

# The Temple – *John 2:12-25*

**Introduction** – The ceremonial washings of the Old Covenant are being replaced/fulfilled with the glorious wedding and wine of the New Covenant (2:1-11), and the Old Temple is going to be replaced/fulfilled with the New (vv12-25). “...old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor 5:17). Christ comes into the Temple as prophet, priest, and king. As a prophet, He gives an exhortation and a prophecy of future events. As a priest, he inspects, discovers, and deals with corruption in a house. As a king, He declares the building of a new Temple for a new kingdom. In addition, we learn in these verses that Jesus knows what is in a man. And this means He knows what is in you at the heart-level. And He has come to unilaterally do something about it.

**The Temple and the Context** – The Temple was a massive structure which had been repaired and expanded by King Herod, estimated to be able to hold 210,000 people. It was the place where, under David and then Solomon, God promised that He would dwell with His people (1 Kings 6:9-13). It had been under construction for 46 years (v20) and this buildout would continue until 63AD.

The Temple in Jerusalem was home to the priests and all ceremonial sacrifices. It was where all Jews were required to come for three major feasts each year (Passover and the following Feast of Unleavened Bread is in view in this passage). Historians disagree as to how large Jerusalem was at this time, but all agree that it swelled to 3-5x its normal size during these feasts.

Worshippers traveling to Jerusalem were required to bring with them a tithe of their harvests and Deut 14 allowed one to bring money representing that harvest to make traveling easier. Once in Jerusalem they would spend that money on the sacrifices that they had to make. In addition, this was often the time that they would pay their annual temple tax. In Jesus’ day, it had become required that all coins had to be exchanged for Tyrian coins (because of the high purity of its silver) for the tax. Rental fees were paid to have a place in the outer court area, fees for animal inspections and priestly approval, fees for currency exchange, fees for purchasing food and drink for the celebration, it resembled an emporium/bazaar, or as Jesus said, “a house of merchandise (Gr: *emporion*).”

**One or Two Cleansings** – John has this temple cleansing episode at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, while the other three gospels all have the account at the Lord’s triumphal entry at the end of His ministry. Some hold that there was only one cleansing and assume John was giving the account out of chronological order for some reason. However, there is a good case to be made that there were two cleansings. In Lev 14 we are given the Levitical laws concerning a house that had corruption in its walls. If a priest found that there was this plague in the structure of the house, he would command the house to be shut up for seven days. After this, another inspection would occur and if the corruption had spread, the priest would order that section of the wall to be dismantled and replaced. And after this, if the corruption broke out later, the priest would order the whole house to be demolished, not one stone left on another (Lev 14:45).

This may correspond to what Jesus is doing. At the beginning of His ministry, He inspected His Father’s house and found corruption and so He cleansed it (John 2:13-17). Three years later He came back for a second inspection (Matt 21:12-13), found the house still unclean, and ordered its complete destruction (Matt 24:2). John may be choosing to give an account for the first inspection as it is also important in this ongoing theme of the old passing away and the new coming in.

**Zeal for His House** – Zeal is a tricky thing. Godly zeal never excuses disobedience to God or a lack of self-control. Jesus was not overcome with anger and just had to let it out. This was a prophetic action and His cryptic answer to their question of His authority proves it. Animal merchants had and could set up stalls across the Kidron Valley on the slopes of the Mount of Olives (Carson). Instead, they were in the temple courts, most likely the Court of the Gentiles. The synoptics say that Jesus taught them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer for all nations?’ But you have made it a ‘den of thieves’” (Isaiah 56:7, Jer 7:11). Inside the temple, the priests controlled the prices, the exchange rates, and the fees. The corruption was rife, and everyone knew it, which is probably why no one appears to try and stop Jesus. The officials may have already realized that popular opinion was on His side.

*“My zeal has consumed me, because my enemies have forgotten Your Word”* (Psalm 119:139). The City of God and the House of God had become a city of merchants and a cleansing was needed (Zech 14:21 – where “Canaanite” may also be translated “merchant”). Jesus says that His Father’s house has become “*a house of merchandise.*” In obedience to His Father and to the Word, Jesus disobeys the posted and duly authorized Temple Rules. This was supposed to be the Court of the Gentiles and instead it had become a place where Jews were fleecing Jews and Gentile proselytes. What we see here is an example of obeying God resulting in disobeying tyrants.

**Signs and Demands for Signs** – While John has only recorded one sign so far in his gospel (2:1-11), he is aware and he knows his readers are well aware that Jesus was doing many signs, both up in Capernaum as well as at the Passover feast in Jerusalem (v23, see Matt 8-9 for 10 signs that Jesus did including “*healing every sickness and every disease among the people*” Matt 9:35, and remember John 20:30). This section of the gospel is called “the book of signs” and yet here, when the authorities ask for a sign from Jesus to prove His authority, He only gives them a riddle of sorts, a cryptic answer similar to what He had said to His mother.

But it is a true sign, pointing to something far greater than anyone was thinking. He foretells His death and resurrection, not in plain terms, but in figurative expressions (He does this also in Matt 12:29 with the sign of Jonah). When asked for a sign, Jesus regularly refuses (he does this with present-day atheists as well) for, as we can often see, signs alone do not convert anyone. Instead, like parables, Jesus speaks in such a way to the willingly ignorant that “*they might not perceive*” (Matt 13:13-14). But, in another sense, this a straightforward answer which His disciples came to understand after it occurred (John 2:21-22). And for believers we often experience moments where God does something crazy and unexpected in our lives – you know God did it – and it almost makes you a little nervous to say so – but it strengthens and encourages your faith.

Finally, we need to notice that the temple itself was a sign – pointing to the thing it signified. Jesus is the place where men dwell with God, where people find the once for all sacrifice for their sins, where the Word is written upon our hearts, and where we abide with the Father. The old temple was falling away because the true temple had now come.

**Jesus Knows What is In Us** (vv23-25) – Here are more words that have to be pondered. While many “*believed*” (Gr: *pisteuo*) in His name, Jesus did not “*commit*” (Gr: *pisteuo*) Himself to them. He who is the Word incarnate has immediate apprehension of the mysteries and complexities of fallen man. While we may see what a man does, Jesus knows what a man is, and He knows not to trust Himself to any man. We will see His keen insight with Nicodemus, the Samaritan Woman, and the lame man at Bethesda in the following chapters. Any of us are able to deceive men, but we cannot deceive Christ.

It is a fine line between having faith in Jesus because of the signs you see and because of what the signs signify. Having faith in Jesus because He will meet physical, emotional, relational, vocational needs is dangerous and a spurious faith. Having faith in Jesus because these signs have revealed to you that He is the Son of God, that He is the perfect High Priest and Lamb of God, that He is the King of Israel and that He is your Lord and Master, full of grace and truth – that is what evangelical faith gives. All that Jesus said and did points to the Cross which is a sign of the rejection of Jesus and the truth. But God loves the world more than the world hates Him and so the Cross is also a sign of the victorious love of God over you and for you. It is the sign of His victory over a world He would not commit Himself to but instead gave Himself for.

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Dave Hatcher – October 3, 2021