

The Confrontational Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] help to me as we look at that together. And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if that would help you just follow where we're going so you can see how long's left. But let's pray and ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you for sending the Lord Jesus that we can be your children through him. And so we pray that by your spirit in our hearts and minds, you'd give us heads that can understand your words to us and hearts that are willing to change and follow you. In Jesus' name, amen. Well, there were a couple of news stories this week about cleaning things up. I don't know whether you saw those. One was about Wayne Dixon from Blackburn. I don't know if you saw about him. Accompanied by his dog Coda, he walked 2,000 miles around the coastline of Britain. And as he walked with his tent and his kit on his back, he's collected bags of rubbish from the beaches, bags of litter, and he kept leaving them and phoning the council to get them collected. So he filled 6,000 bags with litter from Britain's beaches, 42 tons of it.

Possibly a bit more alarming was the story of the five-year-old boy in Essex who went to the loo and lifted the seat and found a three-foot python in his toilet. I don't know if you saw that.

Extraordinary. His mom had to call a specialist to come and clean the loo, get rid of the python. Apparently, a neighbor had moved away and either they flushed away the snake or left it and it found the sewer system and then appeared in the toilet. I keep thinking about that now.

I don't know about you. Apparently, it can happen. Now, in both those cases, of course, nobody complains about the cleanup job. Laura Cowell, the mom, was begging someone to come and clean the toilet.

And we didn't ask Wayne Dixon to go and clean our beaches, but it's great that he did because our beaches have got litter on them. But here in John chapter 2, the situation is very different to that.

[2 : 1 5] Jesus comes uninvited to clean the temple, to cleanse it. And it comes after last week, we might have been asking ourselves, as we read the first half of John chapter 2, why isn't everyone a Christian? His first disciples had this incredible first week with Jesus.

And then at the end of the week, it culminated in this miraculous sign where Jesus turns the water at a wedding into wine. And it's this symbol of life under Jesus' reign. The joy overflows like vintage wine.

And then chapter 2, verse 11, we read, What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him.

Boom. He's away. Everyone's going to follow him. And yet today, of course, we see his followers marginalized, even persecuted. We're fully aware that even if it's just from the apathy of people around us towards Jesus, not everyone sees Jesus as good news. And this passage helps us to understand why. The first thing we see is the zeal for true worship. Jesus, the geography is quite significant. He was in the north, in Cana, in Galilee. And as you read John's gospel, the north is a place that receives Jesus well. But when he heads to Jerusalem, where the senior religious leaders are, things don't go so well. And here he is going into Jerusalem for the Passover. And for any of you who are just wondering about this, you might not be, but some of you might be wondering, Matthew, Mark, and Luke record Jesus going into the temple the week that he's crucified and cleansing it. The gospel writers don't always order things chronologically. They're not embarrassed about that. But I think it's most likely Jesus did it twice. And here he's doing it at the beginning of his ministry. And then he does it at the end as well. So he's gone to Jerusalem at festival time, which was a bit like if you imagine what Edinburgh is like in the summer during the festival. It's just rammed with people. And Jerusalem was like that, but without the street entertainers.

Because it was this religious festival where the population of the city increased tenfold as people congregated. And the reason was because of the temple. The temple was the epicenter of human religion. It was the ultimate place where heaven breaks through into earth and you go to meet with God. So just imagine you're a pilgrim 2,000 years ago. You go to the temple. It's a magnificent building. It's one of the great wonders of the world. You're surrounded by gigantic stones.

[5 : 00] And from wall to wall, there are these courts for people to come and meet with God. And there's bustle everywhere. There are the priests teaching. There are people praying. There are people coming and going. And then there are these animals everywhere being bought and being brought and killed as sacrifices. Because people are coming from all over the world and you've got to have an animal. And you perhaps couldn't bring one from where you were. So you buy one there. Or maybe, and you need the right currency. So you change it with the money changes.

And as you look around at this sea of people and this amazing building, you see this flicker of a disturbance over near you. And you notice there's this man who looks really angry. And he's got a whip now. And he starts using it to whip the animals. And he's driving the animals out. And there's this horrible commotion. And then people are running away from him. And then he heads over to the money changers. And he turns over the tables. And the money comes crashing onto the floor. And then you hear that he's saying something. And he's saying, get these out of here. How dare you turn my father's house into a market? It would be a shocking thing to see. Not so long ago, I went to Keswick in the Lake District. And I went to this village church fete in Keswick. The kind of St. John's is this like lovely picturesque church in Keswick. And I went in and they had, you know, the sort of things you get at a church fete. So they had people selling jam. And they had a tombola. And they had a cake stall.

And they had hookah duck for the kids. Now just imagine if I'd walked in there. And I'd gone up to the women selling their jam at this table. And just thrown it over. And everything went everywhere.

And I'd gone up to the tombola. And I just chucked it across the field. I think in Keswick, they would actually put me in the stocks if I did that. You know, it would be in the local paper.

Vicar from Scotland ruins the day. And what happened there in Jerusalem is just off the scale compared to that. It's absolutely outrageous. He's at one of the most famous temples the world has ever known. And he's kicking it in. And then the disciples realize what's happening in verse 17. His disciples remember that it is written, zeal for your house will consume me. It's a line from the Old Testament, from an Old Testament song, written by God's anointed king at that time, King David. And as he writes this song, he's describing how he has enemies all around him who hate him. He talks about how there are as many as he has hairs on his head. And the reason they hate him is because of his passion for God's name and God's temple. And so the disciples are realizing that's what the anointed king does.

[7 : 59] They've already identified Jesus is the Messiah. He's going to bring us the rescue that we've all been waiting for. But now they're remembering one of the things to expect of the Messiah is that he will be driven by a consuming passion for purity in the worship in God's temple.

And there's a play on words in that phrase, zeal for your house will consume me. Because we can talk, can't we, about a consuming emotion. And we mean it's overpowering. We just can't stop doing it because we're so passionate. But in Jesus' case, of course, it really will consume him. Because as he makes enemies down to his passion for God's name, they'll consume him. So that's his passion for true worship.

And it's a challenge to us to strive for true worship ourselves. It's hard to see exactly what the problem was in the temple. People needed the animals for sacrifice. They needed to change their money. What is the problem? It seems to be, certainly this time when Jesus goes in, that just they were trading in the wrong places. The outer courts where the Gentiles were supposed to come in, and they were meant to have this time to really focus on God himself. And instead, it's just become about getting the boxes ticked, doing the business. And so the temple has become a self-serving place.

And it is easy for religion to become self-serving. It's a problem today in lots of institutions. It's a problem in mainline denominations. No matter how good they might be in some ways, denominations can end up serving themselves instead of God. Para-church initiatives can. They can start as a really good Jesus movement, gospel-centered movement. But then over time, as they have commitments and staff and their own ideas and strategies, it stops being about taking risks to make Jesus known and starts to be about serving themselves. It's a danger, a danger of corruption. And on an individual level, it's very easy for our religion, my religion, to become about serving me.

It might be about the money. For those of us who have the privilege of being paid for Christian service, it can become about the money. And we should be very wary when we see Christian leaders around the world earning lots of money and charging money for you to access their wisdom. Just be wary of that, that's all.

[10 : 40] Maybe we're in it for the respect of others. You know, I'm an elder in my church. It's good on my CV. Or the feeling of power over others as we get to enter into people's confidence and we enjoy that they listen to our advice. Maybe we'd be in it for the intellectual stimulation. You know, we like filling our mind with a good sermon. Or we're in it for the worship experience and it's all about me and my feelings. Whatever it is, just this drifting into, I'm in it for what I get out of it.

And we've all got mixed motives. You know, we can all be pulled in directions like that. All of us accept this one man, God's King. For him, it's all about the glory of God.

So that his love for his heavenly Father gives him a zeal for pure, God-glorifying worship. And it matters to him more than his own personal safety.

And it's putting him on a collision course. So that's the first point, a passion for true worship. Secondly, as we see him do that, we should feel the challenge of true lordship.

There is such contrast between last week's drama, turning water into wine, and this week's drama. He was lord of the wine, now he's lord of the whip. He was at a wedding and he was the party maker.

[12 : 05] Now he's at a festival and he's the party breaker. Last week he was invited, requested. Now he intrudes. Last week he acted privately, almost in secret.

This week he's in public and he's causing a storm. Last week he added. This week he takes away. Last week he comforted. This week he's disrupting.

But in both of these events, what we've got to grasp is Jesus is essentially doing the same thing. He's establishing his saving reign on earth. He is light shining in the darkness of our world.

And sometimes that means he steps into your life and he assures you of God's love and he gives you joy. And it's life changing. Just like he showed up at that wedding and he took the shame away from the bridegroom and he brought joy to all the guests.

But sometimes shining his light means that he exposes real darkness. And Jesus lighting up the darkness in our lives is very confronting. He tears down the idols in our hearts.

[13 : 14] He smashes up the things we love too much. And him doing that can leave us destabilized. Because we've depended too much on those things and he takes them away. And as John puts these two events side by side in John chapter 2, I wonder if he's just pointing out to us, you can't have one without the other.

This is Jesus. Jesus at the wedding and Jesus at the temple. The same Jesus doing essentially the same thing. Shining his light. Establishing his reign.

He's clearing out the old to make room for himself and a new way of knowing God. So we can be asking, well what's your view of Jesus?

Some of us have a picture of Jesus that's all whips and no wine. So we sense his severity bearing down on us. We don't feel loved by him as we should do.

We don't trust that he really is for us. And we need to meditate on the wedding. We need to meditate more on that wedding at Cana and what he did that day.

[14 : 25] But for others of us today, when it comes to our picture of Jesus, we're all wine and no whips. We want the Jesus of the wedding filling our souls with joy.

But we don't want the Jesus of the temple cleaning us up in the way we worship him. And so we ignore that Jesus. And it is easy to ignore him and for nobody else to know.

Because you can ignore that Jesus and still look very Christian. You know, I can go and serve at the Glasgow City Mission. I can turn up to the central prayer meeting here at St. Silas.

I can read my Bible. I can give to charity. I can do all those things without actually letting Jesus really challenge me and clean out the depths of false love in my heart.

When we see Jesus here cleansing that temple, the line that we draw to us isn't just about what we do together on a Sunday. Because we don't go worship, or that's what we do at church.

[15 : 26] Worship is about the whole of our lives. And if you have the real Jesus, you will experience him overturning your tables. He wants us to have such a passion for the glory of God that it permeates our whole lives.

So having the real Jesus in your life should mean that you feel him challenging you. You should feel him challenging the two biggest potential distractions in our lives from wholehearted discipleship.

If you read the New Testament, the two biggest obstacles to wholehearted discipleship, money and family. We should feel that challenge from Jesus.

We should experience him challenge us to see our bodies as devoted to him in a way that means that it affects how much we drink. And it affects how much we eat. And it affects who we sleep with and who we don't sleep with.

We should experience him challenging our minds so that we don't just kind of form our moral values by the spirit of the age. But we recognize Jesus has got the right to decide what's good and bad in his world.

[16 : 41] And so we look at the world through the lenses of his words. And we think his thoughts after him as we look at the world and experience reality. So our whole lives are under his lordship.

And that means he wants to purify us. Sometimes he lays your table and it's joy. Other times he overturns your table and it's really difficult. Sometimes he overturns your table and you don't even know what he's doing yet.

So sometimes we will be serving Jesus and we will sense it as liberation, as true freedom, as true life. And other times if we're dealing with the real Jesus, we will experience him as profoundly constraining on us.

And you have to be ready for that so that you're not destabilized by it. You know, if you think that Jesus is there for your comfort, then we're not going to keep trusting him when we find that we're not comfortable.

And he hasn't answered our prayers in the way that we'd want him to. And he even takes away something that we love. But as with the temple here, he only overturns your table if in his goodness he needs to build us up again with something better.

[17 : 55] Maybe we could ask ourselves, when did you last let Jesus disagree with you and submit to his will? Do you want a real God or do you just want a projection of your own heart?

But if we're willing to stick with the real Jesus, the confronting one, there is a wonderful truth on offer. That's our third point, the raising of the true temple.

If we just look at what happens next in the scene, the Jews confront Jesus in verse 18. And they don't say what you might expect. I don't know if you noticed that. The Jews then responded to him, What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?

Now, I don't know about you, but I would expect something different there. Like they would have called the doctor about this man. It's as though they realize that their temple is a bit of a mess and needs cleansing.

They realize there is something extraordinary about this man Jesus. He embodies authority. They just need a sign to establish that. But if that question was a bit surprising, the answer is even more surprising.

[19 : 01] Just imagine you're there and you hear that question. Jesus says, in effect, I'll give you the sign you want. Verse 19, destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.

That is a really weird thing to say, isn't it? The building is gigantic. They started building it 46 years before. But John explains for us, verse 21, the temple he had spoken of was his body.

Just think about how confrontational Jesus is in saying that. He's saying, for one thing, you are going to kill me.

Isn't that extraordinary? It's his first public episode of his ministry. Destroy this temple. He's also saying, he's going to rise from the dead after three days.

And he is also saying, you know this temple that you care so much about is finished. The building that represents an entire religious system, it's so corrupt, it's over now.

[20 : 10] We need a new temple. And it's me. See how extraordinary that is. They say, who do you think you are strutting in here like you own the place?

And he says to them, own the place. I am the place. So if ever there was a man worth giving your life to and letting purify you, this is him.

John said of Jesus in chapter 1, the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. And literally, he pitched his tent among us. The tent was the tabernacle that had become the temple, the place that symbolized God's presence among his people.

There was presence, but there was also distance because there was a holy place that only certain people were allowed in. And then there was a most holy place that only the high priest could go in once a year because there was this distance from God.

And then now Jesus comes as the fulfillment of all of that because he is the tabernacle, the temple. And through him, any of us can access God.

[21 : 17] We can experience the presence of God through him. He's the only way. So we thought about the zeal for true worship, the passion for true lordship, the raising of the true temple, and finally the challenge, the need for true faith.

John gives us two examples to finish with of responses. One is of saving faith and one is of counterfeit faith. So if you just have a look with me at verse 23. Now while he, Jesus, was in Jerusalem at the Passover festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name.

Sounds terrific. Verse 24. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. And John is giving us testimony about Jesus, but verse 25.

He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person. Now the word entrust in verse 24 is literally believe.

It's the same believe word that we're being asked to do with him. So it's saying many people believed in him. He didn't believe in them. And the reason is that he knows what's in their hearts.

[22 : 31] However much other people are taken in by what we pretend to them, he is never fooled. Jesus knows what's in each person. It's very searching, isn't it?

It forces each of us to ask, what does Jesus see in me? These guys, they like the signs, but they don't like the authority.

They want the wine. They don't want the whip. But there's another example alongside that counterfeit faith, and we had it in verse 22. Jesus makes his prediction, then in verse 22, after he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said.

Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. So for them, it starts with the resurrection. That's the seventh sign in John's gospel.

And for us living today, it's the main one to look at. If we're making up our minds about who Jesus is, look at the resurrection. And for my money, he was definitely dead.

[23 : 33] The tomb was definitely empty. And he was definitely seen alive again. That's the sign that shook the world as those first disciples went out into the world, willing to die for their claim, as though they had no fear of death anymore.

That's the sign. But they don't just believe because of the sign. That's the key. They also let him be Lord. They gave him authority. So we get that other side to verse 22.

They believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. And I remember as a young Christian, having done the Alpha course, and coming to trust that Jesus had risen from the dead and died for me, I started going to church, and I was thinking, yeah, I get that Jesus has died for me, but what I don't get is why we keep looking at the Bible all the time, as though it's authoritative.

What we see here is that counterfeit faith is about perhaps saying you believe in Jesus, saying you're a Christian, but not submitting your life to his words.

True faith is about believing him and acting on that by letting him be Lord, living your life under his authority, under the authority of the Bible. But as we do that, the same words of promise that give us hope for the future in the Bible are also words that purify us, like he did that day in the temple.

[24 : 56] He overturns your tables. And we've already seen, haven't we, even in this scene, as Jesus does that, that if you're willing to submit your life to Jesus' words, it may mean you end up consumed, that people don't like you because of what you believe and how you live.

They killed him for it, and we shouldn't be surprised if people react against us. But here is the man you want to stick with. In just two chapters of John's Gospel, we've seen that he's the eternal one, the word made flesh to make God known to us.

He's the beloved son of the eternal God. He's the savior, the promised king, the lamb who takes away the sins of the world. And now we see he is the temple through whom you can know God.

He has stepped into our world to bring us joy, but that joy is on the other side of change, of letting him purify us and our worship. He can only be lord of the wine because he is lord of the whip.

He only ever overturns your table because he loves you. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we praise you for your authority.

[26 : 21] We confess that you are lord. You are in charge. We trust you today that your will is good.

Lord, we praise you that you are the true temple through whom we can access your heavenly father. And so, Father God, we thank you that we can come to you as children.

We thank you for giving us your son through whom we can know you. Thank you for all that you give us and all that you have given him. And so, Holy Spirit, we pray that you will work in us to purify us, that our religion will be about the glory of God, and that our lives and our thoughts will be under the authority of Christ, and that through you we will experience the joy that is on the other side of becoming more like him.

Amen. Amen. We're going to sing in response to what we've heard, and there will be prayer ministry as well, as Darren said.