

John 2:13-22 Jesus is King of the church

What type of image do you have of Jesus? Gentle Jesus meek and mild? You might know the sort of thing. Pictures of Jesus surrounded by cuddly animals perhaps in a very English-looking pasture with pretty flowers.... Or at Christmas the sweet baby, clean and white, surrounded by clean animals in a stable remarkably free of manure!

In our reading from God's word, we certainly don't see Jesus portrayed like that! John chapter 1v18, part of a well-known Christmas passage, says, "no-one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in the closest relationship with the father, has made him known". So Jesus shows us what God is like. What Jesus did in the temple shows us a little about the kind of God runs the universe, how He feels about things, what He's passionate about.

Can you imagine you're in the scene at the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was the Old Testament national centre of Jewish worship of God. Perhaps a bit like St Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Abbey or Canterbury Cathedral for the Church of England, or worldwide, like St Peter's Basilica and the Vatican City in Rome being perhaps the centre for Roman Catholicism, and the Grand Mosque in Mecca being perhaps the centre of Islam.

Why was the temple in Jerusalem so important? Because it was for the Jews, the focal point of God's presence on earth, the meeting place between God and mankind. So it was where animals were killed as sacrifices to show that a death was needed to avert God's wrath for sins so that we human beings can come to God.

Imagine you're in the outer part of the temple complex, where Gentiles, that is non-Jews, were allowed to be. Only Jews were allowed to go into the more inner sections of the complex as these parts were considered too holy for non-Jews.

It was almost time for the annual Passover festival when the Jews remembered their deliverance from judgement when they were rescued, from slavery in Egypt. Sellers of cattle, sheep and doves were busy with their trade selling these animals to visitors. And those sitting at tables exchanged visitors' money into the local currency. There was the usual noise of bleating animals and exchanging of coins that everyone had got used to on these occasions.

But then all of a sudden there was a commotion, some violence even. There seemed to be some sort of hooligan causing the commotion by using a whip he made of cords to drive the cattle and sheep from the temple, and he was throwing around the coins of the money-changers and overturning their tables. He seemed to be ruthless.

The temple authorities and police who were on duty were quickly on the scene, questioning the man.

Anyway the man left. The mess he created was cleared up, and the normality of the commerce of selling animals and changing money was to return.

Of course *we* know it was not a hooligan who cleared the temple, but Jesus, the Messiah, God's chosen anointed eternal King. And Jesus' actions here don't really fit in with what is perhaps that popular conception of Jesus we've thought about already, "gentle Jesus meek and mild"!

And the Gospel-writer John, who had some years to reflect on what he saw Jesus do and teach before he wrote his Gospel, explains what was really going on as he recounts the incident. Like with all he tells of Jesus in his Gospel, he tells us the incident and explains the meaning of it to help us believe in Jesus, and to increase our faith in Him.

So we'll see first the reason Jesus cleared the temple of the animals and money changing, and secondly we'll see Jesus is the replacement of the temple.

First **why Jesus clears the temple...**

We can see from v17 it's because of Jesus' passion. John explains Jesus' disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me." The disciples remembered Psalm 69v9 where the great Old Testament King David cries out to God because the opposition he suffered from his enemies because of his zeal for God's house, made him suffer to the extent it seemed like his zeal was consuming him.

The manner Jesus was "consumed" was death. His zeal meant He would die because of it. But what was it about the temple that Jesus felt so passionate about? What was it that meant Jesus had to die?

Jesus was clearly asserting His Kingship over the temple. But exactly *why* did he have to clear the temple of the animals and money changing?

Was it because the animal sellers and money changers were using sharp or unjust business practices? Yes they were charging prices that were too high, and that was bad enough - Matthew, Mark and Luke in their accounts of Jesus clearing the temple just before His crucifixion, tell us Jesus said the sellers and money changers had made the House of God into a den or robbers.

But here Jesus did not accuse them of unjust practices. Actually, they were providing a useful service. Jews travelling from a distance could buy the animal to sacrifice there rather than having to bring an animal a long distance. The money changers changed the money of the visitors into the local currency so they could pay the temple tax.

So what was the issue in this passage? It's more to do with finding God and true worship.

See v16: "To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" ". You see, although the sellers were providing a useful service, they should not have been in the temple area. So Jesus tells them to get their activity out of the temple. Why? Because it was going on at the place where God should be worshipped. And being in the part of the temple where non-Jews, Gentiles, were supposed to pray, they were preventing the Gentiles from seeking God. The noise of bleating animals and clattering coins replaced what should have been a scene of people seeking God in prayer and repentance.

So the commercial activity was a distraction from true worship of God and was preventing people from finding God.

Mark's Gospel says Jesus said the temple should have been a house of prayer for the nations. So Jesus' zeal for God's house would have been about God's purpose for people from every nation, to find God. That's what God is so passionate about.

The sellers and money changers were preventing people from prayer and coming to God. So we, as Christians, could ask ourselves if we could sometimes make it difficult for people to seek God and to find faith in Christ – for example by worship styles and patterns that some people can find difficult ? (that can be true of both older and newer styles of worship!) or by behaviour that is inconsistent with what the Bible teaches? Or, can some church activities that while good, be a distraction and diversion from our God-given task to preach and share the message of the good news of Jesus with others?

Any one local church congregation where Jesus *rules* as King will be one where preaching the word of God, the Bible, is central and sharing the message of the good news of Jesus is its mission. Why? Because God's purpose is for people from every nation and background to come to God. And people come to him through faith in Christ alone, and faith comes by hearing the word of God preached and shared.

And what about our own lives? Jesus is King of the Church. So we need to ask ourselves, do we personally live with Him as King of our lives?

Remember the sellers of animals and money changers were doing a good thing – they were providing a useful service. But their activity was hindering people from coming to God. True worship is not just what we do on Sundays. It's living our whole lives for Jesus. So are there legitimately good things that distract us, even prevent us from coming to God and living our lives fully for Jesus as our King? Career? Earning enough money to live? (yes that *is* important!). Hobbies and interests? Leisure? These are all good things and have a place, but they can compete for the first place Jesus should have in our lives as our Lord and King. We all have such battles about our priorities. I do. Perhaps we need to be more ruthless clearing these things out of the way of our faith in Jesus, so that, while having a place in our lives, they don't distract us from living for Jesus in obedience to Him as our Lord and King.

So we have the reason Jesus cleared the temple – people were being prevented from finding God.

Of course the temple authorities and leaders weren't happy. Clearing the sellers and money-changers out of the temple was an attack on the financial arrangements that kept the temple going and thus a threat to the authority of the temple priests and leaders.

So v18 says the Jews responded by demanding Jesus perform a miraculous sign to prove His authority. "The Jews" in this verse refers to temple authorities and religious leaders.

Anyway , in v19 Jesus' answer to their demand for a miracle was "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.". Of course, v20, they thought this was a ridiculous claim as the temple had only just been completed after 46 years of building.

So we come now to see perhaps the main thing John was aiming at in recording this incident for us:

Jesus is the replacement of the temple

See v21. John explains the “temple” Jesus had spoken of when He said “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days”, was Jesus’ body.

This indicates Jesus *Himself* is now the temple, and replaces the physical building of the temple. You see, Jesus was now the fulfilment of all the temple meant. He, having been born of the virgin and come as a man, was now God’s presence on earth. As John says in John 1v14, a well-known Christmas verse, “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”.

John, as he explains this incident, tells us two very specific reasons why the temple is now Jesus, why He is the replacement of the temple.

First because v19 says, “*Destroy this temple*, and I will raise it again in 3 days”. V21 says the temple Jesus spoke of was His body. So He is the temple that will be “destroyed” – that refers to His death. So the first reason Jesus replaces the temple was His sacrificial death.

You see, the temple’s animal sacrifices pointed to *Jesus* as the better and final and only meeting place between God and mankind. Why is this? Because Jesus’ death on the Cross opened the way for us to come to God. And so Jesus’ body is the ‘Temple’ where the ultimate and final sacrifice would take place to satisfy God’s wrath for our sin. This was to enable people from every nation, through faith in Christ alone, to come to Him and have eternal life knowing God’s love forever. To achieve this, Jesus body would be destroyed – that is He would die.

So the first reason Jesus replaces the temple was His sacrifice to pay the price for our sin.

The second reason Jesus is the replacement of the temple is that He was raised from the dead. See v19 again: “Destroy this temple, and I will *raise it again in three days.*” The temple Jesus had spoken of was His body. 3 days after the sacrifice of Jesus’ body, He would be raised from the dead.

See v22: “After he (Jesus) was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.”

The Scripture the disciples believed would have been Old Testament verses looking forward to God’s Messiah, His anointed King Who would reign on His throne forever. Ones such as:

Psalms 16v10: “you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful, holy, one see decay”

2 Samuel 7v13 “He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”

Of course Jesus resurrection from the dead was essential so He could rule forever as God’s King ! So Jesus’ resurrection was going to be the sign proving He’s the Messiah, God’s eternal king and thus has authority over the temple, God’s house. All temple buildings can

get knocked down. This one was destroyed by the Romans about 40 years later, never to be rebuilt. But Jesus is raised from the dead and lives forever ruling as God's King.

He rose from the dead, conquering death to live forever, so He brings eternal life to all who trust in Him.

As we close, can I ask, have you come to the living person of Christ as the only 'place' where you can come to God, be forgiven and have eternal life? Special religious buildings, and places of pilgrimage, are not the way to God's presence. Jesus, through faith in Him, is the way into God's presence. Yes, church buildings have a role, and some of them are beautiful. It's important we come to church to worship God and hear His word preached, and share the bread and wine, but Jesus is proclaimed, as it's through Him alone we can come to God and be forgiven and receive eternal life.

Because of His sacrificial death for our sins, and because He rose from the dead, Jesus is the final and only meeting place between God and mankind.

Let's pray....