

## **Sermon: March 14/15 2009:**

### **John 2: 13 - 22:**

#### **How clean is your Temple?**

Throughout Hebrew/Jewish history the Temple has been an important focal point for the Nation. Firstly during the time of the Exodus they had the Tabernacle, then two temples were built, the first by King Solomon during his 40 year reign – (c970 – c930BCE) and the second during the time of Cyrus the Great and Darius the Great of Persia. This second building of the temple is recorded for us in the Old Testament book of Ezra.

The Temple was built to replace the Tabernacle, to house the Ark of the Covenant and to serve all nations, particularly the Hebrew nation of Israel, as a place where any man, or women, Jew or Gentile, could worship the God of Israel and where God is said to dwell.

**In the Bible prophets describe visions of a mysterious presence of God occupying the Temple.**

[Isaiah](#) wrote "*I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and his train filled the Temple.*" (Isaiah 6:1).

[Jeremiah](#) implored "*Do not dishonor the throne of your glory*" (Jeremiah 14:21) and referred to "*Thou throne of glory, on high from the beginning, Thou place of our sanctuary*" (Jeremiah 17:12).

[Ezekiel](#) spoke of "*the glory of the God of Israel was there [in the Sanctuary], according to the vision that I saw in the plain.*"

Isaiah spoke of the importance of prayer as well as sacrifice in Temple, and of a universal purpose:

*Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make joyful in my house of prayer,  
Their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be acceptable upon Mine altar  
For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.  
(Isaiah 56:7, JPS translation).*

*"My House shall be a house of prayer for all peoples." (Isaiah 56:7)*

The Temple was the place where offerings described in the course of the Hebrew Bible were carried out, including daily morning and afternoon offerings and special offerings on Shabbat and Jewish holidays. Levites

recited Psalms at appropriate moments during the offerings, including the Psalm of the Day, special psalms for the new month, and other occasions, the Hallel during major Jewish holidays, and psalms for special sacrifices such as the "Psalm for the Thanksgiving Offering" (Psalm 100).

As part of the daily offering, a prayer service was performed in the Temple which was used as the basis of the traditional Jewish (morning) service recited to this day and part of which was the reading of the Ten Commandments.

So when Jesus walked into the temple and saw what those charged with looking after the Temple – the Priests and Levites – had allowed the temple to become it is understandable that he got upset, not just because they had turned his father's house from a place of prayer and worship to a market place, a place of trade and commerce where birds and animals were sold for the sacrifice and at exorbitant charges and money could be exchanged. They seem to have allowed the things of the world to enter the Temple and effect the way worship was to be done.

The area of the temple they used was that set aside for the Gentile who came to seek God and for whom the Jews had little time, effectively cutting them off from God.

Jesus' anger was aroused when he saw a lost sense of awe and reverence for his father. The Jews had not only lost their focus, they were preventing others from the worship of God.

Today we still build temples for the worship of God, we call them churches, and refer to them as places where one can meet God.

As I thought on this I asked myself have we in the Church today – the body of Christ – gone the same way, by being lulled to sleep by the push for political correctness and the all paths lead to God approach to religion, and allowing these worldly ways to effect the way we do worship, or the way we represent God and Jesus to the community? Have we turned our churches into market places where the popular is offered rather than the true and have we lost that sense of awe for our Heavenly father and are now in the same strife that those in the Temple courts were in? Have we, by our rituals and doctrines shut others off from finding their peace with God?

This is the second recorded time Jesus had been to the temple, the first being when he was 12, but now he was a man and his almost violent response is in contrast to Jesus' gentle manner and one that shocked the people who were with him as they were not used to this behavior from Jesus.

Jesus then sets about disrupting the corrupt activities that were going on in the temple by making a whip of cords and then setting about overturning tables and making a scene – a big one.

He also condemned them with his words <sup>16</sup> *He told those who were selling the doves "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's House a marketplace!" nrsv*

In Matthew he said to them, *"It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a den of robbers."* nrsv

You can imagine the scene, doves flying every where as they are set free, money going everywhere, traders diving for cover to escape the wrath of Jesus. They even had the gall to challenge Jesus with "what miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" which is like saying who do you think you are, anyone can come into God's house with a whip and make a mess – what makes you so special? This is the same Jesus that has performed many miracles and they still cannot see the truth even when it is before their eyes. They demand a sign saying in a way perform for us, do something miraculous and we will believe.

Kerrie and I do markets and I could imagine what chaos there would bring if someone came in and turned over the trader's displays. We would be calling for the constabulary.

Many Church attendees today still look for Jesus to perform some miracle before they will totally commit themselves.

In response Jesus comes from left field and tells them, destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days. (John 2:19) This statement threw those listening for they looked at the physical building which had taken 46 years to build. In focusing on the building they missed the point that Jesus was referring to his own body and that it too was a temple of God and that the issue was not the building but rather the presence of God among you.

I wonder how we would react if someone came to one Sunday Service, stood up and after telling us that we had got off track in our worship, proceeded to tell us that if we knocked this old building down he would rebuild it in three days. We would possible react the same way as those in Jesus time with the added question as to what funny weed he was using or how much wine he had drunk.

Jesus had switched the focus from the physical to the spiritual and as we read in 1 Corinthians 6: 19 *or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? Nrsv*

So if we are temples of God's Holy Spirit then how clean is your temple or the temple forecourt? What have you allowed into your life that affects the way you worship God or spend time with him in prayer and discussion? Has it become easier to allow the discipline to slip, or the flame of your first love of Christ die down or even grow cold?

What needs to be overturned in your temple or my temple courtyard through a change of attitude and repentance, for that is what Jesus was offering the

people in the Temple, a chance to repent for their sinfulness and waywardness and a restoration in their relationship with God. Unfortunately they were not prepared to give up the worldly ways which were obscuring their focus on God.

The same is for us when we allow ourselves to be sidetracked by the things of the world, or have been obscured in our focus of God. You see faith/religion can deteriorate when the sense of the wonder of God departs from a person or congregation, for we too can lose our sense of awe and reverence for God.

How do we show that we have lost this reverence for God, by not spending enough time with him, and when it becomes too easy to skip meeting together?

God, who is gracious, through Christ wants a close personal relationship with each one of us, his sons and daughters, and if we want to be effective in our nurture of the body of Christ and the mission to spread the good news we need to clean up our act collectively and individually. Then we will be able to be a place or person where the lost and lonely can encounter God through our Lord Jesus.

Let this Lent be a time of spring cleaning in your temple courts and let the Glory of God be seen in you and the Son of God shine forth and exhibit the awesomeness of our God's grace. Let the power of the Risen Lord raise you up and renew a right spirit within you.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit