

What About This Jesus?

Do you like the God you read about in the Old Testament? Some people don't. They read about Abraham being commanded by God to sacrifice, but instead of sacrificing a lamb as a sin offering, he is told to sacrifice his son. The Old Testament is full of stories of God punishing sin. The sin of other nations and the sin of his people. When his people disobey him, a whole generation has to die in the desert before they can enter the promised land. When they worship other gods they get sent into exile for 70 years. When they turn their back on him, and worship other gods, he sends in foreign armies to conquer them. Of course you and I know that's not all of what we know of the God of the Old Testament. There are plenty of stories of his stubborn love for his people, his willingness to forgive, and his determination to bring wayward people back to himself. But for some people, they can't get past a picture of God who is cruel and vindictive, who always seems to be angry and intolerant of anything that seems to be fun.

People who hold what is a distorted view of God in the Old Testament, often want to contrast that caricature with the Jesus of the New Testament. Jesus doesn't say "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth". He tells us to love our enemies and to do good to those who hate us. When someone wants to steal your shirt, give him your coat as well. Jesus is the one who heals the sick, gives sight to the blind, feeds the hungry, gives status to the oppressed. He cares for children and loves people. Some of these people got their picture of Jesus from Charles Wesley's hymn, which they prayed as a prayer when they were little children "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, Look upon a little child; Pity my simplicity, Suffer me to come to Thee". For them, Jesus was a really nice, mild mannered person who never upset anybody, who went about doing good. The first part of John [Chapter 2](#) illustrates this point.

"On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." "Woman why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him." John 2:1-11 (NIV)

Now this is the sort of Jesus we like. The fun Jesus. The Jesus who not only enjoys a party, but keeps the party going by turning water into wine. Not just a little bit of wine. There could have been as much as 500 litres of wine. That must have been quite a party! Mind you, I once heard a pastor who worked with alcoholics say that if Jesus saw the amount of alcohol abuse today, he would turn the wine into water! Do you like the picture of Jesus better in the New Testament or the picture of God in the Old Testament? Well, just hold that thought for a moment while I give you a bit of background before I read the next bit of scripture.

Seventy years after the death of Jesus, when the Romans captured Jerusalem, they were amazed at the grandeur of the temple that dominated the city. It had been one of the biggest building projects in the Roman world at that time. Some of the foundation stones they used weighed nearly 100 tons. The Temple itself was built of imported white marble. The whole place gleamed and shone as it towered above the city. Built by King Herod, who wanted to placate his Jewish subjects, it took 18,000 men working full time for 84 years to complete it. It had only been completed for a few years when the Romans attacked Jerusalem. Titus, the leader of the conquering Roman army, saw how magnificent it was, and so gave orders for it not to be touched. But the order didn't get through to his soldiers, who looted it and burned it to the ground.

It took a lot to impress Romans, for they were used to seeing grand buildings. Imagine the impression the Temple in Jerusalem made on the disciples from Galilee. They were country boys from up north. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were gobsmacked by the magnificence of the place. Talk about

the “wow” factor. They had never seen anything like it. So it’s against the backdrop of this magnificent building, that this next part of Johns Gospel is set.

“After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days. When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found men 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 area, 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! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!” His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.” Then the Jews demanded of him, “What miraculous 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.” The Jews replied, “It has 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. Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men.” John 2:12-24 (NIV)

Well, this doesn’t sound like the really nice Jesus who never upset anybody. This isn’t a picture of a gentle Jesus meek and mild who went about doing good. This seems more like the God we read about in the Old Testament who was full of wrath towards sin. Here are three characteristics of Jesus that make us feel distinctly uncomfortable.

1. Physical Force.

This isn’t “gentle Jesus meek and mild”. This is Jesus with a whip in his hand. This is Jesus causing mayhem. This is Jesus cracking a whip, scattering animals and people, turning over tables. People are running for cover from this Jesus.

2. Anger.

This is not Jesus being a bit grumpy or out of sorts. This is fury. This is full blown anger on display. When we don’t expect to see this sort of a thing, it comes as quite a shock. My mother was a very gentle person who hardly ever lost her cool. But I still remember the day when she was about 8 months pregnant, and as a 9 year old, I came barrelling around the corner of the house, head down, going full speed, not looking where I was going, and I head butted her. I copped the full force of her anger, and it shocked me, because I had never seen my mother like that before. Not only did I come away with very red ears and a sore head, but the memory of that moment is still vivid 60 years later. The Gospel writers didn’t forget this incident when the explosive anger of Jesus resulted in some dramatic action.

3. Spiritual Intolerance.

Does it surprise you to hear me say that Jesus was spiritually intolerant? Many people believe that Christians should be tolerant of everything. But there were things Jesus wouldn’t accept under the guise of religion. There was behaviour he just wouldn’t tolerate. Unconcern about the nations of the world was one of them.

What Got Jesus So Uptight?

What was going on that caused this sort of reaction from Jesus? If we are to understand, we need to understand Gods purposes for the temple. At that time, the temple was the place where people met with God. It was the place where people came to deal with their sin. It was a holy place, where people could be cleansed from everything dirty in their lives as the blood of a sacrificial lamb was shed on their behalf. It was a place of teaching, where people could learn the ways of God. It was a place of prayer, where people could be quiet and communicate with the God of all the universe. It was a place where people could withdraw from all the busyness of life and spend time with God. The temple was the connection point between sinful mankind and a holy God. Within the temple complex, there was a special place made available for those who were not Jewish, so that they too could worship Israel’s God. That place was called the temple court, or the court of the Gentiles.

But by the time of Jesus, the court of the Gentiles was anything but a place of prayer and piety. Greed and convenience had turned it into a market place. During Passover, hundreds of thousands of people would come to the temple to sacrifice an animal and to pay their temple tax, which was the equivalent of

about two days wages. That didn't bother Jesus. What got Jesus so uptight was that the court of the Gentiles had been taken over as a place to run a scam. Here's how it worked.

The Tax And Sacrifice Scam.

Because ordinary Roman coins were not acceptable in the temple, people had to get their money changed into temple money to pay the tax. But the money changers were charging people up to 50% of the value of the money just to change it. And there wasn't a thing the common people could do about it. The rule with the animal sacrifice was that the animal had to be free from any blemishes. No sick or blind animals. It had to be perfect. Because the priests acted as inspectors, they would have their own animals on sale. So it wasn't difficult for them to reject any animal they didn't like so they could sell one of theirs at a nice profit. All this buying and selling of animals and changing money was taking place in the court of the Gentiles.

Misuse Of The Court Of The Gentiles.

Right from the beginning, God's intention was that the temple would be a house of prayer for all nations. It wasn't just a place for Jewish worship, but a place for people of all nations who could worship the God of Israel. The temple was designed with a huge courtyard area that was reserved for the Gentiles to come and pray. It was the only place they could pray. If they went into the parts of the temple reserved for Jewish people they could be put to death. So if they couldn't worship in the court of the Gentiles, they couldn't worship anywhere. But this place, that was supposed to be a place of peace and a place for prayer had been turned into a market place, crowded with people, money, animals and noise. For Jesus, it wasn't just what was happening, but where it was happening that got him uptight. It was happening in the very place that was supposed to be the connection point for those from the nations of the world who wanted to find God. But meeting God there was impossible, because the court of the Gentiles was filled up with so much activity. That's what got Jesus so uptight.

Over the years in churches I have had people complain when we have sold books or cakes in the church building. They have said that we are turning the place of prayer into a market place. But comments like that miss point. The church building where we worship is not the temple. When Jesus talked about the temple being destroyed and raised again in three days, he wasn't talking about the building, but his body. Ever since the death of Jesus on the Cross, the whole temple sacrificial system has become obsolete. God doesn't dwell in buildings, but in his people. The connection point between sinful mankind and a holy God isn't a building, it's the new temple of God.

You Are The New Temple.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians he was trying to get them to understand that the temple that God was living in was their own lives. He said ***"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple". (1 Corinthians 3:16 & 17)*** Later on he said ***"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body". (1 Corinthians 6:19 & 20)***

If you have put your trust in Christ as your Saviour, and you are following him, then you are his temple. You are the dwelling place of God. Once the connection place between non Jewish people and God, was a grand and glorious building in Jerusalem. Today, you and I who have Christ in us, who is the hope of glory, are the connection point. You are one of the connection points God uses between those outside his family, and himself.

What Is Going On In The "Court Of The Gentiles?"

For those of us who follow Christ, I believe God intends for us to have a large space in our lives called the "Court of the Gentiles". It's a large place in our lives prepared for those who don't yet know God. That area has to be kept clear of all other activities. It's got to be clear space reserved for those who don't know God. And if we fill that clear space up with money making activities, we effectively shut out those who are seeking God. If our lives are so cluttered with leisure activities that we have no time for people seeking God, then the Court of the Gentiles has no space for those who don't yet know God. If our Court of the Gentiles is so cluttered with our own personal religious activity that leaves no space for the outsider, we risk the anger of Jesus. If the court of the Gentiles in your life and mine is so filled with busyness, we are not much different than those who turned that part of the temple into a market place.

So when Jesus walks into his temple today, what does he see?

Prayer.