

Jesus: In Jerusalem

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Series: Jesus - John

Text: 2:13 - 3: 21

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### **OPENING PRAYER:**

Our gracious God and Heavenly Father, we pray that by the power of your Holy Spirit, you will come upon us and fill this room with your word and with that grace that attend your word. And that as we consciously place our lives under its teaching, we may also place our lives deliberately and willingly, under your divine authority, that we may be like children saying to you, speak, Lord, for your servants are listening. Oh, God, we need your presence, so much to come to us. We need to sense that you are still speaking to us and have not deserted us. Some of us have needs that we scarcely ourselves recognize. And therefore, we cannot bring them to you. Come to us, we pray, by your holy Word and the power of your Holy Spirit, address us as a father, speaking into the hearts of his children, that we may hear, and be drawn afresh to Christ, in whom are all the resources of your grace and power and be enabled in and through him to live to the praise of your glory? We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated.

### **SCRIPTURE READING:**

Now, our studies in the Gospel of John continue today. And our passage today, chapter two of John's gospel beginning at verse 13 and through chapter three, to verse 21. John's Gospel chapter two, verse 13, through 3:21, page 886 in the English Standard Version, you'll find in the pew.

Let us hear God's word.

***13** The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. **14** In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. **15** And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. **16** And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." **17** His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."*

**18** For the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" **19** Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." **20** The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" **21** But he was speaking about the temple of his body. **22** And therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

**23** Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. **24** But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people **25** and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. **2** This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." **3** Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." **4** Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" **5** Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **6** That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7** Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' **8** The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

**9** Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" **10** Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? **11** Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. **12** If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? **13** No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. **14** And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man (This is Jesus's unique title for himself) so must the Son of Man be lifted up, (He's talking of course about the cross) **15** that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

**16** "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

## **SERMON:**

As we approached this passage today, I'm very much reminded of the words of the great Anglican bishop of the 19th century, JC Ryle, some of whose books some of you undoubtedly will have read. He says that "a man may be ignorant of many things and religion, and yet be saved. But to be ignorant of the matters handled in this chapter, is to be in the 'broad way that leads to destruction.'" He is obviously thinking, particularly of the third chapter of John's gospel, and Jesus' teaching to Nicodemus. But it very obviously applies to the whole of this section.

Jesus has come again to Jerusalem. It is Passover time. It is a high point of the religious year. He comes to this great temple, which he had first visited as a 12 year old boy. And John in these verses, records two events intimately connected to one another. And yet one of them very public and dramatic, and the other extremely private and quiet. He records how in public Jesus cleansed the temple, and how, in private, he challenged a religious leader.

The first section, of course, deals with the famous incident of His cleansing the temple. It was, as I said to the children really like a great cathedral. And the passage indicates to us it was still in process of being built. Herod was piling enormous resources into the building of this magnificent temple. And yet, I suspect something was happening behind the scenes that had led to the way in which the the money changers and the seller of the sacrificial animals had come to find space in the court of the Gentiles. A little perhaps like the days of the Reformation at the beginning of the 16th century, when the Pope wanted to build his great new Basilica of St. Peter's and in order to finance that sold indulgences throughout Europe, and so enraged Martin Luther that he nailed his 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg church and began what we now look back on as the Reformation.

It is sometimes right to be angry. And Jesus was obviously profoundly moved and distressed by what he saw. Love cannot be anything less than distressed when the object of love is maligned. So interesting, isn't it, how compromised we are when it comes to anger that we will feel righteous anger when our child is maligned, or our wife or parents are bad mouthed. But when anyone speaks ill of God and of his church and of the Lord Jesus Christ it is so politically correct for us to not even feel anger. Because after all, we are loving Christian believers.

But love that never fires with anger when the object of its love is under assault and is demeaned is no true love at all. And the disciples, as the passage tells us later, remembered how it was written in the 69th Psalm, which was one of the greatest of the Old Testament prophecies of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, "Zeal for his father's house, consumed him." And of course, one of the lessons that is so obviously to be drawn from this is that this is the Lord Jesus, who has so recently been baptized with the Holy Spirit, in order that he might baptize his people with the Holy Spirit. So that those who belong to Jesus Christ would similarly burn with zeal for the Heavenly Father's house; burn with zeal for the Church of Jesus Christ.

But it's clear when we place this event in the context of the scriptures, that Jesus is not simply expressing the immediacy of his zeal for the house of God and the way in which it was being denigrated. And the way in which the worship of God was being minimized. He was also very obviously fulfilling the scriptures. Do you remember how, almost in the end of their Old Testament scriptures, every Jew knew that the Lord would suddenly return to his temple, and

he would come like a refining fire in the temple. And here was our Lord Jesus Christ coming as a refining fire to purify the worship of God. Fulfilling the prophecy of Scripture that the Lord Jesus had a tremendous zeal for the worship of his Heavenly Father. And in the process, is this not true, exposing the sham of so much Christian profession, even evangelical Christian profession, that we may have so little real zeal for the worship of God.

And we think it normal, spiritually, that we are not aflame with the longing, with the desire to meet with God's people and to the holy people to worship him and to serve them. And we need the Lord Jesus to come again, as it were, with the whip of the Holy Spirit to cleanse our hearts from the garbage and the rubble, and the self sufficiency that makes us in a multitude of ways in danger of being exactly in the same situation as the temple of God when the Lord Himself came to visit it.

But there's something in a sense, even more significant, that the Lord Jesus is doing. Yes, he's cleansing the temple. Yes, he's fulfilling Old Testament prophecy. But he's also doing a third thing. He is giving warning that the days of this temple are numbered. He's giving warning that the days of this temple are numbered. He's beginning to sweep away, as it were, all the instruments that were in place to bring sacrifices into the presence of God. And he's coming as the Lord of the temple who would come again in power, at the moment of his death and finally desecrate the temple. Tearing from the top to the bottom the curtain that barred the way into the holiest place of all, because he wants men and women of his own time, and men and women of all time to understand that this temple stood only for a season during which it had its place, but now the temple in which alone, the Lord God of heaven and earth is to be worshipped is Jesus Himself.

And so when they come to him and say, "By what authority are you doing this?" By what sign can you prove that you have the right to do this in God's temple? He says, "Destroy this temple", speaking of his own body, "and it will be rebuilt in three days". Now none of them understood what he was saying until after the resurrection. Even the disciples didn't understand what he was saying until after the resurrection. But what he was saying was this, that the day is coming, when the place where God will be worshipped will no longer be in buildings made by hands, not even in this building, made by hands, but exclusively uniquely, in and through me.

And he's setting up of course, a principle that eventually he will expound to His disciples on the evening of his crucifixion, you need to know that there is no other way to the Father, except through me. There is no other temple to which you can go truly to meet with God than me.

And so as he cleanses the temple in public, he's making a public declaration about the uniqueness of his person, the uniqueness of his work, and his uniqueness as the only way in heaven or in earth to get to God.

And then the amazing thing happens, people begin to believe in him. Look at verse 23. "Many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part", and it's exactly the same verb was used in verse 24 as was used in verse 23, "Jesus on his part didn't believe in them." Isn't that interesting? They believed in Jesus. But Jesus didn't believe in them. They believed in Jesus, but Jesus didn't give Himself to them.

You remember, if you were here last Sunday, that we thought about that. How the great thing, the great Mark that I am a true Christian, is not just my consciousness that I believe in whatever sense in Jesus but that I also have a consciousness that Jesus has entrusted himself to me. That Jesus knows me. That is to say that I am no longer the master of the relationship with Jesus. But Jesus is the master of the relationship with me. And he was obviously conscious, while they believed in Him, they, they were not really interesting themselves to him entirely. They were impressed by what he was doing, but they were not entrusting the whole of their lives to Him. And then we are told in verse 24, that Jesus didn't entrust himself to them because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in a man. And that, of course, is the segue to John chapter three. This is a specific illustration of the way in which Jesus knows what's in your heart.

And so the Savior who has cleansed the temple in public now comes in chapter three visited by Nicodemus to challenge a religious leader, indeed a theologian, indeed *the* theologian in Israel in private. And my friends, you don't get any better than Nicodemus. That's the first thing you need to know. You don't get any better than Nicodemus. He was a Pharisee. And you don't get any more careful than a Pharisee. He was a member of the ruling council and you don't rise any higher than being a member of the ruling council. And Jesus actually says to him, Nicodemus, is it true what I've heard about you that you are *the* theologian in Israel. You have the accutist understanding of religion of anybody in Israel. That's what he says in verse 10. And yet this man comes, albeit in the night, he comes to Jesus and he says to Jesus, "Rabbi." Which itself was something. Jesus had never been to the schools. Jesus hadn't lived in Jerusalem. He hadn't been at seminary. And here is this great theologian in Israel and he's he's coming to me saying, "Rabbi, we know, we understand that you're a teacher sent from God". And John shows us that Jesus knows what is in him. Look at the wording that's used in verse three. In verse two, Nicodemus makes a statement, "Rabbi, we know you're a man sent from God otherwise you could never do these signs that you do. And Jesus answered him." Jesus answered him. Well he wasn't asking any questions was he? And Jesus answered him.

But that's often, that's often our Lord Jesus Christ way. When you're not asking any questions, he'll come and in His providence or through His Word, he'll begin to answer questions that you were never asking. And so Jesus says to him in verse three, and he is to repeat it really in a slightly different form and verse five, listen, Nicodemus. It's a though he says, okay, okay, I'm not impressed by any of these things, Nicodemus. This is not a situation in which you have come to talk to me. This is a situation in which I have come to talk to you. "Unless you are born from above, you cannot see the kingdom of God." Verse five, "Unless you are born from above, by water and the Spirit, you cannot see the kingdom of God." And as though to underscore it, everything the Lord Jesus says is true, but as Lord to underscore this is not only true, but it's vitally important he prefaces it with his Amen. Amen. Truly, truly, I say to you, these things are true, that unless the Spirit of God works supernaturally on you, you are like a block of stone — as far as the kingdom of God is concerned, you can neither see it, nor can you enter it.

And Nicodemus goes on and this is so marvelous, in the way in which John tells it in the Gospel of Nicodemus goes on to prove Jesus point, doesn't it? What's his response? His response is, *Jesus, I just can't see that. I just can't see that.* Jesus says, unless the Spirit of God comes upon you from above and opens your spiritually blind eyes, you will never see the kingdom of God, you'll never know how the Kingdom of God works. And Nicodemus says, I can't possibly be the case. Because I can't see it.

I wonder if you've ever had the experience, as I've had, I suppose most of us have had as we've tried to explain the Christian gospel to somebody. And we've spoken to them about how Jesus Christ comes to us from God as verse 16 later says, as a free gift, as a Savior who died for our sins and rose again as a as a lord and master who rules over our lives and is our constant companion and, and, and as the conversation goes on our our pulse quickens, because they say, I think I'm getting it now. I think I'm getting it now. And then their last words to you are something like this. You know, I'm so grateful to you for this conversation. From now on, I'm going to try so much harder to live a good life. And your heart sinks. And you realize they've seen nothing. It's almost impossible to believe that you have articulated the message of the Christian gospel, with great simplicity and clarity using the English language and they they don't even seem to have been able to understand the the simplest words in the English language. How on earth is that possible? And especially how is it possible when you do this with some of the most intelligent people you know, and they still don't understand? It's because apparently, it's possible to be the very best it's possible to be. To be the most religious it's possible to be to be the most school that's possible to be and yet not to know the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit that takes the scales off your eyes and, and helps you to see how the Kingdom of God works.

And Jesus goes on to explain this, Nicodemus, he says, this is how the Kingdom of God works. He says, You remember how Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, the bronze serpent when the people had been bitten with snakes? And Moses said, look at the serpent by looking at the serpent God is going to heal you. Jesus says, to Nicodemus, of course, he's referring to the cross ultimately, he's saying to Nicodemus, the way in which God saves sinner, is by placing the results of their sin upon the one who would be lifted up upon the cross so that as they look to Him in faith and trust and abandonment, they would be healed, forgiven pardoned of their sin.

But you see, he's in the darkness. And he just can't see. The truth is in front of his eyes, he's actually talking to the truth, and he still can't see. Because, of course, in part he's been schooled all his life to think that what pleases God is what I do. And he just can't see that there's nothing he can do that pleases God.

And yet Jesus is so patient with him. He says, Nicodemus, you need to be born of water, and of the Spirit. I think he's probably referring to the great promise that's in the great prophecy of Ezekiel when God says about the coming day of grace that He will pour water upon our dirty hearts and cleanse them and give us a new hearts to live for His glory. That when God comes in the power of His Holy Spirit, to open our blind eyes to the gospel of Jesus Christ, it's not just that we say, once I was blind now, I can see, but that our whole lives are changed. As Paul says in Second Corinthians 5:17, "If anyone is in Christ, there's a new creation. The old has passed away. And the new has come."

And the story ends, I think, even if you've got a red letter Version Bible, it actually ends at verse 15. And now it's John that gives us the commentary in verse 16. He says, this is what Jesus was really ultimately pointing Nicodemus too. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." And then, in verse 21, "Whoever does what is true comes to the light turned." And of course, the questions left hanging. Nicodemus came at night in the darkness. And presumably, he went before dawn still in the darkness, and the whole story leaves you hanging at this point in the Gospel. And you want to know, did Nicodemus ever see. Did Nicodemus ever come to the light? Did Nicodemus ever himself trust in Jesus? And he's mentioned two times later on in the Gospel. Right at the end of the story, he's there with Joseph of Arimathea. And he's, he's tenderly, lovingly, compassionately burying Jesus. But it's quite clear he has no expectation whatsoever that Jesus is going to rise from the dead. And at least this Sunday, you ought to wish with all your heart that John told you in his Gospel whether Nicodemus ever saw. Whether Nicodemus ever came to the light. And I wonder if the reason he doesn't make it clear, is just so that that question will stay hanging there. Not about Nicodemus but about me.

Have I seen? My life been changed? By trusting in Christ as my Savior? Do I know that John 3:16 is not only the most famous verse in the Bible, but that it's true for me too. That he so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that because my eyes have been opened and I've come to believe in Him I may have everlasting life.

Don't know about Nicodemus. But it's so very vital, my friends, that you know, about you. Whether you see or are still blind.

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

Heavenly Father, we pray that by the power of your Holy Spirit, you will open our eyes that we may see Jesus Christ and all his matchless glory. And we pray for ourselves as we apply this word to our own lives personally that by the power of His Holy Spirit, He will cleanse the temple of our lives. That he will open our eyes to see him and his saving grace. That our hearts may be washed with water that comes from above. That our affections and desires may be changed. That we have a deep love for you and the longing to serve and worship you. So bring us we pray out of darkness into your marvelous life. We ask it for our Savior's sake. Amen