

Jesus is the Temple

John 2:12-25

Key Verse: 2:19

“Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.’”

In order to grasp the meaning of today’s passage, we need to understand the significance of the temple in Israel. The temple developed from the tabernacle in the time of Moses, which was God’s dwelling place among the people of Israel, where they could come and worship him and receive the forgiveness of sins. It was the center of their community life. This tabernacle was not designed by man, but by God. It was a reflection on earth of God’s dwelling place in heaven. It foreshadowed the coming of Jesus, who is its reality. So this tabernacle had meaning only as it pointed to Jesus; it was not intended to last forever. During the time of King Solomon, a temple based on the tabernacle was built according to God’s instructions. It lasted for four hundred years, and was then destroyed by the Babylonians. A second temple was built on the same site, after the Israelites returned from exile. In the time of Herod, this temple was renovated, and virtually rebuilt. This was the temple that existed during the event of today’s passage, and it had been under construction constantly for 46 years.

This temple was amazing to behold. It was covered by a dome of gold, and when the sunlight reflected upon it from the eastern sky it blazed with such light that the sun itself seemed to reside there. When Jesus’ disciples saw this temple they were totally enamored with its magnificence. But this temple was destroyed by the Roman army in A.D. 70. Since then, there has been no more temple building. Outwardly, this temple was glorious, but inwardly it was corrupted. Symbolically it lacked the ark of the covenant and the Shekinah, which is God’s glorious presence, among other things. Most importantly, it was being abused by the Jewish religious leaders who loved money and used it as a business. That is why Jesus, in today’s passage, cleared out the temple. In doing so, Jesus revealed zeal for his Father’s house and taught how the temple should be used. Moreover, Jesus declared that he is the temple. The visible temple no longer exists. Instead, where Jesus is, there is the temple: a Christian community, a house church or an individual. Let’s think about what it means to us that Jesus is the temple.

First, Jesus’ zeal for his Father’s house (12-17). After Jesus blessed the wedding at Cana in Galilee, he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples (12). After a few days, he went up to Jerusalem with his disciples. It

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was almost time for the Jewish Passover. According to Moses' Law Jewish men had to appear before the Lord in the temple three times a year: at the Passover, at Pentecost, and at the Feast of Tabernacles (Dt 16:16). Among the three feasts, the Passover was the greatest. It was a time to remember the hardship they had experienced as slaves in Egypt, and God's grace of deliverance. They were commanded to remove all yeast from their houses during the feast. This yeast refers to the bad influence that comes from sinful desires (1 Cor 5:6-7a). When people appeared at the temple, they were required to bring a gift to God (Dt 16:17). Worshipers who came from far distances, and even other countries, needed to buy cattle, sheep and doves to offer as sacrifices. A market was established for the purpose of helping travelers. To use this market, they had to convert their foreign currencies, which were stamped with symbols of pagan systems and idols, into temple currency, which was acceptable. Because of this, the temple became a business center and the religious leaders made a lot of money and opened some secret bank accounts.

When Jesus came to the temple, he saw that it was noisy - not with the sound of prayer, praise, and Bible study - but with mooing cattle, bleating sheep, shouts of merchants and tinkling coins. Jesus was indignant. He made a whip out of cords and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle. He scattered the coins of the moneychangers 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!”** (15-16) The fear of God came upon them. Jesus was acting wisely (Isa 52:13). Jesus did not blow up, expressing anger at random. He just drove out the animals without hurting them. Actually, this was fortunate for the animals since they were spared as sacrifices. Still, Jesus sent a very clear message not to use his Father's house for business. Here we see another side of Jesus. Jesus is full of truth, as well as being full of grace. Jesus is the God of righteousness, as well as being the God of blessing.

Jesus said, **“Stop turning my Father's house into a market.”** This had deep significance. The words **“my Father's house”** tell us that Jesus is the Son of God. So he had authority to act in the temple on his Father's behalf. He also teaches us how the temple should be used. The temple is the place where God the Father is present and he is the Sovereign Ruler over it. God is the object of worship, who deserves all glory, honor and praise. So the temple should be used to praise God, sing hymns and give thanks to him, including giving an offering; this is all part of worship. The temple was also the place where God speaks to his people. Exodus 29:42b-43 say, **“There I will meet you and speak to you; there**

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also I will meet the Israelites, and the place will be consecrated by my glory.” We can hear the word of God in the temple through Bible study. Most importantly, the temple was the place where sins are forgiven through the sacrifice of atonement. God is holy and we are sinners. We cannot approach the holy God without a sacrifice. Sin requires the shedding of blood. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Heb 9:22). We should shed our blood and die for our sins. But in his great mercy God provided the way for us to come to him. It was by establishing the sacrificial system in which the blood of animals was offered as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of people. In truth, animal blood is insufficient to atone for human sin. It only foreshadowed Jesus’ blood as the Lamb of God. Now we can receive forgiveness of sins and cleansing by Jesus’ blood. In this way we can have an intimate love relationship with him, like children with their father. All three synoptic gospels tell us that when Jesus cleansed the temple he quoted Isaiah 56:7, “My house will be a house of prayer for all nations.” God wants his children to pray for people of all nations to come to God for salvation.

The disciples were surprised because Jesus challenged the religious leaders who had great authority. No one could dare to resist them. But Jesus did. The disciples had never seen Jesus like this before. But they were not offended or scared. Rather, they understood that Jesus’ great zeal came from his love for God, remembering the Scripture: **“Zeal for your house will consume me”** (17). Here we learn Jesus’ zeal for his Father’s house. There are many kinds of zeal: zeal for power, zeal for money, zeal for fame and honor, zeal for academic achievement, zeal for pleasure, and so on. But these kinds of zeal are rooted in self-glory seeking. In contrast, Jesus’ zeal came from love for God and was rooted in seeking God’s glory. Throughout history, God has used those who have zeal for him. When Elijah had zeal for God, God used him greatly to bring many people back to God in the darkest time of Israel’s history. Paul taught in Romans 12:11 how all Christians should live: **“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.”** Once, Dr. Billy Graham was asked how to be a successful evangelist. He answered, “I have one passion and that is for Christ.” D. L. Moody said, “If I have to choose between a man with great zeal and little knowledge or a man with little zeal and great knowledge, I will always choose the man with great zeal and little knowledge.” **We need zeal for God. Lord, give us zeal for you!**

Second, Jesus is the temple (18-25). When Jesus cleared the temple, there were two responses. The disciples remembered the word of God and understood Jesus from God's point of view. On the other hand, the religious leaders were offended. They did not think about the truth of Jesus' words. They suppressed the truth by

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asking for a sign from Jesus to prove his authority (18). On another occasion, when the religious leaders asked for a sign, Jesus said, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah” (Mt 12:39). The religious leaders were wicked. Still, both times, Jesus granted them a sign. Look at verse 19. “Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.’” At that time, no one understood what Jesus meant; it was cryptic. Even Jesus’ disciples did not understand. Only after Jesus was raised from the dead were their spiritual eyes opened, and they could decode his words. Then they believed the Scripture and his words (22). We can learn here that when we don’t understand Jesus’ words we should not be rebellious like the religious leaders, but patient like Jesus’ disciples.

When Jesus said, “**Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days,**” the religious leaders assumed that he had become crazy and was blasphemous. They retorted, “**It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?**” The temple was regarded as sacred. When the Jews thought that Paul had desecrated the temple by bringing Gentiles into the inner court, they wanted to destroy Paul (Ac 21:28). More than forty men made a vow not to eat or drink until they had killed him (Ac 23:12-13). This shows how seriously they regarded the holiness of the temple. Eventually, on the basis of his words here, Jesus was accused by the Jews of blasphemy and was put to death (Mt 26:61). However, Jesus meant that his own body was the temple (21). This is a very significant truth. John 1:1 tells us that Jesus is, in very nature, God. John 1:14 says that he made his dwelling among us. The literal meaning of “dwelling” is “pitched his tent,” an allusion to the tabernacle. So the coming of Christ fulfills the Old Testament symbolism of God coming to dwell with his people in the tabernacle, which is the temple. This is what it means that Jesus’ body is the temple. However, when Jesus spoke here, he was in the process of fulfilling the temple function. In order to do this, Jesus had to go to the cross and die for our sins and rise from the dead. When Jesus died on the cross, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Mk 15:38). This curtain represented the separation between God and man because of sin. No one can break through the barrier between God and man. But God did through Jesus’ death on the cross. Then God raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him as both Lord and Messiah (Ac 2:36). This is what Jesus meant when he said, “**Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.**” After his death and resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven, and entered the heavenly sanctuary. In this way, Jesus became our eternal temple. Now the sacrificial system in the Old Testament - the priesthood, animal sacrifices, feast days - is obsolete. The temple building is also unnecessary. So we don’t need

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to go to Jerusalem and sacrifice animals for our sins. Also, we don't need human priests. Jesus fulfills all the functions of the temple perfectly. Jesus became our perfect sacrifice, offered once for all (Heb 10:10,14). Jesus is our Great High Priest, who intercedes for us at the right hand of God in the heavenly tabernacle (Heb 8:1-2, Ro 8:34b). Jesus became the new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is his body (Heb 10:20). Now we can come to God anytime, at any place, through the blood of Jesus. The author of Hebrews encourages us in 4:14-16, **“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”** Jesus became the temple to give us this amazing grace. Let's come to Jesus and enjoy this grace.

The temple is no longer a building, it is Jesus himself. In his upper room dialogue with his disciples, Jesus said, **“I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever - the Spirit of truth...I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you”** (Jn 14:16-18). Now Jesus dwells in individual believers through the Holy Spirit. Paul says, **“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body”** (1 Cor 6:19-20). God wants to use our bodies as holy temples. When our hearts have the cattle of lust, pride, and selfishness, and the sheep of jealousy, bitterness, and laziness, and the doves of slander, gossip and malice, God is not pleased with us and cannot use us. In 2 Timothy 2:20-21, Paul described two kinds of articles in a large house: some are gold and silver for special purposes and others are wood and clay for common use. Those who cleanse themselves from evil desires can be instruments for special purposes--made holy, useful to the master, and prepared to do any good work. So Paul encourages us, **“Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on God out of a pure heart”** (2 Tim 2:22). Apostle Peter also encourages us that as we come to Jesus, we are being built into his spiritual house - a temple of the Spirit - to be a holy priesthood (1 Pe 2:4-5). Now we are a **“chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession”** (1 Pe 2:9a). God wants to use us to save people from the darkness of sin and death and bring them into his wonderful light (1 Pe 2:9b). To people's eyes we may look like nobodies. No one is concerned about what we are doing. National media does not

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report about our one-to-one Bible study, disciple raising ministry, or prayer for all nations. Instead they report a lot about terrorism, wars, scandals, murders, robberies, violations and the like. But to God's eyes, we are somebody. We are very precious to God. God is living and working in the world through us. God's history is being made through us. We are history makers. All the noisy activities of worldly people will fade away into nothing, but the work God does through his people lasts forever. In this sense, our International Summer Bible Conference is very important. God hears all our prayers for the conference and answers them. When we prayed for Gustavo Prato, he was granted a USA visa, even though he had been denied three times previously. God has made us temples of the Holy Spirit and wants to use us as a royal priesthood. Let's live up to this glorious calling.

In verses 23-25, people in the crowd are contrasted with Jesus' disciples. The crowd believed Jesus based on his miracles. But Jesus did not entrust himself to such faith because Jesus knew all people. However, the disciples believed in Jesus based on the words of God. They took root in Jesus and had an intimate relationship with him. So they could grow as part of Jesus' temple.

Jesus is the temple. He lives forever (Heb 13:8). Jesus is present in our congregation, in our families, and in each of us through his Holy Spirit. Let's come to Jesus for grace and mercy and to serve the living God as a royal priesthood. Let's have vision, as Isaiah did regarding the temple of the Lord: **“Many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths. The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem’”** (Isa 2:3). May the word of the Lord go out to Chicago campuses and the nations of the world!