

# The Temple of God

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     God, we come before you to be addressed by you, knowing that this is the word of God. And we ask now that by your spirit, the breath of God, you would carry this word into our hearts so that we may be changed, so that we may become more like you, so that we may worship you rightly.

In a manner that befits the only true God. Lead us now, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Nowadays, church services come with a lot of bells and whistles.

I've been to some church services where they had a light show that really a lot of rock concerts couldn't hold a candle to. It was so elaborate and well done.

And I've been to services where they have the slides with the background being like a magnificent nature video. You know, as you're singing, it makes you feel like you're out of nature.

And I've seen churches with professional quality theatrical performances that wow you and amaze you. And a band that's so talented, there's Jimi Hendrix-esque solos, as well as, you know, complete with the headbanging and everything.

[ 1 : 2 6 ]     And even our corporate worship service, which is relatively speaking and intentionally so modest, still requires a lot of thought and preparation. So some of you serve so diligently.

Some of you are here by 8 a.m. Actually, people have to, you know, come up on the stage at the right time. They have to make sure they do the right reading. They have to make sure they go through the right elements of the liturgy. They have to make sure the lyric slides are changed at the right time.

The mic is muted at the right time. People have to step-less volunteer all of their time and effort to serve the church, to facilitate our worship.

But the very activities that are intended to facilitate worship can instead hamper, impede, debilitate our worship.

Unfortunately, this is all too common. And even 2,000 years ago, before the advent of all this technology, Jesus faced a similar situation where people were distracted from worship and things detracted from the worship of God.

[ 2 : 3 6 ]     And so Jesus in this passage calls us back to the heart of worship. And we learn here that Jesus is the new temple through whom we must worship God. That Jesus is the new temple through whom we must worship God.

And we learn this truth in two radical actions that Jesus performs here. And first, he cleanses the temple. And then second, he replaces the temple. That's going to be the outline there if I'll...

He's going to cleanse the temple and replace the temple. And so if you look with me at verse 12, I'll just read along. After his first sign of the wedding, at the wedding in Cana, he turned the water into wine.

And then Jesus, his family, and his disciples traveled to Capernaum. But only for a few days, it says in verse 12, right? And presumably because the Passover was at hand. And they had to make their way to Jerusalem where the temple was to celebrate the Passover.

And the Passover, it took place at full moon near the end of March or beginning of April. And it celebrated, of course, the night when the angel of death went through Egypt and killed all the firstborns of the Egyptians.

[ 3 : 37 ] But spared, passed over the homes of the Israelites because they had smeared the blood of the unblemished lamb on the doorposts as God had instructed.

So this was the culmination really of God's judgment on Egypt. And as a result of the night of that Passover, Israelites were able to leave. They were able to have the exodus from Egypt and be freed from their slavery.

And so that's what they celebrate. This is the Passover festival. And the Passover festival was followed immediately by the festival of the unleavened bread, which is about seven days afterward.

And those two festivals are used interchangeably throughout the gospel sometimes. And so as it was customary for Jews, Jesus makes his way. He went up to Jerusalem, it says, verse 13, because that's where the temple was.

And when he arrives, he finds an interesting situation. Verse 14, read with me. He found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons and the money changers sitting there.

[ 4 : 38 ] So the presence of merchants and the money changers in and of itself is actually not all that remarkable because those three animals, the oxen, sheep, and pigeons, were all animals that were used in the sacrifice at the temple.

So it makes actually a lot of sense for them to be selling those animals there. And especially in the case that because the temple was in Jerusalem and worshipers were coming from all over the place, some traveling quite a long distance, it would be really difficult to bring those sacrificial animals because, I mean, they have to be alive and you have to bring them over.

And so they were actually providing an invaluable service to the worshipers that were coming for the festival of the feast, festival of the Passover. In the same way, the money changers, too, they were providing a valuable service, right?

Because worshipers are coming from all over the different parts of the empire, and they use different currency. And the only currency that the temple tax was accepted in was the Tyrian coinage, which because it's pure silver.

It had the higher degree of silver. And because of that, they had to convert the money, or they were not going to be able to pay the required temple tax. And so these money changers were there to provide another, again, service that the worshipers needed.

[ 5 : 56 ] But if the animal merchants and the money changers were just offering a necessary service to the temple worshipers, then isn't Jesus kind of overreacting? It seems that way. If you read verse 15, it says, And making a whip of cords, he drove them out all out of the temple with the sheep and oxen, and he poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.

A whip of cords sounds kind of over the top, but really you wouldn't be able to drive out oxen, what's heavy and strong, without a whip of cords. So really it's forceful, but Jesus is not being cruel or violent here.

And so Jesus pours out the coins of the money changers and overturns their tables. But why does Jesus react so strongly to these merchants and money changers?

Because they're providing a necessary service. Some commentators assert that these annual merchants and money changers were charging an exorbitant fee, that they were really participating in graft.

But there's no evidence of that, you see, in this passage. Because Jesus' indignation, his anger, doesn't stem from the fact that they were engaging in a greedy, unethical business practice.

[ 7 : 09 ] Because if you look at verse 14, the objection seems to stem from the fact that all of this business practice that was necessary was taking place in the temple. It begins in verse 14.

Right? The selling of animals and exchanging currency were not bad practices in and of themselves, but they were bad in this case because they were taking place in the temple complex.

The animal merchants and merchants are used to, in history prior to this point, have stalls set up on the slopes of Mount Olives across a valley separating from Jerusalem.

That's where they used to do it. But by this time, when Jesus is approaching the temple, they had taken residence in the temple complex itself. And moreover, this is problematic because the animal merchants and merchants were undoubtedly in what they called the court of the Gentiles.

In the temple structure, the outermost part of the temple complex, just inside the walls, was called the court of the Gentiles. And that was the furthest Gentile believers were allowed to go in that temple structure.

[ 8 : 17 ] So that was the place where the Gentiles were supposed to worship God, but the Jews had set up stalls to conduct business at the place where the Gentiles were supposed to commune with God and worship Him.

So Jesus is here confronting a selfish, ethnocentric practice. Because even in the Old Testament, before God's mission was officially universalized to all nations through Jesus Christ, God had made provisions for the Gentiles to come and worship Him, for Gentile God-fearers to come to Him.

Yet the Jewish temple authorities were blatantly disregarding this provision and the concern of the non-Jewish worshipers, and they had set up shop to meet their own needs there.

So that's definitely something that's going on in this passage. But the issue at hand is even more fundamental than that ethnic discrimination. Because verse 16 says this.

Follow along with me. And he told those who sold the pigeons, Take these things away. Do not make my father's house a house of trade. The phrasing of the verse is intentionally dramatic, because the phrases are identical.

[ 9 : 26 ] The house of my father has been turned into a house of trade. Right? The house that belongs to God the Father, now is a house that belongs to business, to trade. Right?

And so instead of the utterance of contrite, sincere prayers being lifted up to God, instead we now hear the bellowing of cattle, the bleeding of sheep, the clinking of change.

That's what's taking place in this temple. There is instead of the smell of incense, right, and sacrifice being lifted up to God, now there is the smell of cow dung and pigeons in the temple complex.

Instead of people's impassioned worship of God, there is now dispassionate business, changing of money of hands. So Jesus implores them, Take these things away.

Do not make my father's house a house of trade. And by cleansing the temple, Jesus demonstrates his zeal for the worship of God.

[ 10 : 23 ] Right? Because it's not that the temple in and of itself is so significant. Right? But because God had chosen to reside in that temple, and he had set, designated a temple as the place where he communes with his people, and that's why it was so important that the temple be cleaned, the temple be reserved for the purpose of worship.

And so verse 17, it says, His disciples remember that it was written, Zeal for your house will consume me. That's a quotation from Psalm 69. And in that context, David is the one that's being criticized by his enemies, opposed by his enemies, who do not have the same regard that David has for the temple of God, for the worship of God.

So if you read the context of Psalm 69, it says, For it is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that this honor has covered my face. I have become a stranger to my brothers and alien to my mother's sons, for zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.

The temple was the focal point of worship. And so Jesus is zealous to purify that temple so that his people can rightly approach him and worship him.

And as we think about that in our context, as we're pulling together church service and whatnot, it's easy for us also, just like Martha was distracted with serving food when Jesus came, while Mary was sitting by his feet to learn and to listen.

[ 11 : 48 ] In a similar way, it's possible, it's very easy for us to be distracted by good and necessary things that we need to do for the service to be put together. And that's why it's important to pursue excellence, of course.

We want excellence in our service because the quality of speaking and reading and praying and singing, all of these things, the beauty of the presentation, the smoothness of the transitions, these are all important things.

Because if it's sloppy, it would very quickly drain the worship service of any sense of transcendence and awe before the presence of God. So it's important to have excellence.

But excellence in and of itself is not the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal is worship. So what we strive for is not excellence in and of itself, but undistracting excellence. What does that mean?

Because if excellence itself was the goal, then we would hire professional rhetoricians to do all the speaking. We would hire the professional state managers to do all the managing.

[ 12 : 51 ] We could hire professional rock band or vocalists to do what they want to do. But because excellence itself is not the goal, but worship is, and we're seeking undistracting excellence, an amazing guitar solo can be just as unhelpful and distracting as a muddled chord.

In the same way, a really, really eloquent monologue can be just as unhelpful and distracting as a speaker who incessantly stammers or stutters. Because it distracts us from Christ.

It distracts us from God, focused on Him. So our goal is not just excellence, but undistracting excellence. But then do we then, with the same zeal that Jesus displays here, over-turning the tables of the money changers, to seek to preserve worship, to worship Him in a manner worthy of Him?

Do we prepare ourselves to come to approach Him so that when it's time to come, all else fades into, recedes into the background, and we're focused on Him to worship Him? And when Jesus does this, the onlookers, the Jews that are there, are unsurprisingly shocked, right, by His cleansing of the temple.

So they ask, they demand an answer in verse 18. What sign do you show us for doing these things? Right. The Jews at this time were known for eagerly seeking signs.

[ 14 : 20 ] Paul writes about that. The Greeks seek wisdom. The Jews seek signs. And so they are asking for a sign to warrant Jesus' action. Saying, so who are you to cleanse the temple this way?

Show us that you have the authority to do this by performing a sign for us. Right. But that question really betrays the absence of self-reflection, doesn't it?

Because they're not asking whether what they were doing was right. They're not asking, reflecting on whether their action of having business in the temple itself was right, whether that facilitated worship.

But they're simply wondering if Jesus had the proper authority to do what He did. And so Jesus answers in kind. And He offers actually a really incredible sign.

It says in verse 19, destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. I mean, that's just brilliant. Right. I mean, it's even humorous a little bit if you think about it. Because Jesus knows that they're not going to call His bluff.

[ 15 : 17 ] Right. And they're not going to, they're not going to destroy that temple. Right. They're not going to destroy that temple. But just destroy the temple and I'll raise it up in three days. And not only that, it's a particularly appropriate sign because if someone could raise up a destroyed temple in three days, well, yeah, that person can surely cleanse the temple.

Right. I mean, he should have the authority to do that. So the Jews reply with incredulity in verse 20, It has taken 46 years to build this temple, and you will raise it up in three days?

Herod, King Herod, had begun construction of this temple in 20 or 19 B.C. And it was not completed until 63 A.D., which means it's still under construction. It's been 46 years since the construction for the temple had begun, and they were using it, but it was still not complete.

But their answer misses a very important point because John frequently employs double meaning throughout his books. And though the Jews who are interrogating Jesus here is thinking of the temple that's made of timber and stones and precious jewels, Jesus is referring not to that temple, but to the temple of his own body.

You see this in verses 21 to 22. Follow along with me. He was speaking about the temple of his body. When, therefore, he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

[ 16 : 46 ] This is a radical statement. It's revolutionary, really. If you'd imagine the understanding of the Jews and the worshipers up to this point, the temple, the tabernacle prior to the temple, that was always the place you came to worship God.

But now Jesus says, I am that temple. My body is that temple. So Jesus not only has the authority to cleanse the temple, he's saying something grander than that. He's saying that he has the authority to replace the temple.

He now replaces the temple that the people used to worship in. So this is amazing because before this point, right, the worship of God was really confined to a physical locale.

In order to have communion with him, you had to travel long distance to get to that temple in Jerusalem. But now that Jesus replaces the temple, the proper worship is given not through the temple, but through Jesus Christ.

And because Jesus and the Father, Jesus is the Son of God, has unique communion with the Father, and he is uniquely able to manifest the glory of the Father.

[ 17 : 50 ] In fact, Jesus is the living abode, the home of the God, the Father, on earth. He's the new center of worship. He's a new temple. And in the same way, then, just like they had sacrifices going on in the temple, the ultimate sacrifice will take place in this new temple.

Jesus Christ will be crucified, right, as the unblemished Passover lamb to cover our sins. That ultimate sacrifice, one cent for all to deal with sin for all time, that took place in Jesus Christ as his body was crushed.

That's what verse 17 is foreshadowing when he says, zeal for your house will consume me. It will consume him. It will kill him. It will destroy him. His passion for God's worship.

So, back then, people used to have to point people in the direction of the temple if they wanted to worship God. But now, we point people toward Jesus Christ when people want to worship. Back then, people had to travel to Jerusalem.

Now, we tell people, you can worship God right where you are through Jesus Christ. And this is so radically different from all the other world religions. If you think about it, the Buddhism has its so-called eight great places where they encourage Buddhists to go on pilgrimage.

[ 19 : 12 ] Hinduism has the seven ancient holy towns that are considered sacred. Islam has its three holiest mosques, the Grand Mosque in Mecca, the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, and they don't even let non-Muslims in because they believe that that would profane the place.

Jews have the Temple Mount, even though the Temple's no longer there. And Jews who are serious about their faith will actually not even go up to the Temple Mount complex because they believe that it's sacred.

But not so with Christianity. We don't have holy places like that. We commemorate Bethlehem as the place Jesus was born, Nazareth as the place that Jesus grew up in, and Jerusalem, of course, the place where Jesus died, buried, and rose again.

But we don't hold these places to be intrinsically holy. They're not holy places. In Christianity, there's no holy place cloistered somewhere away from us.

The sacred rather invades the profane. It's the holy one. It sanctifies and indwells sinful people. And the Spirit of God fills the Spirit of man, and that could happen because the Son of God, Jesus Christ, became the Son of Man.

[ 20 : 22 ] And that's why it's a misnomer to call a place we worship a sanctuary, in any way, because sanctuary refers to holy places. It's not a holy place. It's not a sanctuary.

It's Jesus Christ is the one who is holy. Jesus Christ is the new temple. It's through Him that we worship. So if you are not a Christian yet, and you are here, then this is really good news for you, right?

Because that means you don't have to take a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. You don't have to go to a holy place in order to become holy, to meet with God. You can come to Jesus Christ here and now, right?

And you can worship God here and now, because He is the new temple. And all you need to do, then, is follow the example of the disciples in verse 22. They believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

So believe that Jesus is the new temple through whom we must worship God. That's what He's calling you to, the faith for. So believe that the only way you can approach Him is not in any other design of human design or a place, a geographic location, but that it's through Jesus Christ.

[ 21 : 27 ] And when you make that decision to follow Him, then you are also indulged with the Spirit of God. And that's what it means to become a Christian.

If you are interested in that, please talk to me after the service. And we have a baptism service next week coming up, which is the initiatory rite of becoming a Christian. And so please talk to me afterwards about that if you are interested.

And if you have come to believe that Jesus is the new temple through whom we must worship God, then you are a Christian. And Jesus, after His resurrection and ascension, poured out His Spirit on all of His people.

And so that with the Spirit of Christ in us, by extension, we also become temples of God. So Paul talks about this reality in 1 Corinthians 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.

[ 22 : 30 ] That's why where we meet for corporate worship is ultimately not important. It's important practically, not important theologically. That's why we could meet at a Portuguese recreational club.

That's why we could have a bar downstairs and we could still worship here. It's because Christ is that new temple, and through Him, we are extensions. We become new temples of God as well because the Spirit of God dwells in us.

And this is significant because it radically alters our perspective on worship. Worship is not confined to a physical locale, so it's not something that we do once a week when we come in the morning, on Sunday mornings.

Instead, our whole life, because we are the temples of God. Wherever we are, whatever we're doing, that becomes worship, a spiritual worship to God.

That's what Paul talks about in Romans 12, 1. He says, Of course, there is a special sense in which the corporate worship is important because it's when the body of Christ, the temples of God, people who are indwelt by the Spirit, are gathered, and we together worship Him.

[ 23 : 48 ] But this is not the only place where worship takes place. When you're staying up late at night studying for an exam or preparing a lesson plan, when you're relating to your family members, trying to love them and serve them, when you're day-to-day engaging in a mundane work, perhaps with a difficult co-worker, when you're watching football, when you're rock climbing, running, playing music, eating, drinking, even sleeping, every aspect of how we live is now our spiritual worship because we are the place, we are the temple, indwelt by the Spirit of God.

So let us worship then, Jesus Christ this way, because Jesus is the new temple through whom we must worship God.

So let's pray together. God, this is indeed an unspeakable privilege that people of old could not even imagine that the Son of God would come to replace the temple and that through Him Your Spirit would dwell in us.

God, thank You for Your grace. Now enable us by that same Spirit who indwells us to sanctify us, to enable us to live a life of sacrifice, a holy, acceptable sacrifice to You.

Our spiritual worship. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.

[ 25 : 58 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.