

# Meeting With Christ

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Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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## IN THREE DAYS I WILL RAISE IT UP

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### John 2:13-22

The Jews considered the temple to be God's house. But the arrival of Jesus altered this understanding of the temple. The glory of God will be found somewhere else. Jesus alluded to this change early in His ministry, in John 2:13-22. Let's look at this incident.

*John 2:13. And the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*

*14 And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers seated.*

*15 And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the moneychangers, and overturned their tables;*

*16 and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a house of merchandise."*

*17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Thy house will consume me."*

*18 The Jews therefore answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, seeing that You do these things?"*

*19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."*

*20 The Jews therefore said, "It took 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 When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken.*

### Two key verses

I would like to begin by pointing out two key verses in this passage. The first one is v. 19. *Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."* This sentence is very important in the NT, so important that it will appear again three other times.

This is the statement that was used to charge Jesus with being an insurrectionist at His trial. Two people testified against Him saying, *This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days (Matthew 26:61).'* It was also used to ridicule Jesus when He was being crucified. Those who passed by the cross said, *You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself!* (Matthew 27:40). It was used a third time to put Stephen to death. *We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us (Acts 6:14).* Stephen was accused of being a follower of Jesus who said that He would destroy the temple.

The second verse that I want to emphasize is v. 17. *His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Thy house will consume me."* 'Zeal for God's house.' The word 'zeal' in Greek comes from a word which means to boil with heat or to burn. The sentence here tells us that it is not just boiling, but boiling to the extent that it consumes the person. It 'eats him up,' we read in the NKJ Bible. Such was Jesus' regard for His Father's house. When He saw what was happening in the temple, His zeal was stirred up to such a degree that it was like a consuming fire within Him that ate Him up.

## **A desecrated temple**

Picture in your mind what happened on that day. It was almost time for the Passover. The Lord Jesus came into the temple and found crowds of people buying this and offering that. Instead of being a place of worship, the temple had become as we read in v. 16 a 'house of merchandise' – a place to buy and sell things. How did a commercial market ever get into the temple?

Well, people needed items like animals, incense, wine, oil, and salt for their sacrifices and offerings. Those from foreign countries also needed money exchanged. All the commercial transactions were done outside of the temple area. Then, at some point, the priests decided that they will take advantage of the market themselves instead of letting business people on the outside reap all the profits. So they instituted a market with the merchandising taking place within the temple grounds, more specifically in the court of the Gentiles. The worship center became an area where worshippers could find any kind of service they needed. You can imagine that the atmosphere was one of commercial traffic and commotion, not of worship and prayer.

It is no wonder that Jesus was angry. *He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, saying, 'Stop making My Father's house a house of merchandise.'*

The disciples, as well as the rest of the people there present, could not but be astonished at Jesus' display of anger. It actually reminded them of Psalm 69:9. *His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Thy house will consume me"* (v. 17). There the psalmist complained that he was being persecuted by his friends and his own relatives because of his zeal for the Lord and His house. Though his heart burned with great concern for God's house, even his closest people became his enemies. Their insults against God were directed to him. The disciples came to understand the meaning of Jesus' behavior by remembering Psalm 69:9. Jesus, like the psalmist, was extremely concerned about purity of worship in the temple.

## **I will raise it up**

Let's look more closely at this verse in the context of the gospel of John. *Zeal for Thy house will consume me*. We have assumed that this 'zeal of His house' refers to Jesus' concern for the temple, the place of religious worship, which He called 'My Father's house' in v. 16. And that is certainly the obvious way to take it. But then, it gets somewhat more complicated.

The next thing Jesus says is this. *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up*. This sentence is not necessarily easy to understand. It actually raises several questions. If Jesus was so concerned about the temple, why did He talk about destroying it? That was a rather offensive idea. He could have simply purged it out the way He was doing. Just drive out all the merchants of oxen, sheep, and doves, and all the moneychangers. Why destroy it?

And this thing that Jesus is going to raise up, what is it? Are we still talking about the temple or is it something else? Because the passage goes on to say in v. 21 that what He will raise up in three

days is His body. *The Jews therefore said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body* (vv. 20-21).

Now we are beginning to lose the connection. Jesus is on fire for the house of God. The house of God is the temple which took forty-six years for Herod the Great to rebuild. The Lord says, 'Let it be destroyed and in three days, I will raise it up.' 'It', being what? Logically, it should be the temple. Yet, in v. 21, it says that Jesus was referring to His body. And the next verse tells us that when the disciples saw the resurrection of Jesus, they remembered what He said – that He spoke of the resurrection of His body on the third day.

Are we to suppose, then, that by the statement 'I will raise it up on the third day', it means that Jesus is going to rise from the dead? If that is the case, does it mean that His zeal for God's house is a zeal for His own resurrection, since the temple is His body? Remember v. 21, *He was speaking of the temple of His body*. Something seems to be wrong here. If you feel that way, you are right. But what is wrong?

Here are some of the problems. First of all, the notion that Jesus' physical body is the temple of God is not found in the Bible. There is no passage in the Scriptures that says this. We have a verse in 1 Corinthians 6:19 where the apostle Paul declares that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. But nowhere in the Bible is there a verse that says that Jesus' body is the temple of God.

Also, notice that v. 19 is in the active tense. 'I will raise it up. I, Jesus, will raise it up.' The Bible never says that Jesus raised Himself up from the dead. The raising of Jesus from the dead is always in the passive tense. We have an example of this in v. 22. *When therefore He was raised from the dead...* When Jesus was raised, then the disciples recognized what He meant.

So in v. 19, the sentence is in the active tense. 'I will raise it up.' But in v. 22, it is in the passive. 'He was raised from the dead.' It seems that we are talking about two different things. What is it that He will raise up? What is this body? What is this temple that He is concerned about?

### **House, temple, body**

When we look closely at this passage, we find three words which are very much related. These words are 'house', 'temple', and 'body'. In v. 16, we have 'the house of God'. In vv. 19 and 20, we have the word 'temple'. In v. 21, we find the term 'body', the body of Jesus. House, temple, body. Do you see a link? When we study how these words are used in the rest of the NT, we find that each of these terms can refer to the church. House, temple, body are words that are used in relation to the church of Christ.

For example, Paul tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:15, *I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the **house** of God, which is the church of the living God...* The house of God is the church of the living God.

In 1 Corinthians 3:16, Paul writes, *Do you not know that you are the **temple** of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?* The individual Christian and the community of believers as a whole, the church, represent the temple of God.

And then, Paul makes this statement in Ephesians 1:22-23. *He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is **His body**...* The church is the body of Christ.

House, temple, body. Now we begin to discern something significant. This passage in John 2 seems to contain an implicit reference to the church. Could it be that what Jesus raised up through the power of the resurrection is the church? Exactly! This point requires some explanation.

## God's new creation

You know, I have always wondered where the apostle Paul got this expression 'body of Christ' as a reference to the church. If it is to be found in the Scriptures, it seems to me that Paul got it from here, in John 2:21. *But He was speaking of the temple of **His body**.*

Now, do you know where Paul got the notion that the Christian is a new creation? That is what he says in 2Corinthians 5:17: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is **a new creation**...* I am quite certain that he got it also from the Lord's teaching. Let me explain how I came to that conclusion and you will see how that relates to the church.

Notice again Jesus' declaration in v. 19. ... *In three days I will raise it up.* If we compare this with Mark 14, we have a very interesting result. This is what we read in Mark 14:58.

*Mark 14:58. We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'*

This was the charge which was used against Jesus at His trial. It was, of course, untrue. The Lord Jesus never said, 'I will destroy the temple'. He had spoken in the second person plural, *Destroy this temple...*

But take a second look at this statement. Something tells me that it was not a completely false testimony. There is an element in the accusation that the witnesses could not have fabricated. Listen to the sentence again. *In three days I will build another, **not made with hands**.* Very interesting. This last part is quite certainly a genuine quotation because the accusers had no way of inventing(?) the concept of a building not made with hands. This is most likely something that the Lord had actually said.

All the buildings we see around us have been made by human hands. But the building the Lord Jesus will raise up on the third day is not made with hands. What does that mean?

We have, in the NT, another verse which speaks about a building not made with hands.

*Hebrews 9:11. But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, **not made with hands**, that is to say, not of this creation.*

A building 'not made with hands' means in this verse that it is a spiritual building. As a high priest, Christ entered through the sanctuary in heaven. This building is not part of this creation. Since it is 'not of this creation' as it says here, it has to be considered as a new creation if it is now found on earth. And that is the terminology that Paul uses in 2Corinthians 5:17. 'You, if you are in Christ, are a new creation. You, the church, are the temple of God, not made with hands, not belonging to this creation, but to a new one.'

## The vision that consumed Jesus

Now we are beginning to see what it was in John 2 that was consuming Jesus. The Lord looked at the temple with all these people coming in and out. He looked at all the merchandising taking place. And His heart was burning with intense grief. This building in Jerusalem was going to be destroyed. He prophesied that in Luke 19:41-44. But before it was to be destroyed, a new building would be raised. And this building will be the new creation of God on earth, brought into existence by His own resurrection. Through His death and resurrection, the new temple would come into being. This would be the body of Christ on earth – the church.

‘Destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will raise another one which is not made with hands.’ The reference to ‘three days’ is linked to Jesus’ resurrection. In His claim, Jesus indicated that through His resurrection, He would be replacing the material temple with the new, spiritual temple of His church.

When Jesus said these words, the church has not yet come into being. The event which traditionally has been termed the birth of the church is the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. But the notion of ‘birth’ should be understood loosely because the community was already in existence. Within a few weeks of the crucifixion, Jesus’ disciples were among the people who proclaimed the good news of the resurrected Messiah and assembled a messianic community. Pentecost should be viewed as the moment of animation of the church, i.e., when it became a functioning reality.

### **Becoming part of the body**

How do we become part of that church today? Paul says in 1Corinthians 12:13 that Spirit baptism places a person in the body of Christ. *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...* By the agency of the Holy Spirit, a believer becomes united to Christ and to the other members of His spiritual body. And baptism is a symbol of the transformation that took place. In dying with Jesus, we die to sin. When we rise again with Him, the power of the resurrection through the Holy Spirit becomes active in us.

What does that mean in practical terms? It means that the power of sin and death is broken in our life. That is the background of Jesus’ words in John 8:36. *If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.* Free from what? Free from the dominion of sin. We know that the power of the resurrection is at work in us when we are delivered from the bondage of sin. And all of us who have been baptized, who have died with Christ and been raised with Him, we now live in the power of His resurrection.

The OT sacrificial system – and with it the temple where it was carried on – is done away with the perfect sacrifice of Jesus. The church is now the temple of God. God is today living and active in the midst of the community of His victorious people.