

Text: John 2:12-25

Sermon: Worship 101

Introduction:

Why are you at church tonight? There are a thousand other things you could be doing. Why do you even come to church in the morning? Maybe it is out of habit, because of cultural and social pressure. It is worth asking yourself why you come to church. It is worth asking yourself why you sing the songs you sing. Because God cares why you come to church. God cares why you worship, and God cares how you worship. Sadly, the topic of worship is not talked about biblically often. It is often driven by emotions and preference rather than biblical truth. Tonight, I hope to unpack the topic of worship from John 2:12-25. I want to suggest that in the story of Jesus cleansing the temple, he teaches us 2 truths about true worship.

1. True worship is grounded on **Pure Motives and Truth**
2. True worship is grounded on the **New Temple- Jesus Christ**

Context:

Last week we looked at the Wedding at Cana and saw God's glory revealed through Jesus Christ. We saw the Glory of the obedient Son, the Glory of the New Covenant Purifier and the Glory of the Perfect Bridegroom. 2:12 tells us that after this, Jesus went down to Capernaum with his mother, brothers and disciples and stayed there a few days. In verse 13 we are given the context of story today, it tells us that, "The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem." It is Passover season, and something is wrong. No more wine was the problem last week. And this week the problem is an issue of Worship.

Point 1: True Worship is grounded on pure motives and truth

The Passover for the Jews was the biggest festival. It was that time of the year where the people of God remembered what God had done in Egypt. The people of God were slaves to the Egyptians and God delivered out of slavery. The Passover is thinking very specifically to the last of the signs that God would show to the people. In the final plague God tells us that he will go out in the midst of Egypt, Exodus 11:5 *"and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the cattle."* God would "pass death over them" if the people of Israel made a sacrifice and put the blood of the particular animal "on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they ate it." Exodus 12:7

From then on, they celebrated God's deliverance and so it was a big thing. Every year Jews and some gentiles would come from all over the Roman Empire would come to Jerusalem to bring sacrifices and offerings to the Lord. They would come to worship. The people who were selling oxen, sheep and pigeons were actually helpful because people would travel far and wide and they could purchase their sacrifice at the temple. They could also exchange their pagan and unacceptable currencies for the temple currency, shekels which they would use to pay their temple tax. The problem is their worship and shenanigans were unacceptable. We know it is unacceptable because of how Jesus responds. Look at verse 14-15, *"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 all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables."* Jesus knows how to make a scene. He is furious. Verse 16, *"And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my*

Father's house a house of trade." What has happened is the place of worship, where the people of God were supposedly meant to come to meet the Lord, has become nothing more than a place where people could make money and fulfil their religious duties. They weren't worshipping properly. They had no regards to God's place.

In basic economics, we have something what we call supply and demand. It is one of the first things you learn at high school or university. If you want to begin a business, you need to find out whether there is a demand. If there is no demand, there is no need to supply a particular product or service. If you have the supply for a particular product and there is high demand you can charge more. Look at the Mobile Phone industry. People will pay up 2k for a phone. There is this show called Shark Tank. It's a reality tv-show with wealthy successful people. And people can come in and pitch their business idea to the sharks, who are the investors, and they might invest in their business. The first thing they always ask before thinking about investing, is whether or not there is a demand for the product or service. Because they know if there is a demand for the product or service, then they can make a lot of money. And you would be surprised what people want. There is a business which has made thousands of dollars sending potatoes to people with a message. If the sellers of the oxen, sheep and pigeons of the temple and money changers came to the sharks on shark tanks, you can be assured that they would want to invest. Because they know that people will come to buy. They know that people will need to exchange currencies. It is a very profitable business. There is a huge demand, and the smart market dealers have taken this opportunity to earn big money.

They had made Jesus' Father's house into a house of trade. A place which is meant to be a place of reverent worship, has become a place where money is made. The marketplace had made worship impossible in the temple courts. People complain when a baby or 2 cries during a church service. That's why the creche exists. Can you imagine worshipping with oxen mooing, sheep baaing, pigeons flapping their wings, people shouting out what deals they can make. Can you imagine worshipping in the middle of Springvale market, or Box Hill market in the Asian grocery section? In fact, it would be bigger than any market you can find in Australia. It would be loud. It wouldn't make the best reverent atmosphere. And the hearts of people were certainly not there. In the other 3 gospels, at the end of Jesus ministry, there is an account of Jesus cleansing the temple. In the other 3 accounts, Jesus says, "He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers." (Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46). Their hearts weren't clean. It wasn't pure. They didn't have right motives. We know that Pharisees were lovers of money, "*The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.*"- Luke 16:14 It wouldn't be surprising that many took advantage of the religious practices to make money. So, Jesus is furious.

What we might think is a crazy act, the disciples saw as zeal for the Lord. Verse 17, "*His disciples remembered that it was written, "zeal for your house will consume me."* Zeal isn't used often now days and if is used, it usually is used negatively. It just means being very enthusiastic, eager and uncompromising. It is about having a great desire or passion for something and not letting anything get in the way. This is a quotation from Psalm 69:9, and what was happening in that Psalm is that David was being persecuted because of his Zeal for the house of the Lord. He was opposed because he worshipped with awe and zeal. He was opposed because he was calling the people for true worship. And David cried out to God for salvation knowing that he could and would save. By making the quotation from Psalm 69, the disciples and John have made a link between King David and Jesus Christ. Just like King David, Jesus Christ is calling people to have true worship. To have worship grounded on a clean heart, a right heart, with no strings attached. Worship with pure motives. He is calling people to have worship which is fuelled by zeal for the glory of God. It is a passion to see the name of God magnified. It is worship which wants nothing to take away what God

deserves. That's the contrast. We have people not worshipping reverently and who have other motives. And then we have King David and Jesus. Money is an idol. Legalistic self-righteousness is an idol. Selfishness and hypocrisy are an idol. And Jesus is making it clear. None of this has any space in true worship. Only worship which is zealous for the glory of God. Worship which is pure in motive.

And what Jesus has to say in the first century, is relevant to us today. Because the sad reality is, there are churches and Christians pursuing false worship. Many make a business out of church. Many come to church for all sorts of reasons. Maybe they come to show off their skills and talents. To get praises and a nice resume. Some come to church to get an emotional buzz. I know this to be true because true worship is grounded not only a great passion and desire for the glory of God, but it stems from having a correct understanding of who God is. Look at what Jesus says. He says, "do not make my Father's house a house of trade". This is the Father's house. YAHWEH's house. This is the good and gracious loving God who is also a just and holy God, who will punish sin and unrighteousness. Jesus knows who the Father is. He has a clear understanding of his purpose and will. And he honours his relationship with the Father. Very often what we call praise and worship in our generation is nothing more than emotional love songs. It is nothing more than emotional manipulation, theologically empty songs. It is songs which isn't grounded on biblical truth, rather it is songs grounded on what they want God to be. It is songs which make me happy inside with false promises and lies. If they knew who they were worshipping, they would not dare to write the songs they sing. If you know who God truly is, you will not dare pursue that emotional buzz.

Do you worship God for the right reasons? When you come to church on Sunday, have you prepared your heart to worship him? Are you singing the songs we sing because you mean it? Are you so overwhelmed by who God is, that you can't do anything else but sing praises to him? The New Testament tells us to sing. Ephesians 5:19-20 says, "*addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,*". We do it to the Lord with our hearts and for the glory of his name. In Paul's letter to the Corinthians addressing prophecy and tongues, he talks about the importance of truth and the mind. He says in 1 Corinthians 14:15, "*What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also.*". I wrote a quote a few years ago at college, "Don't assault the emotions but stir up the emotions through the mind". Theological, biblical truth should lead to worship.

A few years ago, I went to Cambodia. And there is this place called Angkor Wat. It is the largest religious monument in the world. It was constructed as a Hindu temple dedicated to Vishnu for the Khmer Empire but now is transformed into a Buddhist temple. Many wake up early to take pictures of the sunrise and they walk a lot to see all the different areas of the temple. The part that everyone goes to is the central tower. And it's this tall tower at the middle of temple where you climb a very steep wobbly ladder a few metres up. The Central Tower symbolises the Sacred Mountain of Hindu and Buddhism, Mount Meru. Mount Meru is considered to be the centre of all the physical, metaphysical and spiritual universes. Whatever that really means. One of the things that you will notice if you go there is that there are signs everywhere which tells you how you are to dress. No singlets and tank tops. Women no short shorts or short dresses. You need to cover everything up. Now a lot of foreigners don't really care. And they think they will be able to go up. But every single person that did not follow the proper dress code, was rejected. They really believe that their temple is sacred, and it needs to be respected.

Unlike the false god Vishnu and a false fake mountain Meru, we worship the one and true living God. And the way you are to come to worship matters. It isn't matter of dress code, although your dress may

reflect your heart. How you worship God, why you worship God, matters. **True worship is grounded on pure motives and truth.**

Point 2: True worship is grounded on the New Temple- Jesus Christ.

If true worship is grounded on pure motives and truth, it is very important to find out more about who God is and what he has done. In verse 18-22 we are given more details on what true worship should look like.

Verse 18 is surprising because you would expect the Jews to get really annoyed and angry at Jesus but instead, they say to him, *“What sign do you show us for doing these things?”*. People responded to him asking what Authority he had to do what he did. What can you show us that gives you the right to change the way we come to worship? Notice they are asking for a sign. The problem is that this sign was a diversion. It didn't really matter. Elsewhere in Matthew 12:38–39 *“Some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, ‘Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.’ But he answered them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign.’”* It is evil and adulterous for them to seek for a sign from Jesus because they weren't really interested. They knew what they were doing was wrong and they were too interested in pursuing wealth and legalistic righteousness. But if Jesus could not show a sign, they had an excuse to ignore Jesus and to critique him.

Nevertheless, Jesus responds to them saying in verse 19, *“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”*. Now we know Jesus is thinking more than the physical temple because of verse 21. *“But he was speaking about the temple of his body”*. He is talking about his body. Therefore, he is talking about his resurrection. v22 *“When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he said this, and they believed the scripture and the word the Jesus had spoken”*. Jesus can raise himself from the dead. John 10:17–18 *“I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.”*

John is all about signs. The Jews didn't understand the sign. The disciples saw the sign and believed. And what Jesus does here in essence is he replaces Old Testament Temple worship with New Testament worship. Worship grounded on the new temple, in Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, Moses received instructions for constructing the Old Covenant tabernacle for God himself in Exodus 25-31. Later King Solomon would supervise the construction of the temple in Jerusalem which was based on the tabernacle and it replaced it (2 Chronicles 2-7). But now, the new place, under the new covenant, where everyone can meet God and have fellowship with God is through Jesus Christ. He is the source and place of true worship. It is through Christ one can come and see the living God in the flesh. It is through him where all the sacrificial offerings have been fully made. There is no need to bring sacrifices because Christ has made the once for all sacrifice by his blood. He is the one to be worshipped because he reflects and shows us God. In the incarnation Jesus is what the temple is designed to be. God dwelling among men. God's glory is revealed in Jesus Christ. And finally, when he rises from the grave after 3 days, the majesty, beauty and glory of the risen saviour will be seen. The greatness of God will be seen in Christ when he has victory over sin and death. That is the true temple. And that's why in Revelation, John writes in 21:22 *“and I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.”*. Do you want to see God's glory? Look to Jesus.

Jesus says in Matthew 12:6

“I tell you, something greater than the temple is here.” And he meant himself.

The Jews didn't understand what he was saying, and we probably wouldn't have either if we were in their position. In verse 20 they responded to Jesus saying that it is practically impossible to rebuild the physical temple in 3 days.

In a few chapters, Jesus will further develop the idea of the new temple. When he talks to the woman at the well. True worship is in spirit and in truth.

“Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. . . . The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.” (John 4:21-23)

This is great news that Jesus is the New Temple. In the first century, although the Jerusalem temple did have a court for the Gentiles, they weren't really welcomed. There was no place for them to worship God. But in Jesus all are welcomed. Jews and Gentiles alike. Everyone can through Jesus Christ. Everyone can come meet the risen saviour. There is no need to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Jesus is the only way to worship. Our worship, therefore must be Christ-centred worship because it is only true worship when it is grounded on Christ the new temple.

There is therefore no other way to come to know God. Jesus says, *“I am the way, the truth and the life, no one can come to the Father except through me.”* (John 14:6) I have a dear brother in Christ who for many years travelled around the world, doing all sorts of things to find truth. He climbed mountains, pursued all sorts of philosophies to find satisfaction and joy. By God's grace, God drew him near back to himself. It was at the place that he already knew. That was Christ himself.

The question is, if Christ is the new temple, how is it possible to worship if Christ is not physically present? The new Testament talks of the people of God, as the dwelling place of God.

1 Corinthians 3:16- *“Do you not know that you are God's temple. You are the dwelling place of God.”*

Ephesians 2:19-22 says, *“¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”*

Christians are promised the Holy Spirit. By Grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone God lives in us. We enjoy God where ever and whenever in the name of Jesus. The household of God, people from every tribe and tongue and nation are the new temple in Christ. We are each individual block, built on the corner stone Jesus Christ.

Again in 1 Peter 2:4-5, *“4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

We can worship through Christ because he is living in us. And the people of God are the dwelling place of God. There is therefore no worship apart from Christ, the corner stone, the true new temple. **True worship is grounded and built on Jesus Christ.**

Conclusion:

Jesus knows where your heart is. I can't know. I can judge and discern what true worship looks like but ultimately it is between you and God. You can't trick God in your worship. He knows your heart. In verse 24-25, the people “believed” but Jesus knew they didn't really, and so he didn't “believe” in them. Every time you come to God to worship, make it true worship. Worship grounded on pure motives, truth and the New Temple- Jesus Christ. May our hearts be like the Psalmist, “For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.” Psalm 84:10