



John 2:13-22
What If Jesus Was Serious?
 (A Series on The Sermon On The Mount)
 “Was Jesus Serious?”

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 Resurrection Sunday

A new series of messages kicks off this morning, looking at Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (today – obviously – we’re looking at Jesus’ resurrection, but it will tie in with the series). It is titled “What if Jesus was Serious?” The title of the series and the outline for the series is based on a book of the same title, by a guy named Skye Jethani. And if you are here this morning and either don’t have a relationship with Jesus or if you do, but you’re not really a part of a church family and in need of a church family (and if you’re not a part of a church family, then you *are* in need, whether you realize it or not) if any of that describes you, then I want to give you a copy of this book. Meet me in the lobby; if you’re watching online then send me an email or call the church office, and I’ll get it to you.

This morning we gather in worship to remember and celebrate the good news of Jesus’ resurrection. The fact is, good news is often overlooked, discounted, or flat-out not believed – it’s “too good to be true” is a common response to good news. **Even worse, we actually tend to be attracted to bad news.**

There was an article from the New York Times recently that asked this question, “Is Bad News The Only Kind?” It was an article on some in-depth research recently done about what kind of news about Covid has been communicated here in the U.S. and around the world. And the research shows that here in America, we love us some bad news. It didn’t matter if it was media from the left or the right or anywhere in between, the news here in the U.S. skewed toward the negative, especially when it came to national news outlets. The article said, **“About 87 percent of Covid coverage in national U.S. media last year was negative. The share was 51 percent in international media, 53 percent in U.S. regional media and 64 percent in scientific journals.”** (New York Times, “Is Bad News The Only Kind”, March 24, 2021)¹

This means three things that are pertinent to us this morning: 1) Good News doesn’t sell, which – ironically – is bad news for us this morning because the reason we’re here and why I’m preaching this message is all about good

news. But that leads to the second thing that's also good news, and that is: 2) If bad news sells, well: The good news of Jesus Christ isn't for sale – it's a free gift of grace. And let's be honest, if there's any good news we *do* like, it's good news about money, so maybe a free gift will at least pique your interest. 3) Lastly, it means that we're breaking the bad news cycle this morning because the resurrection of Jesus Christ is pure good news. No bad news! Amen? Amen!

Now, if we do question if this news is good, or wonder why this is good news, or why we might consider believing this good news – you're in good company, as we heard in the Resurrection account from Luke near the start of the service. The women weren't expecting this news, most of the guys they told about it doubted the news at first, and Peter walked away from the empty tomb wondering what it means.

But even before the resurrection happened, people wondered about Jesus and who he was. They asked him a lot of questions. One of the key questions underneath the surface questions they ask Jesus, is this: Are you serious? Is Jesus serious? For instance, near the end of John 1, Phillip is invited by Jesus to follow him, and he does. And then he goes and invites Nathanael to follow. Here's how the dialog goes: Philip says to Nathanael, **“We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”** Nathanael replied, **‘Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?’**” (John 1:45-46). He's questioning if Philip is serious, which ultimately is questioning if Jesus is serious.

We see it in today's passage from John 2 some as well. Jesus goes up to Jerusalem for the Passover meal and clears the temple. Let's pause here for a moment. Many of you may know, the other gospel writers record Jesus clearing the temple at a Passover festival as well. And all three of the others record it as happening in Jesus' last week of life, just after his triumphal entry that we celebrated last week with Palm Sunday. But here, it's much earlier in Jesus' ministry, coming in only the 2nd chapter of John. So that begs the highly theological question: *What's up with that?* There are a couple possibilities. **Some Bible scholars suggest that Jesus cleared out the**

temple courts twice. That certainly is possible. There are slight differences in what each of them write about this event, and John in particular differentiates from the other three. So, it *could* be a different Temple cleansing.

It could also be that John puts the event here for reasons pertaining to the message of his biography of Jesus. Remember, history was not recorded then just for the sake of documenting facts. Even still today, it isn't always just for the sake of recording facts. The best history books, the best biographies, teach us something from the events or the person's life being documented. But especially prior to the last few hundred years, history was written down for a purpose: to help communicate something, to learn from events and people of the past. And so history frequently was not written in exact chronological order.

John's theological emphasis in his biographical account of Jesus is particularly to emphasize the deity of Jesus and his divinity. It's not that the other Gospels *don't* communicate that (they all do), but it's a little more blatant and emphasized in John's biography. We see it at the very start with the whole "Word became flesh" language, and the "I am" statements from Jesus, and certain "signs" that are given to demonstrate who Jesus is.

So, John is highlighting Jesus' divinity right from the start. And at the center of the Jewish faith is the Temple. It is *the* divine center of their faith. To claim authority there is to claim authority at the heart of the Jewish faith, and to put oneself on equal footing with Yahweh - God. And so, I think (and most scholars land here) John simply brings this event to this point to catch the reader's attention: to highlight that Jesus is Lord even over the Temple, the holy of holies; He is divine. So, *maybe* Jesus cleared the temple twice...it certainly is possible...but it may be that John is emphasizing who Jesus is.

Either way, the response of the people, "the Jews," (probably Jewish religious leaders, not just Jewish folks in general)...**Their response is a question that is a long-hand way of saying "Are you serious?"**

Specifically, they ask, "What sign can you show us of your authority to do this?" Have you ever been asked to show your credentials for something

to demonstrate that you've got the authority to be somewhere or to do something? Back when you used to work in an office, for example, maybe you had to swipe a badge to gain access to the office building. Or if you buy a bottle of wine at the store, what do they want to see? Your I.D. Whenever I'm asked for my I.D. in that situation, I'm like "I still look younger than 21! Yes!" It's a sure-fire way for a waiter to get a bigger tip! Needless to say, however, I don't have to show my I.D. very often. Or every time you turn on your computer or your phone, it wants a password, or a finger print, or it needs you to stare into the camera for a moment to make sure you have authority to use it.

That's what they're looking for here. They want some sense of his credentials, and proof of his authority. And Jesus' response is both cryptic and prophetic. He says, **"Destroy this Temple and I will raise it again in three days" (John 13:19)**. John, in writing the gospel account after the resurrection, is able to clarify what Jesus meant – that it's a reference to his own resurrection. But the people he's talking with don't realize that, of course. They're incredulous that Jesus could say such a thing. "It took 46 years to build that Temple. How can you rebuild it in 3 days?" But his disciples, who remembered this after his resurrection, understood what he meant and believed because in fact he was raised from the dead. They got the metaphor, once it played out before their very eyes.

Let's return to the request for a sign, however. **When they ask for a sign that Jesus has authority in the temple, he gives a prophecy about his own resurrection. *Jesus' resurrection is the sign.*** It is his I.D. card, proof of who he is and proof of his authority. They ask for a sign, and Jesus says that this is it. It's the sign that Jesus is who he says he is: that he has authority in our worshipping life, that he has authority over what is most central to our very being, that he has authority over all time and eternity just as the one they worshipped in that Temple did; it's the sign that Jesus is who he claims to be, it's the sign that he's worthy of your discipleship, that he's worthy of giving your life to. Jesus is laying claim to his divinity here in the Temple courts, and His resurrection, the empty tomb, is the sign that backs it all up.

We might look at this conversation and wonder, “Is Jesus serious?” I mean, he does sound cryptic and he does make a pretty big claim. But the thing is: You and I wouldn’t be here if he hadn’t been serious. If Jesus had been the opposite of serious – if he’d been flippant, or superficial, or joking – if had been *that*, and the resurrection didn’t *actually* happen, then you and I *would not be here*. We’d be doing something else – sleeping in, going for a walk, talking with family, eating breakfast or brunch, getting ready to watch the Mariners lose a game (well, they’re not playing today). But here we are: In church, in God’s house, where Jesus says he has authority. We are here because even though the first witnesses to the empty tomb, like some of us, had questions and uncertainties and were surprised...in spite of that, they quickly came to believe that Jesus wasn’t joking when he said he would be resurrected. Once it happened, they believed him 100%, it completely transformed them, and it spread from there and throughout the ages to us here today.

So, is Jesus serious? Scripture, the testimony of those eyewitnesses, and even our presence here today say that yes, Jesus was serious. **That leaves us with: What does that mean for us? If Jesus is serious – then what? What if Jesus is serious?**

What if Jesus is serious when he says...

- “Blessed are those who mourn because they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4)?
- Or: “...unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20)...what if he’s serious about that?
- “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). What about that?
- “But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father (Heavenly Father) will not forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:15). And what if he’s serious about that?
- “You cannot serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:24). That might cut a little close...but what if he’s serious?
- “Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life...” (Matthew 6:25).

- “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (7:13-14).
- “Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise person who built his house on the rock” (Matthew 7:24)?

What if Jesus’ words and very life are the rock-solid foundation for abundant life here and now and in eternity? What if Jesus is serious about these kinds of things that he teaches? Those statements are all found in the Sermon on the Mount, and are what we’ll look at in the next few weeks...so I’ll just leave that for a moment. But the question remains: What if Jesus is serious? And: Have we taken him seriously? Or have we dismissed him or not really considered him seriously?

John ends today’s passage with these words, “**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**” (John 2:22). In spite of their initial questions and fears, they took him seriously – they believed – because He was raised from the dead. So, Jesus is good news that is freely given. This good news overcomes all the bad news of our sin and all that comes of that: broken relationships, pain, sickness, death, despair, and more.

The Resurrection of Jesus tells us that when we believe Jesus, the Good News outweighs the bad news. This Good News can dominate the headlines of our lives, rather than the bad news we so often gravitate toward. I invite you to hear this good news (you just have...I mean, to really consider it, let it sink in), and to know Jesus and his Resurrection power in your life today. His resurrection is the proof that Jesus is worthy of all of our worship and has the authority to forgive, to wash your soul clean, to make you right in God’s eyes, and help you overcome every obstacle before you from now to the other side of the grave.

And all of *that* is seriously good news. Let’s pray...Amen.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/24/briefing/boulder-shooting-george-segal-astrazeneca.html>