

Zeal For God's House.

Text: John 2:13-22

Suggested Hymns:

503, 346, 504, 186, 191

1) Jesus Cleanses The Temple In Jerusalem

2) Jesus Predicts the Raising Up of Another Temple

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 2:13-22, ¹³ *Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.* ¹⁴ *And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business.*

¹⁵ *When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables.* ¹⁶ *And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!"*

¹⁷ *Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."* 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. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The scene of the story related in our text was the Temple in Jerusalem. It was one of the most famous buildings of antiquity. It was the third Temple erected on this site.

The first Temple, built by King Solomon about 1000 B. C., was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.¹ In its place the Jews, after the Exile, built a

more modest house of worship under Zerubbabel in 515 B.C.² This again was superseded by the truly magnificent Temple begun by King Herod about 19 B. C., but not completed until a few years before it was destroyed by the Romans.

This was the Temple which our Saviour so frequently visited during the days of His earthly life, to which His parents brought Him as a little Child to present Him to the Lord;³ where they found the Boy Jesus sitting among the teachers;⁴ and where He taught, and performed miracles.⁵

Yes, the Temple was very close to the heart of Jesus. How great was His zeal for God's Temple, how ardent His love and devotion for this house of His Father, we learn from our text.

What Jesus did on this particular occasion reminded His disciples of the words of the Psalm 69:9, *[The] zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.* Christ's zeal for God's house is an example for all who bear His name. Let us consider *Christ's Zeal for God's Temple.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Jesus Cleanses The Temple In Jerusalem

What was the reason for Christ's zeal? Why did Jesus so ardently love the Temple? Why was He so zealous for its honour? It was because it was His *"Father's house."* Jesus says in our text, *Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!*

It was the earthly dwelling-place of God among His people. True, the omnipresent God does not need a man-made house.⁶ Nevertheless it had pleased God to choose this place to reveal His holy and gracious presence to His people. The Temple was the centre of all Jewish worship, the most sacred place in all the world.

On its altars were offered up the sacrifices. In its sacred courts God's people assembled to hear the Word of God proclaimed, to worship Him with prayer and praise, and to receive His divine blessings. Jesus was God's Son, and the Temple was God's house, His own real earthly home.

And as He loved His Father with all His heart, so He loved His Father's house. His attitude toward the Temple could be expressed in the words of Psalm 26:8, ⁸ *LORD, I have loved the habitation of Your house, And the place*

where Your glory dwells. And Psalm 84:2, ² My soul longs, yes, even faints For the courts of the LORD.

Jesus whole being was filled with holy awe and reverence every time He entered the Temple. This explains His great zeal for the Temple — it was His Father’s house.

That is why the desecration of the Temple provoked His zeal as described in our text, ¹⁴ *And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business.*

¹⁵ *When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers’ money and overturned the tables. ¹⁶ And He said to those who sold doves, “Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!”*

The Son of God comes to His Father’s house; the Lord comes to His holy Temple. But a shocking spectacle presents itself to His eyes. The sacred precincts of the Temple have been transformed into a actual market-place! The outer court of the Temple, the Court of the Gentiles, is seething with a mass of people, chattering and jostling one another.

There are stalls with cattle, sheep, goats; there are cages with doves; there are money-changers, bankers, sitting at their tables busily engaged in exchanging money, coins of various parts of the Roman Empire, for Jewish shekels, for which they charge a fee.

Here is a man bargaining for an ox. Here is another loudly protesting that he is being charged an outrageous price for a stunted lamb. There is a woman bargaining for a pair of doves. The lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep, the din of hundreds of harsh human voices, penetrates into the interior of the Temple. It mingles discordantly with the solemn chanting of the priests, and disturbs the devotion of the worshipers.

How had this state of affairs come about? Those who lived too far from Jerusalem to bring the animals needed for the sacrifices with them were permitted by the Law,⁷ to turn them into money and purchase others in Jerusalem. This had become a profitable business. The nearer the Temple, the better the business. At last they had invaded the very courts of the Temple and no doubt

paid the Temple authorities a neat sum for these concessions, a commission on every sale.

This would explain why no one interfered with this shameful business. When Jesus saw His Father's house defiled in this way and desecrated, His heart was filled with deep loathing, and with burning indignation, ***“Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.”***

Jesus demonstrated His zeal in this way. ¹⁵ ***When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. ¹⁶ And He said to those who sold doves, “Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!”***

Jesus not merely protests against the irreverent, sacrilegious traffic in the Temple-courts; He takes action. He makes a whip out of small cords, not to strike with, but as a symbol of His authority and punitive justice. Brandishing His scourge, He drives out everything in front of Him, the bellowing, bleating beasts and the greedy vendors. He overturns the desks of the bankers, so that the piles of neatly arranged coins fall jingling and clattering to the pavement.

Then He sternly commands the sellers of doves to remove their wares and not to make His Father's house a house of merchandise, a common market-place. To the amazement of the spectators no one dares to object or offer resistance. Everyone flees from Him in awe and terror.

What was it that struck fear to their hearts? Not the flimsy whip in His hand, but rather the holy wrath and divine majesty that blazed from His eyes and spoke from His voice. A ray of His divine glory shone forth through the veil of His humanity. Thus Jesus purged His Father's house of pollution and desecration and demonstrated His zeal for God's holy Temple.

Christ's zeal for the temple is also an example for us. Scripture says, ***“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”***⁸ By faith in Christ we are God's children. As such it necessary for us also to love our Father's house. Every church in which His Word is taught in truth and purity is a true house of God, a place where God's honour dwells, where He speaks to us, draws near to us, and blesses us through Word and Sacrament, and where we commune with God in worship and prayer.

Our love for God's house should fill us with holy zeal for its honour. And we should show our zeal for God's house, not only by regular attendance at worship, but also by watching carefully over its honour, by keeping from it everything that defiles or desecrates it or disturbs the atmosphere of reverence and devotion, such as noisy conversation near the church door, whispering, and all other irreverent behaviour during the hour of worship.

When a church depends for its support on the sale of tickets for dinners, concerts, raffles, and games of chance, love for God's house is at an extremely low level.

Also the church as a whole is God's Temple. But how often is it desecrated by false doctrine and the ungodly life of those who are its members! Here it is the sacred duty not only of every pastor, but also of every layman to show his zeal for God's temple by purging it of these pollutions and abominations.

Think of the fiery zeal with which St. Paul in his letters protested against those who polluted the Gospel of salvation by grace and faith in Christ with the pagan teaching of work-righteousness. And how sternly he rebuked the church at Corinth for tolerating an adulterer among its members, exhorting it to put away from among its members that wicked person!

Luther showed the same zeal for God's temple. He found the Church of God turned into a house of merchandise, selling letters of pardon for cold cash; and you know how thoroughly he swept this desecrating traffic out of the Church.

When pastors warn against every compromise with false, unscriptural doctrine, or testify earnestly against every form of ungodliness and worldliness and insist on disciplining manifestly impenitent sinners, they are frequently criticised and condemned as narrow-minded. But they are merely following the example of their Lord in His zeal for God's temple.

2. Jesus Predicts the Raising Up of Another Temple

Jesus showed His zeal for God's temple on this same occasion by predicting the raising up of another temple. Our text says, 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."*

The Jewish leaders, especially those entrusted with the administration of the Temple, should have been pleased with the Saviour's action. He had accomplished with a single stroke what they with all their official power and authority had been unable to do in many years: He had purged the Temple of a scandalous abuse.

But instead of rejoicing at His success, they were disgruntled. They took Jesus to task. They demanded from Him a special sign to prove that He had the power and the right to do this thing. Thus even today zeal for God's Temple, as a rule, arouses resentment instead of approval.

Jesus does not give His enemies the sign they request; but He promises them a sign in the future: ***“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”*** The Jews did not understand these words. They thought Jesus was speaking of Herod's Temple. Even understood like that, it would have been a great miracle to rebuild in three days, a structure which had required many years of labour to erect. We know that Jesus could have performed such a miracle. The Jews, however, did not believe it. By their sceptical question they told Him: *You are mad.*

The evangelist explains that Jesus was referring to ***“the temple of His body.”*** This, then, was the real meaning of Christ's words: *Put Me to death, and I shall rise again in three days.* Even the disciples were puzzled by these words at the time when they were spoken; but after Christ's resurrection they recalled them and understood their meaning.

By restoring to life His dead body, an act requiring divine power, Jesus would prove to His enemies that He is the almighty Lord of the Temple who has power and authority to cleanse His own house.

Why did Jesus call His body a temple? This conversation took place in the Temple. He had just cleansed the Temple. This Temple was a type, a symbol, of His body. This building was God's Temple because God dwelt in it. Christ's body is God's temple for the same reason: God dwells in it, as we read in Colossians 2:9, ***“For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”***

When the Jews put Jesus to death by nailing His body to the cross, they destroyed the temple of God. By this same act they also brought about the destruction of the earthly Temple and all it stood for.

When Jesus died, the veil in the Temple was torn in two by an unseen hand from top to bottom,⁹ signifying that all the symbolical, typical, worship of the old Temple had now come to an end. It found its fulfilment in Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice for the redemption of the world. Since the Jewish nation as a whole rejected Christ, the Lord of the Temple, it was but an empty shell which was crushed utterly in the destruction of Jerusalem.

By raising up His body, Christ laid the foundation to another, a spiritual, Temple of God.¹⁰ After being raised from the dead, He sent forth His disciples into all the world to proclaim His Gospel by which millions of lost sinners were brought to faith in Christ as their Saviour.

All who are by faith united with Christ are now His spiritual Body.¹¹ And since His Body is the temple of God, the Church is the true spiritual Temple of God.¹² This is a far greater, a more glorious temple than Solomon's or Herod's. These temples were in one place only; Christ's spiritual temple fills earth and heaven. They were utterly destroyed; but Christ's temple, the Church, will endure to all eternity. The raising up of this temple is a greater miracle than the earthly Temple in three days would have been.

Our text also shows us Christ's consuming zeal for this spiritual temple of God. In order to build this Temple, Christ sacrificed Himself; He laid down His life, shedding His holy, precious blood.¹³ At the moment when He stood there in the court of that impressive structure, the Herodian Temple, and spoke to His foes about raising up another temple, His all-seeing eyes had a clear vision of that marvellous Temple not made with hands. He saw its walls rising higher and higher as one living stone after another was being added.

Jesus saw His kingdom spreading from nation to nation till it finally encompasses all the earth. He saw the spires of His spiritual Temple reaching up into heaven and saw the holy structure finished at last in all its glory and perfection, the grandest masterpiece of its heavenly Builder, outliving and outlasting the proudest structures ever built by man.

But Jesus also knew the enormous price He would have to pay for the building of this temple: the unspeakable tortures of crucifixion and the bitter pains of death. Did He consider the cost too great? No. Not only was He willing to suffer death at the hands of His enemies; He literally challenges them:

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” What sublime, consuming zeal for God’s temple, the Church!

Christ’s zeal should stimulate in every one of us an eager, ardent love and devotion for His temple, the Church. The world, the unbelievers, despise and hate the Church and do all in their power to discredit, undermine, and destroy it. That is, after all, not to be wondered at.

But, sad to say, many of those who call themselves His followers are but lukewarm, others quite cold and indifferent, in the matter of building Christ’s holy temple, the Church. They care little or nothing whether the work of the Church languishes or progresses.

They take interest in, and have time and money for everything else, but little or none in and for the Church for which their Lord so willingly died and which even now, as He sits at the right hand of God, is the chief object of His most ardent zeal. Is it possible to believe in, and sincerely love, Christ and not share His zeal for God’s temple, the Church?

May the divine fire of Christ’s holy zeal for His temple kindle anew in our hearts the flame of ardent love and devotion for the Church, a love and devotion which expresses itself in consecrating to its service our time and talent, our faculties of body, mind, and soul, our earthly possessions, and yes, in sacrificing, if need be, life itself rather than dishonour, betray, or forsake it! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 2 Kings 25:8-9

² Ezra 6:3-4, 15

³ Luke 2:22

⁴ Luke 2:46

⁵ Luke 22:53; John 18:20; Matt. 21:14

⁶ 1 Kings 8:27

⁷ Deut. 14:24-26

⁸ Philippians 2:5

⁹ Luke 23:45

¹⁰ John 4:20-23

¹¹ Eph. 1:22-23

¹² Eph. 2:19-22; 2 Cor. 6:16

