and larger, because they enjoyed the show. Who wouldn't want a miracle? Who wouldn't want to see a miracle? And that's what Jesus is saying. They were believing He was doing miracles; they were enjoying the show. What they did not understand is He had come to be the Savior of the world. What they did not understand is they have a sin problem and their sin condemns them before a holy God, and the only chance they have is to step away from cold, dead religion and encounter the Jesus who came to die on the cross for their sins. That's the only chance they had, and the more Jesus talked about what it's going to take to follow Him, and the less he did miracles, the more the crowds faded...and they faded...and they faded.

This is the problem today. People want Jesus, but it's a Jesus of their own making. They want a Jesus that's all about health, wealth and prosperity. We're consumers; if that sounds like a good deal, I'm in! If I can follow this Jesus and you'll make me rich, count me in! People follow the Jesus of signs and wonders. "I want miracles;" it's a great show! Even this idea that Jesus offers a ticket to heaven. "If that's all it takes, I'm in! Count me in; I'll take a ticket!"

But as long as that's the Jesus that people believe in, they do not understand the Jesus of the Gospels, because Jesus did not come to put on a good show. He came because we're sinners in need of a Savior. He came because we stand condemned before a holy God, and no amount of religion can make that go away. He came that we might deal with our shame, that we might deal with our guilt, that we might deal with our despair, that we might deal with our emptiness, that we might deal with our struggles. He came to offer life to a thirsty soul, but to experience that life, there would have to be an acknowledgement that, "I'm a sinner in need of a Savior, and Jesus came to do for me what I could never do for myself. And it's only on the basis of the shed blood of Jesus that I could ever stand right and clean before a holy God!" Until you understand that Jesus, you do not know Him.

Jesus came to be the Lamb of God, to take away the sins of the world. God is not an angry father waiting to whack you. He's a loving Father who so loves you, He sent His Son to die for you, to shed His blood for you, to cover your sins, that you might be rid of your shame and your guilt, and might enter into a relationship with God now and forever.

Jesus didn't promise health, wealth and prosperity. He didn't promise signs and wonders. He didn't say, "If you trust Me, this will be an endless cruise on the love boat." He actually said, "This is going to be really hard, and there's going to be a lot of pain. There's going to be a lot of struggle. It's not going to be easy, but I'll be with you every step of the way, and I promise I'll deliver you to a place that will be beyond anything you can begin to imagine—and that will be your home forever!

That's who Jesus is. That's why Jesus came. He came to re-create. He came to write for you a new story. You might actually say, "He came that you might be *born again!*" We'll talk about that next week.

Our Father, we're just so thankful that when we were lost in our sin, with no hope, You sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world. God, I know there are people here this morning, they have been wounded. They have been beaten up. They have been abused by religion. God, give them a heart and mind to hear the truth and understand that You're not an angry father, waiting to whack them, but you're a Father that loves them so much You sent Your Son to die for them. Lord, this we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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Opening Discussion

1. What has been your experience with religion?
2. Why do you think religion is so appealing to people? What do they find there or what are they looking for?

Bible Study

1. Do a quick review of the previous text (2:1-12). What was the imagery pictured in the water to wine story?
2. Read John 2:13-25. What did Jesus do and why?
3. What was the real issue Jesus was addressing? What had the temple and the Old Covenant practices become for the people? How do you see this same problem today?
4. Why do you think Jesus responded as He did when asked for a sign? What did He mean? How did this impact the disciples after the resurrection?
5. John is writing this decades after the resurrection but within the lifetime of the eyewitnesses to the events recorded. This is evident simply on the basis of the fact John is doing the writing and he was an eyewitness. If this was the “sign” that Jesus was the Messiah (had authority to do what He did) then how confident must John have been that the resurrection was true and people know that?
6. Why did Jesus not believe in the people when they believed in Him (2:23-25)? What were they believing and what did they not yet understand and believe? How does this same thing happen today? What are things people want from Jesus even though they don’t want to face their sin and need for repentance?

Application

1. What do you want from Jesus? Are you clear what Jesus came to offer and what He does not offer in this world?
2. How can your relationship with Jesus become more like dead religion than the relationship Jesus intended? What can you do to prevent this?