

O Lord our God and our Father
in heaven, we come this morning before the Lord Christ, the Lion
of the tribe of Judah. And we see him in his holy zeal
come down into the church in his own day. And we pray he'll
come down into this church in our day and drive out the carnality
that too often grips our hearts. from pulpit to pew, and draw
our hearts back again to the Father, O Lord. And if there
be any here who as yet are strangers to you, Lord, we pray you would
draw them as the good shepherd who seeks and who saves that
which is lost. We offer these prayers in Christ's
name. Amen. Please take your seats, if you
would. Turn with me and your copy of
the Word of God to John's Gospel. In chapter two, verse 13, And
we're in the middle of the Cana cycle. You remember in John's
gospel, chapter 2 to chapter 4, the end of 4, begins and ends
in Cana with Jerusalem in the middle. And the theme of these
chapters is the newness Christ brings to the oldness of Judaism. The Jews in between
the Testaments
had pretty much taken all of the rites and rituals and rubrics
and religion of the Old Testament and stripped them back, taking
Christ out of them and the true messianic hope. And they became
rootless, therefore, and lifeless, and weightless, and worthless
realities. And in contrast, in chapter 2,
John is showing us how Christ brings newness. There was new
cleansing. Today we see a new temple. And
the new temple, you remember, To come to the temple, you've
got to be cleansed. There were the lavers for washing.
So it's very suggestive that Christ gives a new water for
cleansing before he gives you the new temple in which to meet
God. And in chapter three, you have
the new birth. Chapter 4, you have the new water
that he gives this woman. He offers himself as a new husband
to her. She's had five husbands. She
lives now with another man, the sixth, and Christ offers to be
her seventh spiritual husband. as the bridegroom of her soul. And then at the end of
the chapter,
you have a new way of worship in spirit and in truth, and new
life for a dead son of a royal official. So it's all new this
morning. And we're in chapter 2, 13, the
new temple. Listen carefully then. This is
the word of God. The Passover of the Jews was
at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple, he
found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons and
the money changers sitting there, and making a whip of cords, he
drove them out of the temple with the sheep and oxen. And
he poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned
their tables. And he told those who sold the
pigeons, take these things away. Do not make my father's house
a house of trade. His disciples remembered that
it was written, zeal for your house will consume me. So the

Jews said to him, what sign do you show us for doing these things? Jesus answered them, destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews then said, it has taken 46 years to build this temple, and will you raise it up again in three days? But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When 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. Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus, on his part, did not 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 man. Amen. The grass withers and the flower falls off, but this is the word of God, and it endures forever. Well, even in the church, I'm speaking about the church Catholic, the wider church across the world, but I would expect also in this church, even in the church, many men do not believe in Jesus. Now, I do think the vast majority of you this morning are believers, but maybe not all of you. Maybe you've been here for a while, engaged in the business of religion, And in recent years, through the preaching of Dr. Ferguson, Dr. Thomas, perhaps maybe even now, through our efforts here, the Holy Spirit's begun to work in your heart, and you are beginning to wonder, do I actually know Christ myself? Is there a relationship with Christ behind the rites and the rubrics and the rituals of the religion we do here? And even when men do receive Jesus, they often do not receive him in reality. They receive a fantasy Jesus, one that they have designed by themselves, one they have created for themselves, a bespoke Jesus, you might say. One who they have created to meet their needs, and to fulfill their hopes, and their plans, and their dreams, and to help them deal with their inadequacies. But the one common denominator with this fantasy Jesus is not only they designed him for themselves, but he's designed to meet needs as they define him, or as they define those needs. It's all sui generis, self-generated from within when the true Christ comes down from above. And our text this morning actually gives you an insight into why most men don't believe in Jesus. It's always been that way, even back to the days of Christ and to the church of Christ's day, most men did not receive him. And the text tells you why. First of all, he prizes God more than anything else. Secondly, he confronts sin with holy violence. Most people don't want a savior to do that, to upset the apple cart and the status quo. His words often are hard to understand. They don't seem to make sense. And one of the reasons for that is Christ has a way when he speaks of both concealing and revealing. He conceals himself from those who don't want to find him while revealing himself to those who do. And so if you're trying to avoid Christ this morning, you need to be careful because sometimes he might just pass you by. And lastly, he knows

us too well

to settle for pretend faith. And we'll see that at the end of the passage as these men who are convinced but not converted in Jerusalem, who believe but Christ doesn't believe in them, which is an interesting play on words. But more of that later. First of all, most men don't believe in Jesus because he prizes God more than anything else. And that's unique. Most men fear other things more than they fear God. Most men, for example, fear their wives more than they fear God. And some wives fear their husband more than they fear God. And many parents, most of us at some time or another, fear our children more than we fear God. The thought that our little children would frown at us and think we were being unfair can send us into a tailspin sometimes. and paralyze us as parents from saying that all-important word, no. Well, we see in our text this morning that Christ is not like us. He fears God more than anything else. Verse 17, his disciples remember that it was written, zeal for your house will consume me. That when Messiah comes, he would be ablaze with a holy conflagration of fiery fury for the Father's honor and for the Father's glory and for the Father's house. What's going on here? Well, the

Temple Mount was a huge place. It was in the middle of Jerusalem on the high ground in the city. It's about 35 acres, a trapezoid of a shape. And it's a very imposing structure. In your mind's eye, it's a picture like a fortress, almost, surrounded by what appears to be an impregnable wall all the way around it. Today, now only part of the Western Wall survives. But in Christ's day, it was a wall structure on top of a mountain. And you had to climb up to it, steps. There were steps and staircases all around the Temple Mount. Principally, though, the southern gate was the most accessible, with steps going up to it, to the Hulda Gate. As you went up there, the walls contained the Royal Stoa, which was an important building for all kinds of and royal business. And on top of it was the meeting house where the Sanhedrin met. And so you enter through these gates and you find yourself in this massive 35 acre courtyard, which is the court of the Gentiles. It's surrounded on all sides by a colonnade for shade during the day. And it was, well, we'll pause that for a second. So this huge courtyard, and in the middle of the, well actually off center in the courtyard, you have the temple proper, another wall structure, and a gate at the east end. You always enter the temple from the east, just like the Garden of Eden, because the temple is a recreation of Eden. It's bringing us back to paradise.

No time to explain that right now. Dr. Ross did a marvelous job with Emily in their podcast. But in and through the east gate of the temple proper, and you come into the court of the woman, where women could come with their husbands, and then up steps to the court of Israel where only men could come and they'd bring

their sacrifices up there, give them to the priests, who would then take them through the gate into what would have been the courtyard of the tabernacle, another wall structure. And in the middle of the courtyard of the tabernacle, you saw the actual holy place itself with white marble walls that gleamed blindingly in the noonday sun, where they would sacrifice in the courtyard. And once a year, the high priest would go into the holy place and into the Holy of Holies, where the Ark was supposed to be, and offer oblation and sacrifice for the people's sins. Well, we're outside of all that in this huge courtyard. And that courtyard was the court of the Gentiles. And it was supposed to be the place where Gentiles would come and stand in hushed silence as they would watch the Jews approaching God, right? Because the whole Temple Mount, all those walls were a sign that you don't get to approach God any way you want. In fact, we don't belong in God's presence. It was a lethal place to be if you went without the blood of the sacrifice to protect you. And so the Gentiles should have been there in hushed congregation watching the Jews bring their sacrificial animals to the mountain of God. That wasn't what was there. Instead, it was a bizarre marketplace where there were oxen and bulls and goats and lambs and pigeons and men changing money in the temple mounts. And the reason for that actually was quite practical. You had to have the right kind of animal, right? You couldn't just sacrifice any old bull or any lame lamb. And if you're bringing your own lamb from like Dan or Beersheba, that's a long way. It could die along the way or get lame along the way or get sick along the way and then you're stuck, right? And so there's very practical reason. You had to have a proper priestly sanctioned beast to kill. And so rather than risk bringing your own, you just go there and you'd buy a lamb or a bull. So that's that. And then the money, you couldn't just bring any money to pay your temple tax. You had to use pure silver coins. And the best silver coins were made in tar. And so you had to actually purchase. You changed your drachmas, whatever you had, into these tarry and shackles of pure silver that would be the proper weight and so forth and so on. And of course it all costs a big, there was a big surcharge for that. It's like when you go to Disneyland, you can't bring your own food in, you've got to buy food in the park and they know that. And so you buy this chicken leg for like \$15. And if you'd known that before you went, you might have taken one of Baxter's legs and just kind of brought it instead because Baxter's my dog, I'm joking. But \$15 is a lot for a turkey leg, but you're trapped. It was like that in the temple. You'd go and you'd be in all these surcharges and so forth and so on. And it was an expensive business, but it made money. But it wasn't just that they

were doing that and fleecing God's people with extra taxes and those surcharges. It was not just what they were doing, it was where they were doing it. In this place that should have been defined by worship, it had become defined by business. And Jesus here shows us what

he thinks when the business of the church, because the modern tabernacle is the church, not this building, of course, but the people in it. And our worship, we are now temples of God in the Holy Spirit. But Jesus here shows us what he thinks when the business of the church, nickels and noses and noise become the central thing. And God is pushed out to the side if he's even there at all. That fills him with fiery zeal and fury. And most people don't want a Savior like that. A Savior for whom God matters so much. And that should be a warning to the American church. Because in many churches, the central concern in worship is to get men to come to church. That should never be the central concern of any church. The central concern should be that God comes. You hear things like, the consumer's always right, and so you find out, what does your target audience want? And then you give it to them.

But we forget that the consumer of worship is not man. The consumer of worship is God. And Jesus is consumed by His Father's glory. Nothing matters more to Him than how His people worship. And that in his mind, worship is not just something we do before men. It's not something we do for men. It's something we do before God and for him. And that's one of the reasons why, as Presbyterians, we take worship very seriously, indeed. Worship is our verb here in this

church. It's what we do. We're not about... We're not in first and foremost about helping men. We're first and foremost about the worship of God. And what matters most to us is what kind of worship does God want? Because it's so easy, the church, to try and attract people. I think it's the driving mindset behind so much of what passes for worship today is create like the rock band mentality. And the ethos of such a service is a rock concert. But you have to remember, a concert is a fundamentally man-centered thing. It's about entertaining men. And that should concern us. There's a famous journalist called Marcus McLuhan. He had this wonderful phrase that the medium is the message, right? You get the message and then the medium you wrap it up in. But he says the medium really is the message, and the famous illustration that Neil Postman used was about Sesame Street. Sesame Street is packaging education in the medium of entertainment. So you're teaching kids to count, and you use Barry the Baboon juggling oranges. How many oranges is Barry juggling? One, two, three, four, five.

Oh, we're learning to count, right? And that's all very wonderful. Education can be fun, right? And that can work to teach kids

to count, and maybe the color of oranges are orange, surprisingly. What do you do when education becomes difficult and challenging? Like, you can teach them to count with Barney the baboon, but you can't teach them calculus that way. And Postman says, the medium is the message, and the education and entertainment view the audience very differently. Education views the audience as ignorant, needing instruction. Entertainment views the audience as bored, needing, well, tickled. And what do you do when they come into conflict? Are you gonna pick education or entertainment? And Postman says, the medium you choose is your real priority. And so whenever you choose entertainment as the medium, and your class say, it's boring, you're not gonna change and certainly try and educate them, you're gonna go, oh, sorry, and you go back to educating and entertaining them. And likewise in worship, do you see, if you pick a concert as your, Medium, which is a fundamentally man-centered thing about entertaining the masses. How can you wrap up? Worship, which is a God-centered service with a man-centered medium, and expect to be left with worship at the end of it. You'll have worship all right, but it'll not be God. It'll be worshipping the ears of your hearers and entertaining them. And I thank God that we're in a church that takes worship very seriously indeed, that we prize worship. Because Christ does, it consumes him. That worship honors God. What we do in worship reveals what we think about God. And we see Christ here with a whip in his hand and blazing fury in his heart as he drives out the false worship that was going on in this temple. The second thing we see here is, by Jesus, and why he's kind of unpopular, is that he confronts sin with holy violence. Verse 15, and making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple with the sheep and oxen, and he poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. You might think this was a bad-tempered outburst on Christ's part, but how long do you think it takes to craft and make a whip of cords? It takes time. It takes thought. This was no bad-tempered outburst. This is a measured, thought-through, entirely appropriate response. Some commentators try and take the edge off Christ's action by saying he used the whip to drive the oxen out of the temple. How else do you get oxen out of the temple? But that's not what my Bible says. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple with the sheep and the oxen. It wasn't just the behinds of the sheep and the oxen that was the target of his whip, but perhaps especially those selling them. Now, I got in trouble once when I said that Jesus was nice. Sorry, that Jesus is not nice. but he's good. People were very offended. What do you mean Christ's not nice? Nice is the vice of too many politicians in Washington. Not our governor, I

hasten to
add, but too many politicians, right? Nice is the vice. Nice is about being intentionally charming, deliberately inoffensive, and universally popular. And the real Jesus is none of those things. He's not concerned about, He's concerned much more about your holiness than He is about your immediate happiness. We see him here with a whip of cords driving out these sellers in the temple. And in a similar sense, we might see him in our own hearts, because remember, we are the mobile holy of holies. You, Christian, you are a mobile holy of holies. God has made you to be a dwelling of God in the Spirit. And that should actually affect how we speak, how we act, how we watch television and consume media. Everything we do, we do as if we were in the Holy of Holies with the Holy Spirit resting and abiding upon us. And the image we have Christ coming to drive the sin out violently should grip us. And if we're right with God, should delight us, we should say, Lord, do that with me. Come, Lord, with the whip, if necessary, and whatever it takes, Lord, drive sin out of my heart. If that's not the kind of Christ you want, you might actually be believing in a fantasy Jesus, who's not the kind of Christ that you need. We need a Christ who'll come with holy zeal and drive sin out of his temple. So most men don't believe in Jesus because he prizes God more than anything else, because he confronts our sin with holy violence. Thirdly, at times his words don't seem to make sense. And you see that there in verse 17 and following. His disciples remembered that it was written, zeal for your house will consume me. So the Jews said to him, what sign do you show us for doing these things? Jesus answered them, destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews then said, it's taken 46 years to build this temple, and you will raise it up again in three days? But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When 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." Now, it's interesting here that neither the disciples nor Jesus at first, sorry, neither the disciples nor the Jews at first understood Jesus. His phrase, destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again, doesn't seem to make sense. And neither the Jews nor the disciples fully understood it. But John draws a contrast, do you see, between the way the disciples and the Jews responded to that confusion. Where did the disciples look? They looked to Scripture. The Jews looked for signs. Notice how the disciples are always pictured as those looking to Scripture. Verse 17, Christ is coming with his whip, displaying his zeal, and immediately the disciples think to themselves, They remember that it was written, zeal for your house will consume

me. Now that's interesting, if you go back quickly in your Bible to Psalm 69, that's a reference to Psalm 69, it's a clearly messianic Psalm. It speaks of the cross of Christ and what it was like for Christ to go to the cross. In one sense, the point of Psalm 69 is, that Christ is so willing to bring you to heaven, he will himself go to hell to rescue you. Save me, oh my God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire where there is no foothold. I have come into deep waters and the flood sweeps over me. That's Christ on the cross. Those are words like Psalm 22

verse one that describe what it felt for Christ to be crushed beneath the weight of my sin and yours. He was taken to a place where there was no bottom and sunk there into the depths. And because of that, later in the psalm, he confesses, zeal for your house has consumed me. And the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me. Their sins have fallen on me, you might say, from a New Testament perspective. And the psalmist see Christ's zeal, and they think to themselves, is there anything he wouldn't do to make his people holy? And they're connecting the dots and thinking, he'd even be willing to go to hell if Christ is willing to be sunk

beneath the weight of your sins to bring you to heaven. You can trust him to come at you with a whip, can't you? But they make sense of him by looking to scripture. And even at the end, when 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. They're a wonderful example of

Anselm's famous phrase, credo ut intelligam. I believe, Anselm says, in order that I might understand. That's a wonderful thing. There's sometimes God will say things to us that we don't fully understand.

What do we do? We believe it because it's God

is the one saying it. And as we believe it, God will grow us in understanding. But if we approach God with a demanding attitude, no, you explain it to me in full and then I'll believe it. We're actually making ourselves

the God of God and telling God, I'll only come to you on my terms, not yours. And the disciples, even though

they didn't understand at first, they did look to scripture. And over time, God revealed more and more and more to them. That's how faith works. It leads to understanding. Not

that we check our brains entirely at the door, of course. But we trust God, and that is

the way to understand. And unbelief is the right to darkness. If you won't believe and trust

your creator, you'll never really grow in knowledge and wisdom,

but contrast the Jews. So the Jews said to Jesus, what

sign do you show us for doing these things? That's interesting. There's zero self-reflection

here. What sign? That's the wrong question. The question is, is what you are saying and doing true? It's like perhaps your children

have rebuked you in the past. Maybe the way you were speaking to your spouse was wrong. And little Johnny or little Susie said, Mommy, you shouldn't speak to Daddy that way. Or maybe it was, Daddy, God says you shouldn't yell at Mommy like that. And when your child speaks to you, the only question is, are they right? But sometimes in our sin, we'll say to them, you little squirt, how dare you speak to me? How dare you say that to your daddy or your mommy? And we confuse the issue. Do they have the right to say it? Or is what they're saying right? But sometimes we can sidestep the truth by pulling out the authority card. What right do you have in here to come into the temple? And Christ's word has already told them, this is my father's house. And the very fact they didn't stone him to death for such an outburst reveals, I think, that they were pretty sure he was a prophet and he had authority. But just like W.C. Fields, they were always hoping for a loophole. Credo ut intelligam. The Pharisees were non credo et pretextus fingo, unbelief, looking for excuses. And look at the next chapter.

This is a damning comment. Nicodemus comes, the rabbi, and says, Rabbi, we know. That's interesting. We know that you're a teacher come from God. For no one can do these things that you do unless God is with him." We know. These are the people, we, the Jews, the people I'm a leader of and a teacher of, we know that you're a teacher come from God. That's a devastating indictment. And they have the temerity to demand yet another sign from Christ. And the sign that Christ gives, in an act of poetic justice, both reveals and conceals. It reveals Christ to the disciples in the fullness of time, but it conceals Christ from those who really have no desire to find him. And maybe today you're feeling the voice of God touching your heart and your soul, and you think to yourself, Oh, that's an idea with consequences. And there's an instinct to suppress the truth, and I don't wanna think too much about my soul, too much about the Savior, because too much might have to change in my life. Oh, today if you hear God's voice, do not harden your hearts, because sometimes when you do, God will give you what you want. and you don't want to find him, sometimes he'll just pass you by. And his word will continue not to make sense because you don't want it to make sense. Am I stepping on your toes this morning? And then lastly, Some men don't find Jesus because he prizes God more than anything else. He confronts our sin with holy violence, because his words don't always seem to make sense, and lastly, because he knows us too well to settle for pretend faith. We'll come back to this again next week, but look at the last verses of the chapter. Now, when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name. Oh, praise God. Many are believing

in Christ. It's revival. when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus, on his part, did not literally believe himself to them. It's the same verb used. Many believed in him. He didn't believe in them. Why? Because he knew all people and

needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man. We see here, do we not, the terrifying danger of being convinced, but not converted. Of believing about Jesus, but not believing in Him. Not with true, you know, there's those three aspects of saving faith. No issue, we know truth about Jesus. Then there's assensus, that we assent. That's true, I know it's true.

The devil has both those aspects. The devils believe and tremble, James says. They know, they're better theologians, not just in me, they're better theologians than Dr. Ferguson and Dr. Ross put together. And they tremble, but they lack that all-important third part. They have knowledge, they have assent. But they aren't trusting. They aren't entrusting themselves to Jesus. And Jesus can look at you. He can look at me. He sees through the facade. He knows who you are, and he knows where you are. We often talk in the church about, have you received Jesus? This text tells you there's an even more important question. has Jesus received you? Because He knew all people and

needed no one to bear witness about man, for He Himself knew what was in man. And look at verse 1 of the next chapter, now there was a man. a very religious man, the teacher of teachers, the preacher of preachers, Nicodemus, the R.C. Sproul of his generation. And he comes to Christ with a question. And Christ comes to him with another question and a statement. Unless a man is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Doesn't matter how much you know, doesn't matter how much you do, the all-important new birth. And I'm not trying to undermine

true faith this morning, but it's always healthy to examine our faith. Have you received Jesus? But the greater question, has Jesus received Jesus? We've got to come to the right Jesus and for the right reasons, wanting our sins dealt with, wanting our heart changed, wanting our spiritual deadness taken away. And if you come to Jesus like that, you'll never go away the same. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your Word and its truth and its power. And we see this Awesome Jesus,

we'd never have designed a Jesus like this. One who roars like a lion, and yet one tender like a lamb. One willing to go to hell that we might go to heaven. And I pray, Lord, that you would work through the word of God this morning. In the hearts of the people of God, for the glory of God. In the name of Jesus, the Son of God, we pray, amen.