



Restoring Holiness

Dr. Russell Moore – June 10, 2018

Matt Chandler: Yeah! Praise God! I love that song, man. One of the great privileges I have in just kind of running in some of the lanes the Lord has, by his grace, put me is to meet these really ferocious men of God. Dr. Russell Moore is one of those men. He is the president of the ERLC (or the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission) that's a part of the Southern Baptist Convention.

He and his team interact with our government quite a bit and argue around matters of religious liberty and human dignity. With the SBC coming into town, we asked Russell if he'd be willing to come and preach for us at The Village Church. There are a couple of things I just want to say at the beginning. He is probably going to go about 33 or 34 minutes. That's not normal. You should *not* get used to that. You should not think, "Matt should be able to do that." You should just enjoy Russ's 33-minute proclamation of the gospel. Would you welcome Dr. Russell Moore?

Russell Moore: Good morning. If you would, turn in your Bibles to the gospel of John, chapter 2. While you're getting there, let me tell you what a joy it is to be here at The Village Church. I thank God every day to be able to partner with all of you here at The Village on the proclamation of Jesus Christ. It's a joy to be here with family today.

John 2. Let's begin reading with verse 13 and read on down through verse 22. Since these words are breathed out by the Holy Spirit and come with the exact same authority as if our Lord Jesus were standing here speaking them to us today, would you stand with me out of reverence for the voice of our King? The Holy Spirit says, through the apostle John...

"When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people 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 courts, 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! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!' His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' The Jews then responded to him, 'What 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.'

They 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." Let's pray.

Lord, we stand here right now this morning knowing we're not just standing in a room in a building in Texas right now. Lord, we're here in the name of Jesus Christ, which means we're joining ourselves to an already existing worship service in heaven. Lord, we can't see it right now by sight but only by faith that we are surrounded right now by myriads and myriads of angels, by a great cloud of witnesses.

Father, we are in your presence with glory we could not comprehend. Lord, would you speak to us this morning? Would you speak to us good news this morning by your Word? We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

You may be seated.

A year or so ago, there was an image that went viral all over the Internet from this young woman named Gabriela in Brazil who had gone to visit her great-grandmother. Her great-grandmother was a very devout, pious Catholic woman there in Brazil. She had in her home a little area in honor of Saint Anthony who she considered to be her patron saint.

She had a little figurine of Saint Anthony there in the house, and she would talk about this figure of Saint Anthony all the time until Gabriela (the great-granddaughter) was looking at Saint Anthony, and she said something like, "Yeah, he looks really saint-like. He is wearing a brown robe and looks really sort of blessed and kind of holy" until she noticed, "Wait a minute! He has pointy ears!"

She started doing a Google image search, and she came in and basically said, "Hey, Great-Grandma! This isn't Saint Anthony. This is a *The Lord of the Rings* action figure. So all of this time you've been

focusing on Saint Anthony, it's really Elrond of Rivendell, the elf lord, who is here in your house." She sent it around. People just kept sending this image and sending this image so it went all around the world.

It struck me when I saw this (although most of us in this room don't have little altar areas to saints in our houses). Most of us don't have devotion to saints like that. Most of us don't have figurines probably in our house of any sort like that. Most of us, though, probably know the feeling of saying, "What if all of the sorts of things I take for granted end up being illusions? What if what I'm doing is simply talking myself into thinking I am looking at Saint Anthony when I'm looking at an elf?"

In our case, "What if what I'm doing in following Christ and serving the Lord actually just ends up doing things that are useful to me?" There are many people in the culture around us who would think that's what religious belief of any sort really is. That what we want to do is to have a certain kind of life, have a certain kind of stability, have a certain kind of community, and Jesus is sort of the tool we use, the action-figure toy we use to kind of get that.

They're wrong, but there's a sense in which that could always be the temptation the Bible warns us about over and over and over and over again (the temptation to try to find a useful God). As a matter of fact, when the Bible warns against idols and against idolatry, sometimes these are idols that are of the nations. Sometimes, though, these are idols that are named god. "This golden calf is the god who brought you out of Egypt."

Sometimes we can construct useful illusions and useful idols that enable us to live and to carry out our lives the way we want to carry them out and to imagine we're doing that while following Jesus. What I would suggest to you, though, is there's going to come a time in your life, there's going to come a time in the church around the world, in which Jesus doesn't leave us with our useful god. Jesus interrupts.

Sometimes this feels like a crisis, and it's the sort of crisis, I think, we see right here in this text in the gospel of John. Jesus here is going into the temple. It's the Feast of the Passover. He is walking into a place that's very familiar to him, familiar to him in the Gospels from eight days after he is born (at his circumcision). It's familiar to him when he is 12, and he is left behind there in the temple, and he is questioning the religious leaders.

Now he is coming back into the place where God says, "I'm going to put my name, and I'm going to put my presence here in the temple." When he gets there, he is acting in a way that seems not very Jesus-like. You look at Jesus all throughout the rest of the Gospels, and in almost every instance, he seems to be the most decaffeinated person in the room.

Everybody else is panicking when the boat is capsizing on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus is asleep. When they rattle him awake to say, "We're about to die," Jesus' response is, "Why are you panicking?" You rattle *me* awake with nothing going on, and I'm cranky and startled, panicky, much less when I'm in a boat that's about to shipwreck. Jesus calmly speaks to the winds and the waves.

When Jesus is being arrested, the other disciples are freaking out. Peter is taking a sword trying to cut people's ears off. Jesus simply calmly says, "Put away your sword" walking toward arrest. Here Jesus seems to be having a kind of meltdown. It must have seemed to the disciples around him like, "Man! He probably needs to take a vacation or something," because there is a sort of passion that is happening here that doesn't seem to make sense.

He is coming into a place where you have a group of people who are exchanging money. You have people coming from all around the region. They're coming in. They have different kinds of currency. They're exchanging the money so they can do...what? So they can sacrifice to God as God has commanded. They're purchasing animals, but they're purchasing animals not at some kind of a livestock auction. They're doing it in order to obey God's Word in sacrificing to him.

They're doing here (it seems) everything right, and Jesus comes in and clears the room. He clears the area with a voice of passion and of authority in a way that I would suggest to you Jesus continues to do over the years after his resurrection right until the present moment, even in your life.

What's happening here is Jesus is doing something, John says, that is in light of the cross. Now why he is doing this? Why is Jesus reacting this way when he comes in and he sees the marketplace? Well, I would suggest there are kind of two directions here. Both have everything to do with why Jesus is so upset.

One of those has to do with holiness, with relatedness to God. Notice what Jesus says when he comes in. He says, "You have turned my Father's house into a marketplace. You've turned my

Father's house into a mall here." Now there's nothing wrong with a marketplace. Scripture never denounces a marketplace. Jesus doesn't denounce a marketplace.

The things that are happening here right now seem to be completely normal, everyday sort of things that would take place. That's exactly the problem. Jesus comes in and says, "This is to be my Father's house! The temple is to be the place where God's presence is." That's the reason why you couldn't go skipping on back into the Holy of Holies. The presence of God is there. The holiness of God is there.

The people are streaming there toward the temple because they know that's where heaven and earth are joined, in the temple of God. Jesus says, "You are making this that is supposed to be set apart, that is supposed to be holy, something that is everyday, something that is normal, something that is removed of all of its awe."

Now the reason this has everything to do with us (even though we say, "Well, we don't have a physical temple where we all gather once a year,") is the New Testament says with the church (not the *buildings* of the church but with the *people* of the church) God is constructing a temple that is made of living stones.

What does that mean? That means God is identifying himself and dwelling with his people within the church such that the apostle Peter says, "You are to be holy and distinct from all of the other nations of the world." This is not just a group of people who are gathered together who have the same opinions. It's not even just a group of people who are gathered together who have the same religion. It's a group of people who are being built up into a dwelling place of God, and Jesus says, "This is to be holy."

Now it would have been startling to everyone in the room to see Jesus reacting this way because they didn't start the marketplace that week. This had been going on for a long time. This was something that actually served in everyone's mind the worship of God. It wasn't anything that was immoral. It wasn't anything that was meant to be disturbing.

Everyone probably was standing around, saying, "What is going on? The tables are all being turned over. There are cows running everywhere. We have doves flying everywhere. What just happened here?" "I don't know! Jesus shoved things. This I know. That's all I know. We don't know what's going on here."

"Yet what's happening here," the Scripture says, "is zeal for my Father's house, passion for the place where God resides, the place where God's presence is." Jesus says, "I will make that holy." Now it is easy for us to think about all of the benefits that come with following Christ in a way that can actually replace Christ.

It's easy sometimes for us to think about, "Well, Jesus makes marriages better" (for those of you who are married), or, "Jesus enables you to deal with people better in the workplace," or, "Jesus enables you to have a forgiving spirit when you've experienced something that's bad." All of those things that are benefits of the gospel sometimes we can make those things so central that Jesus just really becomes a mascot to carry those things out.

We can get into the everyday sort of rhythm and flow of life in a way in which the holiness of God is completely eclipsed and in which the church can become unholy, not simply because the church is immoral or not simply because the church is doing something that is scandalous, but because the church becomes just the same as everybody else with the same worries, the same concerns, the same fights, the same bickering. Jesus says, "My Father's house is to be holy, directed toward God."

It's not just holiness here at the *vertical* level. I think it's also reconciliation at the *horizontal* level. Jesus says elsewhere in the Gospels, "My Father's house is to be a house of prayer for all people." The marketplace here is built at the court of the nations, at the place where those who were outside of the people of God would come in order to give worship to the God of Israel.

It would be easy to think, "Okay, we have to enable people to be able to worship. So where are we going to set that up? We're going to set that up at the least important place, which is the place where the outsiders are, the place where the people who aren't as important right now are."

The temple here is becoming a place in which certain people were becoming invisible. Jesus says no. Isaiah tells us this will be a house for *all* of the peoples. The Scripture tells us God is going to return to his temple, and when God returns to his temple he returns to his temple with a kind of judgment. It's not a judgment to destroy it but a judgment to purify it, to make it holy.

Zechariah says in the day the Lord comes back to his temple there will no longer be a trader (somebody who trades) in the house of the Lord. That's a word that can also mean "Canaanite." It can be synonymous. It's somebody who is one of the people who is outside of the people of God.

Jesus comes in, and in cleansing the house of God, he is saying, "You are marginalizing the nations (those who are the outsiders), and in doing that, you are acting like the nations. You are acting like the Canaanites." Because the way of the world is to simply say, "Who are my people? I'm going to build these alliances with whoever thinks like me, with whoever shares the same concerns I have. Those are the people who are my people, and then those over *there* are the people who are somebody else's people."

No! The temple of God is one where God says you aren't just an association. You're not an alliance. You're not just gathering together in some Darwinian sense to protect yourselves from everybody else. No. The church as the temple of God is a sign to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places that you are not here in the same way you would be gathered together if Jesus were still dead.

You instead are gathered together sometimes having absolutely nothing else in common except for the blood of Christ and the Spirit of God, which is one of the reasons it's so difficult sometimes to live together as the church and to get along together as the church. We're being brought from all of these different places and all of these different backgrounds.

So there are some of you in this room who have spent most of your life enslaved to substances and then others of you who may have spent most of your life enslaved to the sort of, "If I do all the things right, then somehow I'm going to make it all right in life." Both of you are together in the same body, and sometimes you can't even understand what's going on with one another.

As God is forming that temple together, the temptation can be to make certain people around us invisible because we turn the worship we have toward God into something that is a tool for ourselves.

I was in a church I served really early on in my ministry. We had an elderly woman in the congregation who was going through dementia. It was a fairly serious form of dementia, but she could still live at home. She came to church every single Sunday. I would be preaching, and she would just randomly yell out in the middle of the service. The problem was she would yell out strings of profanities.

Now this was a really, really sweet, proper, in-church-every-single-week lady, which is why those profanities were in her mind, because she was shocked by them. Things she would hear, she would take notice of them. "That's bad. That's shocking." That sort of embedded into her mind and came out. She would yell out, "Well, you blankety-blank-blank-blank! Blankety-blank-blank-blank!"

I found something happening in my heart where while she is yelling this out, I am looking around. I'm saying, "Who do we have visiting with us today who is going to be totally freaked out by this taking place? What mom has just brought her 4-year-old kid in here who says, 'Hey, Mom. What does blankety-blank-blank mean?' It's not what they're intending to learn at church today." I'm trying to filter through it.

I look at this other group of ladies over here, thinking, "How upset are they about this, and how upset are they going to be with *me* about this?" One day a group of those ladies came up and said, "Brother Russ, when Miss So-and-so starts cussing, it seems like you're embarrassed." I said, "Yeah! I guess I am." They said, "Well, we just were here to rebuke you for that because she can't help this, and when she is screaming out this stream of profanities here, well, that's just her way of saying, 'Amen!'"

If we're going to be the body of Christ to her, then we need to stop worrying about what everybody else is going to think when that takes place and instead say to the outside world around us, 'If you want to know the kind of church we want to be, we want to be the kind of church where our sister who is suffering and who is screaming out things that would humiliate her in any other period of her life doesn't embarrass us.'

We love her, and we receive her. She is welcome here because every single one of us is bringing to the table all kinds of other things that need to be borne up by everybody else that maybe aren't quite as visible as what she is grappling with right now. That's what the church does."

I was convicted to the heart because I realized, "I'm up here teaching about the worship of God, leading people in the worship of God, but the worship of God has become more important to me than her," which means the worship of God had become a tool for me for something other than the worship of God. That is easy to do!

Jesus comes in and says, "This place at the temple, this holy place, is a place where all of the nations are to come in order to cry out in confession of sin, in order to hear a word of welcome from God. Don't turn it into a marketplace. Don't turn this into something you can use."

Why does he do this? He does this because Scripture says when his disciples hear him talking, they remember the words from the psalmist, "**Zeal for your house...**" Passion for your house. "**...will consume me.**" Literally it's "has torn me up." In other words, "The sort of passion I have for this house is going to end up sifting me apart."

Now think about that for a minute. Think about that for a minute! Following Jesus will end up killing you in some way or the other. I heard someone on television one time come out and say, "You know, being a Christian is so wonderful that even if it weren't true, even if Jesus were still dead, I would still want to be a Christian because it's the best way to live."

That's easy to say sitting on a couch on television, but you can't translate that into Sudanese. You cannot translate that into any setting where confessing Jesus Christ as Lord means there are going to be people outside of your house dragging you out of there, which is the experience of most of the people in the world over most of the period of time of the Christian church.

Confessing Jesus as Lord is not the way to get the peaceful, tranquil, quiet life you want. Confessing Jesus as Lord is not the way to please your mom and dad. Confessing Jesus as Lord is not the way to make sure everybody thinks you're a good person. Confessing Jesus as Lord ultimately is going to tear you to pieces, because Jesus says, "If you're following me, you're going to follow me where I'm going, and where I'm going is to the cross."

You will come along later, and someone will carry you where you do not want to go. The mistake we often have in the Christian life is to say, "Oh, well, I know where I want to go (to heaven). Jesus is the way I get there. So I come through Jesus, and then I just follow my spiritual GPS I already have set in this map of my life toward the presence of God in heaven."

Jesus says, "No, no, no, no, no." When you come to faith in Christ, you are saying, "Wreck my life. Wreck my religion. Wreck the way I think." Jesus comes in just as he does here with the temple. He does not turn those tables over because he *dislikes* the temple. He loves it! He turns the tables over *because* he loves the temple.

Jesus comes in and takes every aspect of unholiness in our lives and within the church, and what he does is to create a crisis. We don't want that. We don't want that personally. When people come up and say, "How are you doing?" we want to say, "Oh, I'm blessed. Everything is good. Everything is great!" As a church, we want to make sure our public relations are so good with the outside world that the outside world is saying, "Look at how together and how successful all of them are."

Jesus doesn't allow us to do that, because Jesus comes in and forces that point of crisis where we individually and then we as the church have every little thing we're holding onto in order to say, "*This* is the way I'm going to make it through life. I'm taking *that* away and taking *that* away and taking *that* away so you have nothing else that gives you confidence and stability except for Jesus Christ and him crucified."

It's not just the marketplace of what you're accustomed to in your life. The problem is when that starts happening, it can feel agonizing in a way that if you're not ready for it, you can assume that means God is angry with you, or you can assume God has left you. The tables being turned over there in the temple is not a sign that God is absent; it's a sign that God is there! It's not a sign God wants to shut the temple down; it's a sign he wants to come to it.

When you are going through this intense time of spiritual warfare where you're saying, "I'm having to fight and to struggle all the time with these patterns of sin that I keep having to put to death, with all of these struggles that are going on that I don't know what to do about," you think, "This means somehow God is angry with me. God is harsh toward me."

We imagine every other Christian is leading this tranquil, peaceful life just quoting hymns and praise choruses to themselves all the time. Here I am in this state of emergency, fighting and struggling with myself all of the time. You think that is evidence the Spirit is not... No, that is evidence that the Spirit is *there*.

The Devil is more than happy for you to live a tranquil life. The Devil is more than happy for a church to have a good reputation, to be perfectly untroubled everywhere, to have nothing going on within it as long as that church is not proclaiming the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If the issue is the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, then that means the destruction of the principalities and powers of this world. You can tell in your own life, if you are going through a period where everything has become so routine that you find it very difficult to pray, it's probably

time, if you belong to Jesus Christ, for him to come in and interrupt something in your life, because prayerlessness is not a sign that you're not disciplined enough; prayerlessness is a sign that you are too confident in yourself. "I don't need to cry out to God."

When you are in a car that is spinning out of control, heading off of an icy road, you do not have to say to yourself, "You know, I probably need to pray now. It's a good thing to do to be a Christian." No, you're in a state of desperation. "God!" When someone you love is in a hospital bed and you don't know whether or not he or she is going to live, you don't have to say to yourself, "Well, you know, it's probably that time of day where I ought to pray." You're crying out, "God, will you please hear me?"

Why? Because you're desperate. You know you can't do anything about this situation, and only God can! That is not God being hateful to you. That is God coming to you in your point, in your moment, of need. Jesus creates this crisis within our lives so he can conform us to the cross. "Zeal for your house has torn me up, has torn me to pieces."

Why? Because Jesus says when the people gathered around say, "Give us a sign you have the authority to do this. You can't just come in here turning over tables..." anymore than I as a guest here at The Village Church can come in and say to everybody, "We're moving the kids' area over there to the backside." You'd say, "Well, who are you? Well, who gives you the right to say that?"

"Who are you to come in here and tell us where we're going to have the marketplace?" Jesus says, "Here is the sign. Tear this temple down, and in three days I will build it up." Again, it sounds crazy. They're probably saying, "We took 46 years to build this thing. I don't care what kind of training you had from your daddy in the construction business. You can't build this in three days!"

The temple he is referring to, he says, is his body. Jesus is headed toward the cross, but he is not headed toward the cross alone. He is taking us through the cross with him, not toward destruction and not toward death but toward...what? "I will build it up again. I will rise. I will lay my life down in order that I may take it back." The crisis is a crisis that is not for our ill. It's a crisis that is for our good!

I had a friend who was talking to a group of college students who weren't very familiar at all with Christianity. They were from all around the world. He was talking about Caesarea Philippi where Jesus said, "**...upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail**

against it." My friend was saying, "What you have to understand about Caesarea Philippi is it's outside of the normal geography of the people of God."

There were all of these pagan temples around there. There were little temples to the goat god Pan, and there were temples to Caesar as god. There were all of these things. A student in the room said, "Wait a minute! So Jesus actually saw pagan temples?"

"Yeah!"

"Jesus was actually in a place where there were pagan temples?"

"Yeah!"

The student said, "Well, then why was the only temple he ever tore up his own?" Because Jesus says, "When I come to you, even in ways that are uncomfortable, even in ways that can feel disrupting, and even in ways that tear down all of the illusions you previously had, it is not because I'm against you but because I am for you. It's because you are my people that I shape you, disciple you, and form you for...what? So you may be joint heirs with me."

Jesus is consistently saying to his church as we go through all of the hubbub that happens in all of the cultures around us, and he is saying to you as parts of the church as you go through all of the hubbub that happens in your life, "Do you want a successful life or do you want me? Do you want a Bible Belt or do you want Christ and him crucified? Do you want a life your neighbors will envy or do you want the kingdom of God which endures forever?"

If what you want is for me to simply carry out your agenda, I'm not going to do that. If I did, you would hate it. But if you confess me," Jesus says, "as Lord, then trust me to build my Father's house. Trust me to put you in your place in my Father's house. Trust me to through you call all of the nations together. Trust me to carry you where you do not want to go."

Jesus is passionate for the temple because his Father's presence is there, and Jesus is passionate for you because his Father's presence is there. He is passionate for his church because his Father's presence is there. Sometimes it will feel like you're being wrecked. Sometimes it will feel as though your religion is being shredded.

But if you belong to Christ, where he is leading you is toward the point where you realize, "I have nothing to lose because I am crucified with Christ. I am a dead person, and I have everything to gain because I'm alive in Jesus Christ, which means I cannot do this. Jesus comes in and overturns things in my life."

I'm wanting to go over here to the edge of this cliff. I feel this staff, and I feel this rod coming against me. I think, "This means my Shepherd doesn't like me. This means my Shepherd is angry with me. This means my Shepherd doesn't think I'm doing enough for him anymore."

Jesus says, "I am the Good Shepherd. My rod and my staff are meant to comfort you, to put you in line so I can carry you where you don't know where to go but where you will thrive forever." It's easy for us to just have all of the everyday, necessary things come in in such a way that we are robbed of a sense of holiness and distinctness. We are robbed of the joy of being indwelt by the Spirit together by bearing one another's burdens.

When we see Jesus passionate about an agenda that is not necessarily ours, we realize we are not praying to a dead action figure. We are standing here today no matter what is going on in your life with someone who is standing in the Holy of Holies not made with human hands but in the heavenly places, not with the blood of turtledoves, goats, and cows but with his own blood.

He is praying not generically for the church, for people, or for the world but praying specifically for you, knowing everything you would not want in a thousand years to be placed on this screen up here about your past or your present, knowing all of those things and yet still loving you, pursuing you, not shocked by you at all, and saying to the Father, "This is our beloved child in whom we are well-pleased. Hear my prayer as I intercede for her. Hear my prayer as I intercede for him."

When those prayers come through Jesus Christ, he is heard. How do you know he is heard? Because God has already shown you by pulling him out of a hole in the ground in the Middle East and sitting him on the throne of the universe forever.

A little bit of disruption, a little bit of crisis, a little bit of conformity to the cross, a little bit of uncomfortable lordship, a little bit of humiliation before our family, our friends, our neighbors, or the world can be a crisis, but a crisis is a turning point. The greatest crisis we have is the cross, because the only temple he has ever torn up is his own, and the only temple he is building is his own. Let's pray.

Lord, I pray for the men and women in this room. I pray for those who might be in this room who wonder whether or not they're good enough to be received by you. They may think, "Well, you know, this gospel is for people who are kind of Christian-y sort of people, but I'm not like that." Lord, I pray you would let that person know he or she is not here by accident. You orchestrated that they would be here, and you orchestrated over 2,000 years for a message to get directly to that person in order to say, "You are loved. You are known. Come to me and receive life."

Lord, I pray for those in this room who have already been joined to Christ through the cross and resurrection and, Lord, those who are having a difficult time. Some of them in this room are going through a time of dryness. Lord, they're actually seeking (or *should be* seeking) a disruption from you. Lord, would you make your presence known for them?

There are others in this room who are going through a difficult time right now, and they don't know where you're leading them. They can't figure it out. Lord, would you give them the freedom not to have to know right now but to trust you? Lord, would you make us holy? Would you make your church a place where your glory is visible? We ask this, Father, in Jesus' name, amen.