

THE SIGN OF THE TEMPLE

John 2:13-25

Key Verse: 2:19, “Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.’”

In the last passage, Jesus turned water to wine at a wedding. What a nice blessing for the wedding guests! We really like this Jesus, don't we? After all, who doesn't want nice blessings like that?

In today's passage, we see a very different side of Jesus—Jesus' holiness and righteousness. Jesus expresses righteous indignation and drives out temple merchants and their animals. Christians don't get to choose which Jesus we can follow. He's the same Jesus. We must take seriously Jesus' challenge and rebuke in this passage, if we are to be his true disciples. May God help us to learn the right attitude toward the Father's house and the true meaning of the temple from Jesus.

I. The Father's House (13-16)

It was almost time for the Jewish Passover. The Passover was one of the three annual holy days which all faithful Jews had to attend. The Passover reminded the people of Israel of God's great deliverance of their ancestors from slavery in Egypt. They celebrated this event every year. By Jesus' time, they had been celebrating this for 1,500 years. Anyone within a day's journey from Jerusalem, had to travel up to the city to observe the Passover. Like all faithful Jews, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Where did Jesus go and what did he find? He went to the temple. And he found in the temple courts people who were selling cattle, sheep and doves. Others were sitting at tables exchanging money. Why? Travelers to Jerusalem came to worship God. Part of worshiping God was offering an animal sacrifice to God, like an ox or a sheep or a dove. These offerings were required by God of his people. Leviticus describes five offerings requiring animal sacrifices. These offerings had to be without defect. So, selling animals at the temple would've been a profitable business for the sellers. Probably the sellers also paid for their space in the temple courts. Perhaps they even bribed the temple officials in order to keep their sales booth.

The other people mentioned were money changers. Basically, they were the Jerusalem currency exchange right at the temple, like you see at many airports, to catch many travelers. People came from all over the world to Jerusalem for the Passover. They needed the proper currency to buy the animals and to offer the temple tax. Money changers made a lot of money. We know the Bible warns that money is a root of all kinds of evil. Also, Jesus taught, "You cannot serve both God and money" (Mt 6:24).

Jesus was not happy with this scene at the temple. He was not pleased with the way the temple was being used. The outer temple courts contained the limited space where the Gentiles could go at the temple to worship God and pray. But with all the business going on, there was too much noise and distraction with people bargaining about prices, perhaps like the floor of a stock exchange.

Now we see angry Jesus. Look at verses 15-16, "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!"

Generally, it is not good to get angry. Usually our anger comes from getting our pride or feelings hurt. James 1:20 tells us that "human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires." That's human anger. But Jesus' anger was different. Jesus' anger was holy and righteous. Jesus was full of righteous anger for God's honor. Jesus never sinned. So his anger was justified. With a whip of cords, Jesus drove out all the sellers and their animals. He scattered coins and pushed over their tables. To the dove sellers he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!"

Why did Jesus act so extremely? Why didn't he ask them politely to take their business elsewhere? Sometimes sin calls for drastic measures. Jesus said, "If your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out," and, "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off." Please don't actually do that. Jesus uses hyperbole to express the seriousness of the matter. Sin is a very serious matter. Things that cause sin must be removed from our lives. In the movie, "Fireproof", a man with a pornography addiction destroys his computer with a baseball bat. Perhaps he could've just sold his computer and bought some good

Christian books or he could've gotten an accountability partner. Anyway, he dealt practically with his sin.

Why was this such a serious matter to Jesus? There are two reasons given.

First, things were there that shouldn't be. Jesus' words reveal why he was so upset: "Get these out of here!" It meant that those things didn't belong there. So they needed to be gotten rid of, or cast out. Are there things in your life, in your home, in your heart, in your mind, that you need to get out of there—things that are not pleasing to God? According to statistics, many Christians struggle with viewing sexually explicit material, that is, pornography. This is not good, whether a person is married or unmarried. Jesus says, "Stop! Get it out of there!" Perhaps your struggle is bitterness or unforgiveness toward someone, and you keep replaying the wound like a repeating video meme. Jesus says, "Stop!" You must get it out of your mind and heart by God's grace. How can we get rid of these sins that so easily entangle?

Hebrews 12:1-3 tells us how, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

Apostle John also tells us how in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

If you know you have a debilitating sin in your life, confess it to God. You can also tell a trusted brother or sister in Christ who won't tell others. If it's criminal, turn yourself in. It's better to be judged by men, rather than God. Eliminating sin may require drastic action. Get whatever is causing you to sin out of your life.

Here are some other ways to struggle against sin in your life:

- Be accountable to other Christians

- Receive prayer support
- Get serious about deep, personal Bible study
- Memorize Scripture
- Write sincere reflections on God's word

James 5:16 says, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."

Second, a wrong view and use of the Father's house. This was serious to Jesus. Jesus said, "Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" Imagine someone you know came into your home or dorm room and starting using it, without permission, to do business. Many people came to do business with them. But they ignored you, except perhaps for an occasional, "Oh, hello" every now and then. How would you feel? What would you do?

Probably you would do what Jesus did: get them out of there. It is because they are misusing your space. The temple was God's space. It was the place to meet God. The temple was where God's people would come to hear his word and pray and offer thanks and sacrifices. In the time of Moses, God came down in a cloud of glory above the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle and again then later in the temple. God showed his glorious presence was with his people. In a word, the temple was God's dwelling place.

Jesus called the temple "my Father's house." Even though the people were all sick with sin and corrupt and they misused the temple, Jesus still called it "my Father's house." Jesus didn't regard it as useless. Rather, he saw the problem as how the people were misusing it as a market place.

Jesus stood up for his Father God. Jesus drove out the sellers with their cattle, sheep and doves and the money changers. Jesus dealt drastically with things that were displeasing to God. We too, should deal drastically with things that displease God in our lives.

How do you regard your heavenly Father's things? Does it grieve you whenever his things are misused, by others or even by yourself? How about his church? Do we view it and use it properly? How about our lives and our bodies, that he's given us? Is your space—your home, your mind,

your heart—preoccupied with other things? How about your body? Are these spaces fitting for God to dwell in?

II. The Temple (17-25)

How did Jesus' disciples view Jesus' actions? They must've been shocked like everyone else, that Jesus did such a radical thing. But John tells us something (17): "His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'" This is a quote from Psalm 69:9. Jesus' disciples viewed Jesus' actions in light of the Bible. They remembered Scripture. They could see that Jesus' zeal for God's house was burning him up. We also need this same mind to remember God's word at critical moments.

Not everyone was as mindful as Jesus' disciples. Jesus also had strong critics. Verse 18 tells us, "The Jews then responded to him, 'What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?'" Their challenge of Jesus says a lot about their thinking. They demanded a sign from Jesus. They wanted proof that Jesus really was from God. They wanted Jesus to prove his authority to do this. They were more interested in power and authority than in truth. They wanted to know who was in charge at the temple, and where Jesus got his authority from.

By the way, this event was repeated at the end of Jesus' ministry, just before his arrest. At that time also, they were interested in where Jesus got his authority from. Here, however, they demanded a sign from Jesus. Maybe they were thinking of Aaron's staff that budded or when Miriam got leprosy to show that Moses really was God's chosen leader.

Did Jesus give them a sign? No, but he foretold one. Jesus answered them (19), "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." Here, a common thing happens that happens throughout John's gospel: Jesus is misunderstood. Jesus says something, then he's misunderstood, then the author tells us the meaning.

Verse 20 is their misunderstanding: "They replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?'" They took Jesus' words very literally, "Destroy this temple," thinking he meant the temple building. Actually, when Jesus was later on trial, they misquoted Jesus based on these words saying, "Jesus said, 'I will destroy this

temple.” But Jesus never said that. Jesus said, “Destroy this temple...” meaning, “You destroy it.”

The temple before them was Herod’s temple which began its construction around 20 B.C. It had been 46 years under construction. Therefore, it was about 27 A.D. (because there is no year 0). Historians tell us that the temple still had about 40 more years to be completed in 66 A.D. It was quite a structure. The disciples called it “massive” and “magnificent.” But Jesus wasn’t talking about the temple building.

Apostle John tells us what Jesus actually meant in verses 21-22, “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 believe the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.” Here, the author assumes the reader already knows the end of Jesus’ story. Jesus’ body was destroyed when he was crucified. But on the third day, Jesus was raised to life again. In fact, Jesus raised himself to life again. He said, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”

Why then did Jesus call his body a “temple”? There are two meanings.

First, Jesus is the temple. The temple was the place to meet God, the means to come to God, through prayers and sacrifices offered up by the high priest. Jesus replaced temple worship by the perfect sacrifice of himself. So we no longer have to bring animal sacrifices to come to God.

Apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:18, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”

The book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is both the Great High Priest and the perfect Lamb sacrifice. His blood brings us to God. Hebrews 9:14 says, “How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”

We come to God the Father through Jesus Christ his Son. Jesus replaces temple worship. Jesus is our means to hear God, to know God, to come to God, to worship God and to enter God’s family. Jesus is the temple.

Second, Christians are all temples of God. Jesus is uniquely the temple, that is, the one through whom we meet God and come to God. However,

there is a sense in which every Christian is a temple for God. We are all meant to be dwelling places for God, the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit comes through Jesus Christ to indwell all who repent their self-centered lives and trust in Jesus Christ to save them and to guide and lead them by his Spirit and truth. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 makes this clear: “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.”

Daily we must come to God in repentance and faith. In repentance, we confess our sins. In faith, we invite the fullness of the Holy Spirit to fill and empower us to live for him. Praise Jesus who cleanses us of all our sin and fills us with his Holy Spirit!

The closing verses of this chapter say: “Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.”

Jesus had two kinds of followers: one kind believed in Jesus because of the signs. They were looking for personal benefits and blessings. We can call them health and wealth seekers. The other kind of believers were the ones who believed Jesus because of his words. They were truth seekers. We must understand that following Jesus is not always easy or immediately beneficial. Rather, following Jesus will often make our lives more difficult and challenging than before.

Let’s remember that Jesus is the Lord of blessings and also the Lord of righteousness. Jesus might want to add wine to our wedding. But he might rather want to cleanse our temples. So we must pray: Lord Jesus, your will be done. Above all, let’s thank God for Jesus Christ, who became the way for us to come to God by his death and resurrection.