

Lent 3

“Jesus' Temple - Destroyed and Raised for Us!” (John 2:18-22)

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Rev. Ed Weber

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 3rd Sunday in Lent is from our Gospel reading, John 2:18-22.

“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.”

So far the text.

Today our Gospel reading focuses on the God’s temple, or as Jesus also calls it, the House of God. It is the place where God meets His people with His presence. It is the place where Jesus taught God’s Word, where Jesus healed people, where people prayed, where most notably, animal sacrifices were offered for sin...a reminder of sin and a pointing forward to the sacrifice of blood of the coming Messiah.

It is very important to understand that our English translations use the one word “temple” to refer to not only the physical structure of the temple and the outer courts, but also the Holy Place of the temple. The Greek makes an important distinction which helps us tremendously understand what Jesus is meaning when He says,

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

“This temple”, means Jesus’ body. And the word in the Greek that Jesus uses is “naos”. The physical temple, the entire structure that took Herod 46 years to build is called the “hieron”. There is a big difference which we will see today.

In the first Sunday of Lent we heard that Jesus was taken by the devil to the pinnacle of the temple, the “hieron” and told to jump to prove He was the Son of God. The devil said told Jesus not to worry because God would send His angels to keep Him from getting hurt. Of course, the devil misquoted Psalm 91 by leaving out the phrase “in all your ways”.

“For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.”

Jesus responded, “Don’t tempt the Lord”. For the Christian walks in the righteous ways of the Lord and not according to one’s own whims, unholy desires and daredevil stunts.

The devil had been working hard to corrupt the very purpose and meaning of going to the temple. Little by little the buying and selling of animals for the sacrifices crept in from outside the temple into the Gentile courts. Again, this area is the “hieron”. Jesus has to clean up and clean out the temple because God’s house is not a business to make money. It’s not a flea market or center for trade. But it is where God points people to the most precious blood of His Son that pays for the sins of the world. Yes, there is a trading going on in God’s temple. Your sins for Jesus’ righteousness.

And for this reason, there is a most holy place, where the blood of bulls is sprinkled on the altar. Only the High priest could do this once a year after he himself was cleansed by this blood.

“high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people’s sins committed in ignorance; 8 the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing.” (Hebrews 9:7-8)

This Holy of Holies and the most Holy Place, just outside the veil that separated them is called the temple in English, but in Greek it is called the “naos”. Big difference. Zechariah went into the “naos”, the holy place, to burn incense on the altar of incense. There, we know, that an angel was waiting for him to tell him he would be the father of John the Baptist. Zechariah didn’t believe the Word of God that was spoken to him by the angel and was not able to speak for 9 months.

Now when Jesus died, we hear these words from Matthew 27.

“50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.

51 Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, 52 and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.”

The veil of the temple...here the word used for temple is again “naos”, the holy of holies.

And Jesus calls His body the temple, not “hieron”, but “naos”. For His body is holy and on the cross, on this altar, He sacrificed His blood for the sins of the world, once and for all. As Hebrews 9 goes on to say:

“11 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, 14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”

Yes, Jesus cleaned up the temple, drove out the money changers and animals. But most importantly, He cleansed our conscience by removing our sin. The spotless Lamb of God was sacrificed for the redemption of our sins.

Listen to Hebrews 10:

“5 Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:

**“Sacrifice and offering You did not desire,
But a body You have prepared for Me.
6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin
You had no pleasure.
7 Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come—
In the volume of the book it is written of Me—
To do Your will, O God.’ ”**

The veil of the Holy of Holies, the “naos” was torn. The dead rose, because Jesus had conquered death with His sacrifice on the cross. Yes, His temple would be destroyed. His life would leave His body, but three days later, He would raise up His body to show that He had won the victory for all!

And that means that we have access into the very presence of God, the Holy of Holies. Listen to Hebrews 10 as it continues:

19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

We have access to the “naos” through faith, washed in the pure water of baptism.

So that, God in His great mercy makes His temple in us! His “naos” His very presence lives in you! Listen to 1 Corinthians 3.

16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

Which temple YOU are! You are the “naos”, His presence in you makes you holy. You are called a saint! And again in 1 Corinthians 6.

19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? (1 Corinthians 6:19)

Listen to Paul repeating this beautiful and comforting truth again in 2 Corinthians 6:

For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” (2 Corinthians 6:16)

Jesus has cleansed your heart, and made His temple in you so that you are no longer strangers but members of the household of God! Listen to Ephesians 2!

19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

And because you are united with Christ, you also will be raised with Him just as He was raised on the 3rd day. And you will live forever with Him in heaven where there is no longer any temple because Jesus is the temple and you will be in His very presence for an eternity! Revelation 21 gives us this glorious vision:

22 But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. 24 And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it.

There was no holy of holies in heaven, no separation, only the glorious presence of the Lamb who is its temple, your temple, your “naos”, Amen.

“And this peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)