

The Feast of the Passover

by Major Ian Thomas

Major Ian Thomas explores the significance of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem during the Passover and the true nature of commitment to Christ amidst public acclaim and rejection.

Duration: 40:46

Scripture: Matthew 21:6

Topics: "True Commitment", "Cleansing the Temple"

Description

Major Ian Thomas explores the significance of the Feast of the Passover, emphasizing the contrast between the crowd's enthusiastic welcome of Jesus as a prophet and their later rejection of Him as King. He highlights how Jesus, despite the acclaim, was focused on cleansing the temple, demonstrating that true commitment to Christ requires more than mere outward expressions of faith. Thomas warns against superficial commitments that do not engage the heart, stressing that Jesus is not impressed by public acclaim if it lacks genuine faith. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper understanding of commitment to Christ, one that mirrors Christ's own commitment to the Father.

Transcript

The 21st chapter of Matthew's Gospel. It is the Feast of the Passers, and the disciples at the Lord Jesus Christ's behest did as Jesus commanded them. Verse 6 and verse 7, they brought the ash and the cult, and they put on them their clothes, and they set him their arm, and a very great multitude spread their garments in the way.

Others cut down branches from the tree, and strawed them in the way. And the multitude that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! And there was tremendous excitement. The Feast of the Passover of course was a great occasion.

It was a holiday, and everybody was in town. And all the great preachers, and philosophers, and teachers of course were on hand. Those who lived apart from the city would travel for this great occasion.

And the multitudes would be on the streets, all done up in their Sabbath go-to-meeting clothes. And of course all the small children in the streets would be highly excited, darting in and out of people's legs and trying to get to the front. And of course every now and again there would be a buzz of excitement as some new personality arrived on the scene.

And everybody would strain, and stick their necks up, and try to see over the fat man in front, and wonder who it was. And then the excitement would die down until the next personality arrived. And now the Lord Jesus came.

And there was tremendous excitement, great shouting. They stowed the road with palm branches. And when he was come into Jerusalem, it says, verse 10, all the city was moved saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus of Nazareth, the prophet.

This was Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee. Many rumors had been spread about this unusual man. Stories had been told how he had healed the sick, and made the lame to walk, and the blind to see, and the deaf to hear.

He had cast out devils. He'd even raised the dead. And there was unusual curiosity naturally when he arrived.

This somewhat fanatical street preacher, the prophet of Nazareth. But in spite of all the excitement, and in spite of what appeared to be a great ovation, a mighty welcome, as they cried, Hosanna in the highest. The Lord Jesus Christ seemed to be strangely unimpressed.

He pushed his way through the crowd, almost as though he were completely preoccupied. Verse 12, Jesus went into the temple of God, and he cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple. And he overthrew the tables of the money changers, and the seats of them that sold doves.

And he said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer. But you have made it a den of thieves. In the midst of all this excitement, in the midst of all this apparent goodwill, of this great ovation and acclaim, as they welcomed him to the city, the Lord Jesus pushed his way through the crowd, and went into the temple, and began to cast out the money changers.

And of course the climate began to change. Turn with me to the second chapter of John's Gospel. John chapter 2, where we are given another record of the same incident.

Verse 13 of chapter 2, And the Jew's Passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And he found in the temple those that sold oxen, and sheep, and doves, and the changers of money sitting. And when he had made a scourge of small corns, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen, and he poured out the changers' money, and he overthrew the tables.

And he said unto them that sold doves, take these things hence, make not my father's house and house of men to die. And he cleansed the temple. And of course it wasn't long before the crowd that once had acclaimed him, shouted Hosanna to the highest, and strewed the rows with palm leaves and branches, and gave him such a tumultuous welcome, had a different cry upon their lips.

Turn to the 19th of John, though we shall be turning back to the 2nd chapter again. 19th of John, verse 14, And it was the preparation of the Passover, and about the 6th hour. And he said unto the Jews, Behold your king! But they cried away with him, away with him, crucify him! Pilate said unto them, Shall I crucify your king? The chief priest answered, We have no king but Caesar.

Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away. And he bearing his cross, went forth into a place called the place of Ascal, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha, where they crucified him.

And two other with him on either side one, and Jesus in the mid. And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.

Matthew 21, Jesus of Nazareth, the prophet. And as Jesus of Nazareth, the prophet, a prophet among many, a preacher among preachers, a philosopher among philosophers, and a teacher among teachers. For Jesus of Nazareth, the prophet, there was a humongous, excited, enthusiastic welcome.

But for Jesus of Nazareth, the king, only a cross. Something has happened to change the climate of the crowd. You see, nobody objected to the Lord Jesus Christ coming as a prophet.

Nobody objected to him coming as a preacher. But they were prepared to welcome him as prophet and preacher. Only insofar as he was prepared to accept the status quo.

Only insofar as he was prepared to identify himself with religion as he found it. But the moment the Lord Jesus Christ began to exercise the prerogatives of kingship, his royal sovereignty, and made his way into the temple, and began to cleanse the temple, and make the house of God clean. They said crucify him.

Away with him. We will not have this man to reign over us. He can preach to us.

He can entertain us. But he may not reign over us, nor may he cleanse the temple. He must accept us as he finds us.

And leave us alone. Turn back to John 2, verse 18. Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? How dare you? How dare you enter the temple? How dare you drive out the sheep and the oxen? How dare you overturn the tables of the money changers? How dare you begin to cleanse the temple? By what authority do you dare? Do you dare to protest against things as they are? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them. And they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

Said the Lord Jesus to the Jews, You ask me by what authority I cleanse the temple? Destroy this body, and in three days it will be raised from the dead. That is my authority. What a vivid picture this gives us.

There are many who are prepared to acclaim the Lord Jesus. Who are prepared to give him a tumultuous and enthusiastic welcome. So long as he is prepared to identify himself with contemporary religion.

And so long as he is prepared to remain outside the temple. And never exercises his divine prerogative to cleanse the house of God. And make it fit for the presence of God.

But you see the Lord Jesus Christ always insists upon cleansing the temple. It is for that purpose he came. It was for this reason that he shed his precious blood, and his body was broken.

And for three days and nights he was in the grave. The third day God raised him from the dead. It was to cleanse the temple.

Know you not that your body is the temple of the living God. And when Jesus Christ steps into your life it is not to accept the status quo. It is not to leave things as they are.

He comes into your life for one purpose only. That your whole humanity might be cleansed of that hostile attitude to God. And that independence that makes your humanity unworthy for the divine presence.

He came to cleanse the temple. But what I want you to understand is this. That although you and I if we had loved the Lord Jesus might have been highly delighted at the enthusiastic welcome he was given.

We might have rushed home and said to our family if they had not been present. You should have been there. You should have seen the crowd.

You should have heard the way they welcomed him. You should have seen the way they shouted Hosanna to the highest. It would have thrilled you.

And yet we would have been hopelessly deceived. For though it looked as though the crowd were committed to Christ. The tragic startling fact is this.

That Jesus Christ was in no sense committed to the crowd. Verse 23 of John chapter 2. Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover in the feast day many believed in his name when they saw the miracles which he did. Now doesn't that make good reading? Many believed in his name when they saw the miracles which he did.

They were deeply impressed. And impressed as they were they became his followers and they acclaimed themselves to be his disciples. They said we believe in this man.

And they committed themselves to Christ. Wonderful. One might imagine.

But verse 24. That Jesus did not commit himself to them. Because he knew all men.

And he needed not that any should testify of man. For he knew what was in man. When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover feast many believed on his name after seeing his signs which he was doing.

But Jesus for his part did not trust himself to them. Because he knew all men. He did not need that anyone should witness concerning man.

He needed no evidence from anyone about men. For he himself knew what was in human nature. He could read men's hearts.

And so though on the surface it appeared that many committed themselves to Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ himself did not commit himself to them. Now what do we learn from this? We learn something of absolutely vital importance.

That it is possible for you to commit yourself to Christ to everybody else's satisfaction. And even to your own. But in such a way that Jesus Christ is not committed to you.

That is the startling discovery that we make. That it is possible for you to commit yourself to Christ in such a way that Christ is not committed to you. And it is equally true to say this.

That we may incite others by one means or another to commit themselves to Christ. But in such a way and of such a quality that Jesus Christ under no circumstances will be committed to them. Would you tell me this? If you are committed to Christ in such a way that everybody else is impressed.

And everybody else is satisfied. And everybody else is convinced. But Jesus Christ is not committed to you.

Of what value is your commitment to Christ? Of any value? No. Of no value whatever. No.

And if I can persuade people to commit themselves to Christ in such a way that I'm satisfied. And they're satisfied. And everybody else is satisfied.

Everybody else is excited. But Jesus Christ remains strangely unimpressed. And does not commit himself to them.

Would you tell me the value of my ministry? I'll tell you. Nothing. It has accomplished nothing.

There is a quality of commitment that does not claim from Christ his reciprocal commitment to us. I want to examine tonight the nature of true commitment. Of course it is towards this that we have been exposing ourselves to the accumulative evidence of the word of God.

Because ultimately this is the final issue that must be faced. You see we're living in rather strange days. Evangelically speaking.

I'm happy to say that the symptoms are not so luridly evident here in Australia. As for instance they are in the United States. But almost every country in the world is suffering from this at least in some measure.

To one degree or another. I suppose I've spent about two and a half years in the United States in aggregate in the last few years since 1953. And I've traveled almost in every state within the country.

And had delightful opportunities of ministry. But one thing I have discovered and that is this. That there is a quality of commitment demanded and obtained.

Which is less than that quality of commitment that enables Christ to commit himself to that individual. And by and large this is how it's come about. It wasn't if you like maliciously designed.

But I believe it to be a byproduct of the satanic genius. That satanic genius that is capable of capitalizing upon the highest and noblest ideals within the human heart. It began in a sense in the pulpits.

And I want to speak to you quite frankly about this. Without being unduly critical. Because we're seeking in these days to be essentially realistic.

You see the pulpits for a long time taught the few that the only valid expression of spiritual response was physical action. Let me say that again. The pulpits taught the few that the only valid expression of spiritual response was some physical action.

In other words if there was any inward spiritual response to the truth as presented by the preacher it must inevitably be evidenced by some physical act. By standing, hand up, walk to the front, whatever it may be. And if there was no accompanying physical act there could under no circumstances be any true genuine inward spiritual response.

Now that was the pulpits teaching to the few. In other words the pulpit insisted you must do something. When I have preached the truth to you if you have responded you must do something.

And when I tell you to stand up you must stand. If I tell you to come to the front you must come to the front. If I tell you to bow your head and keep your eyes shut or one eye open that's what you must do.

And if you don't do it then you haven't responded. See. Alright.

So far so good. And the few obeyed the pulpits. Like she did under the shepherds.

And folks got acclimatized of course standing, sitting, walking, doing all kinds of things. But of course it boomerangs. Because the few having taught, the pulpit having taught the few that there must be some physical act as the only tangible valid expression of spiritual response.

It wasn't long before the few having thoroughly learned the lesson only credited the pulpit with any unction from God and any degree of success if the pulpit could now produce the physical action. That's how it boomerangs. And therefore the preacher who couldn't get them to stand, the preacher who can't get them out, the preacher who can't get them in some sort of a swooning attitude whereby they'll do almost mesmerize and hypnotize exactly what the preacher says.

There's no preacher. And so every little preacher had to learn how to get people to do things. And therefore they had to learn every technique under the sun.

And the best place to learn it of course was Hollywood. You see soul massage is not the preoccupation of the pulpit. Soul massage is the stocking trade of the theatrical world.

While you're sitting here tonight there are tens of thousands of men and women sitting in theatres and cinemas here in Sydney and elsewhere or in front of their television. And they are being soul massaged. There is an appeal being made to their minds, their emotions and their will.

And all kinds of responses are being elicited. There'll be some folk no doubt in a cinema and they'll have their handkerchiefs out and they'll be like that. And they'll come out after two and a half hours having been squeezed and rung and they'll say what a wonderful evening we've had.

I've never been in a film that's been so harrowing in all my life. That's one reaction. You'll literally have people weeping their eyes out.

Other times you'll have them holding on to the side. You see with their hair standing on end, their eyes out on hat pins. While Dirty Dick comes along with a putty knife just about to stick it into somebody's back.

That's the stocking trade of Hollywood. And so long as you learn the tricks of the trade you can produce response at any time. And all you have to do is to step off the stage into the pulpit and produce exactly the same effect if you use the same technique.

And instead of having people flocking to the stage door to get your autograph they'll be in the inquiry room signing position cards. But you see certain problems arise. Of course it becomes farcical and childish on many occasions.

I can remember being in one place on the west coast in southern California and a man with pathetic sincerity, with pathetic sincerity, totally, totally unaware of the sheer ludicrousness of it. He said do you

know ever since we bought our Hammond organ we've doubled our turnover at the altar call. Now wasn't that nice? He discovered that under the influence of booeey music in the background he could get twice as many people to the front.

Do you know a day later in all innocence he then added do you know the financial response from our prayer letter is in direct proportion to the number of decisions we raised. Well they've doubled their turnover and they'd already paid for the Hammond organ. And yet the tragedy is this, that man was totally unsuspecting.

I wouldn't challenge his sincerity. I wouldn't. He was too much of a spiritual baby.

He'd never grown up. He just didn't see through the whole thing. I saw some of those fellows, they were nearly all maiden men, youngsters, new recruits, stationed just near the Mexican border.

And most of them for the first time had been in Mexico doing things of which they would have been downright ashamed under any other circumstance. And by their souls they came back with a bad guilty conscience and they found a relief. Just as they might have if they'd gone to a Roman Catholic confession.

But it was purely in the area of the soul. And nothing to do with spiritual regeneration. But you see if the pulpit has taught the pew that physical response is the only criterion in spiritual response and the pew now demands that for a preacher to be a preacher he must at all costs get physical response as the tangible evidence of the spiritual response of the people to his preaching.

He's in rather a dilemma if he's pastor of just a little church of about 30 people because he's had them all out once. And you see he's not going to be a successful preacher unless he gets them out again. Because just as soon as he stops getting them out he's no good.

He's got to look around for another job. So he's got to get them out again. And when he's had them all out twice he's got to get them out three times.

Now this sounds ludicrous and it might even be funny if it went so tragically. I've seen it again and again. And the result is this that the Christian life has got to be reduced to a thousand little fragments, a thousand little issues.

And somehow he's got to conjure up every Sunday morning and evening very often because both morning and evening he's got to get them out. It's printed, printed on the order of service, altar call. He's got to somehow create little issues upon which he's got to get the people to act again and again and again and again until you see the Christian has never, never faced any final issue.

He's always facing little baby issues. And the result is that the quality of commitment is reduced and reduced and reduced and reduced and watered and watered and watered until it almost is nonexistent. Until response simply becomes a physical habit, almost part of the liturgy and has absolutely no spiritual substance to it.

And Jesus Christ is ungrateful. He did not commit himself unto them. Where are we to turn if we're to discover the true nature of the spiritual commitment? Well of course there is only one direction which we can safely turn.

To the Lord Jesus Christ himself. For he is the exegesis of all truth. The final exposition.

All that we can ever know about God. All that we can ever know about man. And all that we can ever know about the perfect relationship of perfect man to perfect God.

If therefore I want to know the nature of true commitment on the part of man to God, I must focus my attention upon the Lord Jesus and discover if I can the nature of his commitment to the Father. So what was the Lord Jesus committed? Was he committed to a lost world? No. Was he committed to the generation in which he lived? No.

His disciples tried their uttermost to persuade him to be committed to them and to their generation and to their people. When the Lord Jesus declared that he would go to Jerusalem and there be delivered into the hands of wicked men and be crucified and the third day rise again from the dead, Peter said not so, or this can never be. It can't.

It mustn't happen to you. You're committed to us. You're going to raise us once again as a political entity.

You're going to release us from the dominion of the Roman yoke. You're going to set us free and make us a nation again and re-establish our influence in the world. You are committed to us.

And Jesus Christ said no. I am not committed to you. I am not committed to you or to the Jews nor am I committed to this contemporary generation nor am I committed to any generation in any time.

I do only always do those things that please him. I am committed to my father exclusively and to all that to which my father is committed in me in the supreme confidence that my father that dwelleth in me and of the works is completely confident and adequate for all that which he in me is committed. I am totally arraigned to my father.

Or as some of us discovered yesterday evening the measure of the perfection of his humanity was the perfection of the measure that his humanity was available to and exclusively committed to the father. That was the commitment of Jesus Christ. He was not even committed to redeeming you or me.

Does that surprise you? How much did Jesus Christ do in order to save your soul from hell? I know what you'd like to say. You would like to say because you love him you would like to say he did everything. But you would be wrong.

John 8 28. Eighth chapter of John's Gospel. Verse 28.

The Lord Jesus Christ is speaking prophetically of his impending death upon the cross. Then said Jesus unto them when ye have lifted up the Son of Man then shall ye know that I am he and that I do nothing not even in the act of dying I do nothing of myself. My exclusive responsibility is to be committed to my father and to all that to which my father is committed in me and my father happens to be committed in me to die for a lost humanity.

My office is to be. It is my father's office to act and I am supremely confident that my father is completely adequate for all that to which he in me is committed. How may we know the adequacy of the committal of the Son to the Father? That is very simple.

From the second chapter of John's Gospel we have seen the inadequacy of man's committal to Christ by virtue of the fact that Christ was not committed to them. I recognize at once that the quality of their commitment was inadequate. It wasn't enough by the simple fact that Christ refused to be committed to

them by virtue of their committal to him.

How may I know therefore whether the committal of Christ to the Father satisfies the Father? By the measure in which the Father was committed to the Son. At what moment in the whole of his life for 33 years on earth was the Father anything but totally committed to the Son? On what occasion in 33 years of life on earth as perfect man did the Father repudiate the activity of the Lord Jesus? Never once. The totality of his commitment to the Father was demonstrated by the totality of the commitment of the Father to the Son.

Is that clear? And I want to tell you this, that the measure of your commitment to Christ will be precisely and only the measure of Christ's commitment to you. And as to what others think or how much you may impress others or convince others has absolutely nothing whatever to do with it. You can deceive them as you deceive yourself.

What then will be your true committal to Christ? The Lord Jesus said, as my Father has sent me, so send I you. I am committed to my Father and to all that to which my Father is committed in me. Supremely confident that he, my Father, is completely adequate for all that to which he in me is committed.

All right. This then, if it is to be valid, must be my committal to Jesus Christ. I am committed to the Lord Jesus exclusively and to all that to which he in me is committed.

Supremely confident that Jesus Christ is overwhelmingly adequate for all that to which he in me is committed. And you will discover that when you are committed to Christ this way, there is absolutely no other issue to face. That's fine.

What is the nature of your commitment? How easily we can be misled and sincerely so. It was my privilege earlier before this meeting to speak to some who are concerned about missionary service. And this is the principle that we discussed.

How tragically possible it is to be committed to a need and not to be committed to Christ. As Moses was committed to the need of his people, was not committed to God. And flew in a gypsy, became a murderer instead of a missionary and was chased into oblivion for 40 years to be useless to God or man because he committed himself to a task, but not to God.

Preacher, you can commit yourself to your pulpit and not commit yourself to Christ. And you can work yourself to the bog in selfless devotion to your people. And yet your committal being to your church and not to Christ is such that he, Christ, cannot commit himself to you.

Do you realize that you can commit yourself to the will of God in such a way that you do not commit yourself to God himself? There are some folk committed to the will of God in such a way that they have become useless to God. Can you imagine, can you conceive that as being possible? The Bible is full of illustration. Take Abraham.

What did God say to Abraham? Abraham was promised by God that in his seed, a nation, a seed, singular, should be born, in whom all the famines of the earth should be blessed. God said to Abraham, you're going to have a little son. This is my will.

And of this son, a nation will be born, and of that nation, the Messiah. So what was the will of God concerning Abraham? The will of God concerning Abraham was that Abraham should have a little boy.

And Abraham made the supreme blunder.

He committed himself to the will of God, but he did not commit himself to the God whose will it was.

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