

The Dwelling Place of God (John 2:13-25)

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Demolition is a necessary step in most home improvement projects. If you're going to put in a new deck, you first have to tear down the old one. If you're going to put in a new kitchen, you have to first have to remove the old cabinets. If you're going to replace a roof, replumb the master bath, or reseed a lawn, you first have to scrape off the old shingles, pull out the old pipes, or kill the existing weeds.

The same principle holds true spiritually. Before Jesus can make us into what he created us to be he must first cleanse us from what we have become. But we prefer to think otherwise, don't we? We like to think of Christianity, knowing and following Jesus, as something you simply add into your life to discover eternal happiness. We hear Jesus came to give us the wine of God's favor and blessing and we say, "That sounds great, Jesus. Why don't you just back your delivery truck right up here to offload a case or two for me?"

Then we tell stories that go like this. I used to be one of those sad, miserable people. But then I discovered a little secret. All I was missing was Jesus! And now these wonderful Christian people tell me that I can have a relationship with God free of charge because Jesus accepts me as I am. It's about time someone did!

Make no mistake. Jesus came to fill our hearts with a joy that never runs dry. John, the author of the 4th gospel, wrote this book so that we might believe Jesus and find life in his name. But in order for us to experience the life he alone can give us, we first need Jesus to purify our hearts from all the sinful desires, thoughts, and deeds that prevent us from experiencing the joy of becoming more like him. It's a cleansing work of repentance that begins at conversion and continues for the rest of our lives.

The other gospels include a temple cleansing similar to the one we find in Jn 2:13-25 at the very end of Jesus' public ministry, just before his crucifixion. The most natural conclusion is that Jesus cleansed the temple not once, but twice. And John chose to report the first cleansing at the outset of Jesus' ministry because it makes a profound statement about what he came to accomplish through all that follows. **He came to cleanse our hearts that we might become a dwelling place fit for God.**

Like the wedding at Cana, the cleansing of the temple is an acted parable. So let's think carefully about what Jesus did in the physical realm, what that teaches us about who he is, and why we should trust him to accomplish the same sort of spiritual work in our hearts today.

1) AS THE OBEDIENT SON, JESUS WAS ZEALOUS FOR GOD'S HONOR (vv. 13-17)

Look at v. 13. "The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem." The context John establishes here is significant for at least two reasons. First, it reminds us Jesus is the obedient Son.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread or Passover commemorated the night when the Lord delivered the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. He killed all the firstborn sons of Egypt but spared the Israelites who painted the blood of a lamb over the door of their house. The lamb died so they wouldn't have to die. God didn't want the Israelites to forget his power to save, so he instituted the Passover and commanded them to keep it.

By going up to Jerusalem for the festival, Jesus wasn't checking off a religious ritual. He was demonstrating once again that he came to do what the people of God from Adam onward continually failed to do. He came to keep God's law on our behalf.

Second, v. 13 reminds us what his obedience would ultimately require. John mentions three different Passovers in the gospel, the first here in Ch. 2, the next in Ch. 6, and the last in Ch. 13. The entire record of Jesus' public ministry is framed with Passovers. Why? Because after three short years, Jesus became the Passover sacrifice, the fulfillment of the festival, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

He walked in perfect obedience. He would soon die for the disobedient. It's the only way sinners like us can be made right with God. And yet Jesus didn't move through the temple complex during Passover in some sort of trance, fixated on the future. He walked into the outer court, the court of the Gentiles, and was filled with fury.

It was a sacred place, God's place, the place the Lord had chosen among all the nations on earth to make his presence known. It was a place of worship, a place of prayer, a place for communion between God and man. Only Jews were allowed to enter the inner courts, but the outer courts were also open to Gentiles. For them it was a taste of the Lord's heart and promise in Isa 56:7, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." And when Jesus walked in, the place looked like Costco before a snowstorm.

v. 14, "In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there." Now the law explicitly commanded worshipers to not appear before the Lord empty handed. In that sense, oxen, sheep, pigeons and temple coinage were all necessary for keeping Passover. There was nothing wrong with furnishing people with sacrifices or offering money. The great injustice, as Jesus declared in v. 16, is where they were doing it.

They had turned the house of God into a house of business. They took a sacred place and treated it as common. They took what was holy and treated it as ordinary, displaying a profound lack of reverence for the Lord and love for his people. It wasn't a minor oversight. It revealed the truth about their spiritual priorities. Jesus was rightfully angry.

And if his actions in v. 15 come as a surprise, you should consider whether you really understand the depth of God's jealousy for his glory. He makes a whip and drives out the flocks and herds. He pours out the coins of the money-changers. He flips over their tables. He orders the pigeon sellers outside. Why? Because they were defiling his Father's house. "Do not make my Father's house a house of trade," prompting his disciples to remember the words of Ps 69:9, "Zeal for your house has consumed me."

What consumes you, friend? What dominates your thoughts when you lie in bed at night? What floods your mind when the alarm goes off in the morning? Jesus, the obedient Son of God, was consumed with a holy passion for the honor of God. He wasn't just willing or open to God being honored. He was zealous for it. It was the governing ambition in his soul. Jesus wanted his Father to be known and loved and feared and praised and magnified and exalted and treasured and worshiped above all other gods because no one in the entire universe is more worthy than him.

In Ps 69, zeal for God's honor cost King David bigtime. Ps 69:10, "When I wept and humbled my soul with fasting it became my reproach...I am the talk of those who sit in the gate, and the drunkards make songs about me." Come on man. Why are you taking all this sin stuff so seriously? What's with all the confession, all the repentance, all the sorrow over areas of remaining ungodliness in your life. A little religion is fine. It makes you well-rounded. But you're going way too far. Lighten up. God isn't *that* important.

Nah 1:6-8, "Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him. The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him. But with an overflowing flood he will make a complete end of the adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into darkness."

Friends, the blessing of God is reserved for those who are devoted to the honor of God which is why Jesus didn't make peace with sin. He didn't turn a blind eye to sin. He took decisive action against sin for the honor of God's name. He was fiercely and violently committed to cleansing the dwelling place of God from every vestige of ungodliness.



If you are a Christian, you are that dwelling place in an individual sense. As a church, we are that dwelling place in a corporate sense. 1 Cor 3:16-17, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy and you are that temple." Whenever we sin, we are taking what is holy and sacred, our bodies and souls, and devoting them to our own priorities and purposes instead of the Lord. We're desecrating the temple.

Consider your attitude toward remaining sin in your own heart or life. Are you doing whatever it takes, no matter how radical or "crazy" it appears in the eyes of your friends to put sin to death? Consider your attitude toward the holiness and purity of our church. Are you praying God makes your brothers and sisters more like Jesus? Are you faithful to lovingly correct them if you see someone wandering from the path of God's commands? Do you rejoice whenever you see them growing in godliness?

The good news is that Jesus is even more committed to cleansing us today, both individually and corporately, than he was to cleansing the temple in Jerusalem on that day. For something has happened since that day that gives us an even greater assurance of his power save.

2) AS THE TRUE TEMPLE, JESUS VINDICATED GOD'S WORD (vv. 18-22)

Needless to say, the Jewish religious leaders were less than thrilled by Jesus' actions. V. 18, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" Translation: prove to us that you have authority to walk in here and start telling people what to do. Unless you give us some piece of convincing supernatural evidence that passes muster in the court of our own minds, we won't believe you.

The very question reveals the extent to which they had domesticated God. Little did they know God himself was standing before them. So Jesus replies (v. 19), "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." "Wait, you want us to level Herod's temple, the temple we're standing in right now that's been under construction for 46 years, so you can rebuild it in 3 days? Now we know you're really crazy." V. 21, "But he was speaking about the temple of his body."

Jesus was misunderstood back then no less than he is today. The Jews failed to grasp that the entire nature of God's presence among his people had changed. For centuries, God made himself known through a particular place. The tabernacle (followed by the temple in Jerusalem) was the dwelling place of God on earth, the locus of his manifest presence, the center of true worship and piety, the place where man communed with his Maker. But those places were mere types of the One who was to come.



For when the Eternal Son of God took on human flesh in Mary's womb, the place became a person. Jesus became the temple, not because his body was some sort of container for God but because he was God. Once God's people went to the temple to worship him. Now we worship God by trusting and obeying Jesus. Once God's people went to the temple to understand what he was like. Now we understand God by coming to know Jesus. Once God's people went to the temple to atone for their sin through animal sacrifice. Now we receive the gift of forgiveness once and for all through the sacrifice of Jesus.

Everything the temple was and represented, Jesus is and fulfilled. Thus, Edward Klink rightly concludes, "God is not to be found in any religious practice or place; he is only found through Christ." But why should we place *exclusive* confidence in Jesus for knowing God and enjoying a relationship with him? Because no one else can do for us what he did. No other human being in the history of the world has ever raised himself from the dead.

Jesus did it because he's God, because the imperishable nature and infinite worth of his life exceeded the immeasurable debt of our sin for which he died. And what does his resurrection prove? That the greatest uncleanness, the greatest wickedness in the world, the rebellion of sinful man, is no match for the power of God to save. Take heart in that, friend! You can't overcome the ungodliness within you, but Jesus can.

He has delivered you from the guilt of sin. He has delivered you from the power of sin. And he has poured his Spirit into your heart, empowering you to fight for godliness and guaranteeing the final completion of his cleansing work in your life. 1 Thess 5:23-24, "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it."

Christian, no matter how great your struggle with sin, you are not a lost cause. You are not a hopeless rebel. The power that raised Christ from the grave beats in your veins! God has promised to sanctify you completely and when he makes a promise, he keeps it, just like he kept his promise in v. 19 to rise from the grave. In fact, it's the resurrection that ultimately vindicates the authority of Jesus' words.

Years later, his disciples recognized as much. The word of the living temple, God in human flesh, was worthy of their trust, no less than the words of Scripture. V. 22, "When therefore he was raised from the dead...they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken." Notice how the disciples rightly perceived them as being equally authoritative.

It wasn't like you have the Bible over here filled with what people think about God, and then Jesus shows up and we finally get to hear what God himself has to say. No. The word inspired carries the same authority as the Word incarnate and their abiding truthfulness hasn't changed. That means there is no space in Christianity for believing Jesus but taking issue with some portion of Scripture or saying you're following Jesus if you're disobeying any portion of his Word. To trust Jesus is to trust God's Word because his resurrection vindicates God's Word.

3) AS THE SEARCHER OF HEARTS, JESUS EXERCISED GOD'S WISDOM (vv. 23-25)

Jesus' actions in the temple tell us what he came to do – cleanse our hearts that we might become a dwelling place fit for God. Jesus' exchange with the Jews reveals the power he has to do it. He is the crucified and risen Son of God whose words are authoritative and true. And John's editorial comment in vv. 23-25 tells us why Jesus is uniquely qualified to get it done. He knows exactly who we really are on the inside.

At first glance, v. 23 might seem like a sign of smashing success in gospel ministry. "Many believed in [Jesus'] name when they saw the signs (or miracles) that he was doing." Jesus' response in v. 24, however, suggests their expression of faith was not the genuine article. "But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people..." In the original language, it's an explicit wordplay. Many "believed" in Jesus. But Jesus did not "believe" in them.

In contrast, he promises later in Jn 14:24 that if anyone truly believes in him and chooses to follow him, "my Father will love him, and we will come and make our home with him." When genuine faith in Jesus is present, the relationship is reciprocal, not in the sense that Jesus ever trusts us the way we are called to trust him, but in the sense that Jesus fully and unreservedly gives himself to us in response. The end result is an experience of intimate relationship with Jesus that reflects his own intimate relationship with the Father.

But such was not the case here. Feelings were excited, lips were professing, but hearts were not renewed. Leon Morris' observation is insightful. "To believe on the basis of the signs is to take as basic something we can see and to which we give weight on the basis of our experience. Jesus calls people to trust him for what he is, not because he passes the tests we set."

The crowds might have fooled a mortal man; they could not fool the immortal God. It won't be the last time a supernatural power is attributed to Jesus in John's gospel that the Old Testament reserves for God himself. 1 Ki 8:39, "For you, you only, know the

hearts of all the children of mankind." Jer 17:10, "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind to give every man according to his ways..." Why did Jesus need no one to "bear witness about man"? Because (Jn 2:25) "he himself knew what was in man."

Your friends, your parents, even your pastors might not know who you really are on the inside. Jesus does. He knows your desires. He knows your thoughts. He knows your ambitions. He knows whether your faith in him is true or a lie. That's a tremendous comfort to the believer. It means we don't have to convince Jesus that we really do trust him. He knows your heart and rejoices in even the smallest mustard seed of faith. But it's a sobering warning to every unbeliever. It doesn't matter how much you look like a Christian or talk like a Christian. Jesus knows what's really going on.

You can't hide from him, friend. The good news of the gospel is that you don't have to try. Instead of playing games, cry out to him for mercy. Instead of choosing hypocrisy, run to him for salvation. He already knows everything that needs cleansed, everything that needs forsaken, everything that needs to be removed from your heart and life that you might become a dwelling place fit for God. As the searcher of hearts, Jesus exercised God's wisdom.

CONCLUSION

A passage like this leaves us with a very simple question. How will you respond to Jesus? He came to cleanse our hearts that we might become a dwelling place fit for God. He is eager to cleanse you. He is able to cleanse you. And he knows exactly where you most need him to cleanse you.

The question is whether you will humble yourself and ask him to change your heart or keep trying to make your life work on your own. There is no joy better than the joy of drawing near to God through Jesus and being cleansed from the sin that so easily entangles that we might walk the path of righteousness. So let's draw near right now, by faith, to the Searcher of Hearts, to the True Temple, to the Obedient Son, to Jesus, and make King David's prayer at the end of Ps 139 our own.

Ps 139:23-24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"