

In 1962, in his book, *The Structures of Scientific Revolutions*, scientist Thomas Kuhn coined the term—“paradigm shift.” In its most basic sense, a paradigm is a way of seeing, thinking, or understanding. When we say to ourselves, or others—*that’s just the way things are*, or, *that’s how it works*—we’re describing a paradigm. A paradigm shift takes place when a better explanation of the data, or of reality itself, is set forth. As we shift from one paradigm to another, we change the way we think; we leave one set of assumptions and expectations behind in favour of a new set of assumptions and expectations.

The word “shift” may conjure images of a person driving a car with a manual transmission. We bring the RPM’s up to the right level, push in the clutch, shift into a higher gear, and we pick up speed. It all sounds so *smooth*. But shifting one’s paradigm is rarely smooth, more often it’s painful and anxiety-producing. Shifting paradigms rarely happens without a precipitating crisis; one’s framework of understanding is torn down, and something new is constructed out of the rubble.

In 1543, Nicolas Copernicus published the heliocentric theory; he formulated a model that placed the Sun—not the Earth—at the centre of the Universe. At the time, the geocentric theory—the Earth at the centre—had been established for 1800 years; with Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton, the geocentric apple cart was turned upside down. It’s not a stretch to say that this theory shifted the way people think about the world.

Another paradigm shift took place through the Industrial Revolution; it marked a major turning point in history. The shift from hand

production methods to machine methods led to unprecedented growth in terms of production, standard of living, and population.

And the paradigm shifts continue, even when we think there can’t possibly be any more change. Ken Olsen, engineer, and co-founder of Digital Equipment Corporation, had the following to say in 1977: “*There is no reason anyone would want a computer in his/her home.*” I suspect Ken wishes he could take those words back. From the personal computer, to the world wide web, to the smartphone; shifts in technology continue to have a profound effect on the way we think, communicate, and live.

Most of us adjust rather easily to small changes. Whether we view the change as positive or negative, a small change produces a small impact; we think the same, we act the same—life goes on as it did before. But when something unprecedented takes place, often, a paradigm shift follows—things can’t go back to the way they were.

As we continue in our series through John’s Gospel, once again, Jesus is front and centre, and once again, Jesus is disrupting the status quo. Last week, in John 1 and 2, we saw Jesus beginning to form His team. Those who began to follow Jesus had to let go of what they thought they knew about God, the world, and themselves, in order to embrace a new paradigm. This week, in John 2:13-22, Jesus moves from shifting the paradigm of a few disciples, to shifting the paradigm for all Israel.

If you have a Bible with you, please turn with me to John 2:13-22; if you are going to use the Blue Bible directly in front of you, you can find our text on page 861.

*“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.’*

*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.*

**illus:** Throughout history, people have painted, carved, and sculpted images of Jesus—there are too many to count. And often these images say more about us than they do about Him. Jesus has been portrayed as a 15th century European, as an African, and as blond-haired, blue-eyed Westerner.

My first Bible was filled with images of Jesus: surrounded by children, cradling sheep, healing people, and hanging on a cross, etc. Most of these images portray a nice, gentle, almost fragile, Jesus; the kind of guy you’d invite to a tea party, but not the kind of guy you’d want on your football team. We know what to do with a loving, healing, forgiving Jesus, but what do we do with an angry Jesus?

When Jesus arrived at the Temple, He didn’t introduce Himself to the Chief Priest, bow His knee in prayer, or preach a sermon—He began to drive people out. Imagine one of our ushers getting up in the middle of this service and start shoving people out the door.

We’re told that Jesus made a whip out of “cords;” the Greek word John employs is only used one other time in the New Testament, and there it is used of ropes on a ship. It seems that Jesus was improvising; He grabbed a nearby rope and began to use it to drive sheep and cattle out of the Temple. Jesus walked up to the people who were collecting the temple tax and He upended their tables, scattering coins everywhere.

There was no “*please,*” “*thank you,*” or “*if you don’t mind.*” Jesus was angry, forceful, and He imposed His will on those around Him. Initially, the vendors and money-changers would have watched in disbelief—*was this really happening?* But their initial disbelief would have given way to action: trying to corral their animals, or picking the scattered coins up off the ground.

And imagine the disciples: horrified, embarrassed, frozen—*what is Jesus doing?* It’s one thing to act irrationally in the privacy of your own home and it’s quite another to walk into the most importance place, in all of Israel, and cause a public disturbance.

In the writing of this account, John lays out what Jesus did, but in order to gain understanding, we need to get behind the *what* to the *why*. But before we get to the *why*, let me take a step back and offer a few observations that provide some context to what took place.

- The first observation has to do with John's reference to the Jewish

Calendar in vs. 13; we're told it was almost time for the **Passover**. The Passover festival celebrated the salvation God had won for Israel—they had been enslaved in Egypt, and God set them free. It's interesting to note, in Deuteronomy 12, that upon setting His people free, God instructed Aaron and Moses to institute a new “calendar” for Israel; the month in which they had been set free was to be the first month of their year.<sup>1</sup>

In the West, the month of January is a month for reflection and resolution; we remember the past year and resolve in the year ahead to *do* things differently, or, to *be* different. Passover had a similar function; it was a time to remember *that* they had been saved, and *why* they had been saved—to live in communion with God.

Over time, the celebration of the Passover grew into a multi-day festival that took place in Jerusalem. Luke, the Gospel writer, tells us that every year, as a boy, Jesus and his parents travelled to Jerusalem for the Passover (Luke 2:41). John tells us that on three occasions during His earthly ministry, Jesus was in Jerusalem during the Passover (John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55). Incidentally, this is the evidence for suggesting that Jesus' ministry spanned 3 years.

John's Gospel displays a literary sophistication, with double meanings scattered throughout. At a time when Israel flocked to the Temple to worship God, remembering His past salvation, Jesus appeared in the Temple and through word and deed called for a paradigm shift. Jesus points to Himself as the centrepiece of God's

activity, and the means through which God's salvation will come to the entire world.

- The second observation comes from vs. 14; all of the action takes place in the **Temple Courts**, by which John means *the Court of the Gentiles*.

On the screen behind me I have a scale model of the Temple in Jerusalem, and what looks like a wide open courtyard is the area referred to as the Court of the Gentiles. If you like, this was the sanctuary for non-Jews, it was the place for the nations to gather; it was set aside so that they too could draw near to God, to pray, to worship.

God loves the nations—every tribe, every people group. He loves those who are already committed to Him, and, those who have never even heard His name. God didn't choose Israel because they were better than other nations, He chose Israel to represent Him *to* the nations.<sup>2</sup>

In Isaiah 56:7, God spoke about His Temple saying, “*My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations*”. But when Jesus entered the Court of the Gentiles he was angered by what He saw and heard. It was noisy, smelly, chaotic! Instead of the murmuring of prayer, cattle were calling, sheep were bleating, and money-changers were haggling over exchange-rates.

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 12:1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 19:6.

What might have been convenient for commerce was preventing the nations from coming to seek, know, and worship God. Incensed, Jesus shouted, “*Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!*”

It’s worth noting that this is the first time that Jesus uses the word “Father” to describe His unique relationship with God. And in so doing, indirectly, Jesus claimed both intimacy and equality with God: He spoke with the Father’s authority, pronouncing God’s judgement on the Temple.

At this point I want to leave the observations behind and get to the heart of the matter—*why did John include this account in his Gospel?* On one level, Jesus’ actions in the Temple—while ruffling a few feathers—didn’t change anything. When the Temple authorities arrived, within a matter of minutes, the sheep were herded back to their pens, tables were turned right-side-up, and vendors got back to business as usual. We know nothing changed because three years later, Jesus went back to the Temple, and for the second time chased out livestock and overturned tables.

Let’s remember why John wrote his Gospel in the first place; he wants us to believe, as he does, that Jesus is the Messiah, God-in-the-flesh, sent to rescue the world.<sup>3</sup> John believes that Jesus is *the* link between heaven and earth, the centre of God’s saving activity. And Jesus said as much when confronted by the Temple authorities.

Note in vs. 18 that the authorities don’t ask why Jesus did what He did. Perhaps they agreed with Him—hosting a market inside the

Temple made worship difficult. But they were less concerned about the *why* question and more concerned about *who*; only a person with superior authority could get away with doing what Jesus did. Jesus’ actions indicated that He seemed to think He has this kind of authority. *If have come from God, and speak for God, then prove it by performing a miraculous sign.*

And Jesus proposed such a sign: “*Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.*” It’s clear from the text that the authorities took what Jesus said literally, and why wouldn’t they? But what becomes clear in this encounter, and in many future encounters, is that the spiritual leaders in Israel were blind to spiritual realities. God was standing in their midst, fielding their questions, doing the miraculous, and they missed it. They were so committed to their own paradigm—to their particular way of thinking—that they were blind to any other alternative.

“*They replied, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?’*” We know from history that construction of the Temple began in the 18th year of King Herod’s reign, 19 BC; if we do the math, it means that the date of this conversation is A.D. 27. Up to 18,000 men worked on the Temple, full-time, until it was finished in A.D. 64. They asked Jesus for a sign of His authority but they rejected the sign He offered—how could anyone rebuild the Temple in 3 days?

In vs. 21-22, John inserts the following editorial comment: “*But the temple [Jesus] had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from*

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<sup>3</sup> John 20:31.

*the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.”*

The authorities demanded a sign, Jesus offered one, and a few years later, the authorities fulfilled the sign when they destroyed Jesus’ body, but three days later, true to His word, Jesus was raised from the dead. On a separate note, we also know that the physical Temple was reduced to rubble in A.D. 70 and it has not been rebuilt since.

For hundreds of years, the Temple in Jerusalem served an important role in Israel. The Temple was meant to represent the dwelling of God on the earth. Politically, socially, culturally, the Temple was the “organizing centre” of Israel.<sup>4</sup> But in Jesus, a new organizing centre has come; God came to dwell with humanity, as a human being.

In John 1:14 we read, “*The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*” Jesus is God in the flesh, He is the link between heaven and earth, and in His coming, Jesus replaced the Temple as is the centre of God’s saving activity. And in this temple—in the body of Jesus Himself—the ultimate sacrifice would be offered to atone for the sin of the world.

**Application:** In the time remaining, I want to move from explanation to application; we know what Jesus did, and why, but what does this mean for us today? Let me suggest two paradigm shifts that arise from Jesus’ prophetic words and deeds; here’s the first:

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<sup>4</sup> Gary M. Burge, *NIV Application Commentary: John*, 99.

<sup>5</sup> Burge, 105.

**(1) We need to shift from private conviction to public practice.** As I was studying this week, one author made a provocative point. While this account took place at the Temple, a religious place, Jesus’ prophetic action clearly crossed over the boundaries of spirituality into politics.<sup>5</sup>

We live in a country where church and state have been separated into two distinct spheres. In one sense, this separation was made in recognition of the fact that not everyone shares the same faith perspective. Clearly there is some merit to this separation. The Church doesn’t dictate the laws of the land, under which all people—Christian, Muslim, and atheist—must abide. Similarly, the State doesn’t tell the church or mosque what to believe; there is freedom to practice religion, or not, as one sees fit.

But this separation of Church and State seems to suggest that religion—faith—is purely a matter of private conviction, which leads to the suggestion private matters shouldn’t be expressed in the public square. It’s a ridiculous notion of course. No one, including the secular atheist, is capable of keeping deeply held values entirely private—what we believe affects who we are, and we bring who we are everywhere we go.

That being said, the call to follow Jesus, inevitably, lead us out of the private sphere of personal spirituality, into the public sphere of neighbourhood, school, work, and yes, even politics. After all, *is Christianity a privately held moral philosophy, or is it something*

*more?*

If God wants the world back, if restoration of the world is His aim, then surely what we believe in private, must become public. And just as certainly, when our privately held convictions become public, they will cause a disturbance.

Isn't it enough to speak boldly in the church? I will say it plainly—**no, it is not enough**. It's not enough to retreat into the private sphere and practice a private spirituality; we are called to witness to Jesus Christ. If we let fear rule our hearts, we will never be a prophetic voice to our world. It's time to speak boldly and live vibrantly.

In Jesus, at the Temple, private conviction and public life collided. Jesus came to the centre of Israel's public life, and spoke against "*the way things were*". To borrow an analogy from Jesus, we cannot be "salt" in this world, if we remain in the salt shaker. We will not be "light" in this world, if we hide behind closed doors.

We need to shift from private condition to public practice. There's a second paradigm shift that is highlighted through Jesus' actions...

**(2) We need to shift from "me" to "we"**. Time and time again, Israel failed in her calling to be a light to the nations; the Church is ever in danger of the same failure. Bleating sheep and bellowing cattle weren't *the* problem, they were a symptom of the problem. Israel got in on God's salvation and were quite happy to keep the blessings and benefits to themselves. *God, save us but not them; heal us but not them; transform us but not them.*

Why does the church exist? For God? Yes, of course. To know, love Him, and praise Him? Yes, yes, and yes. But there is more. Jesus said, *My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations*.

Jesus didn't pronounce judgment on the Temple only to turn around and create a different kind of country-club called the Church. Jesus came to establish a rescue mission a few steps away from hell. If time can run out for prayerless temples, time can run out for self-serving churches.

One of our core values is maintaining a kingdom focus. We will pursue God's plan for our church, neighbours, city, and world. We strive to focus on other-centeredness and generosity and will regularly ask the questions: *Where is God working and how can we be involved? Where can we partner with others? How can we bless and provide for others?*

The Father calling *the Church*—generally—and North Shore Alliance—specifically—to live on mission, reflecting His love. The question is, *who is living at the margins that needs to be brought to the centre? Who have we counted as "out" that Jesus wants to invite in?*

Perhaps you're here this morning and you feel like you're on the outside looking in. Hear this—you are welcome in God's family. Jesus died for you. His forgiveness is wide enough, long enough, high enough, to include you. You don't need to get cleaned up before you turn to Him. He loves you and wants to give you new life.

**Conclusion:** Shifting one's paradigm is rarely smooth, more often it's painful and anxiety-producing. And shifting paradigms rarely

happens without a precipitating crisis. It's not surprising that personal crisis is often the reason people begin to consider spiritual matters. When life as we know it falls apart, we awaken to the possibility that there is something beyond us.

When God the Son became human, a new paradigm was ushered in—in Jesus we have a new way of thinking about God, ourselves, and the world. In one sense, with the coming of Jesus, everything has changed—things can't go back to the way they were. But in another sense, in both the past and present, some look at Jesus without really seeing; they hear without listening. We may be so committed to a particular paradigm that we are blind and deaf to spiritual realities. Are you blind and deaf to Jesus? Are you ready to consider Him? To follow Him?

**Pray**

**Worship**

**Benediction**