

# THE TEMPLE CLEANSED

March 03, 2024

Rev. Mark F. Bartels

Old Testament Lesson; Exodus 20:1-17

Epistle Lesson; 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

Psalm of the Day; Psalm 19

Sermon Text; John 2:13-22

The text we will look at this morning is taken from John, chapter two, verses thirteen through twenty-two.

This is in Jesus' name.

The Jewish Passover was near, so Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts He found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and money changers sitting at tables. He made a whip of cords and drove everyone out of the temple courts, along with the sheep and oxen. He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those selling doves He said, "Get these things out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a place of business!"

His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house will consume me."

So the Jews responded, "What sign are you going to show us to prove you can do these things?"

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

The Jews said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple! And you are going to raise it in three days?"

But Jesus was speaking about the temple of His body. When Jesus

was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this. Then they believed the Scripture and what Jesus had said.

These are your words, Heavenly Father. Lead us in the way of truth.  
Your Word is truth.  
Amen

I am going to take you to a little bit of Holy Cross history. In 1971 our school was started on Milwaukee Street. It was actually started in some of the Sunday School classrooms. In the middle of the hallway, where the Sunday School classrooms were, was a cross that was donated by Pastor Orvick, and his wife Ruth. It hung on the wall in the school hallway.

One year, about two years after the school was started, on New Years' Eve, vandals broke into the church building that was on Milwaukee Street. They vandalized the school terribly. They turned over desks. They emptied filing cabinets. They threw books all over the place. It was just trashed.

They also went down into the church basement, where we had a big, commercial stove. They turned on the gas knobs, so there could have been a terrible explosion. Thank God there wasn't.

Maybe the worst of all, was the vandalism done to the cross that was hanging in the hallway. The arms of Christ had been broken off. But, had I walked in to the church that New Years' Day, and seen what vandals had done to the building, and then I had seen what they had done to our Savior, I am guessing, like me, your heart would have surged with some righteous anger that somebody would come into the House of God, and do something like that.

Now, there probably would also have been compassion in your heart for the people who had done it, hoping they would come to repentance, and turn to Christ.

But, I want to use that as a little illustration of what happened in

Jesus' heart, when He saw what was going on in the church of His day, in the temple. You just heard that Jesus' heart surged so powerfully, that He actually took some cords, made a whip, and He drove people out of the temple, because of what they were doing in the church, in the temple of God. Now, that is very uncharacteristic for Jesus to have that type of anger, righteous anger, rise in His heart. So, what happened that caused that to happen in Jesus' heart? Here is where it is really, really, **really** beneficial to know Old Testament history, and Bible history, because it helps you put things into context. What we are talking about in today's scripture reading took place in the temple. So, I want to talk about the temple in The Old Testament. Basically, there were three temples.

-The first one was built in the mid 900's BC by King Solomon. It was a magnificent temple. There was gold all over the place, as well as bronze and cedar wood. And, there was cut stone everywhere. It was absolutely magnificent. It was all designed by the Lord. The whole purpose of that temple in Jerusalem was this, and it is so significant: it was the place that God had designated where sinners could come into the presence of a righteous God, be in His presence, and not be destroyed.

God had established a whole series of worship practices that would take place in the temple. So much of it was centered around sacrifices. People confessing their sins, sacrificing innocent animals in their place, and then God graciously forgiving their sins. That is what happened in the temple.

Now, you and I, from our perspective of The New Testament, we see that was all a picture. It all kept pointing forward to ultimately the great sacrifice Jesus, Himself, who was going to come and really pay for the sins of the world. So, that is what happened in the temple, day after day, year after year.

Through the course of four hundred years, from the mid 900's until 586 BC, things that had happened in the temple got more, and more

twisted, and perverted. Let me describe some of the sins the people of Israel actually fell into. They would go into the temple of God, and started worshiping false gods, with their neighbors. Some of their neighbors would take their little children, and literally sacrifice them to a false god in fire. And, the Children of Israel actually started to get involved in that.

God warned them, *“Don't do that. Repent of that. You should not be committing a terrible sin like that.”*

In addition, there was a very sexualized religion called Baal Worship. Part of that religion was prostitution, that happened all over the place. And, the Children of Israel got involved in that very sexualized, perverted religion, also.

And God continued to tell them, *“Don't do that. Don't be involved in that. Repent of those sins.”*

But, those people had the gall to come into the temple of God, having been warned to repent of those sins, and they went right into the temple. They had no intention of changing any of those sins. They had every intention of continuing to be involved in all of these twisted, sexual practices, and sacrificing their children. Then, they thought they could come into the temple of God, and be right with God because they were offering the sacrifices, but with no intent, no intent of repenting of those sins.

Another thing they were doing was injustice. They were robbing the poor people.

Let me read something from the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was sent by God to warn these people. (*Remember Pastor Van Kampen just read The Ten Commandments.*) This is what God said.

**“Do you steal and murder, commit adultery and swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and follow other gods you have not known, and then you come and stand before Me in this house, that bears my Name, and say, 'We are rescued', so we can continue doing all of these detestable acts. Has this house, which bears my**

## **Name become a den of robbers in your view?"**

God kept warning the people, *"If you keep doing that, I will destroy this place."*

But, they kept doing it.

Finally, in 586 BC the temple was destroyed. They did not have a place to go anymore, and meet with God. It was gone. They were led into exile into Babylon. While they were in Babylon, they came to repentance, and they longed to have that temple, again.

God is such a merciful God that He brought them back to the Land of Israel after seventy years. Under Nehemiah and Ezra they rebuilt the temple.

Now, it was not nearly as magnificent as the first temple. In fact, The Bible tells us that people who had seen the first temple, and now they saw this new temple wept, because it just was not the temple they had seen before. But, regardless, regardless this is where they reestablished the worship of God. That went on for about five hundred years.

Then, a man by the name of Herod became one of the rulers of the land. He wanted to ingratiate himself to the Jewish people so they would listen to him, and do what he wanted them to do. So, he thought, *"If I renovate their temple, then they will really want to follow me."*

So, in 19BC, 19 years before Christ, he started a very massive renovation of the temple. This went on for decades, and became a magnificent building, again. It was considered one of the wonders of the world.

This is the temple Jesus was familiar with. This is the one, when He was forty days old, He was dedicated in that temple. When He was twelve years old, this is where He taught the teachers of The Law.

This is where His parents brought Him every year for The Feast of Passover. And, this is where our scripture reading takes place.

Here is what had happened. It was Passover. People had come from

all over the land of Israel. There were several million people in Jerusalem. They were required to offer sacrifices, but it is pretty difficult to bring sacrifices hundreds of miles. So, they would go to Jerusalem, and there they would purchase their sacrifices. In the temple courts the religious leaders had set up places where you could buy sacrifices. And, in and of itself, they needed the sacrifices. They also set up places where you could change money. You had to give something for the temple offering, but it had to be paid in Jewish money. So, if you came with foreign coins, they had a way where you could make that into Jewish money.

But, here is what was going on, according to history, and according to Scripture. Because this became kind of the only place where people could buy the sacrifices, guess what the religious leaders were doing? They were charging 'convenience store prices' instead of like 'grocery store prices'. (*When you go to a convenience store, you pay a lot more money.*) They started taking advantage of the people, and they had a monopoly. They were, essentially, robbing the people.

And, when they changed coins, they charged an exorbitant exchange rate.

So, right there, in the temple of God, which is a place where people were to be made clean of their sin, there was this intentional, unrepentant robbery going on by the religious leaders, themselves. And, Jesus' anger surged. That is the exact type of thing that had caused the destruction of the first temple – this intentional, unrepentant sin, right in God's House. Jesus had zeal for the House of the Lord. He had this burning in His heart, that it would be a place of holiness. So, He drove out the money changers, and He drove out the people who were selling the sacrifices.

Now, I am going to make application. (*This is going to be a little more difficult than the typical sermon.*)

The temple is gone. In 70 AD it was destroyed. It is gone, because

the people, the Jewish people, continued to resist Jesus, and God. Judgment came on that temple, because of the intentional sin that was going on. That temple does not exist anymore.

But, The Bible tells us this.

-Number one, we are going to look at the fact that Jesus calls Himself the Temple of God.

-Number two, in The New Testament, the Holy Christian Church, and that is believers, are called the Temple of God. We are like the stones that are built together.

In this temple is God, Himself, amongst believers.

But, here is where I want to make the application. Did you know The Bible calls you, you as an individual believer the temple of the Holy Spirit? The Bible says your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. That is a stunning thing to think about. The Holy Spirit, God Himself, dwells in you, by faith.

We call Him the Holy Spirit, because He is holy, and His job is to make you holy.

How does He make you holy? He makes you holy in two senses.

-Number one, He brings you to faith in Jesus, as your Savior. You cling to Jesus, and for the sake of Christ, God, the Father, looks at you with that faith the Holy Spirit has planted in your heart, and He sees you, He sees you as holy, for Christ's sake. The Holy Spirit who lives in us, does that for us.

-Then, He gives us hearts that want to live holy, god-pleasing lives. So, you are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Now, I want to read something that is a little troubling. This is from 1 Corinthians, chapter three.

**“Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple  
and that the Spirit of God lives in you?”**

Now, listen to this.

**“If anyone destroys God's temple,  
God will destroy him,**

**for God's temple is holy.”**

That is what you are.

Now, here is an application. The question is, *“In this temple that the Holy Spirit lives in, am I doing the same thing that was happening in 586 BC, and in the time of Christ?”* In the temple of God there was intentional, unrepentant sin going on, with no intent of getting rid of it, every intent of just walking in that unrepentant sin, and at the same time thinking, *“I can be a Christian. I can be a believer.”*

Let me give you the example. Here is an example The Bible gives of what can happen in our lives. This is taken from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, chapter six.

**“Flee sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the person who is sexually immoral, sins against his own body. Don't you know your body is the temple 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. So glorify God with your body.”**

Here The Bible is making this point. If I am a Christian, and have been cleansed by the Holy Spirit, but then I intentionally, intentionally bring sexual sin into my life, (whether it is having an affair, whether it is moving in with somebody I am not married to, whether it is looking at pornography), and I intentionally plan on doing that with no intent to repent of that because I want to do that, that is bringing total uncleanness into the temple of God.

Another example The Bible gives is about drunkenness.

**“Don't get drunk on wine,  
which leads to debauchery with all kinds of sin.  
Be filled with the Spirit.”**

This is the temple of God. I should be filled with the Spirit.

Any intentional sin, unrepentant sin that you and I are walking in, is a grave, grave danger.

Now, if that troubles you, causes you to tremble, and have a fear of



God's wrath, God's punishment, and Hell, then I want to say something. *“Have confidence. You are the one God wants to talk to. You are the one He wants to show His mercy to. You are the one He wants to save!”*

Now, I am going to take you back to what Jesus said in the temple. After He drove out the money changers, who were living in unrepentant sin, they said, **“What sign are you going to show us to prove you can do these things?”**

This was at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. Most people did not even know who He was. Here was this guy who walked into the temple, and turned over the money changers' tables, and they are asking, *“Who are you? Who are you to think you can do this?”* And, you know the sign Jesus gave them to show He had the authority? He said,

**“Destroy this temple,  
destroy this temple,  
and in three days I will raise it up again.”**

They did not understand what He was saying, so they said, **“It took forty-six years to build this temple! And you are going to raise it in three days?”**

That phrase, when Jesus said, **“Destroy this temple”**, The Bible says He was referring to His body. You see, this is where God dwells. That temple in Jerusalem was a picture of Christ. This is where God meets with His people.

Why did the temple in Jerusalem get destroyed twice? It was because of sin, but particularly because of unrepentant, intentional sin that people were falling in to. God finally brought His judgment, and said, *“I am destroying this temple.”*

And, Jesus said, **“Destroy this temple...”**

Here is the comfort. Why did temples get destroyed? It was particularly because of intentional, unrepentant sin.

And so, we cast all of our sins on Jesus, even the sins we maybe

have been purposely, intentionally committing with no intent of changing, and now understanding the judgment that brings on us. Even those were put on Christ, every single sin was put on Christ. There God brought His wrath against sin, and the temple was destroyed, and I mean destroyed.

### **Jesus died.**

The very body that houses God Himself was destroyed. Jesus took our place. That is The Law, this crushing of what we deserve, because of our sin.

But then, what happened? Three days later that temple was rebuilt. **Jesus rose from the dead.** Why did God have the temple rebuilt in Jerusalem? Because, He is a gracious God. He is a gracious God. And, when Jesus rose from the dead, The Bible says,

**“He was put to death for our sins,  
but raised to life for our justification.”**

And, when Jesus was raised to life, there we see the mercy of God. *'To be justified'* means God looks at you, for Jesus' sake, and He declares, *“I don't see any sin in you. I don't see it. It is gone.”* Talk about the mercy of God.

If you believe that, right now the Holy Spirit is in you. You are the temple of the Holy Spirit. He has cleansed you, and forgiven all of your sins.

And, the heart of a Christian then says, *“Lord, I don't want to bring 'garbage' in to this temple, and dirty it, again. I want to live for my Savior. I want to keep this temple clean. I want to strive to live a god-pleasing life.”*

May God grant that to all of us.

I am going to close with a beautiful, beautiful little verse we sing on Communion Sundays, right after the sermon. It is a little song that is a cleansing of the temple, this temple – our bodies, which are the this temple of the Holy Spirit.

Do you remember King David? Do you remember what he did to

his temple, the temple of his body, the temple of the Holy Spirit? He committed intentional sin. He committed adultery. Then, he committed murder. And then, he came to repentance. Finally, he wrote psalm 51. Psalm 51 is a cleansing of this temple psalm. Let us all sing *Create in Me*.

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
And renew a right spirit within me.  
Cast me not away from your presence,  
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore unto me the joy of your salvation,  
And uphold me with your free Spirit.  
Amen*