

Title: This Temple
Text: John 2.18-22
Theme: Where God dwells with His people
Occasion: Resurrection Day 2011, AM sermon
Prop Stmtnt: Christ alone is the merging of God and Man

Some of the greatest words ever spoken were by the angel of the Lord to the women who came to the tomb of Christ on that Sunday morning. From that moment on, Sunday would never be the same. From that moment on, Sunday would forever be, Resurrection Day. "He is not here, he is risen, as he said."ⁱ

Read Text:

Could you imagine going to Auschwitz or Treblinka, Poland and making jokes about extermination camps and gas chambers? World War II concluded over 65 years ago, but many of the scars still remain. Death camps are no laughing matter. Neither are crosses. Death by crucifixion was a horrible reality in the 1st century world. It would have been absolutely inexplicable back then to conceive of some of the things that we sing. Think of the irony, the strangeness, even the offensiveness of some of these words.

"So, I will **cherish** the old, rugged **cross**." Cross means crucifixion. "Cherish" and "cross" do not belong together. Stronger yet, we sing the words that Paul wrote, "I will **glory** in the **cross**" or "I will boast only in the cross." Those two categories (boasting and death by crucifixion) are at the complete opposite ends of the mental spectrum of the 1st century mind. No songwriter seems to capture this irony better than Isaac Watts. Friday night we sang about the "wondrous" "cross". Nathan has pointed out that the text of this song is full of phrases that at first do not seem to go together. "On which the Prince of Glory" "died." How can someone be the Prince of Glory and die?

These ironies are part of the ministry of Christ that are prominently displayed in his arrest, trial, death, burial and resurrection. For example, soldiers and others mocked him as a king. They used some of the cruelest form of humor as a means to show him contempt. The irony was, He is the King. Last Sunday night I pointed out another irony. By not saving himself, he saved others. Could he have been delivered from the cross? No, he could not be delivered from the cross and deliver you from your sin. It was one or the other. It is ironic that as Christ cried out in despair, he was actually expressing faith in God. All of this was ironic, but Christ often used irony as a means to teach. In fact, often the full meaning of his words was not immediately clear to his disciples or the others who heard him. That is the case in this text. Christ says something that at first glance sounds strange. It is not until after his resurrection that it becomes a little clearer, and then upon further study it is a glorious surprise. Let's go back to the scene in John 2.

1. Who do you think you are?

"What sign do you show us for doing these things?" (v.18)

Here in John 2, Christ went into the Temple, early in his public ministry and threw out the money changers and disrupted their business because they had set up shop in the very area surrounding the Temple where that was designated for the non-Jewish worshipers to be able to come and worship. It was bad enough that they were ripping people off through exchange rates and other abuses; it was an even greater offense that they were preventing non-Jews from being able to worship. But, who is this guy who takes charge and throws everyone out. Who does he think he is? It is interesting to note that these guys do not appear to pause, even for a minute to consider whether or not this guy (Christ) could be right? There is no self-examination; they just want to see his permit.

Now, here is the logic. If this guy is from God and therefore has the authority to act in this matter, then he would surely be able to do something that would confirm that, like a miracle or sign or something. So, that is what they challenge him with. Show us a sign, which, at the very least is a challenge that betrays the fact that some of them considered the possibility that he was a prophet sent from heaven.

By the way, John includes this account in his gospel, because he is attempting to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that only by means of believing in Christ can anyone have eternal life.ⁱⁱ

2. You are going to do what?

“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” (19)

Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Now, hold the phone there for a second. Here is one little statement by Christ that occupies a few verses in John’s gospel, but could fill a book. The Jews (likely temple authorities or representatives from the Sanhedrin) asked for a sign, so he gave them one. “Destroy this temple and I will rebuild it in three days.” It is brilliant! Christ is telling these guys that if THEY destroy the Temple, he will rebuild it in three days. The only way that they can actually prove that he can’t do it is to destroy the temple which, or course, they are not going to do. So, he offers them a powerful sign to prove his credentials for cleansing the temple and they are stuck. Of course, they are also incredulous. They said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple and you will raise it in three days?” In fact, the outer portions of the temple complex were not yet completed when this event took place. Later on it becomes clear that the Jews never forgot this statement. At his trial he is accused of saying that he was going to destroy the temple, which, he did not say. He said, “You destroy the temple...” Now the reason why this would be raised at his trial was because desecrating a temple was always a surefire way to stir things up. Imagine if today some Jewish zealots were able to plant explosives and blow up the Dome of the Rock? That would be a bit more problematic than a two-bit, publicity hound from Florida holding a protest in Dearborn – right? If you blew up the Dome of the Rock or threatened to blow up the Dome of the Rock, you would have, as we say, “a situation.” Rome did not want “situations.” Religious conflicts were often the cause of many problems in the Roman Empire and problems demanded soldiers and soldiers cost money so Rome made the desecration of a temple a capital offense. That is why this statement by Christ was used

against Christ in his trial. But, honestly, we can appreciate some of their perplexity. How could someone rebuild the Temple in three days?

We are rather amazed at an “Extreme Home-makeover” project that can redo a house in a week and we have trucks, dozers, lifts, cranes and really cool tools. But that was not the case then. In fact, the architects of the famous European cathedrals never lived long enough to see their work completed. It took a long time to build things. And it took a really long time to build really big things. Some men spent their entire lives working on one structure and died never seeing it done. This was exaggerated at the Temple site because the use of a mason’s hammer near the Temple was forbidden. Every stone had to be pre-cut elsewhere and hauled to the site. The project was started around 20 BC and was not completed until A.D. 63, just seven years before it and the entire city of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. The Temple, proper was built rather quickly, while the rest of the buildings took a long time to finish. It was a magnificent structure. By the way, archaeologists have located the base of this particular temple and have discovered that some of the foundation stones of Herod’s temple weighed up to 400 tons each. So, the idea of someone rebuilding the Temple in 3 days was patently absurd. Now, while he is on the cross, these words are thrown back into his face. Why? Because here, the One who claimed to have so much power that He could rebuild the Temple in three days, does not even have the power to help himself. The irony of that becomes a reason for Christ to be mocked. But...

3. He wasn’t kidding

“He was speaking about the temple of his body.” (v.21)

The one, who claimed to be the King, was the king.

The one, who could not save himself, saved others.

The one, who cried out in despair, was trusting fully in God.

The one, who did not have the power to help himself, is omnipotent. In fact, he can rise from the dead and did.

John wrote his gospel later than the other three. He includes helpful little comments that reveal that later on some of the loose ends of these events, or puzzling statements by Christ became tied together and made sense. And that is what happens here. (21-22) At some point after the resurrection, the disciples were reflecting back on the events of Christ’s ministry and realized that even then he was talking about his resurrection. And when we study this a bit further we realize that he is saying even more. In this one statement Christ summarizes the story of the Bible. It is actually fascinating and is another one of those “Ah-ha” moments.

4. More than you realize

“His disciples remembered that he had said this.” (v.22)

Like so many other things that Christ did and said, there is often more to it than we initially see. The Jews thought that he was referring to the Temple. The disciples realize that he was referring to This Temple (his body). But, that does not mean that the temple

was insignificant. It was Christ who cleaned the thing out. It was Christ who called it a house of prayer for all nations. It was Christ who was zealous for the honor of his Father's place. Why? Why was the temple so important to Christ? In this text, it was Christ who made the connection between his body and temple. Why did Jesus say it like this? Was he just messing with the Jews? Was he just yanking their chain, pushing their buttons, tweaking their strings and watching them get all wound up and freaked out just for fun? There was a point to this statement. But if, the temple was so important to Christ, why, when his disciples were in awe of its prominence, did he throw a cold blanket on their coals of enthusiasm by predicting its destruction? (Matthew 24.1-2) Here is where stepping back for a minute allows us to see an aspect of the resurrection that it truly fascinating. Let's start with this.

- What is a temple? A temple is understood to be a dwelling place for the divine. Every culture has temples. Have you ever wondered why? Why is it that people all over the world build temples? (Hold on to that question for a minute) We understand that there is only One Divine. Therefore, the Temple was the dwelling place that God chose to manifest himself on the earth. But, the Temple was not in the original design, was it?

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And on the earth, God made a garden, in which he placed Adam and Eve, whom He would meet with and delight in. Here, the Garden of Eden was designed by God to be His Temple. It was not only a place for God to dwell, it was a place for God and man to come together for worship (by man), for fellowship, for relationship, for joy, and for satisfaction. It was where the creation and the Creator merged. It was a point of connection between that which was physical and that which was ultimately spiritual. Every day God came to his garden, his sanctuary, his temple and enjoyed his children. No garden could contain all of God. No two people could take up all of his attention. God's love and presence is so infinite that he could fill an entire planet with his presence and relate perfectly with and enjoy millions of people all at the same time. And since God is so immense and therefore his joy and his ability to relate is so inexhaustible he gave the great commission to Adam and Eve. So, God told them to expand the borders of the garden, that is the temple. Their mission was to rule, subdue and the fill the earth with their own kind who would live with and enjoy God and delight in him. The only thing better than one kid, is a houseful, if they can be nurtured and loved and treasured and provided for. Our inexhaustible and infinite God had designed the earth to be filled with people who lived with Him enjoying His presence glory. So, at the end of the opening week of creation, God blessed Adam and Eve and he saw all that he had made and it was very good.

That magnificent setting was destroyed by sin. Adam and Eve squandered the temple. Their distrust of this delightful God led them to disobey his command and they lost it all. They had been warned. Now, they were thrown out of the garden, out of the temple, out of the sanctuary, out of the presence of God because God cannot dwell with sin. The way back to the garden, back to the temple, back to the sanctuary was guarded by an angel with a flaming sword that promised swift physical death to anyone who dared to go back. The way back to the Temple was blocked. They lost access to the dwelling place of God. Instead of enjoying the presence of God and the glory of God, they were now terrified of

God. They lost the fellowship, the relationship, the enjoyment, the delight, they innocence, the security, the safety, and the satisfaction. The loss was colossal. How could God ever dwell with man? How could the two ever again meet and enjoy each other? Because of our sin and its polluting effects, we are offensive to God's righteousness and because of God's holiness we are terrified of his wrath! How could the earth be restored? How could God ever dwell with people again? The story of the Bible is the story of how the dwelling of God with people is restored and recovered. We see this a bit more in Exodus.

Exodus is more than the story of the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt. Exodus is the story of redemption for the purpose of relationship. You see, in Genesis, God called a people, who became known as the Israelites. God selected them to be a testimony of his glory to the world. But, at the beginning of the book, they were in perpetual and hopeless slavery! At the end of the book, they were now the people with whom the God of the universe lived! They had been delivered from Egypt. Egypt had fascinating temples and Israel had a tent. But here was the difference. God lived in the tent, in the midst of his people. The only way that one could get into the tent was if he did it by means of a sacrificial death that represented the sins of the people. Now, back in the Garden of Eden, there were no altars for sacrificing animals, no basins to clean the hands of the priests, no curtains to separate the people from the holy place, no incense and no veil to hide the glory of God. God was completely accessible. Now, instead of filling the garden, he confined himself to the back room of a tent. This was not how it was supposed to be! But, it was a step in the right direction, for now. Eventually the tabernacle would be located, along with the children of Israel in the Promised Land. God was not satisfied to live in the back room of a tent. That was only a step to a greater plan. His plan was to fill the land of Canaan with his presence in such a way that the earth would be drawn to worship him through the example of the glad obedience and joyful worship his people. His people were to function as representatives of all people. So, the great commission that Adam and Eve failed to carry out was now given to the children of Israel. They were to rule, subdue and spread the borders of the nation. They were to worship God alone and live by the terms of the covenant that he had made with them. The land of Canaan was supposed to become like the Garden of Eden. God's desire for this land of milk and honey was for it to become even more beautiful. The tabernacle was eventually replaced by Solomon's temple which took 7 years to build, was dedicated on the seventh month during a feast that lasted 7 days and Solomon's speech of dedication was organized around seven petitions. And just as God's awesome presence had filled the tabernacle, God filled Solomon's temple in such a way that the priests on that day of dedication could not even do their work. They were overwhelmed. God's dwelling on earth with his people has been his plan from the beginning. But there is more to this divine building program than looking back to the original creation. The temple looked forward to the day when Eden would be restored. It looked forward to the day when the glory of God would fill the entire earth. It looked forward to the day when earth and heaven would be one, where God would live with and enjoy his people and they would live forever. But like Adam before them, Israel could not keep the Temple. The glory of God that rested in the Tabernacle and then the Temple left because of the idolatry and disobedience of the people. Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Solomon's temple. The unthinkable had happened.

The temple that was replaced it was a shadow of its former glory. It was this rather simple temple that Herod replaced with his magnificent structure. But this time there was no fire, no glory cloud, no presence of the Divine. They had a building, but there was no glory of God resting in it. It was only a symbol. There was no reality. For 400 years the people of Israel walked in darkness. But then, God came back in the person of Christ. The true temple had come, but at the time, no one knew it!

When John starts his gospel account about Christ he says this. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” The Word (God) became flesh (man). God and man had come together in the person of Jesus Christ. What is that? That is a temple. No, that is THE Temple. He is not only “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn (pre-eminent One) of all creation” the creator and the one in whom “all things hold together”, he is the One in whom “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” so that when he became man, he could offer up himself as the full and final and supreme sacrifice for sin by offering up THE temple through which he made peace between God and man. Jesus is the only place, the only temple where a holy God can meet with a sinful people. And the reason why he is that place is because of his death, burial and resurrection.

Every culture has temples. Have you ever wondered why? Why is it that people all over the world build temples? God made you. You were made with a divine tracking device (like the I-Pad and I-phone). You know that there is a God. Everyone does, but sin has distorted that understanding of who God is. Since you were designed by Him, you were made in order to know him. You long to do that. You will not be satisfied, nor be at rest until you do. That is why you ask the questions that you do. Every one does. Every person who has ever lived tries to answer these questions: Who am I? Where did I come from? What went wrong? What is going to happen to me? The religions all over the world, try to answer that. All of the temples try to do what only Christ can do. They try to be places where the divine and humans can meet. But they don't work. All of the religions try to satisfy your longing that only Christ can really answer. Why? Because no religion but Christ has an answer for sin. Religions understand guilt and shame. They understand that we long to live forever. But they have no satisfactory answer for what went wrong and how do we fix it?

5. What is your Temple?

“and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.” (22)

Jesus Christ is God who became man. He came to this earth in order to do what Adam could not do. Christ lived the way God intended for us to live. And when Christ lived a perfectly righteous life, he did that in your place. He did that for you. Although he died on the cross, he was not guilty of any personal sin. His death was offered in your place. He died as a substitute in place of you. The only way that God could spare you from being cursed because of your sin was to curse His Son in your placeⁱⁱⁱ. And so, Christ died for you. Christ died in order to pay your debt. Christ died in order to take upon himself the wrath of the Father against your sin, so that you would not have to. Unless your sin is forgiven and your guilt removed you cannot ever meet with God. You need a temple where you can meet with God. Only Jesus is that temple. It was through his death,

through the destruction of his body on the cross, that the wrath of the Father was satisfied. How do we know? How do we know that the penalty of our sin was paid? How do we know that the wrath of the Father has been removed? How do we know that there is nothing left for me to pay? How do we know that our debt has been removed? The death of Christ on the cross, was like the paying of our debt with a check. The wages of sin is death.^{iv} On Resurrection morning, God the Father was declaring to the whole world, “that check cleared the bank!”

Go ahead and destroy this temple. Go ahead and destroy the one to whom this temple points (and they did) and in three days I will raise it up (and he did) and in so doing put into a motion a restoration that you have never even dreamed about.

Toward the end of his life, John writes again about Christ and the temple. It is a fascinating account, called the book of Revelation. It speaks of what is going to happen at the end this world as we know it. And the end is just the beginning.

The Bible ends like it begins. God is dwelling with his people. Instead of a garden, it is a city that looks like a garden. And in Revelation 21.22 as John is describing this eternal city of glory where the redeemed (and only the redeemed) get to live with God forever, he writes, “And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.”

Do you believe?

ⁱ Matt 28.6

ⁱⁱ John 20.31

ⁱⁱⁱ 2 Corinthians 5.21

^{iv} Romans 6.23