

The House Doesn't Always Win
John 2:13-25
October 12, 2025

I feel like today I am teaching a summary of John already. The story that we are reading about takes all of the themes that we've learned over the last four weeks and combines them. I find that John does this. He keeps repeating the same message over and over again, using different angles and signs, all to answer the one question: What is true about Jesus?

As we begin today, I want to remind us of the main points from the past sermons on John:

First, Mark taught us the truth revealed in Jesus is not a set of doctrines or a statement of faith; the truth revealed in Jesus is the presence of God within creation. Hannah reinforced this truth, telling us God wants us to experience him, and is continually moving towards his creation *so that we can experience him with us*, and then point out what we see to those around us.

Then Katelyn taught us about bounded set cultures. We attempt to safeguard both truth and community by setting up boundaries, fences, defining who is in and who is out. These are good things. Today's story is about Jesus doing exactly that. But the heart of the story is what truth and community are we keeping safe, and why?

Just last week Mark led us through a wedding celebration where Jesus takes ceremonial cleaning jars, and fills them with new wine. He takes water in stone vessels of the law (two images that call the story of Moses to mind¹), and they are filled with new wine that is the best, and brings not only joy and celebration, but also removes shame and embarrassment. Now he goes to the temple, the place of ceremonial cleaning, and it is full, but not of what it should be full of! So he empties it.

And here is the big thought. **Jesus does these signs to reveal his glory.** Hold on to that thought for a minute.

Here is what I see happening in this story.

First, the practices of the temple market were practical and necessary for the people traveling for their pilgrimage. Some pilgrims travelled from the far reaches of the Roman empire to Jerusalem for Passover, swelling the city population to a million people according to historian Josephus. That journey would be full of opportunities for your perfect lamb to become ill, or maimed, or dead. So the market allowed people to transport coin instead of livestock, and purchase appropriate sacrificial animals right near the temple.

¹ See Exodus 17:1-7

But this market also over time reveals a subtle exclusivity, a bounded set of restrictions to safeguard the holy sanctity of the temple by gradually restricting who can access God's presence.

Here is the trend I'm talking about:

God makes a garden, and he puts his favourite things in it. It is his sanctuary, and humanity is in there, with purposeful work to partner with God. It is perfect – human living in the divine presence, intimate, and good.

This breaks because of sin, and humanity experiences isolation from God for the first time. In response, God begins his plan to bring us back into his presence.

So God puts his plan in motion. Personal appearances, conversations, and signs. Think Abraham with Isaac as a sacrifice. Moses with the burning bush. Israel receiving the covenant as God speaks to Moses in fire, smoke and lightning. Elijah in his desperation finding God in a cave, after a wind and a fire, in the silence of supernaturally calmed nature. God relentlessly moves towards his wayward people, physical and powerful.

Then the tabernacle. This is God tabernacling in the very middle of his people (this is the exact word used for Jesus dwelling with us in John), with priests who look like little tabernacles walking around. Sacrifices are God feasting with his people. Incense are conversations with God.

And this is where the trend goes bad. At first, all people were able to pray towards the tabernacle, followed by the temple.² The original plans do not limit either women or gentiles to separate areas.³

It isn't until Herod renovates the Second Temple that people's access to God at the temple becomes based on categories of men, women and Gentiles. Gentiles who went past a short wall were subject to execution. Concern for the holiness of the temple is beginning to prevent people from the purpose of the temple, which is summed up in Isaiah 56:4-7. This is the passage that Jesus quotes from.

⁴ For this is what the LORD says:

“To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,
who choose what pleases me
and hold fast to my covenant—

⁵ to them I will give within my temple and its walls
a memorial and a name
better than sons and daughters;

² See 1 Ki. 8:29-43

³ See 1 Ki. 6-7; 2 Chron. 3-4

I will give them an everlasting name
that will endure forever.
⁶ And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD
to minister to him,
to love the name of the LORD,
and to be his servants,
all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it
and who hold fast to my covenant—
⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain
and give them joy in my house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house will be called
a house of prayer for all nations.”

By the time Jesus arrives on the scene, markets that used to be “on the slopes of the Mount of Olives,”⁴ have been established in the court of gentiles, pushing those who seek God further away from his presence.

This makes me think of Christmas creep – the availability of Christmas stuff in stores appearing earlier and earlier, as merchants try to maximize their profits. The longer the spending season for Christmas, the further in the background the birth of God fades.

The temple was experiencing “Sheep Creep.” The press for convenience or efficiency, or even to obey the law more easily,⁵ led to the temple of God, supposed to be known as a house of prayer for all nations, to instead bear more resemblance to the pagan Graeco-Roman temples, which were also commercial centers and politically influenced.⁶

To the Jewish aristocracy that ran the temple, what needed safeguarding was God’s holiness – his *set-apart-ness*. The presence of women might be an issue. Better to have birds and sheep on the temple grounds than a gentile. If they dare to approach, they will become the sacrifice.

As though God is either

- a. In need of priests to guard his honour, or
- b. Contained by the boundaries of the temple.

Again, Isaiah says:

⁴ Carson, 178.

⁵ Keener, 521.

⁶ Keener 523-524.

This is what the LORD says:

“Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.
Where is the house you will build for me?
Where will my resting place be?
²Has not my hand made all these things,
and so they came into being?”
declares the LORD.

Jesus’ suggestion that the people destroy the temple was not only criminal in Rome, but also very close to blasphemous to the priests. After all, the Temple was the heart and center of Jewish community and religion, the physical representation of God’s presence.

But this misses the point! Isaiah continues:

“These are the ones I look on with favor:
those who are humble and contrite in spirit,
and who tremble at my word.
³But whoever sacrifices a bull
is like one who kills a person,
and whoever offers a lamb
is like one who breaks a dog’s neck;
whoever makes a grain offering
is like one who presents pig’s blood,
and whoever burns memorial incense
is like one who worships an idol.”⁷

God is not in need of safeguarding. Neither is the temple! For Jesus, what needed to be safeguarded was the presence of God with his people, regardless of heritage, gender, or standing. It was the crowding out of the gentiles by a market that Jesus considered evil.

The message is clear, and simple: Do not get in the way of people trying to come to God.

Who is Jesus to define the temple grounds? Who are the priests? Whose word contains the will of God?

They ask for a sign. I’m not sure what they expected, but what they got was certainly not it!

The sign was Jesus’ GLORY!⁸

⁷ Isaiah 66:1-3.

⁸ John 2:4.

Glory is a fascinating word. It is not only the majesty and awesomeness of something, but in the bible, it is the physical, density of God's substance. I've seen videos on YouTube of hydraulic presses squishing crayons, or candles – God's presence is like that.⁹ When God fills a space, like the tabernacle, it displaces everything else. Like when Moses couldn't enter the tabernacle when God's glory filled it, it wasn't only because he was so awe-struck. He literally wouldn't fit!

God's glory establishes space for his created order, his vision of goodness, to flourish.

God isn't the only one who fills spaces. So do we. How many of you have a room in your house that collects the overflow? This is mine. Kirstin and I affectionately call these the piles of life. I show this picture in humility, but also with a strong suspicion of relatability!

There was always a vision for this room. A guest room. A games room. There is a gas line for a fireplace hook-up. It could be a library.

But it can't be used for that, unless something changes.

At least, not until that vision forces the space to be reclaimed.

By clearing out the market, Jesus reclaims the temple. He reveals his glory by filling the temple, pushing out everything from the temple except himself – the ultimate sacrificial lamb, who will die on a cross and then rise from the dead. The temple is no longer the best symbol of God's presence, because God has arrived.

How does the cross reclaim space? How does it fill up creation and push out sin and evil?

When God set about creation, the space and order that God made was good. The garden, the plants and animals, God and humanity.

But creation has been corrupted, damaged, and filled with something else – not-goodness. The decisions of humanity to be gods to themselves filled God's good creation with evil, chaos, and death.

Jesus, in a plan that only God could conceive of, took the death of evil and sin on his own body, sacrificing himself. Death, a one trick pony and the end result of all sinful choices, wasted its power on one who could not be held by it!

This is why Jesus declared that he would raise the temple, his body, in three days.

When Jesus opened his eyes in that tomb, when he moved the gravestone and the fresh air filled the dank mustiness of the cave, the fullness, the inevitable solidness, the physical, real,

⁹ See <https://youtube.com/shorts/mGpB9oP2Rzc?si=x2uhvOwAR6G6BoWR>.

presence of almighty God filled his creation, pushing out anything that is not life-giving, God-reflecting, kingdom of heaven. Emmanuel, God with us.

This, friends, is the glory of God on a cosmic scale.

And it is on a personal scale too.

Scripture alludes to our bodies as a temple of God, but one that is filled with conflict – created for good, but with an unfortunate knowledge of evil, and an innate specialty in choosing wrong. God longs for us to be filled with his presence, his power, his being, in the Holy Spirit. But we can't do that and keep a space for ourselves. Eventually, either the Spirit of God fills us so completely that nothing else fits, or we return to the corruption of our sin.

This is the good news worth celebrating on Thanksgiving weekend. God wants to fill you, grow you, with the power to become the vision of who he made you to be.

Time for some self-reflection.

Are you longing for the Holy Spirit to fill you, healing your sorrow, your hurt, your anger, your fear?

Do you feel an invitation from Jesus to experience his forgiveness, and his glory filling you with new freedom?

Do we believe that God does miracles, and will show his glory through us? Are you invited to reflect God's glory in a place of injustice in our community?

Consider these things for a few minutes. With your eyes closed, look for where God is walking towards you, and begin that journey of walking towards him, letting him push on the things that get in his way. We will pray to close.