

5. John 2:12-25

Mark Wormell

Getting started

Do you consider yourself a Christian activist?

What do you think of other Christians who challenge the church or aspects of our culture and politics?

Observation

1. Where does this story start and where does it end? (Unlike the other authors of gospels, John records Jesus moving between Galilee and Jerusalem over a period of three years. Keep an eye out for this. Some commentators believe this suggests John is more 'historically accurate' than is often claimed.)
2. What was the passover festival and why would Jesus go to Jerusalem for Passover? (Note that Jesus goes to Jerusalem for at least two more Passovers, 6:4 and 11:55-19)
3. Why would there be animals and money changers in the Temple courts, particularly with Passover approaching?
4. What were the political implications of Jesus' violent actions?
5. Why might Jesus call the Temple his 'Father's house'?
6. What could be the intended effect of Jesus quoting in verse 17 from Psalm 69:9?
7. Why might the Jews ask for a miraculous sign from Jesus?
8. What purpose is achieved by Jesus saying, 'destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days'? (see verses 20-22)
9. Why might John not record the 'miraculous signs' Jesus performed in Jerusalem? (John's point is Jesus' identification of the temple as his Father's house and his authority to judge and punish sin.)

Interpretation

1. What does this passage show us about the character of Jesus?
2. What does this passage show us about the purpose of Jesus?
3. Why does Jesus not need other people to testify about him? How does this fit with the significance of John the Baptist's testimony in chapter 1? (Note this theme is continued in 5:31-39; 8:14 and 10:25)
4. What does this story teach us about pure worship?
5. Was Jesus just challenging the corruption and absence of proper worship, or was he suggesting that he had come to replace the whole sacrificial system?

Implications

1. What is it about Jesus that helps you see him as more than a teacher?
2. The temple was destroyed. We now meet God in Jesus and his Spirit dwells within us. A church building is not a temple. To what uses should we put our church buildings, and are we limited by this passage in answering this question?
3. What do we need to do to ensure pure worship?
4. In verses 23-24, Jesus appears to put little trust in people who seek or are influenced by signs? Do and should we seek signs today? How do we help people whose faith is weak and are always seeking signs?

Prayer suggestions

1. That our lives may be pure.
2. That we may trust Jesus without seeking more signs.
3. That we will be alive to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Notes:

The temple in this story was not 'Solomon's temple' (1 Kings), as that was destroyed by the Babylonians c.596-86. Nor is it the smaller and less imposing temple build by the Israelites on their return from exile (c.537: see Ezra). It was the one that King Herod had started in BC 19 to try to impress the Jews. It had been in construction in for 46 years, and would be completed in AD 64, before being destroyed in AD70.

Verse 19 is often misquoted. Jesus did not say that he would destroy the temple. He said, in effect, that if/when his body was destroyed, God would raise him in three days.

A question you may ask is how this passage relates to the 'clearing of the temple' that are recorded in Mt 21:12-17, Mk. 11:15-18 and Lk 19:45-46 as occurring the the last week of Jesus' life. Possible explanations include:

1. There were two similar events, one at the beginning of Jesus' ministry and one at the end, and each author chose to record only one.
2. John's account is historically accurate and the other authors chose to relocate the event to suit their literary purposes.
3. The other three accounts are historically accurate and John chose to relocate the event to suit his literary purposes.

It is clear that each author chose material, and ordered it, in ways to suit his purposes in writing his gospel. The arguments between the alternatives are complex. On balance, I prefer the first alternative, in part because the clearing recorded by John did not attract the violent response that the later one did. He got away with it once, when he was building in popularity, but could not get away with it a second time, as the opposition to him increased. However you land on this issue, what purpose is served by John recording this event so early in his narrative?

Like much of John's gospel, a great deal is going on here. We see evidence of Jesus' self understanding and relationship with his Father. We see his judgement on corrupt worship and inadequate faith. We see his anticipation of his cleansing death, when his body would be destroyed and raised in glory. And we see the type of public political act that would lead him into conflict with the Jewish leaders. There is this, and more, in only 10 verses!

