

It is amazing the passion that sports fans express: [Video: Passionate Fans](#)

Fans will sing, shout, scream, jump up and down, cry, punch the air, hug each other, kiss the badge and go through absolute agony with every success and failure that their team experiences - and all because they are passionate for the glory of their team.

And I can understand that. I can get excited about someone kicking a ball into a net, or carrying it across a line or hitting it between the posts. But is that really what we should be most enthusiastic about? Is that supposed to be our greatest obsession?

Or is there something else, someone else that we should be willing to follow, honour and praise with our whole hearts? Clearly Jesus believed there was. John 2:12-25: ["After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.](#)

[¹³ When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵ So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.](#)

[¹⁶ To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"](#)

[¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."](#)

[¹⁸ Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"](#)

[¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."](#)

[²⁰ The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" ²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.](#)

[²³ Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. ²⁴ But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. ²⁵ He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man."](#)

1. Celebrating God's Salvation

In his gospel, John mentions three Passover feasts – here in chapter 2, later on in chapter 6 and then finally at the time of Jesus crucifixion. The Passover was one of the three annuals festivals for which Jewish men were expected to attend Jerusalem. It celebrated the deliverance of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt and their birth as a nation, and at its heart was the sacrifice of a lamb, which looked back to the original Passover lambs killed on the night that Israel escaped Egypt.

As we saw a couple of weeks ago, the blood of the lamb was put on the tops and sides of the doorway because God had promised ["When I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt."](#) Exodus 12:13

But as we've also seen, this Passover did not just look back at that great rescue mission. It pointed forward to the ultimate rescue mission when Jesus would rescue us from slavery to sin and death through the sacrifice of himself. As John the Baptist said: ["Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"](#) John 1:29

And so it is significant, that, ["When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem."](#) John 2:13 Jesus came to celebrate the festival that for centuries had pointed to his arrival and ultimately his death on a cross.

2. Clearing the Temple

And so this was an incredibly busy time in the city, and especially in the temple, where the animals were sacrificed. That was the reason why, ["In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money."](#) John 2:14

In principle there was nothing wrong with this:

- These animals were required for the visiting pilgrims to Jerusalem so that they could make the necessary sacrifices.
- And every Jew over 19 also had to pay his yearly temple tax of a half-shekel. They were not allowed to pay this in their own currency, because it was seen as defiled. And so the money changers provided a vital service as they exchanged money into the sanctuary half-shekel.

But Jesus was anything but happy to see them there: ["He made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables."](#) John 2:15

This doesn't fit in with many people's idea of gentle Jesus, meek and mild, the peace-loving pacifist and friend to everybody! So what was going on? Why did Jesus respond so passionately and violently to what was going on here? What should we learn from this?

a) Zeal For God's House

Well, this is not a general endorsement of violence. Jesus did not come to start an armed rebellion. He did not come to use force to sort out the problems in this world.

- Jesus taught and embodied unconditional love, even for our enemies. He said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Matthew 5:44
- He promised blessing on the peacemakers: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." Matthew 5:9
- And Jesus refused to fight, or allow his followers to fight, to protect him. Later on in this gospel, Jesus told Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews." John 18:36

So this is not Jesus starting a violent overthrow of the establishment. This is not him trying to rouse a rebellion. Instead, this is an expression of his zeal for God's house. When the disciples saw this, they remembered what was written in Psalm 69,
"Zeal for your house will consume me." John 2:17

This is why Jesus reacted so strongly and cleared the temple. He was zealous, deeply concerned and fiercely passionate about the temple, about God's house.

b) Zeal Without Knowledge

And of course there is something attractive about people who are wholeheartedly committed to their cause. However, we also know that zeal that not based on truth can be a dangerous thing.

When the apostle Paul visited Ephesus, a violent riot broke out because they were zealous for their religion. They saw Christianity as a threat and so "They all shouted in unison for about two hours: 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'" Acts 19:34 That's passion! But it is passion for a false god. It is zeal without knowledge.

And that is dangerous. Proverbs 19:2 says: "It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way."

And we can see the dangers of that today in Islamic terrorists or other religious fanatics, criminal gangs, warring factions, football hooligans. They're all zealous for their cause – whether it is their team, religion or wealth. But their zeal is misplaced because it is not based on what is true, or good or important.

This was a problem with the Jews. Paul wrote that: "They are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge." Romans 10:2. They were passionate about God. But because they didn't know the gospel, and the salvation that comes through Christ alone, their passion led them to crucify the Son of God and persecute the church.

And Paul knew all about it because that's what he was like before he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. He said about himself at that time: "As for zeal, persecuting the church." Philippians 3:6

c) Zeal With Knowledge

But the zeal that Jesus expressed here, was not this kind of misplaced zeal without knowledge. Instead, Jesus was acting on what is true and good and important. That's because there were a number of major problems in the temple:

i) Distraction

One of those was distraction. The temple was supposed to be a place of communion with God. People went there to express their repentance for their sins, to learn more about God, to pray to him. But how could anyone do this, if it was just like a busy shopping mall? "How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" John 2:16

And this was all happening in the Court of the Gentiles, the place where the nations could come to hear about the one true God. It was supposed to be a place of evangelism. But instead of hearing the truth and reaching out to God, all the Gentiles would have heard was the business of making money!

ii) Dishonesty

And to make matters worse, this was being done dishonestly. In the temple people were getting ripped off:

- The animals came from the temple herds or flocks and were outrageously overpriced.
- And the commission for exchanging money was something like 50%.

And so when Jesus cleared the temple again, near the end of his ministry, he criticised not just the fact that they were distracting people from what the temple should have been, but also the dishonesty of those who were doing it: **“My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers’.”** Mark 11:17

iii) Dishonour

And worst of all, this was all happening in God’s house. Jesus said: **“How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!”** John 2:16.

The temple was the place where God dwelt with his people. When Solomon built the original temple he said, **“I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell for ever.”** 1 Kings 8:13 This was the place where God met with his people and lived among them, where God was supposed to be worshipped.

But the distraction and dishonesty was dishonouring God’s name. And it is this that offended Jesus the most, because Jesus’ primary passion, his ultimate goal was to glorify his Father. At the start of his prayer in John 17:1 he said: **“Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.”**

So this is why Jesus was so passionate about clearing the temple. In the very place where God’s name should have been honoured and glorified, it was being dishonoured for selfish and materialistic reasons – and as Jesus said, **“You cannot serve both God and Money.”** Matthew 6:24

3. Changing The Way To God

But how can we apply this today? Where is God’s house? How can we honour it? After all, that temple was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. Well, in this incident, Jesus was pointing to a new way to God.

a) A Demand For A Sign

When people saw Jesus clearing this temple, they challenged him. They couldn’t criticise him for his actions, because they were justified, and so they questioned his right to do it. They demanded: **“What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?”** John 2:18

Of course, Jesus could have shown them a miraculous sign. Last week, we read about him doing this in Cana. And as a result of his miraculous signs, some people put their faith in Jesus. **“Many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name.”** John 2:23

But Jesus knew that this kind of superficial response to miracles is not always wholehearted commitment to him, and saving faith in him. **“But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men.”** John 2:24.

Jesus didn’t get carried away with this wave of popularity. He knew that many of these people would walk away when they realized that he wasn’t the Messiah they were expecting.

And so when people were demanding more signs of his authority, he knew that it wasn’t because they were genuinely seeking him. Instead it was because they had already rejected him: **“A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign!”** Matthew 12:39

b) A Different Kind Of Sign

And so Jesus gave them a different kind of sign: **“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”** John 2:19

The Jews completely misunderstood what he was talking about. Herod the Great had started to rebuild this temple 46 years previously, and the work was still going on. So they couldn’t understand how Jesus could possibly raise it in three days.

But Jesus wasn’t talking about a construction of stone and wood. **“The temple he had spoken of was his body.”** John 2:21 This was a prediction of Jesus’ death on a cross and his power to rise from the dead on the third day.

His resurrection would be the ultimate sign of his authority. But this sign wouldn’t just point to his authority, but his true identity. Paul wrote that Jesus, **“..was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead.”** Romans 1:4

c) A Different Way To God

So that is why he called his body a temple. His body was the dwelling place of God. It was the place where men and women could meet with God. [“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”](#) John 1:14

And so in clearing the temple in temple, Jesus was pointing forward to the end of that whole Old Testament system. The Jerusalem temple, with its Levitical priests, ornamental robes, rituals and ceremonies and continual annual sacrifices is no longer needed.

Instead, we are invited simply to come to Christ, where we can meet with God, know him in our lives, experience his love, pour out our hearts to him and receive the forgiveness of sins bought with his own precious blood.

So Paul wrote about the whole Jewish system: [“These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”](#) Colossians 2:17

And so today, we don't come to a temple, with altars, ceremonies and sacrifices. If we have put our faith in Christ, then we don't need those shadows. We have the reality of coming into the presence of God, through the finished work of Christ.

d) A Different Kind Of Temple

But even more than that, we have the amazing privilege of becoming the true temple of God.

- Paul wrote to the individual Christians in Corinth: [“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.”](#) 1 Corinthians 6:19.
- And he wrote to the church as a community: [“Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?”](#) 1 Corinthians 3:16

Today, God does not live in sacred buildings. Instead, because of the gift of the Holy Spirit living in us, we, as individual Christians, and especially as a community of God's people, are his dwelling place. We are where God lives. We are God's house.

4. Calling Us To Be Passionate

And so this is what we can learn from this passage. If we are going to be passionate about something in our lives, then don't be like the Jews in the temple.

- Don't be distracted from the most important things.
- Don't be dishonest, trying to cover up our selfish and materialistic greed.
- Don't be dishonouring to the God who deserves all the honour and praise.

Instead let's be passionate about what is most important. Let's be passionate about God's house. That's not about being passionate for a building, an organisation or a denomination.

a) About a People

Instead it is about being passionate about a people. The church is the temple of the Holy Spirit, so we should love the church and be willing to do everything that we can to see it grow and flourish and be all that it was called to be.

So [“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.”](#) Romans 12:10

And: [“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others.”](#) 1 Peter 4:10

b) About our Personal Responsibility

Secondly, it is about being passionate about our personal responsibility. After declaring that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, Paul challenged us by saying: [“Therefore honour God with your body.”](#) 1 Corinthians 6:20

If we are the dwelling place of God, then we need to be wholehearted in our rejection of sin and in our commitment to God!

c) About a Person

But ultimately, this is about being passionate about a person. Jesus' body is the temple of God. He is God with us, the one who loved us and gave himself up for us.

And so our passion should be centred on him. We should say with Paul: [“For to me, to live is Christ.”](#) Philippians 1:21 This is who we should seek to follow, to honour and to praise with our whole lives.