

Ps 8:3,4
Ps 103:4 (Ps 100:2,4)
Ps 69:4,6
Ps 76:3,4,5
Hy 57:3,4
John 2:12-22
Psalm 69
John 2:22b

Yarrow, January 17, 2010

Beloved Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ!

John's account concerning Jesus in chap 1 and the first part of chap 2 had been unambiguously positive. Jesus was the Word become flesh, Son of God in the midst of people through whom sinners were reconciled to God. Even the curse that resulted from the fall into sin was removed through Him. It all resulted in the conclusion of 2:11b: "He thus revealed His glory, and His disciples put their faith in Him." We're sure: had we met Jesus and understood what He was about as John's first chap and a half explain, we'd believe in Him too....

It's interesting then, brothers and sisters, to notice how John proceeds in the next part of his writing. For John relates next the incident about the cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem, and tells us the impact of this deed in vs 22: "After He was raised from the dead, His disciples recalled what He had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken."

Did you notice: the significance of Jesus' action in the temple did not dawn on the disciples for some three years! (Between brackets: the gospels recount that just before His crucifixion Jesus cleansed the temple; that's a second cleansing, not to be confused with this one.) More, the disciples didn't so much catch the significance of what Jesus *did* as the significance of what Scripture prophesied about the cleansing and what Jesus said while He cleansed the temple. And most intriguing: Jesus' actions and words in the cleansing of the temple were *judgmental* and yet that's what prompted faith....

Why we're told this? It's delightful that the Word became flesh. But the riches of that good news implies judgment for those who don't believe it. And the reality of that judgment needs to drive us again to embracing God's Word in faith.

I summarize the sermon with this theme:

THE ONE WHO BROUGHT THE MESSIANIC AGE IS ALSO ITS JUDGE.

1. Jesus proclaimed judgment on the temple
2. Jesus prophesied judgment for Himself
3. Jesus' preaching of judgment bore fruit in the disciples

1. Jesus proclaimed judgment on the temple

The apostle John recorded in our text for this morning that the disciples "believed the Scripture and the word that [Jesus] had spoken." Yet they didn't believe it immediately; the first part of vs 22 leads to the conclusion that this faith came to the disciples after Jesus had risen from the dead some three years hence.

What was it, now, that lingered in the minds of the disciples these three years? John tells us of two elements: there is material from "the Scripture"; there is also material from "the word which Jesus had said." That first element – "they believed the Scripture" – points up that Jesus, by His act of judgment in the temple, showed to the disciples that He was the fulfillment of the Scripture. For our part, then, we need to read the events of this second sign in the light of the Old Testament Scripture.

“Jesus went up to Jerusalem,” we read, and “found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business.” In response He “made a whip of cords” and with it “drove them all out of the temple” – that’s all the merchants, and chased out behind them “the sheep and the oxen”; He then “poured out the changers’ money” by turning over “the tables” (vss 14f).

That’s dramatic, exciting. Why did Jesus do it? We should be aware that at the Passover many Jews, both from Israel and from foreign countries, travelled to the temple to celebrate, so that both the city and the temple were filled with crowds of people. The head of every family was expected to present a sacrifice to the Lord as well as to pay the annual temple tax. We can imagine the busy-ness in the temple, the hustle and bustle to get your animal into the temple (with your wife and children in tow), the shouts and confusion when your animal panicked because of the crowds and the noise. Well now, to make the movement of animals for sacrifice run more smoothly, the leaders of the Jews had permitted cattle merchants to bring their animals into the outer court of the temple. Similarly, since foreign currency was not acceptable according to the Jewish authorities, visitors to the temple could obtain right at the temple itself the particular coins they needed to pay the temple tax.

There came Jesus of Nazareth, made a little whip¹ from the bits and pieces of cord laying on the floor, and cast out² the merchants and their wares. Why? It is to be clear in our minds that this action on Jesus’ part was not motivated by Jesus being anti-establishment, nor by a desire on Jesus’ part to get rid of outward forms of religion and replace it with a service of God “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). I say this because our text is widely used to portray Jesus as a revolutionary, or as one teaching that only what is in the heart is of significance.³ No, John tells us that Jesus was motivated by His *zeal* for God’s house. That’s the implication of the Old Testament quote in vs 17: “Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.”

Before I come to this quote from the Old Testament, I need to draw your attention to a number of other passages from the Old Testament fulfilled by Jesus in his act of casting the merchants out of the temple.⁴

a. The first Scripture that needs our attention here is Ps 8. David the psalmist marvelled that the God who created the moon and the stars was mindful of “the son of man”. Though man, says David, is such a tiny entity compared with the vastness of God’s handiwork, God has nevertheless crowned man with glory and honour. Says David:

“You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet,
All sheep and oxen...” (vs 4ff).

“All things” under the dominion of man, including “sheep and oxen.” As a result of the fall into sin, so much of God’s creation does not readily submit to mankind. We experience it ourselves: so much in creation does not go the way we would like. And Yes, that we do not have fully mastery over the works of God’s hands is the result of sin. But see: in the temple of Jerusalem stands this man with that little whip made of cords – and I say ‘little’ because that’s the literal meaning of the word, and so we’re not to think that Jesus exercised here a momentary reign of terror. There was nothing threatening about the tool Jesus used, and yet He could drive out first the merchants themselves, then their “sheep and oxen”, and finally flip over the tables and so pour the money on the ground – all of that without being stopped by the temple police nor by the merchants themselves nor by the people

¹The word translated as ‘cord’ is in the diminutive form: cf Dutch ‘schaap’/‘schaapje’.

²The word translated as ‘drove...out’ is the same word used elsewhere for the concept of excommunication; cf Jn 9:34.

³See C vanderWaal, *De Vervulde Thorah* (Kampen: vandenBerg, 1984), pg 88ff.

⁴I am indebted to C vanderWaal, *De Vervulde Thorah* (Kampen: vandenBerg, 1984), pg 85ff for drawing attention to these OT texts.

doing the buying. The whole scene conveys a sense of authority, of majesty. Here is the ‘son of man’ of Ps 8, exercising absolute “dominion over the works of [God’s] hands” so that sinful people (the merchants) readily obey, yes, even the “sheep and oxen” submit to the herding of one man and exit the temple. Here is revelation: this man is one of *authority*, He has dominion over the works of God’s hand. In the words of Dan 7:

“...behold, One like the Son of Man,
Coming with the clouds of heaven!...
Then to Him was given dominion and glory and kingdom,
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him” (7:13f).

And serve Him they do; in the face of the wish of this Son of Man in the temple, people and animals oblige Him and leave. You see: Jesus is fulfillment of the prophecy of Ps 8. Sovereign.

b. There’s a second Old Testament text we need to look at to understand John 2. After Jesus cast out the merchants from the temple, together with their cattle, He said to “those who sold doves”: “Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!” By describing the temple as “a house of merchandise”, Jesus recalls the prophecy of Ezekiel about the temple of heathen Tyre long ago. Said the prophet Ezekiel concerning Tyre:

“You defiled your sanctuaries
By the multitude of your iniquities,
By the iniquity of your trading” (vs 18a).

Notice: that the heathens should trade in their sanctuaries to their gods is described by the prophet as ‘iniquity’. How much more must Israel’s conduct in the temple of the only true God be described as ‘iniquity’! The temple is “My Father’s house” – a thoroughly Old Testamentic designation of the temple as a place where God came to dwell with His people, His covenant children. That the Jews of Jesus’ day should use the house of their covenant Father as “a house of merchandise” –following the example of the heathens of Tyre– is nothing else than an offence to the God who lives in that temple.

Listen, then, to the divine judgment Ezekiel long ago pronounced to the people of Tyre upon their ‘iniquity’. Said the prophet:

“Therefore I brought fire from your midst;
It devoured you,
And I turned you to ashes upon the earth
In the sight of all who saw you” (vs 18b).

If *that’s* God’s judgment on *heathens* doing iniquity in their heathen sanctuaries, how much heavier must God’s judgment be on *His people* doing iniquity in *God’s* sanctuary! As Jesus said elsewhere: “It will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you” (Mt 11:22). Worse should befall the temple of Jerusalem than befell the people of Haiti last week.... Make no mistake: the Son of Man of Ps 8 has the power to do it, and He’s there in the temple now!

c. So why didn’t judgment happen?? The answer lies in Ps 69. There’s a reason why the Holy Spirit tells us in John 2:17 that the “disciples remembered that it was written (in Ps 69:9): ‘Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.’”

We read the Psalm. David described his own situation; he was in great distress: the waters had come up to his neck; he’s perishing and sees no way of escape. The reason for his great distress is the fact that he boldly and openly championed the cause of the Lord and His house. Certainly, his championing God’s cause was done with so many sins. Vs 5:

“O God, You know my foolishness;
And my sins are not hidden from You.”

But even the existence of sin did not undo David's honourable motives; vs 7: "*for Your sake* I have borne reproach" and vs 9: "zeal for *Your house* has eaten me up." His efforts to champion the cause of the Lord and His house—done indeed with so many sins—brought on himself the anger of those who didn't agree with David. So it is that David has "become a stranger to [his] brothers, And an alien to [his] mother's children" (vs 8). So David prays, prays for deliverance. Vs 13:

"O God, in the multitude of Your mercy,
Hear me in the truth of Your salvation.
Deliver me out of the mire,
And let me not sink;
Let me be delivered from those who hate me."

More: David prays that the Lord please destroy his enemies. Vs 24:

"Pour out Your indignation upon them,
And let Your wrathful anger take hold of them.
Let their dwelling place be desolate...."

The prayer for deliverance, and the petition for judgment on the enemies, is all motivated by David's "zeal for [God's] house."

The disciples observed Jesus casting out the merchants and their wares from the house of His Father. It prompted them to recall this word from Ps 69: "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up." That is: the disciples saw in Jesus' actions and words the fulfillment of Ps 69. David's zeal was marred by sin, but Jesus' zeal is perfect. He's the "Son of man" of Ps 8 who has perfect dominion over the works of God's hands so that the merchants, yes, even the "sheep and oxen" obey Him. Through Him, then, the judgment announced in Ezekiel 28 can come upon the temple *in answer to the prayer of Ps 69*.

But again the question is: then why did God not destroy the temple?? Why be content only with driving out the offending sinners and their wares? Wouldn't it be more in keeping with Old Testament prophecy if the temple were now flattened as the churches of Port-au-Prince were? That brings us to our second point:

2. Jesus prophesied judgment for Himself

The disciples ultimately believed, says our text, but believed not only on the basis of what they read in such Scripture passages as Ps 8, Ez 28 and Ps 69; they believed also "the word which Jesus had said."

The "word which Jesus had said" is a reference to Jesus' proverb in vs 19: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." This saying is placed in our text as being of equal authority with the Scripture. But to be honest, it comes across to us as mysterious. The Jews, we read in vs 18, had responded to Jesus' action of casting out the merchants and their animals with this question: "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?" That is: the Jews want to know from where Jesus received the authority to cleanse the temple. Jesus' answer is given in the words of vs 19: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews replied in turn with their argument that it took 46 years to build the temple, and would Jesus do it in three days?! We understand: Jesus' words made no sense to His listeners. John, though, tells us the explanation of Jesus' saying: "He was speaking of the temple of His body." Jesus, then, was referring here to the fact that He would die and after three days arise from the dead.

What, now, is the connection between this saying of Jesus and Jesus' earlier action of casting the merchants out of the temple? The connection, beloved, is this: in this saying Jesus *is describing what the Jews are actually doing* by permitting a market in the temple; they are *destroying* the temple.

The Jews ask for a sign, and Jesus' replies by using what is called a 'concessive imperative'.⁵ That is: Jesus speaks here in the same sort of way as we speak to a thick-skinned person. Then we say: 'Go ahead, do it your way then, go ahead.' We give a command, but don't mean the command literally. That's what Jesus says too with his command to "destroy the temple." He says: 'you are destroying the temple by making it into a market, and you don't want to see that by driving your merchants out I am showing you that I am in a position to bring about the full judgment prophesied in the Old Testament. You persist in your sin, and so keep on bringing the inevitable destruction of God upon the temple. But be aware: while you're destroying your temple, I for my part will raise it up in three days.

With those last words, of course, John wants us to know, Jesus was speaking not of yonder building of stone and plaster; He was speaking of the temple of His body. Yonder temple of stone and plaster was God's dwelling place, but Jesus was the fulfillment of God's dwelling place, for "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..., full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). That Jesus was the fulfillment of the Scripture is something the Jews did not want to recognize, and so –says Jesus– they are going to begin to hate Jesus and eventually kill Him. So He will die – and that is to say that the destruction that ought to come on the temple would come on Jesus Christ instead, 'tabernacle' that He was (1:14). Here's the gospel of substitution: Christ Jesus would die in place of sinners!

And what would cause this judgment from the Jews to fall upon Jesus? It's because of His zeal for God's house! As David long ago experienced: zeal for God's house earned him the displeasure of brothers and friends; Jesus –fulfillment of Scripture– would experience the same.⁶ The Judge would be rejected by the judged; those now transgressing the ordinance of God in the temple, those now enslaved to sin, would reject the Son of Man sent to them by God Himself, would reject the Word-become-flesh.

Now there remains for us yet the third point:

3. Jesus' preaching of judgment bore fruit in the disciples

In the course of time, Jesus' prophecy in John 2 came to pass. His own people received Him not; Jesus was hated, rejected, arrested, crucified. The Judge became the judged. In fact, at His trial, His words in vs 19 were hauled up as an accusation. That's what it says:

"Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none.... But at last two false witnesses came forward and said, 'This fellow said, "I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days"' (Mt 26:59ff). You see: the Jews remembered Jesus' saying in John 2, and three years later they used this word – twisted, certainly, but this word still– to justify their sentence of condemnation. Zeal for God's house earned for Jesus the hatred of which David prophesied in Ps 69, with as result that the Son of man was killed.

But: Ps 69 had included a prayer for the destruction of the enemies of God! Then the triumph of the unbelieving Jews over zealous Jesus could not be the end of the matter! And see: the Judged did not stay under the sentence of judgment! He was Son of Man, to whom had been given dominion over all the works of God's hands. So even death itself could not master Jesus; Jesus had dominion over death too. After three days in the grave, Jesus arose from the dead. The temple of His body, destroyed by the unbelief of the Jews, was rebuilt in three days; the Word was still flesh, and still

⁵Both AT Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, n.d.), pg 948 and F Blass & A deBrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), ©387.2 mention Jn 2:19 as an example of the concessive imperative.

⁶Here it is important to note that Ps 69 has received the future tense in John's quote (contrary to the NKJV; MSS evidence is very much against the past tense of the NKJV). That is: Jesus *will* get consumed on account of His zeal.

dwelt among us. It happened as Jesus had foretold! The Judge arose, arose to be Judge, arose to pour out His judgment one day upon those who rejected His zeal for God's house! It was His prophecy: the Son of Man would go away, and then would come again to *judge*. Recall Jesus' words in John 5:

The Father "has given [the Son] authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (vss 27ff).

The Christ who was bringing the glorious Messianic Age was at the same time the One who would judge that Messianic Age, and condemn those who chose evil. See there Jesus' revelation about Himself in the temple.

What, now, was the reaction of the disciples? This: "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" (vs 22). Three years after this judgmental sign of John 2 the disciples "remembered", and now went to work with the evidence from Scripture Jesus had laid before them about Who He was. Three years later they worked with the material of Ps 8, Ezek 28, Ps 69, went to work too with Jesus own prophecy about His coming death and resurrection, and now, *after three years loaded with many experiences*, "they believed." After seeing Jesus die and arise from the dead, *then* it was that they accepted for truth the Word of God as it had come to them in Jesus' judgmental proclamation in the temple.

Others, though, did not believe; in fact, countless Jews persisted in their unbelief and eventually died in and with the temple when the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD. For there is one way only to escape the judgment of God, and that is through faith in Jesus Christ. Believe, as the disciples did....

John began His gospel with such a positive sound, proclaiming the glories of the Word-become-flesh. It's a tone we appreciate and embrace. But sin needs to be confronted with discipline, and so John moves on in chap 2 to set forth that the Saviour is also the Judge, the Word-become-flesh also the dispenser of God's righteous judgment. So the question that remains is this: shall we *believe* that Scriptures and Jesus' words to the effect that the Son of Man took sinners' punishment on Himself so that we're spared? The alternative is that we shall all experience the judgment of God on the Day of judgment....