

Zeal for God's House

John's gospel is a peculiar treasure in that it approaches Jesus' story from a different viewpoint than the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke), which



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all follow a common historical timeline. For instance, John does not order his account with the story of Jesus' birth, his baptism, his wilderness temptations, death, and ascension. John does not spend time on Jesus' parables but carefully records Jesus' long discourses that are not recorded in the other gospels. Today's study is a clear contrast to the Synoptics in that John puts the story of Jesus cleansing the Temple at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in contrast to the Synoptics putting it at the last.

Scholars argue over who the actual writer is, John the Beloved or perhaps one of his disciples, but we know it was written toward the end of the first century CE, after the Roman's destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, when the church had already spread across the empire and had drawn many Gentiles and Jews together in a common faith centered on Jesus. So John is utilizing the upheaval and insecurity of those times to present Jesus as God's gift to all the world. John 20:31 clearly states his purpose: "These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name."

It is a human failure that we tend to tie our beliefs/faith to physical monuments, traditions, ceremonies, and organizational structures. John's approach from the beginning is to present Jesus as God incarnate, the "word made flesh" (John 1:14). The Temple is only a symbol of God's presence among his people; Jesus is the true presence of God in our world. So, when Jesus declared "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" ... "he was speaking of the temple

of his body" (vv. 19 and 21).

This transfer of focus and tradition was not easy in that first century church, which is confirmed as John explains that it was not until Jesus' resurrection that his disciples understood what he had said "and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken" (v. 22). As the 21st Century church we forget that Jesus faced not only militant religious opinions, but the comfortable familiar traditions of the Jews. Think about traditions that shape the modern church and are so ingrained we forget they are not printed in the Bible.

The Temple cleansing was not just practical – it was essential to reframe faith in God and to dismantle stifling legalism. Passover was the greatest of all the feast days and Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside were crowded with hundreds of thousands of pilgrims. Every Jew over the age of 19 was required to pay an annual Temple tax equal to about two days' wages.

The high priest's office controlled the money changers' booths located in the courtyard of the Gentiles, and those money changers charged a premium to exchange secular coins into "Temple coins." Besides that, pilgrims who traveled any distance had to purchase officially approved doves, lambs, or cattle for their sacrifices. Another big moneymaker!

No surprise that Jesus turned over tables and set animals free while declaring: "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" (v. 16). There is real anger in Jesus as he declares that the faith of Israel has turned into a system of rituals, a religious business, and a barrier to the love and grace of God!

Jesus was acutely aware that his own people would struggle with his ministry. Israel longed for God's promised Messiah, and it was only natural people would see him through the eyes of cultural anticipation. We

all tend to fashion Jesus and God according to our family and church experiences. John carefully points this out: "many believed in his name because they saw the signs he was doing. But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people" (vv. 23-24).

We see the same flawed religious thinking today as people try to combine those who lead with God's purposes and will in spite of conflict with biblical truth. Jesus refused to become a captive of the Temple power brokers, the political agreements between the high priest and the Roman governor, or the popular idea that the Messiah would restore Jerusalem as some kind of world headquarters for God's chosen people. John's gospel cannot go along with any idea that compromises Jesus as God's Son, the hope of every lost soul, whether Jew or Gentile.

Paul, the Pharisee who became the "apostle to the Gentiles," connects to the spiritual idea of temple and faith: "Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate, says the Lord ... and I will be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,' says the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:16-18).

To become a child of God is based on simple faith that sees Jesus as God's gift of life, a choice to follow in the example of Jesus. This is more than admittance to a religious organization, this is a trust that will change your thinking and living. Jesus did not merely upset the Jerusalem Temple and its leaders that day. Jesus offered us the open arms of God and the hope of love beyond any human measure. Zeal for God's house? No! New life now and forever? Yes! There is no love that can compare to God's love.