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Jesus overcomes Satan when he obscures the purpose of worship.

Since the beginning of time believers have gathered to praise the Lord and proclaim his love at public worship. It isn't surprising that Satan tries to infiltrate and then confuse the worship assembly of God's people. He convinces some people to be more concerned with worship traditions than the message. He leads others to demand worship activities which blur the central message of forgiveness. The Word for today leads us to look past Satan's temptations and continue to praise and proclaim Christ, the central reality of God's plan to save us.

Sermon John 213-22 Zeal for God's House

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

The Jews then responded to him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple he had spoken of was his body. 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.

The death and resurrection of Jesus marks the turning point in worship history. So far this year, we've been tracing through the words and works of Jesus in Mark's Gospel. In this season of Lent, however, we're going to be departing from Mark for a time and dipping into **John's** gospel to look at when Jesus visits the center of worship activity in Israel and how he points to this shift in worship history.

Jesus' anger in our text may be sometime jarring to some of us at first, but we have to realize that this is absolutely a righteous anger that Jesus has. It's a zeal that flares up for God's house because the **purpose** of temple worship was being obscured—a purpose the people who came to the temple so desperately needed to see clearly! So, in order to see how the purpose is being obscured, we should probably understand what the purpose was in the first place. But to see the full concept of what the temple was, we need to go back—way back.

God wanted a physical, visible place on earth where he could meet and dwell with mankind—a place to communicate his gracious will and intention for them. That physical place was supposed to be the **Garden of Eden**, but after sin created separation between God and man, there needed to be a place to atone for sin and cleanse the space so that man could continue to meet and dwell with God and continue to hear his gracious will

for them despite their sin. That place was the **temple**—a little pocket of Eden remixed in a context of sin, and a concession made by God out of love so they could continue to meet together in an Eden-like holy space.

While Moses was leading the Israelites from Egypt to Israel, they had a temple-on-the-move called the **tabernacle**—a temple in tent-form. Once they arrived and got established in the land, Solomon constructed a stationary **temple**. Generation after generation were taught at the temple as sacrifices were performed that the wages of their sin was death, and without some sort of substitutionary death and the shedding of blood, cleansing was not possible. There were many different sacrifices, but none more pointed than the **Passover** celebration (the celebration that brought Jesus to Jerusalem in our text today), which looked back at when God saved the people from physical slavery in Egypt, while at the same time looking forward to *the* Passover Lamb of God himself, the Messiah, who would take away the sin of the world, saving them from spiritual slavery to Satan. That's an important message for the people to hear and see clearly—*the* message!

Just as we **value** above any other *words* in the world the Words of God for how they deliver the message of Christ to us, what could be a more valuable *place* in the world than the place of God's house for how it delivered the message of Christ to the people? This place was to be a beacon to the entire world of how God and man are reconciled to meet and dwell with one another just like in the beginning.

Well, as Lutherans who value the Word so dearly, nothing quite grinds our gears as much as when we see people **abusing** the use of God's word—emptying it of its meaning, purpose, and beauty. When we see the Latter Day Saints church twisting the good news of *what God did for us* into something *we must do for God*, it wells up righteous anger within us. When we see churches skip the challenging but necessary process of journeying through law to the gospel for a cheap feel-good service that seems to worship man more than God, we get rightfully riled up. The message of the Word is so important and so dear to us, that when it's obscured, we feel zealous to correct it! Likewise, the message of the temple was so important and so dear, and when it was being obscured and emptied of its meaning, God felt zealous to correct it.

John 2 is *not* the first time this happened. People had been obscuring the purpose of worship at the temple practically since the day it was built, breaking the very First Commandment to have no other gods besides him (which was written on stone tablets in the center of the temple, and which we read in our First Reading). They engaged in such rampant idolatry that God allowed his very own dwelling place to be destroyed. When it was rebuilt after the Babylonian exile, the Second Temple (and then subsequently upgraded by Herod), we're never told that the personal presence of God ever returns to the temple grounds again. *Until the life of Jesus—and this* how it goes (in what seems like more than 1 instance):

“When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts (Not outside—Inside!) he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords (probably the cords that were used to tether the animals), and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, ‘Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!’ His disciples remembered that it is written (in Psalm 69): ‘Zeal for your house will consume me.’”

What began no doubt as a practice to make worship convenient for the thousands of visitors who had travelled from far away had turned into a corrupt and lucrative business opportunity to sell animals and exchange money not in service to God, but in service to the idols of money and self-interest. This day, the Passover, was a day that was supposed to communicate God's good and gracious will for mankind and is supposed to point to what he will soon do as the perfect, unblemished Passover Lamb for the sins of the world; but at this point, it would practically be a miracle for anyone to see any of that in what had become little more than a marketplace. So when Jesus, the walking personal presence of God, enters the temple, the disgust for idolatry that kept him away in the first-place surfaces as zeal for his house, and it consumes him. He must cleanse this place of worship. He must restore its purpose and focus.

Worship is not just an hour-long Sunday morning activity; worship is a lifestyle.

You are not your own to do with your life as you please, defining what is good for your life in the wisdom of your own eyes. You're called to a life of the worship of God. And your worship lifestyle has a purpose: to be a reflection of the gracious God who made you (having no gods beside him—not just no gods *in front of* him, no gods *at all* but him) and to point to the sacrifice of the Lamb. But is that purpose so obscured someday that it would practically be a miracle if someone managed to see that message through your life? Do people see the *version of you that worships in here in the version of you that worships out there*? Or has what was meant to be a *place of worship of God* been corrupted into a *place of worship of idols*? Luther said, “*Whatever you set your heart on and put your trust in is truly your God,*” and Tim Keller said “*anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give*” is the idol you truly worship. Our idolatry in worshipping money, possessions, comfort, and self is disgusting to God, and with all this corruption that clings to our flesh, Jesus would be absolutely justified in zealously acting out of righteous anger, driving us out of his presence forever.

Our corruption is not so much different than their corruption, but what Jesus does in between—that, that is different. As he goes through cleansing the temple grounds, Jesus is standing at a great turning point in worship history—as shift from *that* temple to *this* temple: When asked how he possibly has the authority to do such a thing, Jesus says, “*Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.*”

To construct the first temple, the tabernacle, a movable-temple, leather was stretched around poles, creating a space where the glory of the Lord was pleased to dwell. **When Jesus was formed in the womb**, skin was stretched around bones to construct a new movable temple where the glory of the Lord was pleased to dwell. As this temple-on-the-move, Jesus interacted with people, they saw clearly what the temple was always supposed to communicate—*restoration, reconciliation*. As Jesus cleanses the temple, he is restoring the purpose of the physical temple to shine a clear spotlight on what he will soon do with his bodily temple.

The thing is, once Jesus left, the idolatry he purged would **inevitably come right back**. When all those people were driven from the temple courts, their sins remained in their hearts. So, is an endless cycle of cleansing the temple again and again the only solution?

No—as the true temple, Jesus does something incredible. All the idolatry Jesus zealously drove away from the temple grounds, he actually **brings back** and gathers onto his own temple grounds of his body—the very idolatry of that temple area comes back to cling to Jesus' very flesh. Even more, the sin that drove Adam out of the temple grounds of Eden, the sin that drove you out of a relationship with God from your birth, the sin of the world—instead of continuing to zealously drive out, as the true temple and Passover Lamb, he actually zealously brings it all back and gathers it onto himself.

As he adopts the sin of humanity onto his very own bodily temple grounds, and as zeal for God's house collides with zeal for humanity, it consumes him so much that he *must* cleanse it—but **cleansing it means his own destruction**. So just as he whipped the idolatry out of the temple, he takes the temple of his body to be whipped and scourged—stricken, smitten, and afflicted. As the true temple of God is destroyed and God's personal presence is punished for humanity's corruption on the cross, the wheel of endless cleansing is broken. Humanity's idolatry is banished once and for all, and God reconciles the world to himself in Christ Jesus to meet and dwell with him in holiness.

What sign proves that Jesus has the authority to do something as incredible as that? What sign proves that Jesus really acts as the true temple for humanity—*for me*? Jesus answers: “*Destroy this temple, and I will **raise it again in three days.***”

As the bodily temple that had been crumbled to pieces on the cross takes a breath of air three days later, all objections to Jesus' authority to cleanse the temple, the world, and myself are silenced. The historical and verifiable fact of the **resurrection** is all I need to be assured. And as we look upon Jesus' death and resurrection unobscured, we see with clarity the true purpose of worship.

What blows me away in all this is the fact that Jesus doesn't just cleanse and purify you and leave you as some sort of neutral ground. When he makes you holy, he makes your body into a place of temple grounds—a place of worship in spirit and truth. And being holy temple grounds, God himself is pleased to make his home *within you*! The dogmaticians call this the "Mystical Union"—when Christ dwells within justified believers through faith. What does that mean for you?

You may feel of little value someday, and as you look within yourself and see sickness, disease, tumors, you may feel like you are a rather worthless vessel of flesh. But that body is a temple of God. You're not waiting to someday join God. Through the work of Jesus, he has already joined you—you'll just get to see him completely unobscured, face-to-face like it was in the beginning.

Your life is temple on-the-move, and your lifestyle is worship—a beacon of God's good and gracious will to the *world*, to our *children*, to *everyone* around us, pointing to the sacrifice of the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

That's why Paul writes to the Ephesians, after calling them "*a holy temple in the Lord*," and "*God's dwelling in the Spirit* (Eph 2:21-22)," "...**don't grieve the Holy Spirit**. You were sealed by him for the day of redemption. [So] Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ. (Eph 4:30-32)." So **be what you are!** When people walk into your vicinity, may it be like they just walked into the place where God dwells—a place where they see clearly grace in action. Have zeal for God's house here and everywhere, 'til we meet again in God's heavenly house. Amen.

This sermon was preached by seminarian Micah Otto.