

Jesus the New Temple
John 2:13-22 (1 Kings 8:27-29)
10/31/21

Opening Prayer

Forty two years ago God broke into my life with a revelation of His love. At that time the only thing I knew about God was that He was real and that He loved me more than I could know. In an effort to get to know this living God, I turned to the gospels and there I found Him, in the person of Jesus.

For the last four decades I have been absolutely captivated by Jesus. When you take the time to look at Jesus' life and teaching within its historical and theological context, the conclusion is clear and unmistakable. Jesus is God in the flesh, and He does have the words of eternal life. Such things were not concocted by human design; they were revealed by divine decree.

John was called the beloved disciple. He had a special relationship with Jesus. Late in the first century he set out to write a gospel that was different from the others that had already been written. He wanted to leave a record that showed how our Lord's life and teaching revealed the glory of God.

We see it in the prologue where the Word of God becomes flesh and walks among us. We hear it in Jesus' words to Nathaniel, that he would see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. And just like Jacob who saw that original access point to heaven, we are left wondering if Nathaniel thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place and I wasn't even aware of it" (Genesis 28:10-16).

With these stunning words John now embarks on telling the story of Jesus. Last week we saw how Jesus took the huge water jars used for ritual purification and turned them into vessels containing the promised new wine. This week our Lord teaches another profound message at a very special place, the temple.

From John 2:13-22

¹³ When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple courts he found men 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 area, 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! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"

¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

¹⁸ Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous 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 The Jews 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.

Before we talk about what Jesus said, let's climb into the story a little more to understand what He did.

The temple was the place where God lived. It was His house and visiting there allowed one to draw near and gain access to the LORD. God's house started as a tabernacle, a tent in the wilderness. It became a stone building under Solomon's reign.ⁱ

Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Solomon's temple in 586 BC when he carried the nation off into exile. Construction on a second temple began when the exiles returned and was finished around 515 BC. It was so scaled down from what once was that it caused those who remembered Solomon's temple to weep (Ezra 3:12).

About 500 years later, in 19 BC, Herod wanted to make a name for himself by expanding and beautifying the temple. Without interrupting the daily sacrifices, he vastly expanded the court area around the temple by leveling off the top of the mount as he increased the beauty of the structure. By 4 BC the main part was finished but work continued until full completion at 63 AD. In the end, it became one of the largest sacred sites in the Roman Empire. By Jesus' day it was not just the place to access God, it was also a place of great Jewish pride.

Here is our best guess as to what his finished work looked like. The tallest structure in the center contains God's throne and in front of it are the various courtyards that were assigned to different people.

Let's zoom in and think about it in concentric circles. God is seated in the center circle, the Holy of Holies, and only one priest one time each year is allowed to enter there. Outside this was the Holy Place where priests did their work. The next circle was the court of priests and then the court of men and then the court of women. Then outside of this, in the furthest circle away, was the court of Gentiles.

Between the Court of Gentiles and these other courts was a wall and on that wall was this sign which read: "No foreigner may pass beyond this point. Those who do will be responsible for their own death." Only Abraham's children could access the nearest courts.

This entire area was about 172,000 square yards or the equivalent of 29 football fields. It was here, in the Court of Gentiles, that religious leaders allowed a market. People traveling great distances could not easily bring their sacrifices with them. And rules required that the temple tax be paid with a coin that did not carry an offensive symbol so many had to change their money into an acceptable currency. For these reasons, traders were naturally brought in to help these pilgrims fulfill their obligations.

It was practical. It was understandable. It was efficient. The one problem was that it wasn't what God intended for His house.

Logic suggests that the market did not cover the entire open area in the Court of the Gentiles as there were many other things that needed to take place there. And I'd make a guess that the market was located somewhere near the main entrances which would put it in the slightly larger, southern courtyard (highlighted in green).

Also, the story details reveal that Jesus disrupted but didn't shut down the operation. To shut it down would have required Him to overpower the temple guards, the Roman Garrison in Jerusalem and take control of the Antonia Fortress. Like the prophets of old, Jesus was acting out a message that the people needed to hear.

With all the behind us, what was that message? What was He trying to do? Thankfully, John does not leave us guessing. In verse 17 he writes, His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me." This verse, from Psalm 69:9, continues with a very interesting follow up. "And the insults of those who insult you, fall on me."

By connecting Jesus' action to Psalm 69:9 John is telling us that Jesus' zeal for the Father's house led to Him being consumed. This does not mean that Jesus saw what was going on and was so shocked that He was filled with righteous indignation, lost control and gave these people a piece of His mind.

"Consume" does not refer to the intensity of the emotion Jesus felt, but to the lethal hostility that the zeal evoked from His adversaries. When Jesus pointed out the ways these leaders were offending God,ⁱⁱ He became a target of that same offense and their offense rose to such a level that it eventually consumed His life.ⁱⁱⁱ

While God's anger, wrath and judgment can be inferred here, Psalm 69 tells us that the primary point has to do with Jesus giving His life. This is confirmed with our Lord's response when they ask for a sign to validate His authority to do what He did.

Jesus said, "Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days." At that time everyone took Him literally and thought He was talking about the temple of stone. This is why John helps us out by explaining that the temple Jesus referred to was His body and the raising was His resurrection.

Talk of destroying God's home was extremely offensive and making a claim to rebuild it in three days would have been blasphemous because only God Himself could build His house that quickly.^{iv}

As He does in several places in John, Jesus uses this moment to imply His own deity.^v Jesus is the place where God can be found and the only way to access Him. And in the end, the sacrifice He makes will be the only one sufficient enough to open the way for all people to come to the Father.

No one could act against the temple and its leaders as Jesus did and not expect severe retaliation from the authorities. Jesus knew what He was doing. He was intentionally provoking a confrontation with the temple leaders over one singular issue: who has the authority to decide how the Father's house will be used?

And so the leaders ask Him. What gives you the right to tell us what we can and cannot do? Does Jesus have the right to correct and direct their actions? As we've seen in the last few weeks of sermons John answers that question with a resounding YES!

Through His resurrection, Jesus proved His authority over the temple (and the Sabbath and all things). Just as Jesus is the Lamb of God (1:29), so too He is the temple through whom the indwelling presence of God can be fully realized for all people (4:21ff). He is the place of access to God, where God can be met and known.

I am captivated by the person of Jesus. What He taught and how He lived leaves no doubt as to who He is. Jesus is God in the flesh and He does have the words of eternal life.

John believed this too and in 20:31 he says that he wrote his gospel so "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

His life comes to us when we surrender to Him and so the question of authority comes down to us as well. Does Jesus have the right to correct and direct our actions too?

On the day of Pentecost, like a rushing wind, God's Spirit moved out of the temple of stone and moved into the temple of the human heart (Ez 36:24-27). It was because of this that the Apostle Paul asked the Corinthians, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that the Spirit of God lives in you" (1 Cor 3:16)?

So, for me, the question suddenly gets very personal. Who has the authority to decide how the place in which God dwells will be used? Is it me or is it Jesus? The answer is obvious, but do my actions and my attitudes match my answer?

During the pandemic we've spent significant time resting in the truth of God's love for us and how that love can be expressed to others. Or using the language of today's text, we've considered what sort of things, actions and attitudes should be found in God's temple, should be found in our lives and our community of faith.

There is a danger here. We need to guard against creating rules that we have to follow and expectations that we need to keep. That is a legalistic trap. At the same time, we need to be open to hear the Lord's voice speak to us and to even invite Him to challenge the attitudes, actions and words that we may think honor the Lord but may actually be an offense to Him.

An altar is a surface upon which an offering to God is placed. And while our sanctuary does not contain a physical altar, there is an altar that every Christian is expected to visit every day. In Romans 12 Paul writes, "Therefore, in light of all God has done for you and the mercy you have received, offer your bodies as living sacrifices."

Every day we go before the Lord to hear from Him about the things He wants to see changed in His temple, the things we need to pick up or let go of in our lives. Rather than compare our lives to a list of rules, we surrender to a living Savior and trust Him to guide us. And then every day we go to a figurative altar to dedicate our lives anew to the One who gave His life to us.

Here is one of the most difficult truths I've had to learn and it is one I have to relearn time and time again. God's motivation and attitude toward you is always love. When He reveals something that needs to be changed in your life, He does so with the desire to see you experience the flourishing life He created you to enjoy.

For those who have been ignoring His voice for a while, His loving word might feel like the stinging rebuke of overturned tables. This is God's discipline toward those He loves. Hebrews 12:11 reminds us

God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Whether we confess and repent of our sin quickly or take years to do it, any time His wayward child returns, God's response is that of the Prodigal's father; He runs to us with a welcoming embrace. This kind of response is so foreign to our experience, but it should not come as a surprise to us.

In the Old Testament, God described Himself as "the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" (Ex 34:6). In the New Testament Jesus described Himself as "gentle and humble of heart" (Mt 11:29). How else would such a God respond?

When Jesus speaks to you about the condition of your temple—when He points out things that should or shouldn't be in your life—it is always done in love and grace. Train yourself to listen for His voice then learn to listen to His voice by going to the altar and in gratitude for all He has done, offer yourself as a living sacrifice.

There are two kinds of people here today. Perhaps you are here today and have never responded to the life Jesus offers. For those who see it and respond, His death and resurrection bring forgiveness of sin and a new, indestructible life in relationship with God, a relationship that even death cannot sever.

Or maybe you call Christ Lord and seek to listen, but it's been a while since you've responded to what you've heard. You likely know what He is saying to you. You know the

marketplace that has been set up in your heart that He wants you to expel or the thing that He is inviting you to add. These things could be an attitude, an action or a possession or maybe it is in a relationship that you need or shouldn't have.

Most Christians know what Jesus has been saying and so the question is, do they believe that Jesus has the authority to correct and direct their actions?

Every person alive today is in one of two categories. There are those who have never responded to the Lord's gift of new life and those who need to respond to it every day by listening to His voice and offering themselves as a living sacrifice. No matter which category you are in, we are all invited to respond today.

If you are willing, would you please respond with me in prayer?

As we pray remember that Jesus is not surprised or offended by where you are. He knows you. He knows your weaknesses, addictions and struggles and yet He loves you more than you can ever know. He knows the truth that everyone of us is hurting and broken by sin. We all need Jesus.

Closing Prayer:

God, I need you. I want to be like the disciples who believed the scripture and the words that you have spoken. I see your grace and I see my need. I'm sorry for all my sins, for the many ways I've offended you by what I've allowed into my life and what I have kept out of my life. I'm sorry for the way I've lived for me and not for you.

I now put my trust in, or reaffirm my trust in, your Son, Jesus Christ. I believe that in Him I come face to face with you, that through His death and resurrection He rescues me, making me right with you, bringing me into relationship with you and making me the place where your Spirit dwells.

I accept his gift of forgiveness and new life. I want to be that living sacrifice, turning from a life lived for me, and choosing a life lived with you and for you. You love me more than I can know and you alone have the full authority over me. Lead me into the life you intend for me, Lord. Help me learn to listen to what you say and then empower me to put into practice what you say.

I pray this in the name of Jesus, my King. Amen.

Extras:

Timing Question: Was this early or late in Jesus' ministry?

John presents this as one of Jesus' first public acts in ministry while the other three gospels present it as something He did the week of His crucifixion.

Either Jesus cleared the temple twice or the authors changed the location of the story to make the point they wanted to make (first century, middle eastern peoples were not obsessed with timing and sequence as we are. They were more concerned about what something communicated more than when it happened). No one expected ancient biographies to follow chronological sequence. Material could be rearranged to present points more clearly.

John mentions three different Passovers (2.13; 6.4; 11.55) and possibly a fourth (5.1).

It is possible that two temple cleansings framed Jesus' ministry and it is possible that John repositioned the cleansing to the front of his narrative in order to prepare the reader for what was to come.

There is a lot to support the idea of an earlier temple cleansing, but we won't ever know for sure. The reference to 46 years is one example.

John records how building had been taking place for 46 years. With a 19 BC start year, that puts this moment at 27 BC. With the best guess that Jesus was born around 3 BC, that puts his age at around 30, which the Bible says was the start of his ministry years (but remember, people then did not keep track of birthdays or years like we do, but they did place it within seasons so that a person knew he or she was born in the summer or winter X number of years after an important historical event. Also, the 19 BC start was the start of preparations to build, which took two years. What was the starting point for the "46 years" statement? Was it preparation or actual construction? The best we can say is that this event took place somewhere between 26 and 30 AD which puts it early in Jesus' ministry and is support for more than one temple cleansing.

Finally, we need to remember that ancient authors were not as concerned about exact chronology. While we could have a great conversation about when this event happened in Jesus' ministry, by placing this story immediately following the first sign John expresses right up front the critical nature of Jesus' coming and work. We see the blessing in His coming, the depth and nature of His authority and, in chapter three with Nicodemus, how even the best teachers needed to learn the way to life that He brings.

ⁱ In his prayer of dedication Solomon acknowledged that a stone structure could not contain God but that God had deigned to allow His Name to dwell in this place. The temple was the geographical place one prayed toward or traveled to in an effort to access God. It was the absolute center of Jewish life and they took it very seriously.

ⁱⁱ Jesus said it was a reproach to God because it was a common marketplace. Other gospels record Him saying that it had become a den of robbers. Ancient Jewish sources (like Josephus for one) record complaint about the corruption of the priestly elite who ran the temple establishment. Finally, Jesus said that His Father's house was to be a house of prayer for all nations and this economic enterprise was inhibiting those Gentile nations from coming to the one place set aside for them to pray.

ⁱⁱⁱ In order to become the chief cornerstone, He must first be rejected by those who ran the temple (Mark 12:10-12)

^{iv} This was one of the most magnificent buildings in all the world at that time. It was the symbol to which all Jews looked. To most, speaking against the temple would sound like opposing God. In Acts 6:13-14) Stephen was accused of speaking words against "this holy place." These words were also part of the false charges brought against Jesus at His trial and the words sneered at Him while He hung on the cross (Mark 14:58-59; 15:29).

^v see also John 5:18; 8:58-59; 10:33