



TIME OF GRACE®

Fake News/Real Jesus: Turning the Church Upside Down

Study Notes

Summary

Within one verse in John chapter 2, Jesus turns from wine maker to church destroyer. Raging, flipping over tables, and whipping animals, a furious Jesus turns the church upside down . . . in order to keep the church right side up. In an age when greed, sin, secrecy, and scandal have driven people away from church, Jesus is passionate about protecting the places where his resurrection is proclaimed.

- **John 2:13-17:** ¹³ When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple courts he found people 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 courts, 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! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!” ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.”
- Jesus _____ churches.
- **John 2:18-22:** ¹⁸ The Jews then responded to him, “What 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 They 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.
- _____ judges churches.
- **John 2:23-25:** ²³ Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name. ²⁴ But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. ²⁵ He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.

Points to Ponder

1. Read Revelation chapters 2 and 3, a section where Jesus judged seven first-century churches. What themes do you notice in the way that Jesus judges? What does he care deeply about?
2. **Evaluate:** Distraction is one of the greatest enemies of spiritual growth.
3. **Challenge:** What is one step you could take next week to focus your heart on Jesus during church?

Homework for Next Week

Read John 3:1-21.

Time of Grace Ministry
Fake News, Real Jesus: Turning the Church Upside Down
John 2:17-25
May 10, 2020

Pastor Mike Novotny

"Hey Mike," the pastor leaned over and whispered. "What do you think is your church's sin?"

If you've heard of a church that was, you know, so passionate about Bible truth and what's right and what's in the Scriptures but they weren't really that passionate about listening or being compassionate or being loving like Jesus. You know, there's a thousand things that Jesus would hate that happen under the roofs of churches like this that he would judge. And so, if we care at all that those stories don't happen here, they don't happen among us, that we protect and bless people instead of shoving them away from the book that has been changing lives for thousands of years, it's an important question for us to ask. Would Jesus judge our church?

I want us all to think about that question today because we're about to open the Scriptures and see a time 2,000 years ago when Jesus did that very thing. He walked into a church - in fact, it was the biggest church of his time and place - and he judged it. Actually, in a very uncharacteristically angry way, Jesus judged it. The word "judge" means to draw a line between right and wrong and say this is right and this is wrong and that's exactly what Jesus did. With his words and with his actions, he judged the church. Not because he hated people, not because he was mean, but because he wanted to love and protect people who gather in God's name. So we're going to read that story and think about our church and all churches today as we jump back to John chapter two. So listen to these words.

"When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts, he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, 'Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!' His disciples remembered that it is written: Zeal for your house will consume me.'" It's probably obvious, but if you're filling in blanks today, let's remember this: That Jesus judges churches. He makes a hard line between right and wrong and sometimes he looks at a church and says that what they're doing is wrong.

And let me show you the place where it happened. Here's a picture I took of the model city of Jerusalem in an incredible museum just outside of the city of Jerusalem itself. It's a modern reconstruction of the church that Jesus judged; the first century temple in Jerusalem. Two thousand years ago, Jews from all over the country would gather in that place to worship for the Passover festival. The big building you see there on the left, the temple itself, was kind of reserved for the Jewish religious leaders; the priests and especially the high priest himself. But

over there on the right, the massive temple courts, which would have been like multiple football fields big, hundreds of thousands of worshippers would have gathered. And they would have retold the old story of the Passover where 1,500 years before that, in the days of Moses, God had saved his people. They were slaves in Egypt but God rescued them with his love and with his power. Where they would kill the Passover lamb and they would paint its blood on their doorposts and God's judging angel, the angel of death, would pass over them so they could live and be free and make it to the Promise Land.

Except, one day, on this Passover when Jesus walked into that church, he didn't just find people praying and worshipping and retelling the old story. Instead, the text says, he found people buying and selling cattle, sheep and doves. And from everything that I can tell from John 2, that made a lot of sense. If you don't know the geography of Israel, let me tell you why it did. Where Jesus lived was up in the northern part of the country called Galilee and he didn't own a minivan and there was no high speed rail so to get all the way down to Jerusalem was a journey of about 75 to 80 miles. So if you're a runner, that's a marathon and then a marathon and then a third marathon. And you might have missed the detail, but John said in John 2 that he went up to Jerusalem and that was literally true. The Sea of Galilee is actually a couple hundred feet below sea level and the city of Jerusalem is a couple thousand feet above it. So can you imagine like this is not just one heartbreak hill like in the Boston Marathon. This is hill after hill after hill. Can you imagine three marathons, a 3,000 foot climb to get to Jerusalem, on foot? And now here's the kicker - you had to come with a cow; your family's sacrifice for the Passover feast. Can you imagine going up those hills, dragging some stubborn Bessie along with you? And so sometime in Jewish history, someone had an idea. They said, "Guys, we work smarter and not harder, so why not worship smarter and not harder?" So here's what they do: They would sell their cow up in Galilee, they'd put the coins in their pockets, they would go the three marathons to Jerusalem, they'd take the coins out of their pockets and they would buy a cow and offer it to God. And apparently, that was okay. You know, I was looking through John 2 and in studying the rest of the Bible, I can't find anything that God said, "No, you have to bring your cow from your home up in Galilee." He just said, "Bring a sacrifice." Remember, that through the shedding of blood, people are set free. It's not so much what those people did that made Jesus angry; it's where they did it. I think I found five times in those five verses that I read to you from John 2, the temple courts, the temple courts, get these out of here, my Father's house, zeal for God's house consumed Jesus. It was the where and not the what; the location that got Jesus' attention. He walked into the church and there people were buying and selling and he snapped.

Which makes sense, right? Think of it like a study Bible. Do you know what a study Bible is? One of those Bibles that has like explanations on the bottom and maybe nice pictures and maps of the temple and some like cool maps of Israel in the back? As a pastor, am I against study Bibles? No, they're great tools to use. Am I against people selling study Bibles? Well, no; it's expensive to print them and bind them. I expect you're going to have to pay for them. Would I be against someone selling study Bibles in the church while I'm teaching? The answer is yes. I think about these communication cards that we have at our church. We ask all of our guests and members of our church family, let us know if we can help them in their faith. And on the back, there's a section that says prayer requests or questions or comments. And I was thinking if Jesus filled this out, what would be his comment? If I saw a stack of these on my desk after worship,

what would Jesus say about us? And I thought a lot about that question the past seven days and I came up with maybe three things we really need to keep our eyes on. They're not like three super prevailing problems I see but I sense that if we don't keep our eyes on these, we might lose our focus and be distracted from true Jesus-pleasing worship. The three things are me, we, and you.

Here's what I mean: Me. If I'm not a man who has solid Christian character, it would be a distraction for your worship. Like, you all know that I'm imperfect, that I'm a sinful person like anyone else; I try to be really open about that. But there's, honestly, a certain level of character and morality that I have to have or it would be really hard for you to come here and listen to me and focus on God. Alright, like if I lived a lavish lifestyle, if I was known for being greedy, if I was a preacher who was always asking for your money and then like rocking \$5,000 sneakers, and then I'm asking single parents and those below the poverty level to give generously during our offering, like that would be a distraction. If all of you knew that I was a bozo of a husband, that I was selfish and mean and emotionally abusive to my wife and then I got up here and I tried to talk about God-pleasing relationships and marriage and saying "you first," like you would not be thinking about God at that point; you'd be thinking wait, wait, wait. Alright, there's certain things that if I would do them, it'd be hard to take me seriously. And so the Bible says, very seriously to pastors, they must be above reproach. If my character was so bad that if you tried to invite your friends to this church and they would say, "That guy?" If I was famous in our community for being mean and selfish, a hot head, arrogant, you know what on the soccer field and then someone came up to learn about your faith and I was the guy leading the church? No, he couldn't focus on our faith. And so, I have to be very, very careful with the way I live. One mistake, one wrong move, and people might stop thinking about Jesus.

Second, we have to pay very close attention to we. And by we, I mean those of us who organize what church looks like. You ever been to a church service whose announcements were just as long as the sermon? And it didn't feel like you were worshipping very much? Do you know why that happens? Because of convenience, right? Church leaders know that not everyone reads the church newsletter or the emails or checks the Facebook account for the church so sometimes, when everyone is here and we have your attention, it's just convenient. But in those moments, do you really focus on Jesus? I'm assuming you can feel it in your heart, right, if it's going on and on? You just haven't thought about Jesus or faith; you haven't been inspired or gotten hope or comfort or conviction in a long time. So we have to be very, very careful that like the people selling cows in the temple courts, that we don't make convenience more important than worship. We want to craft our services in a way that we can communicate clearly with you and certainly share things that are happening at our church but in these sacred moments when we're together, it's about worship. It's about God. It's about more than the building or the organization of the church but about the one who runs it in heaven.

And then finally, there's you. You have to be very careful when you come here that your eyes are fixed on Jesus. Because I have a hunch most of you are like me and you find it very hard to focus. The other day, I came into church just a little bit late; I got caught up in one too many conversations in the lobby and when I walked in, the band was just starting the first song. And as I was walking up to my seat, I jumped in with like the very first lyrics but I realized kind of by the second chorus that my heart was not at all thinking about God. Like, I could go through the

motions and participate in worship but was it actual worship from the heart? And the answer was no. And it was just a reminder that we have to be very careful with these sacred moments; that we don't rush through them. We don't take them for granted. We don't just assume that we can go from like checking emails before church starts to standing up and actually singing to God instead of just singing. Maybe you've seen these studies that they try to do about multi-tasking. They say you can do two things at the same time but you can't focus on two things at the same time. That every time you check your phone, do you know how many minutes it takes your brain to refocus on the thing that you were thinking about before? Up to seven minutes! So brothers, sisters, you need to be very careful that you come here to focus and think about God. There might not be people selling study Bibles in the aisle but there are a lot of people selling things on your phone so be very careful with technology that when you come here during the sacred time, it is all about Jesus.

That's a hard word, maybe, for us to hear but it's really important because that's why Jesus judges churches. He doesn't judge churches to make them feel bad. Instead, he cleanses out temples and churches so that we can know of God's love in his heart. So the question is: Will you let him judge ours? That was the controversy that Jesus' original audience had to wrestle with. Listen to the next verses from John two. Verse 18 says, "The Jews then responded to Jesus, 'What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.' They replied, 'It's taken forty-six years to build this temple and you are going to raise it in three days?' But the temple he had spoken of was his body. 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." If you're taking notes in your program, essentially, they questioned the first word of our next fill in the blank; that Jesus judges churches. What gives him the right? Why should he?

And Jesus' answer is both powerful and comical. Jesus said, okay, you want to know what gives me the right. You want testimony? Evidence? Destroy this temple and I'll raise it in three days. And they snickered because they were standing next to this picture. That is just one stone that comprised the ancient temple of Jesus' day. I took that picture when I was in Jerusalem. It's actually underground because of, you know, stacked soil on top of the original temple in the last 2,000 years. That single stone is called the master course stone. It weighs 600 tons. Is my math right? A ton is 2,000 pounds, 600 times two, that's 1.2 million pounds and Jesus, who's standing in front of that stone, says destroy the temple and I'll raise it in three days. Now they say, come on, Jesus. Forty-six years we've been working on this thing and it's still not done and you're going to remodel this in an entire weekend? And Jesus said yep! And it will be the proof, the sign, that I can judge you.

Which is a brilliant answer! You know, it's a brilliant answer because churches today are asking the same question. In fact, I bet you have asked the same question. What gives Jesus the right to judge us? To tell us we're wrong and we need to change? Alright? This is always the conflict when it comes to Jesus. If he was always warm and fuzzy and always clicked the thumbs up emoji's on the YouTube videos of our life, Christianity would be easy but it's not because Jesus draws the line and sometimes he said, "No, that's wrong." So why would you follow him? Why would you let him judge you? Why would you repent and why would you change? I mean, this

isn't small stuff. For some of you, Jesus is asking you to change your entire belief system; your view of money and time and government and forgiveness. Jesus would judge the way that some of you treat your coworkers, your bosses, your enemies, or the authorities. For some of you, he would judge your sexuality, what you do with the money that God puts in your hands, the words that come out of your mouth, the way you view relationships. He would judge all of it so the question is why would you listen to him? Why would you ever come back to a church where we're going to say here's what Jesus says; repent and believe in him. And Jesus' answer is brilliant. "I'll tell you why," Jesus says to all humanity. "Destroy this temple and I'll raise it in three days."

Think of how masterful that is, for two reasons. Number one: If Jesus can die and rise from the dead, predict that that would happen and then pull it off, whom must Jesus be? God! When's the last time one of your buddies predicted his own death and resurrection and pulled it off? Never! So would God have the right to tell you what's right or wrong? What he likes, what he wants to change? Absolutely. Easter, the cross and then the empty tomb of Jesus, are the most compelling proof that we should change because the God before whom all of us will stand has spoken, right? If Easter historically happened and there's so much evidence that it did, then absolutely we should let Jesus judge us because Jesus is God.

But actually, there's something else and it's even better. Follow my logic here for a second: If Jesus is God and God can do anything and God is all powerful and no one can overthrow his power, why did he let them destroy his temple? When the Roman army came in 70 A.D. and leveled the city of Jerusalem, the Jews tried to defend the temple but they couldn't; they got overpowered. But no one can overpower God so why did Jesus end up on a cross? And the one word answer is "you." He allowed sinful men to destroy his temple, to rip apart something that was weightier than a 1.2 million pound stone out of love for you. And that's why you should trust him when he judges.

See, there was another Passover just a few years after this one when Jesus came back to that same place, the temple courts. Except this time, he didn't hold the whip; he took it. Verse 23: Now while Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. He did not need any testimony about mankind for he knew what was in each person."

Does that make sense to you? The first time I read those verses I thought I'm not going to preach on those; that has nothing to do with our story. But the more I think about it, the more this is my favorite part. Here's what it means: Jesus is performing these signs, he's doing miracles at the festival. People see the testimony and they believe in Jesus' identity. He's the Son of God; this is the Messiah. They believe in Jesus but, the text says, he doesn't believe in them. He wouldn't entrust himself - his heart, his peace, and his joy - to people. Why not? Because he knew, right? He knew what was inside of people. In fact, he knew what was inside the person who's sitting next to you.

Can you do me a favor? Can you look at the person who's sitting next to you in church today? Look long enough until it kind of gets awkward. Is that good? Alright, now I need you to repeat

after me. Look at that person in the eye and I want you to say "You are." Try it one more time, you with me? "You are unreliable." But I love you, alright? But it's true, right? Why wouldn't Jesus entrust himself to even people who believed in him? And the answer is this: **His joy and his hope were so important to him that he would never put it in the hands of unreliable people.** He knew people, right? I mean people, even the best people, even believing good Christian people, we love some days well and then we don't. We're compassionate with each other and then we're selfless and then we're not. We have really good days where we act a lot like Jesus and then someday it's just a mess. And Jesus knew that his heart was way too important to put it on the roller coaster of unreliable people. So to whom did he entrust himself? To the Father. And that's the reason why Jesus cleansed the temple. Why does he want pastors to be men of integrity? Why does he want worship services to be laser-focused on the gospel? Why does he want you to do the hard work of protecting the focusing ability of your brain? Because he wants your heart to be entrusted to the one who is reliable. He wants every day that no matter how good or how bad the people around you are that you could have your heart in the safest place in the world, in a refuge that is better than the towering walls of Jerusalem itself, that you would have a rock a million times better than 1.2 million pounds. Your rock would be God. And because of that God, your feet would always be on solid ground. Because of that God, every single morning you would wake up and there would be consistent love and time and energy and compassion and grace and forgiveness for you. Why does Jesus care so much about church? Because when we gather here, we focus on God; the God on whom we can rely every day for everything.

And that's why Laurie is so passionate about church. I met Laurie a few months ago. I was down in Florida giving a message and I met this woman, Laurie, who was obviously really excited about Jesus. You ever met a person like that? I mean, she was just gushing with spiritual things and so excited about the Bible and about church but Laurie told me she had a problem. She would go to her little church down in Florida and she'd bring her massive study Bible and she'd try to open it to the page because she just wanted to soak in and follow along and really get the word of God. But then she'd bring like this notebook because she didn't want to forget everything she learned; she wanted to write down the main points and the fill in the blanks and the passages to take it home. But she found that she couldn't like balance this big Bible and her notebook and her pen all at once kept falling on the ground. So do you know what her husband did? She sent me a picture. He built her this. This tiny little table that she carries with her to church. She says she brings a whole backpack of stuff and she puts the table on her lap, she gets her Bible ready, her notebook. Why? Because she wants to focus on God because she knows that God is the one in whom she can rely.

Why does Laurie set up a table in her church? For the very same reason Jesus flipped over a table in his: Because God is the best thing in the world. Fix your eyes on him and your heart will have everything that it needs.

Let's pray.

Jesus, thank you for hard truth. Sometimes, we have to get cut to get the cancer out and we trust your hand as a skilled surgeon to know that you truly care about every patient who walks into this place. I pray, God, for courage. Not just for myself as a pastor but for all of us as we try to follow you. It is hard to speak hard words. It is difficult to judge, especially in a culture like ours. So give us courage, God, that we would speak your truth. That we would be 200 proof and never ever water down what the Scriptures say. And yet, God, help us to always, always, always focus on what matters most - on your grace, on your unfailing love, on your mercy that is new every morning. Thank you, God, that you just don't leave us judged. That you, Jesus, went to the cross to be judged so that we could escape the condemnation and judgment of our Father in heaven. We're so grateful to be free. We're so grateful that one day death will pass over us and we will march into the Promise Land with joy and we will celebrate not with 400,00 people but with countless people from every race, skin color, language, tongue, tribe, and nation as we worship you forever. We cannot wait until that day, God. Help us to be faithful until it comes so we can hear your reply to us, "Well done, good and faithful servants." Help us to be that kind of church and those kind of Christians. We pray, Jesus, in your powerful name because your temple was destroyed and you did rebuild it on the third day. So in your name we pray, Amen.