

John, Part 7: Jesus and the Temple, John 2:12-22

John 2:12 ESV After this (the wedding at Cana) he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days. **13** The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. **14** In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. **15** And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. **16** And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." **17** His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." **18** So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" **19** Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." **20** The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" **21** But he was speaking about the temple of his body. **22** When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

- I. This morning, as we continue our study of the gospel of John, we find ourselves at John's account of Jesus cleansing the temple of the merchandisers and money-changers, the Jew's indignation because of this act, and Jesus response to them.
 - A. By way of a disclaimer, I am not going to spend a lot of time on Christ cleansing the temple, simply because I preached a message using John's account of this event as my text as recently as August 28th. If you are interested in what I said, you can go to cityviewlubbock.org and listen.
 - B. I do, however, want to point out a couple of things about this odd account from the life of Christ.
 1. This is one of the handful of things that both John and all the other gospel writers tell of. You can find the other accounts in Matthew 21, Mark 11, and Luke 19. All four accounts are very similar with only minor variations.
 2. The one glaring difference between the account of John and the other writers is the placement of this event in the chronology of Christ's life.
 - a) Matthew, Mark and Luke all place the cleansing of the temple in the last week of Christ's life after he enters Jerusalem just before the crucifixion. John, however, places it right at the beginning of his book in chapter 2.
 - b) There are a couple of possible reasons for this...
 - (1) Some speculate that Christ actually cleansed the temple twice, at both the beginning and end of his ministry. However, since the accounts of John and the synoptics are so similar, it's unlikely that this happened twice, but instead are different accounts of the same event.
 - (2) Others have conjectured that John haphazardly placed things out of chronological order; relating events in a "stream of consciousness" manner, as you would when talking to a friend you have known for a long time about past events of which you were both familiar.

- (3) Though it is clear that John did rearrange chronological events (like this one), it is unlikely that it was haphazard, but rather intentional. What do we mean by that?
- C. On closer examination, the relationship between the **structure** of John's gospel and **events** he chooses to recount suggests that he was far more concerned with the theology of the Christ rather than with a chronology of his life.
1. Remember, by the time of John's writing, 3 gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) had been written and widely circulated with a range of details of Jesus' life; what he did, who he was, what he said, etc.
 2. Therefore, John, the last gospel writer, could take the liberty of writing a very intentional analysis of why Christ's life mattered to the church, including to you and I. He did so by relating only a few events, and focusing on certain of Christ's teachings which more fully explain his mission.
 3. Consider this fact: We know that Christ lived on earth for approximately 33 years. 3 of those years were spent in public ministry. Of those three years, John writes about fewer than 30 specific days in his Gospel.
- D. So we can conclude that when John occasionally rearranges the chronology of Jesus' life, he is choosing certain events in order to introduce and discuss "big picture" themes. For example, we'll see him do this in chapter 6 with the feeding of the five thousand; and in chapter 11 with the resurrection of Lazarus.
- II. So what is the grand theme John is introducing and discussing in our text today? From the beginning to the end of our text this morning, the theme is the temple.
- A. Anytime you read a passage of scripture dealing with the temple you should pause and call to mind the significance of what you are reading.
1. You'll recall that when God led the people out their slavery in Egypt, about 1500 years before Christ's incarnation, he led them to Mt. Sinai in the Arabian desert where he gave Moses the 10 commandments.
 - a) While on the mountain, God also gave him detailed blueprints for a tent called the tabernacle or the "tent of meeting".
 - b) This tent would be the centerpiece of Jewish life. It was where the people would worship God through various sacrifices and where their most sacred symbol of worship, the Ark of the Covenant, was kept.
 - c) It was in the chamber of the tabernacle called the "holiest place" or the "holy of holies" where the high priest would make an annual sacrifice to atone for the sins of the entire nation,
 2. But most importantly, the tabernacle was the earthly representation of the dwelling place of God. **Exodus 25:8 ESV And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.**
 - a) God symbolically chose this one place to call his dwelling place among his people, displaying his glory there in the form of a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night.
 - b) The tabernacle served it's purpose during the entire 40 year journey from Egypt to the promised land, and in total for about 500-600 years, until it was in ruins in the city of Shiloh.
- B. During the reign of King David, God made it known that his son, King Solomon, would build a magnificent, permanent temple for God in Jerusalem, and just as

God had said, Solomon indeed built a temple that was so amazing that it is regarded as one of the wonders of the ancient world.

1. Its grandeur far surpassed that of Moses' tabernacle, yet the purpose it served was the same. It was a place of worship and sacrifice, and a dwelling place for God that was intended for all generations.
 2. However, 373 years later, because of the idolatry of the people, the temple is destroyed, and the people are exiled to Babylon for a period of 70 years.
- C. After the seventy years of captivity, a man named Zerubbabel, with permission from Cyrus, the King of the Persians, began rebuilding the temple, though it was never quite as glorious as Solomon's original.
1. However, this rebuilt temple had a very interesting prophecy spoken over it by the prophet Haggai, even after he pointed out that there was no one who still recalled the glories of the original temple, he said...
 2. **Haggai 2:9 ESV** The *latter glory* of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts. And *in this place I will give peace*, declares the Lord of hosts.
 3. This prophecy would find its fulfillment in the fact that God himself, in the form of Christ would one day physically enter that temple!
- D. This promise seemed somewhat empty shortly after it was given, though, because the new temple was eventually desecrated by Greek pagans during the Seleucid empire, under the reign of Antiochus Epiphanies (whose blasphemous name meant "God Manifest").
1. But the Jews of that time resisted fiercely for the glory and sanctity of the temple, and eventually, the temple was cleansed and worship restored.
 2. By the time that the Roman Empire came to power in Judea, the temple and the mosaic law had the enthusiastic support of a new, highly strict and conservative party called the Pharisees, who took it upon themselves to ensure strict compliance to the old traditions among the people.
- E. Lastly, right before the time of Christ, the puppet King of the Jews, Herod the Great, undertook a massive renovation effort on the temple in order to make a name for himself. This restoration was so thorough, that it seemed to be a return to the former glory of the temple.
- F. This history is very important for you to understand that the tabernacle, and the various incarnations of the temple, were highly important in the history, culture and worship of the Jewish people, comparable to nothing else!
1. The Tabernacle and the Temple represented the center of Jewish religion, politics, military might, etc. If the temple was OK, it meant peace.
 - a) **Habakuk 2:20 ESV** But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.
 - b) A functioning Temple meant that God was enthroned and residing among his people to administer justice and truth in the beauty of holiness.
 2. But when the Temple was not OK, sorrow and despair was the result.
 - a) **Lamentations 2:7 ESV** The Lord has scorned his altar, disowned his sanctuary; he has delivered into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces; they raised a clamor in the house of the Lord as on the day of festival.

- b) Because of this, the Jews (like in the days of Antiochus) considered any threat to the security of the temple as a threat to national security.
- III. So Jesus, the ultimate Jew, enters the temple, looks around, and is not pleased by what she sees. Those who should be most protective of the God's dwelling place have turned it into an unholy marketplace, even taking advantage of their brothers!
- A. His response is violent and immediate! He forms a weapon and begins laying stripes on the guilty and disrupting their profiteering.
1. As this is happening, the Holy Spirit, reminds Jesus' stunned followers of a passage from **Psalm 69:9 ESV** *For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.*
 2. This is saying that those who have slandered God, have by default, slandered Christ. Jesus, because he is God, takes any affront to the Father very personally!
- B. But watch what happens next! The Jews are astonished at the audacity of the country boy rabbi from Nazareth! They are convinced that they (certainly not he!) are the rightful custodians of the temple and the worship that occurs within it!
1. They ask, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" What they are really asking is, "Who do you think you are?!" If anyone is going to disrupt the temple, they better have a really good defense!
 2. They want a sign, so Jesus gives them the ultimate sign. **"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"**, he says.
- C. The Jews are convinced Christ has lost his mind! They remind him that the renovation of the Temple was a 46-year project!
1. What madness to think that he could destroy this magnificent place! And even if he could, to even suggest that he could rebuild it in 3 days was just too much!
 2. But what he said wasn't just considered to be crazy by the religious leaders, but a criminal act! When he was arrested, this statement of his was given as the primary piece of evidence against him.
 - a) **Matthew 26:59 ESV** *Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, 60 but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward 61 and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'"*
 - b) The people even used this statement as ground for mocking Christ on the cross. **Matthew 27:39 ESV** *And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads 40 and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."*
 3. But John makes it clear in our text that Christ wasn't talking about the building in Jerusalem, but the greater temple, the far superior dwelling place of God; the very Body of Christ. Remember Matthew's quote from Isaiah?
 - a) **Matthew 1:23 ESV** *"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).*

- b) Scripture makes clear that the way God has chosen to dwell among humankind is in the person of his only begotten son, Jesus, not a religious structure!
 - c) In fact, God never intended to be confined to either a tent in the wilderness or a temple in Jerusalem! Even Solomon, the great Temple builder of Israel, said **1 Kings 8:27 ESV** “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; **how much less** this house that I have built!”
- IV. We speak often around here of how that all scripture, Genesis to Revelation, finds its meaning and context only in the person of Jesus. Never in cleverly designed philosophies, or moral principles, or religious history. Until you see begin to Jesus on every page, you have no clue what the book is about!
- A. This may not be seen more clearly anywhere in scripture than in our text today. Notice the seamlessness of what Jesus does. He zealously drives out all of the human pollutants in the actual, brick and mortar temple in Jerusalem, then, without missing a beat, says, in essence, “I **am** the temple.” This was powerful, earth shaking revelation!
 - 1. The Jews thought that the Temple was necessary for God to have a dwelling place, a headquarters, a home base. But they entirely missed the fact that this revered building was a mere shadow of a far greater reality and substance. God’s “home base” is Jesus!
 - 2. **Colossians 1:19 ESV** For **in him** all the fullness of God was pleased to **dwell**, **20** and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Remember the prophecy that God would make peace in the last temple?)
 - a) This passage in Colossians means that it was in Jesus Christ that all of the majesty of the Father, the Power of the Spirit, and all the sacrifice and compassion of the Son made residence in the Body of Christ through the incarnation; no longer a building or a tent.
 - b) But that is only half of the mystery! Because the Bible says that we have been reconciled (made one) to God through Christ’s death and resurrection! The Apostle Paul declares, **1 Corinthians 12:27 ESV** Now **you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.**
 - B. Therefore, if the Body of Christ is the true Temple of God, his eternal dwelling place, and through Christ’s work you are that temple; where does Christ live?
 - 1. **2 Corinthians 6:16 ESV** What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For **we are the temple of the living God**; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”
 - 2. This reality should have tremendous implications for how we live! No where in the New Testament are we encouraged to live in a way that is less than **holy**. The Apostle Peter, under grace, under the New Covenant, points us back to the Old Testament book of Leviticus, where it says, “Be holy, says the Lord, for I am holy.”

- C. Like Christ, we are to demonstrate a constant, growing “zeal for his dwelling place”, which is the Body of Christ, of which we are all members.
1. **1 Corinthians 3:16 ESV** Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? **17** If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.
 2. We demonstrate zeal for his temple by keeping watch our personal holiness, driving out whatever is crass and earthly in us.
 3. But we also accomplish this by doing as it says in Hebrews 10, by spurring each other on to love and good deeds. This is not to be done as religious busybodies, but by mutual encouragement, and gentle, loving, and direct admonition.
- V. I want you to notice one last thing from our text today. **John 1:22 ESV** When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this (about the temple), and they **believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.**
- A. When this verse says that the disciples later recalled and “believed the scripture”, what scripture is it talking about?
 1. It is talking about Old Testament scripture! Why? Because until several years after the resurrection, there was no such thing as New Testament Scripture!
 2. Why is this of note? Because everyone of those disciples were good, synagogue-raised Jewish boys. Everyone would have balked at the suggestion that they did not believe the scripture!
 3. But John says that it was only until after the resurrection that they truly believed the scripture **because it is only Christ who is able to bring clarity to the scripture** so that we can ever really understand what it means.
 - B. This scripture makes it clear that we can never really believe the scripture until we believe “the word that Jesus had spoken”.
 - C. It is Jesus, and only Jesus, who can tell us who he is, who can tell us who we are, who tells us what matters, what brings life, and what causes death. It was he who famously said in John 14:6, not that he merely told the truth, but he said, **“I am the truth.”**
 - D. He is the true temple, and has the power to make us one with him so that **we become the actual dwelling place of God**, his very own body, the center of worship, praise, and the place of the final, complete, sacrifice that was pleasing to God.
 - E. **1 Corinthians 6:19 ESV** Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, **20** for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.