

Zeal

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- [0 : 0 0] Zeal is defined as great energy in pursuit of a cause or an objective or intense emotion compelling action.
- I wonder if that would describe any part of your life. Are you zealous for anything? Do you have zeal for anything? A cause that truly inspires emotion in you or drives you to action.
- Maybe you once did. You remember a time when you were zealous for something in your life. You really, it got you up in the morning. It's what you were thinking about, what you were pursuing during your day.
- And perhaps when you were a student, you were zealous about something. It's fashionable for university students to have a cause to be zealous about, even if they don't quite know what they're supposed to be zealous about or what the cause is.
- They still, when I was at university, everybody was zealous about something. You could see it in the student protests in our country recently. Zealous undergraduate students fighting for a cause.
- [1 : 0 7] But of course we grow up, don't we? And we tend to tone down our zeal for things as we get older. We get a little more level-headed. And after all, our society doesn't much like zeal.
- It's a little bit too much like extremism. So people in our society can tend to avoid, you know, zealots, extremists. Which is why this morning's passage once again challenges us to re-evaluate the view that we have of Jesus.
- The view that we tend to have grown up with. Just like our previous passage did. Two weeks ago, you remember we looked at the beginning of John 2, where our sanitized view of Jesus was challenged when we learned that for his first miracle he provided alcohol for a party.
- It's a bit shocking. And I think John, in these opening stories of Jesus, is wanting to shock us and change how we think about Jesus. Because in this very next passage, we find him rampaging through Jerusalem, chasing people out with a whip that he made for the purpose.
- It's not quite the Sunday school picture of gentle Jesus, meek and mild, is it? Last passage we saw Jesus the party animal. And this passage we see Jesus the religious extremist.
- [2 : 2 0] And so these stories in John, as I said, they really challenge our view of Jesus. But not only do they challenge us to rethink who we think Jesus is, but they teach us more about him on a much deeper level than we might otherwise have.
- That's why they're here. They help us to get a deeper understanding of this man, Jesus. And particularly the story this morning, I hope, by the way, it's in front of you. They've got it open in your Bibles, John chapter 2.
- This story of Jesus going through the temple with a whip gives us a glimpse into what he is really passionate about. You know, we hear his teaching, we see his miracles, but what is on Jesus' heart?

It's a good question. It's an important question. And it's in this story that I think we find out exactly what is on Jesus' heart, what he is passionate about, what he has zeal for.

And it's important for us to know what he's passionate about and whether we as his people are passionate for the same things. And so let's find out what that is as we have a closer look at this passage.

[3 : 30] Now what stands out in this whole section of John, just in the broader context, and you would have seen it in the previous passage too, is that Jesus in these early chapters of John is constantly confronting the religious establishment of the day.

He's constantly coming head to head with the religious leaders of Judaism, and no more so than in this passage. You know, he's not just going through any market and causing a ruckus here.

He's in the most holy site in all of Israel, the most holy land in the world, during the most holy festival, which is the Passover, which you'll know from the Old Testament.

It was when Israelites from around the country would descend on Jerusalem. The entire population of Israel would come to the one city, Jerusalem. They would descend on Jerusalem. It would be packed.

There would be crowds. It would be chaos. And they would come to make sacrifices at the temple to approach God and to worship God in response for him rescuing them from slavery in Egypt all those years ago.

[4 : 32] And so the city would have been chaos. And most of the travelers from around the country wouldn't have brought their own animals to sacrifice. You know, it's not like you can pack a bull in the back of the wagon and bring it to Jerusalem.

And so they needed to buy them once they arrived at the city. And hence the need for all these animal traders. It was big business. And it was an important service that they were offering for these temple sacrifices to take place.

But you can imagine the scene. You know, the city chock-a-block with people all trying to get into the temple precinct, lining up to buy their sacrifices. And the money traders frantically exchanging all the foreign currency into local coin because you would have had people from outside of Israel as well.

And add to this scene that all the frightened animals that needed to be contained in their separate pens and cages. It was a very big and involved operation going on here at the temple to make sure that everything ran smoothly.

And no doubt there would be Roman soldiers on every street corner, you know, watching to make sure that nothing got out of hand. Not unlike modern Jerusalem. In fact, I had the privilege of visiting Jerusalem in 2005.

[5 : 45] And here behind me is me standing, not with a Roman soldier, but the modern equivalent, an Israeli Defense Force soldier. And these guys were all over the place.

You might not recognize me. I didn't have the beard back then. But these soldiers were there in Jerusalem, dotted all over the place to keep order. Because that city, when you're in Jerusalem, if any of you have had the privilege of traveling there, it always feels like it's on the boiling point.

You know, you've got these Palestinians and these Jews living side by side. And they're in a war zone, basically. And it always feels like it's about to explode. Well, it would have been the same back then.

I think Jerusalem hasn't changed in 2,000 years. Especially during the Passover. It would have been on the boiling point. About to explode. All these people packed in.

All the things that need to happen. So this is just the one time, the one time of the year, that you don't want to cause any trouble in Jerusalem. Which is exactly what Jesus decides to do.

[6 : 52] By walking right into the middle of it and pretty much unleashing chaos. As I said, he's got this whip, which he starts driving out animals with.

The whip is probably for the animals, by the way, and not for the people. Just in case you think that he went beating people. And so you've got these animals in panic. Sheep and oxen running everywhere.

People ducking for cover. And then, as if that's not bad enough, he goes straight to the tables of the money changers. With all their carefully organized piles of foreign exchange. And tips them over. And orders the money changers out.

So now, on top of the terrified animals running around. You've got these traders scrambling to scoop up whatever fallen coins they can. Before they can, you know, run away from this crazy man. And of course, as you would expect, it doesn't take long before someone calls the cops.

In this case, the religious authorities of the temple. And they catch up with Jesus. And they confront him and demand him to explain just who on earth he thinks he is.

[7 : 50] Look at verse 18. The Jews then responded to him, What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this? It's a good question.

You know, what right does a carpenter in Nazareth have to come to the temple in Jerusalem and start bossing people around? What possible right? To do something like this, you need to have some kind of authority.

But what credentials of authority does Jesus have? What badge can he show? You know, on the American movies, you always see the three-letter acronym agents, government agents coming out and taking out their badges to show that they have authority to boss people around in this crime scene or whatever it is.

Well, they're asking Jesus, show us your badge. What authority do you have to do what you're doing? To tell us what we should be doing at the temple. Well, listen to how he responds.

Verse 19. Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days. You want credentials? Fine. I'll give you credentials.

[8 : 58] And while they didn't quite understand what he was talking about at the time, what he was saying here, very important, he was saying that the proof of his authority to do this, to come and boss people around at the temple, was going to be when a few years later they killed him.

The temple, you see, he was talking about was his body. And then he was going to rise from the dead three days later. And him doing that, that miracle of miracles, that central point in human history, is Jesus' badge.

It's his authority showing that he has the right to tell people what to do. That's going to be the ultimate sign to prove that he is who he says he is, that he is God's son, and therefore he has God's authority to do whatever he wants.

If you have ever doubted that, then you can look back at the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That is his ultimate mark of authority.

It's no wonder, in fact, when Paul was in Athens a few years after this, and people were complaining about him for talking about judgment for sin, what did he say?

[10 : 06] He said, God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he has given proof of this to all men by what? Raising him from the dead.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the ultimate badge of authority that he has to call the shots in this world. And we must not doubt that.

You see, it shows us that this event, this resurrection that we keep on talking about in churches, we look back, yeah, Jesus rose from the dead, we say it in our Apostles' Creed, but this is not just an interesting historical phenomenon.

It's proof to all people that he is the boss, not just of the temple in Jerusalem, but he is the boss of you and me as well. Whether you like or not, Jesus rising from the dead is proof that he gets to say how things ought to be in our lives, and he has the right to be angry if they're not, just like he did in this temple.

And that's what he's saying to these religious authorities, and that's what he's saying to you and me this morning in this passage. He is the real authority. He has every right to call the shots in this world and in your life.

[11 : 16] I wonder if you've realized that about Jesus in your life, that you don't actually have the right to use your life and your time and your resources and your money any way you want to, any way you see fit, just like these people who are using the temple any way they saw fit.

No, Jesus has the right to say how things should be in your life and mine. And that's really the first major thing we learn about Jesus here. But what else do we learn about him?

Well, as I said earlier, we also get to see what he's passionate about. That's what I want us to see for the rest of our time this morning. What is on Jesus' heart?

What is he zealous about? Well, the question here as we read the story is why does he make such a big deal about these animal traders at the temple?

After all, they were providing an important, essential service for worshippers coming to Jerusalem. They weren't actually doing anything wrong in and of itself.

[12 : 16] The problem, of course, wasn't what they were doing. It was where they were doing it. We read in the temple precincts, in the temple courts. You see, in the point of the temple, now the Old Testament teaches us, this time and time again, it teaches us about the significance of the temple of Jerusalem.

And the point of the temple was to be the place where people could approach a holy God through the sacrificial system that God had established so that their sins could be atoned for.

And that was amazing. That there was a way, there was a place on earth that you could come and that knowing that you're a sinner, every one of us knows that we're a sinner against God and that keeps on gnawing away at our conscience.

But there was a place you could come and you could know that your sins were atoned for, that your sins were covered through the sacrificial system. It was the one place on earth at that time that people could therefore come near to God in real relationship and worship Him and know Him and actually have a relationship with God untainted by sin.

It was the one place on earth they could do that at this temple. And it was amazing and yet it was right there that these traders had chosen to set up shop. You can start to understand why Jesus is a little bit bothered by that, can't you?

[13 : 44] Of all the places they could have conducted their business, anywhere in Jerusalem, outside in Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives, just outside, it would have been a great place to conduct their business. No, they choose they choose the one place that was set apart for the worship of God.

It's a bad choice. I often take my dog in the car for a drive when I'm going to the shops or take him here to work sometimes.

If you have a pastoral meeting with me, I'm just warning you, there is a church dog and he's very pleasant. But when I take him in the car, I open the back door and he hops in or I open the boot and he hops in and then I close it and I go around to the driver's side and I open the door and what is right there in the footwell of the driver's seat, none other than my dog because that's his favorite place in the whole car.

You see, of all the places in the car that he can choose to settle down, he chooses to settle down on the accelerator pedal. Now that's very inappropriate. He goes to the one place that I need clear in order to drive the car.

Well, it's a silly illustration but that's kind of the problem here. You see, of all the places these traders could have chosen to do their trading, they chose the one place people needed to be clear and open so that they could approach and worship God.

[15 : 05] And that's why Jesus got angry. These businessmen were distracting people from doing that, especially, in fact, the Gentiles.

You had people from outside of Jerusalem coming to, that had converted to Judaism. They weren't allowed in the inner courts. They weren't allowed close to the temple. There was a special court called the Court of the Gentiles where non-Jews could come and worship and it was most likely right in this court where they were busy doing this trading.

The Jews didn't, these traders didn't care about the Gentiles coming to worship God. The one place that they could do that was booked, it was busy, it was taken. People were distracted and these traders were totally disregarding the purpose for which God had given them the temple in the first place and that's why Jesus is angry.

That's what leads him to do what he does. And the thing is, he knows, he knows that by doing this, he's sticking his neck out in a big way.

By doing this, by objecting to the misuse of the temple, he's making some serious enemies and there are enemies which remain in the book of John until his death, his arrest and his death.

[16 : 19] These enemies would end up killing him and he knows it. He talks about them destroying him later. He says to them, not so much destroy this temple, he's saying, you will destroy this temple, this temple, my body.

He knows that they're going to kill him. And so he came in here knowing that what he was doing was going to be the beginning of the end for him. But he was so zealous about this, so passionate about the temple being used properly that he didn't care.

And that's what the prophecy means. That's quoted in verse 17. Have a look. His disciples remembered that it is written, zeal for your house will consume me. That's from a psalm that Paul read to us earlier talking about how God's servant would be so zealous for people to come and know and worship God at his temple that he, the servant, would suffer and even die for that purpose so that people could come.

Which of course is what Jesus went on to do. This prophecy in the psalm was fulfilled when Jesus died on the cross. He died and walked into that death knowingly.

Why? Well, because of his passion. Jesus didn't nonchalantly go to the cross and go, well, you know, if it happens, it happens. No, he was passionate and that passion drove him to go die on that cross.

[17 : 43] And that same passion that he had that day at the temple was the passion that drove him to die on the cross. And that was his passion for human beings to be able to have a real relationship with God and to approach God and to know God and to worship God.

That was Jesus' passion. That's what he lived and died for. But he knew that the only way people could ever do that on a permanent basis, the only way people could ever come and have their sins atoned for and come to God in relationship on a permanent basis was if he died for their sins as the ultimate sacrifice.

If he removed the one thing separating them from God and that's why he calls himself here the true temple. Jesus would from now on be the one place that people are able to have their sins atoned for and the one place that people are able to come and approach their creator God in relationship knowing that their sins are covered.

Jesus Christ is that one place now. And so that's how zeal for God's house would literally consume him fulfilling the prophecy. His passion for people his passion for you and me to be able to come to God in real relationship and have our sins atoned for.

is what drove him to the cross to be consumed by his enemies in dying for our sins because he was passionate for you to be able to have a relationship with God.

[19 : 18] That's how passionate he was. So shouldn't you make sure that you are pursuing that relationship with God that Jesus was passionate to live and die for?

if that was his overriding passion in life how dare it not be our overriding passion in life to pursue that relationship first and foremost?

How dare we let the busyness of life get in the way of us coming to God in daily worship? How dare we let the sheep and oxen and money changers of this world distract us from coming to church and knowing God more and using every opportunity we can to know God and grow in a relationship with him and love him and hear his word and worship him?

And so how should we respond as we learn about the passion the zeal Jesus had and still has for you and me to know God?

Well firstly the first obvious way to respond to what Jesus did and the passion he had for you is to actually come into relationship with God if you haven't done that yet put your trust in Jesus who died for your sins to bring you to God and submit to his authority in your life he came to this earth specifically and he lived his life specifically and was passionate about and died for you to be able to have a real relationship with God if you do not yet have that relationship realize all that he has done for you to make it possible and enter into that relationship that's what this life on earth is about it's a chance it's an 80 year chance for you to come and enter into real relationship with God before you pass into eternity don't waste your time have you done that?

[21 : 17] have you submitted to Christ? have you put your faith in him? have you taken him seriously? well if you have then how do we respond to the zeal of Jesus here?

well then make sure every day that you are pursuing that relationship that Jesus died to give you make sure every day that you are putting aside those distractions of life that pull you away from God and that you are prioritizing relationship with God that Jesus was so passionate for you to experience but more than this what we need to do as Christians is develop to learn to develop in our lives the same zeal that Jesus had we've learnt here in this passage and throughout the rest of the gospel what Jesus is passionate about and if he is our Lord and Master who saved us we need to make sure we are passionate about the same thing he is just as zealous as he was for people to have a relationship with God through the temple then should be how zealous we are for people to have a relationship with God through him the true temple today but are we are we are we zealous enough are we zealous enough to break through the barriers that society puts up which keep us quiet about Jesus and so keep others from coming to God your work colleagues and your friends and your neighbours are being prevented from approaching God because they don't know the gospel because the sheep and the oxen and the money traders and the hustle and bustle of daily life have drowned it out and because we keep quiet about him in that hustle and bustle don't we we say it's because we have no opportunities to talk about him but the truth is we keep quiet about him because we have no zeal for him let's be honest that's why we keep quiet because the busyness of life the hubbub and the chaos of life has drowned out the gospel in our lives and so we keep quiet because the zeal is not there and so I think it's time we need to examine what we are passionate about in our own lives that's why I asked you at the beginning what are you passionate about if anything because let's be honest more often than not our zeal is for the world and the things in the world and what the world can offer we are far more excited about our sports and our careers and our entertainment and our relationships on earth than we are for our relationship with God in heaven that Jesus passionately lived and died for zeal great energy in pursuit of a cause or an objective intense emotion compelling action does that describe your relationship with God does that describe your desire to see him glorified in the lives of others like it was for Jesus well if not let's change that because if we come to God and we confess our shortcomings to him he is willing and able not only to forgive us of our lack of zeal but to give us a new zeal through his Holy Spirit and so we are going to come now and we are going to pray a prayer of confession together with the words that will appear on the screen behind me let's just take a moment silently to consider the zeal and passion

Jesus had for you to be in relationship with God and what he went through to make that possible and let's now pray that we would have that same zeal so let's pray the prayer on the screen behind me together father father God lord Jesus Christ I admit that my zeal for you has been poorly lacking I confess that I have loved the things of the earth more than I have loved you I confess that I have allowed the distractions of life to prevent me from worshipping you like I should I repent now of these and all my other sins and I put my trust in Jesus and his death on my behalf thank you Jesus for being passionate enough to die on the cross and make a way for me to come to God and have everlasting life help me to have that same passion for God so much so that I will boldly tell others of what he has done to save us all from our sins

Amen