

John 2:13-25  
Haggai 2:1-19  
Psalm 69

“Cleansing the Temple”

April 5, 2020

The prophet Haggai spoke to those who had returned from exile.  
They and their fathers had spent 70 years in exile in Babylon.  
Now they have returned to Jerusalem and have started rebuilding the temple.

When they laid the foundation of the temple, many rejoiced –  
but others wept – because *this temple* would be smaller.  
This temple would seem “as nothing” compared with Solomon’s temple.

But Haggai assures them that God will be with them.  
“I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts....  
The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts.”

What was the former glory?

In Exodus 40, when the tabernacle was dedicated –  
the tabernacle was filled with the glory of God  
In 2 Chronicles 5-7, when the temple was dedicated –  
the temple was filled with the glory of God

But after the Exile, the glory of the LORD did *not* fill the temple!  
This is why the people of God were so concerned  
when the glory of the Lord did not descend upon the new temple after the exile.  
Where was God?

It is easy to ask that question in times like these!  
Our turn has finally come!  
Disaster has struck us!  
Pestilence has come upon all the earth.

Where is God?  
I suppose there is some use in history –  
knowing that this epidemic is merely one in a long string of diseases.  
Our forefathers all went through these sorts of trials –  
and, well, *we are still here!*  
But where is God?

Our Psalm of response asks God to “save me” “deliver me,” “answer me”!  
Draw near to my soul and redeem me.

Where is God?

Sing PHSS 69 (stanzas 1-10)  
Read John 2:13-25

### **Introduction: The Passover of the Jews Was at Hand (v13)**

We often think about Jesus as this mild-mannered, loving, kind, person.  
And to those who love him--to those who belong to him, he is!  
But what did the Jews think of him that day in Jerusalem when he entered the temple courts  
and drove out the money changers?

Imagine if you will, what is happening that day.  
You are a Jew, you have traveled a hundred miles on foot to be here  
in Jerusalem for the Passover  
Of course, you couldn't bring a sheep with you to sacrifice for the Passover,  
so you were planning on purchasing one here at the temple,  
so that you could celebrate the Passover with your family.  
You are standing in line at one of the tables,  
so that you can change your money:  
after all, at home you use the standard Roman coins,  
but here in the temple you have to use the special Jewish coins.  
Once you have your Jewish coins,  
then you will go over to one of the stalls and purchase a sheep for Passover.  
On the other side of the courtyard, closer to the Holy Place,  
you see a few people trying to pray--but the noise and the clamor,  
and the stench of the animals is clearly annoying to them.  
You feel bad for them, but after all, Passover only happens once a year;  
and the markets are already crowded,  
so the temple courtyard is the logical place to take care of business!

SUDDENLY you hear **[the sound of a whip]** and a loud voice crying out  
"Take these things away!!!!"  
You spin around in time to see this man knocking over tables;  
He opens the pens where the animals were kept  
and with a crack of his whip, drives them toward the temple gate.  
Some of the merchants and money changers are scrambling  
for their goods and animals  
  
But others start to yell and complain!  
The man with the whip stares at them, grabs them by their beards,  
and says "Do not make My Father's house a house of trade!!"  
And with that, he drove them out of the temple  
--throwing their money to the ground and tossing tables right and left!!

Astonished and bewildered,

a crowd gathers around.  
Nobody condemns him--after all, this IS the Temple, and according to the Law,  
this really shouldn't have been happening!  
But you are curious. Why did he do this?  
Is he a prophet?  
The prophets used to do things like this--whenever Israel sinned,  
God would send a prophet to rebuke them.  
Who is this man?  
One of the Jewish leaders asks:  
"What sign do you show us for doing these things?"

The man answers:  
"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up!"

What?  
This is absurd!!  
It has taken 46 years to build this temple, and this man will raise it up in three days?  
What is he talking about?  
He is either a prophet or a madman!!!!

For just a moment, imagine yourself as an ordinary Israelite moneychanger.  
Where is God in all this?  
God just turned your tables upside down – threw your money on the ground –  
and chased you out of your business!

You were just doing your job!  
And God just made a mess of your day!

What is Jesus doing?  
Why does Jesus drive out the money changers?

Yes, Jesus comes to "fix" things!  
But things are *so messed up* that he is going to have to disrupt your life!  
The gospel does not just tidy up a few messy corners.  
The gospel overturns the tables of your life – throws everything on the ground –  
and then Jesus looks at you and says, "Come, follow me."

Remember 1:51--(read)  
Here Jesus reminds them of Genesis 28,  
where Jacob has the dream of the stairway to heaven,  
that the stairway to heaven is the place where earth and heaven meet:  
and he calls it "the house of God and the Gate of heaven"

John is showing us, already here in chapter two,  
that Jesus Christ IS the temple--he IS the place where earth and heaven meet.  
He IS the house of God and the gate of heaven.

**1. “Zeal for Your House” – Jesus Cleanses the Temple (v14-17)**

**a. The Temple Is Where Earth and Heaven Meet**

<sup>13</sup> *The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*

We read earlier about the Triumphal Entry on Palm Sunday,  
where Jesus came to Jerusalem at the Passover.  
In the other three gospels, the very first thing that Jesus does on Palm Sunday  
is cleanse the temple.

Some think that John is reporting that same event here.  
Others think that John is reporting a different event.

I don't think that it matters.

We know that the gospel writers organize their material in different ways.  
So it's possible that John puts the cleansing of the temple up front  
in order to make a point about who Jesus is.  
But it's also possible that Jesus did this twice.

What we *know* is that Jesus did this!  
He came to his own place – but his own people did not receive him.

<sup>14</sup> *In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there.*

The temple is the place where earth and heaven meet.  
At Sinai, when the tabernacle was built,  
the glory of the LORD left Mt. Sinai  
and came and filled the tabernacle!  
The presence of God came and dwelt in a tent.

And for many generations – from Moses until David –  
the presence of the LORD dwelt in a tent.  
God wanted to dwell with his people –  
but he is holy – and we are not!  
And so God had to protect us from himself!

In the days of Solomon, the glory of the LORD filled the temple!  
Now God would dwell in a house of stone.  
More impressive? – sure!  
But closer? – not really.

The glory of the LORD – the presence of God himself –  
was still hidden away in the holy of holies!  
Only the High Priest could enter the presence of God –  
and that only once a year, at the Day of Atonement.

But the point remained that God wanted to dwell in the midst of his people.  
The temple was supposed to be the place where earth and heaven met.  
The place where God himself would meet with his people.

But it was easy to forget about this.  
It was easy for the priests to become callous to the presence of the LORD.  
For them, it could too easily become all about *business*.

It had happened before.  
Eli's sons – at the beginning of 1 Samuel –  
had disregarded the law of the LORD,  
and had used their priestly status for personal profit.  
Now the priests have once again lost sight of the purpose of the temple.

The temple was supposed to be a house of prayer.  
But now it has become a house of commerce.

#### **b. The Corruption of the Temple**

*<sup>15</sup> And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup> And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade."*

The problem here is not that they are doing business unjustly.  
The problem is not unfair business practices.

The problem is that they have turned the temple into a place of business at all!

This is probably the court of the Gentiles – the outermost court of the temple.  
This is the one place where non-Jews could come and pray.  
But now it is filled with people doing business –  
*so that they can worship God!*

It would be like installing an ATM in the back of the sanctuary –  
“for convenience.”

But even that pales in comparison with what Jesus is dealing with.

Because *this is the temple!*

This is the place where earth and heaven meet!

This is the place where God meets with his people!

Our earthly church buildings today are *not* temples!

Where today is the *place* where earth and heaven meet?!

John just told us in John 1:51 –

Earth and heaven meet in Jesus.

The earthly temple was a picture of Jesus.

In Haggai 2, the prophet had said that the latter glory would surpass the former glory.

Where is the glory of Zerubbabel's temple?

God had restored his people from exile,

but the glory had departed from Israel.

And indeed the glory of the second temple WAS greater!

Because Joseph and Mary brought the baby Jesus  
to the temple

And when he was 13, he sat in the temple and taught there!

And here in John 2, this second temple

had the glory of being cleansed by Jesus Christ,  
the Son of God himself!!!!

But even the glory of this second temple was no match for Jesus Christ!

It could only point toward him!

Jesus *is* the heavenly temple –

he is the place where God meets with his people--and forgives their sins

What we are doing here is so entirely upside down and backwards.

Really – if you think about it – this is family worship –

just conducted according to part of the pattern of our morning service.

Yes, we are all gathered together at the throne of grace –

but there is still something fundamentally *physical* about Christian worship.

When Jesus says two chapters later,

that true worshipers will worship “in Spirit and in truth”

Jesus is not denying the bodily character of Christian worship!

We worship in the *Holy Spirit* – we worship at the *heavenly* temple –

but we still do so in *these bodies*.

We need ears to hear the Word of the Lord.

We need mouths to speak and sing his praise!

We need hands to “take” – mouths to “eat” – the bread and the cup.

Here in John 2, Jesus sees that worship isn't happening  
because people have lost sight of what the temple is for!

They have lost sight of the *presence of God*.

They are so focused on the economics of "keeping the church going"  
that they have lost sight of what the church is for!

And

<sup>17</sup> *His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."*

That's a line from Psalm 69 – which we sang earlier.

The context is instructive.

David cries out, "Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck." (v1)

"My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God." (v3)

When will God answer?

When will he make himself known?

I'm under attack.

"mighty are those who would destroy me, those who attack me with lies."

David admits his sin: "the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you." (v5)

And yet he has still hoped in the LORD –

"it is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that dishonor has covered my face.

I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's sons." (v8)

And then comes the line quoted here:

"For zeal for your house has consumed me,  
and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me." (v9)

David had longed for the day when God's house would be built in Jerusalem.

There were lots of times when David's life was a mess –

sometimes due to his sin –

other times due simply to the miseries of this life!

And sometimes the misery came because David had stood faithfully for God.

But standing faithfully doesn't always mean standing passively.

"Zeal for your house has consumed me."

Sometimes, zeal for God's house means causing trouble!

Because it means that you care more about what God thinks –  
than with what other people think!

As Jesus looks at the court of the Gentiles –

he sees that the Gentiles are being kept from worship.

He sees that the temple authorities do not care about worship –  
they care about money.

And as you can see in verse 18 – they are not very happy about this:

## 2. “Destroy This Temple, and in Three Days I Will Raise It” (v18-22)

### a. The Resurrection and the Temple

<sup>18</sup> So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?”

They ask for a sign.

Show us by what authority you do this!

Don’t just come in here turning tables over and talking tough!

What gives you the right to do this?

<sup>19</sup> Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

Not surprisingly, they take him very literally:

<sup>20</sup> The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple,<sup>[c]</sup> and will you raise it up in three days?”

We call it the “second temple” –

but in fact, Herod the Great had embarked on a massive rebuilding plan  
that had enlarged the temple considerably!

So by the time of Jesus, the temple looked nothing  
like the piddly little temple of Zerubbabel!

But that’s not what Jesus was talking about!

<sup>21</sup> But he was speaking about the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup> 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.

### b. In Christ, Earth and Heaven Meet in the Flesh

In Christ, earth and heaven meet in human form

He is God--the Creator

He is man--the creature

The OT temple was designed as a picture of Christ.

It was the place where God dwelt in the midst of his people.

The high priest would offer sacrifices in order to cleanse the tabernacle.

The temple itself could be defiled by the sins of the people.

If the temple becomes defiled,



then there is no way for God to dwell with his people.  
And this was why God could not dwell in humanity before.

Since humanity was defiled by sin,  
it was not a fit dwelling place for a holy God.  
Therefore the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.  
And Jesus offered himself as the perfect sacrifice to forever cleanse humanity.  
And with Jesus himself as the true temple,  
he now cleanses us as his temple—  
the dwelling place of God with man!

No one had anticipated that this structure of gold, wood and stone,  
was actually a picture of a man.

That's why no one gets it.

Verse 22 says that it was only after the resurrection  
that the disciples realized what this meant.

Jesus radically reinterprets the Old Testament.

Neither Moses nor Solomon had envisioned a human temple.

But that is because they could not imagine God becoming man.

But in Jesus, "the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us."

God will now dwell with his people in a personal way.

Watch the result of all this!

### **3. The Result: "Many Believed in His Name" – But Jesus Knew Better (v23-25)**

*<sup>23</sup> Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.*

See, Pastor, signs and wonders are important for getting people to believe in Jesus!!

Yes,

*<sup>24</sup> But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people <sup>25</sup> and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.*

Even as came to dwell with man personally,  
the eternal Word of God did not entrust himself to man.

Jesus does not entrust himself to his followers.

What does that mean?

Jesus does not entrust himself to them.

He knows what is in them.

He knows that the crowds will one day betray him.

He knows the wickedness that is in their hearts.

And so he does not commit himself to them.

Does he love them? Yes

Does he lay down his life for them? Of course!  
Does he entrust himself to them?  
NEVER

He is the new temple.  
He is the place where earth and heaven meet.  
As the mediator between God and man,  
he cannot entrust himself to man.

Instead, Jesus entrusted himself to his heavenly Father.  
Zeal for his Father's house consumed him.  
After all, Psalm 69 is a lament that calls upon God to destroy the wicked.  
Jesus came to Jerusalem at the Passover and found the Jews despising the temple.  
The temple was to be the place of worship—not a place of trade.

The enemies of God had destroyed the proper function of the temple.  
Now Jesus will set about cleansing the earthly temple,  
as a picture of what is about to happen.

The enemies of God will destroy the true temple—his body—as well.  
But the enemies of God cannot triumph in the end.  
Because if they destroy the temple of his body,  
he will raise it up in three days.

What is going on here?  
Chapter 2 reveals Jesus' first sign,  
and focuses on the response of those around him.  
After Jesus manifests his glory in turning water to wine,  
“And his disciples believed in him.” (2:11)  
After the disciples came to understand the meaning of what Jesus had said,  
“And they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.” (2:22)  
And while he was at the Passover feast,  
“Many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.” (2:23)

Three times in this chapter it says that people believed in him.  
John declares to us who Jesus is.  
Jesus has revealed his glory.  
He is the true temple.  
Will you believe in him?  
Will you believe the Scriptures?  
Will you believe in his name?

Jesus does not come as a mild-mannered fellow.  
John does not portray him as a gentle teacher with soft, comforting words.  
John shows us Jesus as a fiery prophet who has come to turn your world upside down.

He turns the water of the Jewish purification rites into the wine of rejoicing.  
He turns the tables of the money-changers upside down,  
driving out the wicked with a whip.

Jesus does not allow others to set the terms of the relationship.

If you want life,

you must believe in his name.

But to those who believe in his name,

he gave the right to become children of God. (1:12)

And indeed, now you are being built into that glorious temple of the body of Christ.

Because the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.