

The Climax of The Temple

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we are continuing our study in John's Gospel this morning, so please turn again to chapter 2 and we'll look at the section that we read and we'll read again verse 17.

His disciples remembered that it was written, Zeal for your house will consume me. The passage that we read records what's often known as the cleansing of the temple, that's the way it's referred to in the heading in the ESV, and it tells us about how Jesus drove out those who had turned the temple court into what was pretty much a marketplace.

And it appears that this is something that Jesus actually did twice because here in John it's recorded very early in Jesus's ministry, and if you read the similar passages in Matthew 21 and Mark 11, we see Jesus doing something similar in the days just before his crucifixion.

And it's likely that it's referring to two separate events and there was probably three years between them. And that shouldn't really surprise us. Any of you here who has tried to tell a man to put down the toilet seat will know that you have to say or do something more than once in order to get the message across.

So the cleansing of the temple, that's a great heading for this passage, and it captures the fact that Jesus was ridding the temple of a whole pile of stuff that shouldn't be there.

[1 : 3 6] And that was crucial because the temple was and still is massively important in God's unfolding plan of salvation. But I want to suggest this morning that I think that there's maybe a better title for this passage.

I think that instead of calling it the cleansing of the temple, I think we should call it the climax of the temple. That's our title today and we're going to look at three things.

A past that tells you something, a present that is missing the point, and a future that is better than you ever imagined.

So we'll go through them one by one. A past that tells you something. Reading through this passage, you quickly see that so much of it is pointing back to the past.

In verse 13 we're told that it was the Passover of the Jews, and then just to make sure we're aware of that, John tells us again in verse 23. The Passover was a key moment in the Jewish calendar.

[2 : 3 5] It was an annual feast remembering and celebrating God's great deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt in the Exodus. And this is actually one of many references to feasts that we have throughout the Gospel of John.

As you read through to chapter 10, you'll see that much of it, almost all of it, is recording stuff that Jesus said and did in relation to these feasts that took place annually in the Jewish calendar.

So as you read on through John, keep your eye out for that word feasts because it'll come up again and again. All of it means is that we're being pointed to the past. And along with this reference to Passover, the passage is also getting us to think about the temple.

And in many ways the two things were actually connected. When God took Israel out of Egypt in the Exodus, it was in order to show them that they were special, that it was through them that God was going to keep and fulfill the promises that he made to Abraham, that all the nations of the world would be blessed through his descendants.

So that Exodus was an identification of Israel as a special nation. Part of what made them special, part of what made them unique, was God's presence with them.

[3 : 55] First of all, he was present with them with the pillar of cloud and fire that led the Israelites out of Egypt. Then he was present with them in the tabernacle, which was a tent-like construction that they were able to move with them as they travelled through the wilderness for 40 years.

But all of that culminated in the building of the temple in Jerusalem where God himself dwelt. In other words, God took Israel out of Egypt in the Exodus, which the Passover celebrated.

He took them out of Egypt so that they could be his people. A key part of it, his people, was that they had the temple and that was where God himself dwelt.

All of that means that the temple, like the Passover, was a massive part of Israel's past. Now, when we talk about the temple in Jerusalem, as it's recorded here, we need to be aware that there were actually two temples, a first temple and a second temple.

The first temple was built by Solomon, and that's the one that we read about in the Old Testament. It was the place where God's glory presence dwelt and it was magnificent.

[5 : 06] But in 586 BC, it was destroyed by the Babylonians. The second temple was a replacement for that first destroyed temple.

Now, that reconstruction work began at the very end of the Old Testament. You can read about it in Ezra. It continued in what we call the Inter-testamental period, the bit between the Old Testament and the New Testament, which is about 400 years or so.

But the whole thing was given huge new momentum by King Herod. King Herod the Great, who was the same king who tried to kill Jesus, he began a massive expansion project on the temple.

And he started that around 18 or 20 BC around then, and it continued for decades, which is why in verse 20, it can say that it's taken 46 years to build this temple.

So, first temple built by Solomon, destroyed by the Babylonians in 586. Second temple reconstruction work began with Ezra, continues through the Inter-testamental period, given a new massive injection of effort and energy under Herod.

[6 : 16] And in Jesus' days, you had it almost finished, looking really good, and it was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.

So, it's good to just be aware of that first temple, second temple distinction. You sometimes might read in books a phrase, Second Temple Judaism. And when you read that phrase, it's referring to the period in the experience of the Jews where the second temple was functioning.

So, that means basically the bit in between the Old Testament and the New Testament all the way up to AD 70. So, there was two temples.

There was a massive difference between the two of them. But I'm not going to tell you what it is yet. You'll have to wait. What I want to notice now is that the temple told Israel two crucial things.

It told them that they were special, that they were unique among the nations of the world. And part of the reason they were unique was because they had the temple. That's where God dwelt. That's where His laws were kept.

[7 : 24] And that's where the most holy place was, a place that no other nation had. And so, the temple gave them the extraordinary privilege of having God's presence, God's glory presence among them.

So, it told them that they were special. It also told them that they were broken. The whole functioning of the temple was dominated by the sacrificial system.

And that was where animals were offered for the people's sins. And the whole reason that was needed was because even though Israel had this unique status where they were God's chosen people, they were still sinners.

They were still unworthy. They were still unable to enter God's presence. And part of the temple's purpose was to address the monumental problem of the people's sinfulness before a holy God.

So, the temple was telling them something from their past. It was telling them that they were special and that they were broken. Now, this immediately confronts all of us with two massive mistakes that we can make in our relationship with God.

[8 : 40] The first mistake is to think, I'm not special. It's so easy to think like that. It's so easy for the bruises and disappointments and failures of life to leave you thinking that you're just rubbish, that you're not worthy of anything, that no one cares that if God is up here, you are way down there and he's not interested.

It's so easy to think like that, but it's not true. It's never true. And one of the most magnificent truths that the Bible teaches us regarding humanity is that every single one of us is a unique and precious image of God bearer.

And there are dozens of world views out there that will tell you that humanity is just a chance and a billion, that we're just a cog in a machine, that we're just an accident in a meaningless universe.

The Bible tells you that you are far, far more special than that. The second mistake, though, is to think, I'm not broken.

And that's incredibly easy to think as well, because we can compare ourselves to other people and it's very easy to find somebody who's more broken than you. And we can look at ourselves and think, well, we're not quite like that.

[9 : 53] And there's a fair few decent things that we've done. And we can even look at the fact that we're a church today and think, well, that's a good sign, and at one level it is. It's so easy to think, you know, before God, I'm not that bad.

I'm sure I'll be good enough at the end of the day. But that's not true either. And the problem that the Israelites had approaching a holy God is the problem that every human has.

The temple had huge restrictions around how God would be accessed. And that's because God is utterly pure and utterly holy. And just as the number of people who test positive for COVID, allowed into an operating theatre, is absolutely zero, so too the number of people who can just walk into God's presence as sinners is absolutely zero.

Israel had a past that told them something. And so do you and I. Your past tells you that you're special. You can look at your hands and you can see God's handiwork.

Your very existence is testimony to His purposes. And no other explanation for our existence is intellectually satisfying, other than that there is a God who's capable of making us.

[11 : 12] You are special. You're His handiwork. You're utterly unique. Your past tells you that you're special. Your past also tells you that you're broken.

Think back the last 24 days. A good way to test this is think back the last 24 hours. Think back the last week or the last month of your life. And think, are my sins absolutely zero?

Or a better way to think, are there things that I just wish I hadn't done? We are never going to understand the gospel if we don't understand that we are special, but we are broken.

Second thing we see is a present that's missing the point. Jesus comes to the temple and here in the passage we read, he's addressing two big problems that he finds there. One is misuse and the other is misunderstanding.

So first of all, verses 14 to 16, we see misuse. John gives us a very vivid description of how Jesus entered the temple. He saw the people who were selling animals, who were exchanging currencies.

[12 : 17] And he's appalled. So he makes a whip. He pours out the money. He turns over their tables. He drives them all out. And I think it's a wonderful reminder that Jesus is not as softy.

And I think that's sometimes we can present this idea of Jesus as as softy. Here is a magnificent reminder that he's not at all. And it's clear that Jesus has become appalled at how commercialized the whole thing had become.

Now to give a bit of background to this, this is Passover. Loads of people would have been coming to Jerusalem. Some of them would have traveled quite great distances. Not all of them would have been able to bring their own animals.

Instead, they would buy animals when they got there. Some of them have come from nations outside Judah. So they've got foreign currency. So they need to exchange their currency in order to be able to purchase an animal.

And all of that at one level was OK. But the problem is that the whole thing seems to have taken over the temple. And it's become the focal point. The temple, the place where the worship of God was centered, has become a marketplace.

[13 : 22] Instead of reverence, prayer and worship, there was retail, bureau to change, and a whole lot of noisy animals.

Now there's a wee bit of debate as to just exactly what Jesus was objecting to. It's definitely the case that he had a big problem with the marketplace trading and intruding into the temple area.

But some have suggested that there was deeper problems than that. Some have suggested that this whole thing created a barrier, particularly for foreigners who may become and wanted to be part of the Jewish religious community.

This whole thing made it more difficult for them to enter in. And some have even suggested that the whole carry-on was about making money and exploiting those who are poor.

Now, we definitely know he wasn't happy with the marketplace thing because it's in the text with us. I tend to think that the other two things were a problem as well, but we can't be completely certain.

[14 : 20] Either way, the temple is being misused and Jesus is not going to just stand back and watch that happen. The second big problem though is misunderstanding, and we see that in 18-21.

In verse 18, the Jews confront Jesus, they ask him for a sign, and he gives them an answer that shows that they have completely misunderstood what the temple is all about.

Jesus says, destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it. The Jews respond in verse 20 and they think that he's being ridiculous.

But John tells us in verse 21 that Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body. And this is the thing that's crucial for us to understand.

The true temple is Jesus Christ. Now, you might be thinking, oh, what does that mean? Well, let's try and explain together.

[15 : 18] As we've been saying, the temple was a key part of Israel's history. Here in the New Testament period, the Jews, as they tended to do, were longing for a return to those glory days of the Old Testament.

And so that had various aspects to it. They were longing for a king like David, and so that they would restore their independence as a nation. They also longed for a restoration of the temple to the glory days of Solomon.

And this would have intensified in the last 46 years because you've had this great magnificent rebuilding project being undertaken under Herod's initiation and continuing on after him.

In other words, the Jews were longing for the temple to get back to its glory days. But what they completely misunderstood was that the glory days of the Old Testament were only ever meant to be a shadow.

They were only ever meant to be a shadow, a glimpse of something far bigger that was to come. Now, here we need to, I'm going to give you a word that you may have seen before, that's a very important word for understanding the Bible.

[16 : 27] It's the word typology. Now that looks a complicated word, but it's not too bad at all, really. Typology is referring to the fact that in the Old Testament you're going to find events and people who function as types of something else.

So a great example would be the Exodus. The rescue of Israel out of Egypt is a type of the real rescue of all of God's people from sin.

David is another example. He was Israel's best king, but he was just a type of the true king, the Messiah, who was to come. Another way to think about it is to see the Old Testament events as shadows of the full reality that was to come.

So when you use that word typology, you could also call it shadowology, but sadly that's not a word, but that's the idea.

What this means is that in the Old Testament people and events are shadows pointing towards the true fulfillment that's going to come in the New Testament.

[17 : 40] And one of those types was the temple. In other words, the temple was a shadow of something bigger.

And this is where the Jews got it wrong. They were looking to get back to the Old Temple, to restore it, so that the Second Temple would be like the First Temple. But what they needed wasn't a Second Temple, they didn't need a Second Old Temple, they needed the True Temple, the true fulfillment of everything that Old Testament type was pointing towards.

And John is telling us that that True Temple is Jesus. That means that in this verse Jesus doesn't just cleanse the temple, he replaces it. And that's why this is the climax of the temple, this is what the whole temple is all about.

But how, how is that possible? How does Jesus replace the temple? Well, you remember that we said that the First Temple gave the people two things.

It gave them the extraordinary privilege of God's presence among them, and it addressed the monumental problem of their sinfulness before God. God's presence and then dealing with their sinfulness.

[18 : 59] Jesus replaces the temple because he's the one who does both of these things, and he does them in a way that goes far beyond what the First Temple could ever do.

Now, you'll remember that we said that there was a key difference between the First and the Second Temple. Do you know what that was? The key difference was glory. The First Temple had the cloud of God's glory presence dwelling in the middle of it in the Holy of Holies.

The Second Temple didn't have that. It never had the same glory that was at the heart of the First Temple. That was the big difference.

It never had God's presence in the way that the First One did. Here in John, we're being told that Jesus is the True Temple, that he is the one where God, he is the one in whom God, through whom God is present with us. God's, John's telling us this in chapter two, but the truth is he's already told us this in chapter one because in chapter one he said the word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory. Glory as of the only son full of the Father, from the Father full of grace and truth. So the Jews are looking at the Old Temple and then they're looking at the Second Temple and then we're thinking the glory from that temple, we need it in this temple and John is saying that's the wrong temple.

You need to look at Jesus and what are you going to see in him? You're going to see glory. And it's reinforced by that word dwelt which is literally tabernacled, which is very much a temple word. If you think back to the Old Testament, the tabernacle, that was the precursor to the temple when the Israelites were in the wilderness. John's telling us that Jesus is the True Temple. Now that Jesus is here, God is right in the midst of his people again.

[21 : 11] But it's not just in terms of God's presence that Jesus fulfills the temple. He also fulfills everything that the sacrificial system foreshadows. And again John has already told us this because in verse 29 of chapter one John the Baptist saw him and said, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

That's temple language again. Jesus is the sacrificial lamb who will die in the place of all his people. So maybe, maybe part of the reason that Jesus drove out all the animals is because they're not going to be needed anymore. I'm not sure if that's the case or not, but one thing is for sure, that Old Temple shadow is passing away because the true fulfillment has come. Jesus has come.

And what I just want you to see is that it's just so cool how it all fits together. If you look at the Old Testament you see Exodus and glory cloud and tabernacle and temple, God's presence, the sacrificial system and they are all pieces of a jigsaw that when you put them together it makes a massive arrow pointing towards Jesus.

He is the climax of the temple. He replaces it because he fulfills its purposes. But there's even more and the only way we can fully understand it is if we look ahead which takes us to our third point.

A future that's better than you ever imagined. We are saying today that Jesus is the true temple, that he fulfills the temple's role in terms of God's presence among us and in terms of fulfilling the sacrificial system that's needed to deal with our sins. And all of it culminates in what Jesus has come to do.

[23 : 10] And that takes us back to verse 17. His disciples remember that it was written, Zeal for your house will consume me. Now this is a quote from Psalm 69.

Zeal for your house has consumed me and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me. That's one of the many moments where something that's said in a Psalm and that arose from the experience of the person writing the Psalm is actually pointing us towards who Jesus is and what he's come to do. That's part of the reason why the Psalms are amazing because they teach us a little bit more about who Jesus is and about what Jesus has come to do. In Psalm 69 David's commitment to God has led to people opposing him, attacking him.

His zeal for God and his house has put him in grave danger. John is telling us that that zeal for God's house in David is also what we see here in Jesus. And so the two verses correspond. However there is a crucial difference between the two verses and I want you to have a look and see if you can tell me what it is. Now I don't mean the reproaches but I mean just in the specific statement that John quotes. There's something different between the two. What's different?

The difference is that word will. You see that? It has there. It's will there.

And that's very important. Now this is not uncommon. It's quite common for new Testament writers to take statements from the Old Testament and to adapt them to fit the message that they want to convey in the writings that they are doing. And I think that by doing this John is telling us that the full implications of verse 17 are not realized here in John chapter 2. They're pointing us towards something that's going to happen. And as verses 18 to 22 make clear the fulfillment of all of this is going to come through Jesus' death and resurrection. It's all pointing us forward to what's going to happen later in John's Gospel. So that means that when it says in verse 17, zeal for your house will consume me.

[25 : 35] It's not just referring to the temple courts in John 2. It's referring to the cross. But how? What exactly is that saying?

Well if we look at verse 17, if you look at any verse of the Bible it's always important that we understand the key words. And one of the most important words in here is the word house. And this is the word that we need to make sure that we understand. What is that word referring to?

What's the word house referring to here? Well at one level it refers to the temple. Because that's the place where they're standing. Jesus cleanses it because of his desire to see the Father honored and worshiped properly. But I think that there's more. As we've been saying Jesus is replacing the temple. He's the temple. But there's even more than that. Because we've been saying that the temple was the place of God's presence. It was the place of sacrifice where sin was dealt with. But all of that was to accomplish a purpose.

And the purpose was that it would be the place where God and his people could be together. That's what we have in this chapter. People flocking to Jerusalem. The temple was the place where God and his people met. That's what the two functions of the temple accomplished. God comes down, he's dwelling there.

That makes it possible. Sin is dealt with through the sacrifices. That makes it possible for God and people to be together. In other words, at the heart of the temple it's not God on his own in this inaccessible building. It's God and his people together. And that makes perfect sense when you think of the when you look at the rest of the New Testament we read it in our call to worship. That God's people are described in terms of the language of temple. The church, the people of God. We're all described by the New Testament as the temple. Everyone who's united to Jesus is part of his temple. God's house, God's temple, finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ and in everyone who is united to him by faith. That's the true temple. That's the house of God. Jesus and all who are united to him. That means that when it says zeal for your house will consume me.

[27 : 57] It's saying zeal for all people united to Jesus. By faith will consume me. In other words Jesus is saying zeal for you will consume me.

And that's exactly what happens. Jesus goes on from here to the cross and there he is consumed.

All our reproaches and disgrace and shame that our sins deserve. All of that falls on him. All the wrath that our rebellion provokes is poured out on him. The brutal power of death overcomes him. He's forsaken by his father.

He cries out in agony. He breathes out his last breath and he is consumed. Why?

Because of his zeal for you. He's doing it to save you. He's doing it so that you can be united to him.

[29 : 28] So that you can enjoy God's amazing presence forever. So that you can have all your sins taken away. When it says zeal for your house will consume me. It's not telling us that Jesus wants a great building in the middle of Jerusalem. It's telling us that he wants a great temple people who can be with him forever. That's the ultimate climax of the temple and that's why this is talking about a future that's better than we ever imagined. If you had been standing in the temple courts on that day in John chapter 2 you'd have never in your wildest dreams have realized just how much Jesus is actually going to do to save you. And now that he has it means that the glory days of the temple are not in the past. They're waiting for us in the future when we can be with God and with one another forever. And the church today is a foretaste of that. Not the church as a building but the church as a people and not the church in terms of all the mistakes that the church has made and that we've made over the years but the church when it's Christlike, when it's holy and obedient and warm and merciful and loving. That's a glimpse of the incredible future that Jesus has for all of us. Zeal for you took Jesus to the cross.

There he was consumed but that temple which was destroyed on that cross after three days it rose again.

There's two crucial things I want us to think about as we close. When it comes to your relationship with God and this is an incredibly important question. When it comes to your relationship with God do you rely on your zeal for him? In other words are you thinking I need to kind of get myself up to a certain standard for God? Are you feeling like you need to do certain things that impress God or another way to look at that is do you tend to think that the stuff you do just puts God off you?

Do you think that God's commitment to you is going to depend on you proving your commitment to him? It's incredibly easy to think like that. It's incredibly easy to think I need more zeal, I need more commitment, I need to be in a better place. So many people think like that. In the name of God you've got to realise that no one is ever saved because of their zeal for God.

We are saved because of his zeal for you. And that's why instead of us having to come to God and trying and pressing him all we have to do to become a Christian is come to God fall into his arms and say thank you and then follow him for the rest of our lives.

[32 : 24] Second question or second thing to think about is that the world around us will offer us many things that will consume us.

Work, maybe I sometimes feel like my emails inbox is consuming me just relentless. Maybe kind of the desire for more stuff you just want a bit more of this, a little bit more of that.

Maybe the dream of a perfect relationship whether that's in terms of friendships with people or whether it's in terms of someone to marry. Whether the fear about your health, the desperation to have a long life.

Whether it's when you've fallen out with people and you're just just eating you up and consuming me. Maybe it's all the garbage that you get on social media that just can get us all down. The world will offer you a never-ending list of things that will consume you. The gospel offers you a savior who was consumed for you.

And because he was consumed for you none of that other rubbish can take a bite because you're his forever. That's what makes the gospel so amazing. That's the message that God is calling every one of us to believe. Amen. Let's pray.

[33 : 53] Lord Jesus, thank you for these amazing words. Thank you for your zeal for your house. Thank you for your zeal for us.

Amen. We are going to close by singing together from Psalm 150. We're going to sing version B of the sing Psalms version and we will sing the whole Psalm. These are our words just of exuberant praise to God. Praise God in his holy temple.

Praise the Lord in heaven's high. Let's stand and sing the whole Psalm together.