



Zeal For God's Temple
John 2:12-22

12 After this He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples; and they did not stay there many days.

13 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

14 And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business.

15 When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables.

16 And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!"

17 Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."

18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"

19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

20 Then the Jews 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 of the temple of His body.

22 Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

Before we look at these verses, it may be helpful to consider the question: *What was the temple?* Well there are several ways we can answer that question. We can answer it in a material sense. The first temple, of course, was built by Solomon in Jerusalem at the Lord's instruction. It was the fixed replacement for the Tabernacle or tent of meeting that had been at Shiloh, it was hub of Jewish worship, it was the only place where the Priests ministered and where, the various sacrifices commanded in the ceremonial law might be offered, and the place where all Jews were required to gather for the feast days like the Passover. The first temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians and the second temple was built 70 years later by Zerubabel. That temple in turn been torn down and massively rebuilt by Herod the Great starting 46 years before these events, hence the comment of the Jews in verse 20.

But there is another sense in which like all the sacrifices and feasts and ceremonies, the temple was merely a shadow or a copy as Hebrews 8:4-5 puts it. It was part of the ceremonial law that was intended to instruct and build up God's people in the faith until the time when the reality that it pointed to came. That reality was the divine Messiah who was and always would be the true temple of God's people. As such the earthly temple, as grand as it was, was something temporary and designed to pass away when that heavenly reality came. That is why in his vision of the new heaven and the new earth that shall come after the return of Christ and the final judgment John saw no temple: *Rev. 21:22 But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.*

So as these verses open, I want you to understand how important this moment we are reading about is, we are at the point in the history of God's redeeming work when the shadow is being replaced because the heavenly original, the Lamb of God, has come to earth and is present with his people.

Jesus had gone with his followers to Capernaum, the home of Peter and Andrew, that was to be the hub or forward operating base for Christ's Galilean ministry, it was a town to the north of his home town of Nazareth on the sea of Galilee. But it was the time of the Passover, and because He perfectly fulfilled the law, Jesus went up to Jerusalem as the law said he must. Now if we were in the north and we were going south, we'd say we went down someplace, but no matter where you were in Israel you always went *up to Jerusalem*. That has nothing to do with Geography or the fact that Jerusalem is on a hill. It's supposed to describe the attitude of the heart. You were ascending to Zion, going to experience a taste of heaven on earth. In fact as you went up with the pilgrims you would sing what were called the psalms of ascent. I hope going to worship is like that for you, Kids I can remember as an unbeliever what a drudge the few times I went to worship were, *I went down to the church*. Now I go *up* to worship. What changed was not my geographic orientation, it was my heart.

Well they arrive at the temple, this is not Christ's first time there by any means, but it is the first time since the inauguration of His public ministry. This time as he comes to the temple it is not a private citizen but as the Messiah, and that day was prophetically described in Malachi 3:1-3. Please turn there in your bibles.

NKJ Malachi 3:1 "Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts.

2 "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire And like launderer's soap.

3 He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness.

He comes to the temple as the refiner, the one who purges out the dross from the gold by fire. He comes as the great Reformer, and what does he find?

He finds that the only courtyard in the Temple Complex, that non-Jews could enter in order to pray, the court of the Gentiles has been taken over by Temple approved merchants providing religious services. There was a good reason for that. You see when you came to the temple on a high holy day, you needed to do two things, you needed to pay the temple tax and to make a sacrifice. Well the half-shekel tax had to be paid in coinage that didn't bear the image of heathen emperors and rulers, so you exchanged your unacceptable money for an acceptable coin. Also, the sacrifice had to be animal approved as clean by the priests. Can you imagine arriving at the temple having dragged your lamb all the way from Alexandria in Egypt only to find it was unacceptable? Or having bought one from a merchant in the market finding out he sold you a diseased animal, besides what non-Palestinian Jew wants to tramp all over Jerusalem finding the acceptable articles? **This was one stop shopping!** It was convenient, everyone liked it. Especially as the merchants paid to be there, so the Priests made a little extra too! As an added benefit, it helped to discourage the gentile scum from coming anywhere near the temple. If the congregation like it, and the clergy like it, and it helps to keep out the wrong kind of people, well then who could have a problem with that? The answer to that is **GOD**.

He intended for his HOUSE to be a place of worship and a house of prayer for *all nations*. The people had made these changes in his worship without His authorization, and had made his house into a profit center. They liked it, it made worship easier took out the effort and increased the turn-around time so you could get in – do the worship thing, get your forgiveness, and get on to the important things of life, it fit the culture, but it was sin, and sin in the very midst of His Father's house, and so Christ the refiner purifies the temple, he makes a scourge or a whip out of cords and drives out the merchants and overturns the tables.

Now how is it that one unknown man from Galilee able to drive out the mob in the court, and not even the Temple police stop him? Was it a big and scary whip? No it was because of the sovereign authority of Christ as God. This Jesus is able to cast out legions of demons, because He has divine authority over all things. The Mob in Jerusalem tries to throw him off the cliff after he preaches in the Synagogue in Luke 4 and he just walks through them and goes his way. No one and nothing could do anything to Him, unless He allowed it, and the hour had not yet come. Even at the very hour, in the garden in John 18 they come with Judas to capture him and they ask for Jesus of Nazareth, and he says "I am He" and they draw back and fall to the ground. He could have stopped it right then. But then the time had come for him to lay down His life:

John 10:17 "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again.

18 "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."

Well the mob can do nothing to stop Him, and really all Christ is doing is purging away the very things they should never have allowed, but they still ask to see his credentials, show us by what authority you are doing these things, show us a sign a miracle to prove you are a prophet. God has come to His own, and they want to see his credentials. Christ however, knows their hearts, and He knows that every miracle that he will perform will be insufficient to convince them. After a while, there will be so many signs piled up they'll revert to saying he does them by the power of the devil. But he is not here to perform for them. So Jesus simply lays before them, here at the beginning of his ministry the ultimate sign that will prove his Messiahship. , ***"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."***

They think he is referring to the shadow, the physical temple, so they laugh. Its been 46 years since they started building this complex, and they still aren't finished. Incidentally, it was finally finished in 63 AD, just in time for the Romans to destroy it in 70 AD. But Christ isn't speaking of that which was about to pass away, he was speaking of the true temple, the one that will last forever. He was speaking of Himself. They didn't understand that though, and at this point not even his disciples do. It was only three years later, after Christ's resurrection when he raised up the true temple, that they understood the sign, and they believed!

That brings me to my **first application**, Parents I hope you draw great encouragement from verse 22, as a parent I know you labor to teach your kids the gospel, and sometimes wonder is this all in vain, we finished family worship last night and I asked my kids what the central point of the verses was, I'd repeated maybe 40 times. No dice. Remember in those moments this verse and Ryles comment *"The texts that are taught by parents to children are not all taught in vain. There is often a resurrection of sermons, and texts, and instruction, after an interval of many years. The good seed sometimes springs up after he that sowed it has been long dead and gone. Let preachers go on preaching, and teachers go on teaching, and parents go on training up children in the way they should go. Let them sow the good seed of Bible truth in faith and patience. Their labor is not in vain in the Lord. Their words are remembered far more than they think, and will yet spring up "after many days." (1 Cor. 15:58; Eccles. 11:1.)"*

Those of you who witness again and again and wonder will this do any good remember as well...

Second application, does this Church as a house of merchandise, and worship the way the congregation and clergy but not God want it, remind you of any other age? Two come to mind. The first is the time just before the Reformation, when the church sold indulgences with the slogan *Sobald die Müntz' ins Koffer ringt Die Seele aus Fegefeuer springt!* "As soon as the money in the coffer rings, Another soul out of

purgatory springs” and every Cathedral in Europe vied to be a center of pilgrimage with its list of bogue relics, bones of apostles, pieces of the true cross,

“The Gospel testifies that the cross could be borne by one single individual; how glaring, then, is the audacity now to pretend to display more relics of wood than three hundred men could carry! As an explanation of this, they have invented the tale, that whatever quantity of wood may be cut off this true cross, its size never decreases.” - Calvin

The Reformers came and cleared away the dross, but Jesus needed to cleanse the Temple twice because the dross comes back. The need for Reformation is constant, the other age that I’m remind of is Our Own Day – TBN, Prayer Cloths, Holy Water, Willow Creek boasts a waterfall, bookstore, restaurant and coffee shop. It, too, has a congregation of 20,000, and so many Sunday school kids that the church uses a fingerprint scanner to keep track of them.

Brothers and sisters, we don’t need Convenient, Easy worship with, One-Stop Shopping, we need a recovery of worship in spirit and in truth and heart religion that has Christ not US at the center.

Because here we have seen a Christ the world is uneasy with, we are probably, if we admit it, uneasy with it is Christ as Refiner and Reformer, we have seen what Rev. 6:16 the wrath of the Lamb. And that too is a foreshadowing it foreshadows the day when Christ shall return to judge, and in that day religion that had money and ease and not Him as its objectives will be worse than worthless.

Friends, therefore have you gone to the true temple, I am not asking have you gone to church. I am asking have you gone to Christ. He is the true temple that was destroyed not for his own sake, but for yours, He laid down His life voluntarily as a sacrifice for the sins of His sheep, and to prove to you that that was what did it for, and that it was no accident, he gave you a sign, he raised up that temple again on the third day. Do you believe that, can you honestly say as John his disciple wrote many years after that event, that you have “believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said?”