

Christmas According to John
Why God Became Man, part 1
John 2:12-22
December 3, 2017

Today we start a series within a series, “Christmas According to John.” All the other gospel accounts start with Jesus’ earthly life but John starts farther back, into eternity. Jesus is God, the eternal Word who became a man. From the opening sentence of his gospel, John tells us that Jesus is no ordinary man. We are going to look at John chapters two and three for the next four weeks, as we think about the Christmas story, culminating with our Christmas Eve service. Today we look at 2:12-22, “Why God Became Man.”

John wrote so that we would believe that Jesus is the Son of God and by believing enjoy eternal life. John told us that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth (1:14).” At the wedding at Cana when Jesus revealed his glory, the disciples believed in him (2:11). Seeing Jesus’ glory and believing are connected. My desire in this series is to see Jesus’ glory in John’s gospel.

Today we see Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was at the center of the religious life of Israel. It was designed for the worship of God and the place where sacrifices were offered for the sins of God’s people. It was also the place God chose to reveal his glory and his presence. But the history of Israel is a cycle of faithlessness to God and his temple. Israel’s kings built pagan temples and altars undermining the worship of the one true God. At one point the Book of the Law was misplaced or hidden for some fifty-five years (2 Ki 22:8). The cycle got so bad that the glory of the Lord left the temple and God was set to destroy Jerusalem (Ezek 10). Though the temple was rebuilt, the glory of God never returned. This is the condition of Israel and the temple when the glory of God once again appeared in Jesus (1:14).

After the wedding, Jesus and his disciples head to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover (13). Pilgrims from all over the Roman Empire traveled from afar to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover feast causing Jerusalem to swell with pilgrims¹ there to worship and offer sacrifices. In the Passover, Jews remembered the Exodus, that great saving act when God delivered Israel from death by making atonement for their sins through a sacrifice and delivered them from slavery to the Egyptians. Jesus enters the temple area through the outermost court, the Court of the Gentiles,² the place Gentiles worshiped and found an open air market (14). Stands are set up to sell animals for sacrifice, oxen, sheep, and pigeons, as well as money changers converting foreign currency for the pilgrims to purchase sacrifices. The Jewish leaders, the shepherds of Israel, set up the market because pilgrims, traveling long distances, could not practically bring sacrifices with them. They were providing a service for the pilgrims but it made it impractical for Gentiles to worship,³ excluding the Gentiles from worship. Israel existed to be a light to the nations and this gives us a glimpse into the spiritual indifference of Israel in the time of Jesus. They were religious but callous to God.

Jesus looks around at the scene with a righteous anger and formulates a plan. He finds some cords and makes a whip and drives out the merchants and the animals (15). He pours out the money of the money changers and over turns their tables. Then he tells those who sold pigeons to “take this stuff away;⁴ do not make my Father’s house a house of trade (16).” Picture this, the place is crowded. There are pilgrims, merchants, and animals in holding pens lined up, forming walkways. Merchants are calling out to pilgrims to buy their goods, people are haggling over prices and animals. Pilgrims

¹ There are various estimates of the population of Jerusalem at this time as well as the number of pilgrims flooding into Jerusalem. It is safe to say that the city swelled to five times its population during the Passover, from 30,000 to 150,000.

² The Temple contained 4 different courts; the Court of the Priests, the Court of Israel, the Court of the Women and finally the Court of the Gentiles. The Court of the Gentiles was the most outer Court encompassing the Temple. Despite the whole of the Temple being considered holy, this was the least holy court in the Temple. This is the place Gentiles could worship and were forbidden entry further the temple courts, by penalty of death!

³ The market was originally set up outside and around the Temple area but later moved into the temple area.

⁴ The pigeons were probably caged.

are carrying or leading animals around that they had purchased. Then Jesus starts cracking this homemade whip, hitting the animals and maybe the merchants. The crowd sees the commotion and start moving away when the animals start stampeding. People are now running away, the oxen are bellowing, grunting, and snorting as they move, and the sheep are bleating. This is an audacious act if it were not done by the God man. The religious leaders had made his Father's house into a house of trade." The shepherds of Israel turned the temple, the place where a holy God met with and forgave sinners, into a place of profit. Greed masquerading as religion, victimizing spiritual pilgrims. Shepherds making money off sheep in the name of religion (Lu 20:46-47).

Meanwhile his disciples, remembered Psalm 69:9, "Zeal for your house will consume me (17)." Jesus has a zeal for his Father's house, that will consume him, send him to the cross. Jesus is cleaning house. The mission of God, rescuing humanity from their sin, is the reason he came. Jesus is not a religious lunatic, God was cleansing his temple. The ultimate authority is clashing with the human religious authority. Jesus is not just a good moral teacher, he is the Son of God. The Jewish leaders demand a miracle as a sign of divine authority for what he did (18). But this demand condemns them. They had ignored God's mission to line their greedy pockets. I think they knew they had been exposed. By now they had heard Jesus preach and saw his miracles (2:23; 3:2). He condemns their love of money disguised in a religious veneer (Mat 12:38-39). What they need more than a sign is a change of heart. They do not need a miracle worker, they need a Saviour.

Jesus responds, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up (19)." They think he is talking about the physical temple but he is talking about his death and resurrection (21). I think he is saying two things here. First, they are destroying God's physical temple by their greed and ignoring the mission of God. God confirmed this by destroying the temple in 70 A.D., never to be rebuilt. He is also saying that they destroy God's new temple by killing him but he will be resurrected in three days. Jesus fulfills and replaces the temple. The temple pointed to Jesus. They need a better temple, Jesus. They need a better sacrifice, the Lamb of God who takes away their sins. They need a better high priest, who can mediate on their behalf. And they need a better Passover, God delivering them through the sacrificial Lamb of God and delivering them from slavery to sin and the devil. He is the better temple, the better sacrifice, and the better priest! Jesus is the New Temple as the meeting place between a holy God and sinful humanity. The temple has been forever replaced by Jesus (Mat 12:6; John 4; Rev 21:22- 27). All religions have some form of temple, a meeting place between God and man. Jesus replaces all religious systems which cannot not reconcile humanity to God; He is the only mediator between God and man.

Questions for Life Groups:

1. Describe an incident when someone did an outlandish act to get attention? Did it work?
2. What do you think were Jesus' initial thoughts when he entered the temple?
3. How would you describe Jesus' anger in this story? When is anger sin?
4. Do you see any parallels today with shepherds profiting at the expense of the sheep?
5. Do you know of any other times when the Jewish leaders were accused of being greedy?
6. How important are miracles for faith?
7. Why did Jesus not give the Jews the kind of sign they demanded?
8. Why were the Jewish leaders asking Jesus for a sign?
9. Do you ever ask for miracles? Have you ever seen or heard of a miracle?
10. What is the greatest miracle?
11. What is the significance of the Passover feast? How does the Exodus, the sacrifice, the deliverance from slavery have parallels in the Lord Supper?
12. Why did the disciples remember Jesus' saying about destroying the temple after his resurrection?
13. Why did Jesus not seem to affirm those who believed because of the signs he did?

