

A PAINFUL PARADIGM SHIFT
(From Sacrificial System to Real Lamb)
John 2:13-25

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Are you familiar with the term “paradigm shift”? It’s when everything changes from the old way to a new way, from the familiar to the unknown. The term comes from Thomas Kuhn, a well-known physicist, philosopher and historian of science. Kuhn wrote a book in 1962 entitled *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. He literally transformed the philosophy of science and changed the way many scientists think about their work.

But his influence went way beyond the academy. The book was widely read and seeped into popular culture. Many of us now use Kuhn’s term, “paradigm shift.”

Kuhn said there are two kinds of scientific change: (1) Incremental developments in the course of what he called “normal science” (those are stable periods in scientific discovery), and (2) scientific revolutions that punctuate these more stable periods. But incremental developments are not a real paradigm shift, are they? That’s not a real scientific revolution. Scientific revolutions involve “paradigm shifts,” earthquakes of change.

A paradigm is a model or pattern of something that may be copied. A paradigm shift is defined as an important change that happens when the usual way of thinking about or doing something is replaced by a new and different way.

Just talking changes – big changes – makes a lot of Baptists nervous. I know, makes me nervous, too. And you can be sure I never embrace change just for change’s sake. “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!” Change has to be purposeful, helpful, and, basically, unavoidable. Sometimes – well, always eventually – change is.

An example of a paradigm shift – an old one – the orbit of the sun. Before the discoveries of Nicolaus Copernicus in the sixteenth century, the old paradigm held that the sun orbited the earth. Copernicus presented a new paradigm – the heliocentric model – in which he displayed how the opposite was true: the earth, in fact, orbits around the sun. This change revamped humankind’s understanding of the heavens and set off other significant changes throughout the Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The discovery of germs was a paradigm shift. Before we talked about germs, most pre-modern scientists believed pandemics, epidemics, and even common ailments came from miasma (a bad air or mist). Certain scientists, however, began to propose something like a germ theory to counter this widespread belief in miasma. But it wasn’t until the nineteenth century that that paradigm shift really occurred. It was fully adopted. And, of course, it has led to more effective treatments and the containment of disease.

Many think we are in the middle of a paradigm shift even now, with the Artificial Intelligence, where our computers become like thinking persons, accomplishing in seconds what it would take us days to do. Thinking tasks. Writing tasks. Research tasks. Put plainly, Artificial Intelligence is a field of science concerned with building computers and machines that can reason, learn, and act in a way that would normally require human intelligence.

Today, in John 2, we have a paradigm shift. Quite frankly, I think that if you read this passage any other way you've missed the true meaning, the true message. Last week we looked at the new wine of the messianic kingdom, as Jesus showed up at a wedding in Cana and turned the water into wine. Today, we finish out chapter 2 in our Johannine series, beginning with verse 13.

“The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, ‘Take these things away; stop making My Father’s house a house of merchandise’” (vs. 13-16).

I. House of worship or religious retailing? (2:13-16)

In the Synoptic Gospels (that's what we call Matthew, Mark, and Luke), “syn” in Greek means “with,” and “optic,” of course, means “to see.” So Matthew, Mark, and Luke “see together.” Put plainly, Matthew, Mark, and Luke share more in common than the Gospel of John. They present much of the same message about and image of Jesus.

But in these Synoptic Gospels, the Passover occurs only one time in the life of our Lord – once in Matthew, once in Mark, once in Luke. And the one Passover happens at the end of Jesus' ministry, during the period of His passion, that is His crucifixion and resurrection.

John's Gospel, however, clearly refers to three Passovers, maybe even four (2:13; 6:4; 11:55; and perhaps 5:1). The only way we know the length of Jesus' earthly ministry lasted somewhere between two and three years is from the fact that John gives us three or four different Passovers. If we only had the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we would suppose that Jesus only had one year of ministry, for only one Passover is mentioned in their Gospels.

But this isn't the Passover of the Passion. This is the first Passover during the ministry of Jesus, perhaps three years before His Passion. In John's Gospel, Jesus goes to Jerusalem often – not just to die.

Going to the Passover, Jesus was an observant Jew, keeping the appointed festivals. Passover commemorated the great deliverance of God's people from Egypt. John, mentioning this festival much more than the other Gospel writers, may well be trying to bring out the messianic significance of Jesus. The Passover was one of the three times in the year when the law required all Jewish men to appear before Jehovah.

At the very heart of the Passover is the sacrifice – the spilling of blood and the offering of life as God had commanded Moses long before. Every adult Jewish male within about a 15 mile radius of Jerusalem was required by law to come. And thousands of Jews, scattered throughout the

Roman Empire, made the sacred pilgrimage at a great personal cost. The Passover was about the sacrificial lamb whose blood was placed upon the door posts so the Israelites would be safe as the Angel of Death passed over their homes because of the presence of shed blood. It was nothing less than a proclamation of the birth of a nation and the deliverance of God from slavery.

In verses 14-16, we have a house of merchandise, some religious retailing taking place. Most likely, Jesus finds merchants peddling their goods in the outer court, the Court of the Gentiles. Such merchants kept a ready supply of sacrificial animals to sell to the pilgrims who had traveled too far to bring their own. Maybe marked up a bit above market prices.

And money changers were there to exchange various coinage from throughout the Roman Empire for the one coin that was accepted as appropriate for paying the yearly temple tax, a tax to be paid by Jewish males twenty years of age or older. The exchange ensured that the temple tax was paid with the proper coinage – exact weight, and pure alloy. Maybe the exchange rate was excessive, enriching the priestly system.

The exchange of the coins and the selling of the animals created an rigged business operation, controlled by the High Priest himself. Have you ever bought a Coke at Disneyworld or sun tan lotion at a little hut on the beach? How about a hamburger in the airport? Or popcorn at the movies? I found a story about Justin Thompson, a security technician who decided to go to the movies in 2012. The smell of the popcorn had him stopping at the concession stand, with its \$8 popcorn, \$6 sodas, and \$5 candy bars. Left with no alternative, he indignantly bought a treat at an 800% markup. Then he went home and sued AMC for charging “grossly excessive prices” on its snack. Thompson’s lawyer said he was “taken for a ride.” The lawsuit was later dismissed, but it raised a question: Why are movie theater concessions so expensive? (www.thehustle.co) You’ve been on the receiving end of a mammoth mark up yourself.

This loud, raucous, gouging, competitive marketing had been brought into the outer court of the temple, the place of Gentile worship. How could anybody find worship in the midst of a carnival? How could this be happening in the temple itself, a place considered sacred? The tabernacle was followed by the temple. It was the house of God, the earthly counterpart of heavenly sanctuary (Exodus 25:40). It was here that the Ark of the Covenant, containing the tablets of the law, was housed. The temple was the place where God dwelt in the midst of His people. And this sanctuary was so sacred that its physical presence was thought to consecrate the entire city. Even today, standing at the ruins of the temple is an over powering spiritual experience – at least it was for me –and is daily for pilgrims who still go to prayer.

And yet this house of worship had become a den of thieves, a marketplace. It was no longer deriving its character from Him to whom it was dedicated but from the business carried on in its courts.

The Father’s house is not to be a “house of merchandise.” Perhaps Jesus is alluding to Zechariah 14:21, where we read, “And on that day, there will no longer be a merchant in the house of the Lord Almighty.” Or, perhaps it’s Malachi 3:1-3c, where we read, “And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple!... But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears?...He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness.”

Jesus makes a scourge of cords, dares to drive them out of the temple – including the animals – turns over the tables, pours their coins on the ground, and shouts to the sellers, “Take these things away; stop making My Father’s House a house of merchandise.”

Perhaps it was the dishonesty in part; perhaps it was the lack of purity in their worship. This cleansing of the temple is an acted out parable. Like the prophets of old acting out their prophecies, Jesus comes to the temple with sweeping, messianic motion.

We have nothing less than a paradigm shift. Jesus comes symbolizing that He Himself is the new temple, the new place where God dwells, and He is the new sacrifice that supersedes and ends all other sacrifices. Jesus was literally exchanging the old temple sacrificial system for Himself, the real presence of God.

The second thing I want us to see is

II. Stones and mortar or the embodied Messiah? (2:18-22)

Luther said, “But today, in the New Testament, God has established another temple for His residence: the precious humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. There, and nowhere else, God wants to be found. (Luther, *Sermons on John’s Gospel*, in *LW* (American Edition), 22:249)

The temple was the dwelling place of God. And now, at the beginning of His ministry, this unknown prophet from Galilee came in and turned everything upside down. Paradigm shift. Everybody knows what this means. The Jewish authorities, themselves, understood the messianic nature of Jesus’ actions. He was saying He was God present. Like the temple had been, He now was – the presence of God in their midst, turning over the tables and driving out the impure trappings of worship. In fact, if you read the text carefully, you will notice the Jewish authorities never even dispute the rightness of His actions. Rather, they ask for a sign: “Since you act like the Messiah, can you do the signs of the Messiah?” If you’re claiming this much power, you need to authenticate it. He was clearly claiming to have more authority than those presently in charge of the temple – more authority than the temple itself. Paradigm shift!

Remember, the water into wine was already a sign. And they asked for more. Jesus gave them the ultimate sign, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (v. 19). The Jews object, they object big time. “Are you kidding me? This building has been under construction for 46 years. It can’t possibly be rebuilt in three days.”

But in verse 21, John makes it clear that Jesus is not speaking of stones and mortar, but of His own body, the true temple of God.

When others demanded a sign, Jesus regularly pointed to the resurrection as the only sign that would be given to the people (Matthew 12:39-40f.; 16:4; Luke 11:29). Remember forward to the trial of Jesus. One of the primary charges against Him was that He said He would destroy the temple and raise it up again (Matthew 28:60f.; Mark 14:56-59). In fact, the same was said about Him when He hung on the cross (Matthew 27:40; Mark 15:29).

Though misunderstood and misconstrued, these words of Jesus were clearly remembered. Lest you’re unclear, as a reader of the Gospel, John gives you the interpretation (v. 21). “He was

speaking of the temple of His body.” Elsewhere Jesus is clear that He will be raised in three days (Matthew 12:40).

Despite these constant predictions about the resurrection, the disciples were blind until they gained hindsight following the resurrection. The new temple, of course, is not one made of stones or mortar, but is a spiritual temple – the new covenant accomplished by the death and resurrection of the Christ. It says in verse 22 that they believed in the Scripture after his resurrection, maybe a reference to Psalm 16:10 – “For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.”

There is no doubt, no debate about the meaning of this passage. John makes it clear. It’s Passover time. He’s already told us that Jesus is God’s Passover Lamb. Remember what John the Baptist declared in John 1:29, “John the Baptist saw Jesus and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’”

Will not the author of Hebrews write (Hebrews 10:1-10) is it possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins? The answer, of course, is “no.” Those lambs only pointed to the true Lamb, the Lamb of God.

The context clues are clear in the early chapters of John. This Passover Lamb goes to Jerusalem at a time when liberation, freedom, and rescue from slavery are being celebrated. Somehow, John wants us to understand that what Jesus did in the temple is a hint at the new meaning He is giving to Passover. Yes, Jesus is the true temple. He is the Word made flesh, the place where the glory of God has chosen to dwell.

The Jews had ancient traditions about the temple being destroyed and rebuilt. It had happened before, and some thought it would happen again. Herod the Great had begun a program of rebuilding the temple. And 46 years later, one of his sons was completing it. Jesus takes the traditions and applies them to Himself. He is the reality to which the temple itself points. His death and resurrection will be the reality to which the whole Passover celebration arrives.

Finally,

III. Dazzled to faith or called to costly discipleship? (2:23-25).

“Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.”

This action of Jesus is not merely that of a Jewish reformer. It is a sign of the advent of the long-awaited Messiah. It is not merely a protest against irreverence and corruption of the Jewish worship. It is a sign that the end of animal sacrifices is at hand.

In the end, the Master goes His own way, unswayed by the passing enthusiasms of humanity, for He knows us all too well. They “believed” here seems to be the little “believe” – a little “b,” not a profound faith, but only sign seekers, those who want to see the magic show of miracles from a Messiah. Those who are attracted by miracles and ready to make Him an early king. So He didn’t trust Himself to them. He looks for genuine conversion, not enthusiasm for the spectacular.

When you call Jesus “Lord,” you’d better be ready for a paradigm shift. A radical reversal. A turning over of your temple, whatever you think is holy. When Jesus comes into our lives, He says, “I’m here; it’s all going to change. It’s all going to change right now. For in your midst is a dwelling of the Holy God.”

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