

COMMENTARY ON JOHN

LESSON NUMBER 25

“ John 2:18 Then answered the Jews and said unto Him, What sign showest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things? ¹⁹ Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. ²⁰ Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt Thou rear it up in three days?”John 2:18-20)

WHAT SIGN WILL BE SHOWN TO THEM?

INTRODUCTION

Jesus has entered the Temple during the time of the Passover. Having seen that some had made His Father's house a place of merchandise, He has terminated their business, turned over the tables of the moneychangers, and driven the oxen, sheep, and merchandisers from the Temple. This has all been done publically in a display of holy zeal for the house of the Lord. The disciples associated Jesus' action with the Scripture that said, *“the zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up”* (Psa 69:9). The NIV version reads, *“zeal for Your house consumes Me.”*^{NIV} Evidently, this was not the usual reaction that was being displayed in the Temple. The merchandisers had been consumed by their business, and therefore used the house of the Lord to conduct it. Others were apparently merely fulfilling their obligation to keep the Passover. Jesus was living out what it means to love the Lord God with all of the heart, soul, mind, and strength. Things that pertain to God supercede other things. There, in the environment of the Temple, the merchants were not offering anything to God, but were using a day devoted to the recollection of His deliverance of the children of Israel to make financial profit. They were not giving to God, but selling to the people.

The action of Jesus was apparently confusing to the Jews who witnessed it. This was not because there was anything confusing about His action, for the disciples were able to make a proper assessment. The Jews of reference, however, had bought into a system in which God was not preeminent, His house was not primarily for Him, and religion was little more than a set of rules. It is generally true that where there is an inability to comprehend the things of God, erroneous ideas have been adopted and maintained. When the truth is not perceived, it is because it is outside the perimeter of the people's understanding. They have adopted a way of thinking that is in sharp conflict with the mind of the Lord. It is true that they may have been deceived into thinking in a contrary way, but that does not excuse them. Those who speak for the Lord must develop a holy intolerance for error, making it their aim to direct people to look in the right direction and learn to think properly.

WHAT SIGN WILL BE SHOWN?

JOHN 2:18 *“Then answered the Jews and said unto Him, What sign showest Thou unto*

us, seeing that Thou doest these things?"

THEN ANSWERED THE JEWS. Other versions read, *"the Jews demanded of Him,"* NIV *"the Jews then said to Him,"* NRSV *"the Jews put this question to Him,"* BBE *"confronted Him by asking Him,"* CJB *"replied to Him,"* CSB *"the Jewish leaders responded,"* NET *"intervened and said,"* NJB *"addressed Him and asked,"* WILLIAMS and *"the Jews retorted."* AMPLIFIED

The word translated *"answered"* [apokrinomai] means, "TO CONTRADICT IN REPLY, TO ANSWER BY CONTRADICTING, REPLY AGAINST; EQUIVALENT TO ALTERCATE, DISPUTE." THAYER

Jesus had not addressed any word to them, and particularly asked them no question. How is it, then, that the text says they *"answered?"* This was an expression of disagreement. They did not approve of what Jesus did. It was contrary to what they had thought. Their words were a rebuttal to Jesus driving the merchants and their animals from the Temple.

THIS KIND OF REPLY IS CONTEMPORARY. There is more of this kind of response than most men think – people disagreeing with what the Head over all is doing. Often, when the Lord requires something of them, they ask for a better reason for doing it than conceding that His Word is enough to promote instant obedience. Things like, "Do we really have to do that?" "How often are we required to do it?" etc., are really revelations of disagreement with God. If God says, "Forsake not . . ." (Heb 10:25), should there really be any further questions about it? If He says, "Purge out the old leaven" (1 Cor 5:7), is it really in order to ask what "old leaven is," or whether or not we will be accepted if we fail to do this?

While it is true that *"love thinketh no evil"* (1 Cor 13:5), and that we are to be forbearing of one another (Eph 4:2), and should be kind one to another (Eph 4:32), we are not to be naive about things like this. The people of God are to be of *"one mind"* (2 Cor 13:11), and are to be *"perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment"* (1 Cor 1:10). This has more to do with our unity with God and Christ than with one another. If there is any among us who find it difficult to be in agreement with the Lord, it should be known that this mindset is not acceptable.

Being *"swift to hear"* (James 1:19) involves being attentive to the Word of the Word of the Lord, being quick to listen, prone to agree, and not questioning whether or not that Word is to be heeded. All of us should strive to be familiar enough with the Word of God to recognize when it is spoken, and be quick to bring our lives into conformity with it.

WHAT SIGN SHOWEST THOU UNTO US? Other versions read, *"What miraculous sign can you show us,"* NIV *"What sign of authority have You to give us,"* BBE *"What token showest Thou unto us,"* PNT *"If You have this authority from God, show us a miracle to prove it,"* LIVING *"What proof of Your authority do You exhibit to us,"* WEYMOUTH *"What credentials can You present to justify this,"* MESSAGE and *"What sign can You show us, seeing You do these things? [What sign, miracle, token, indication can You give us as evidence that You have authority and are commissioned to act in this way?]"* AMPLIFIED

This may have seemed like a legitimate request. After all, Moses had given the people signs from God that he had really been sent to them, God gave Moses three signs to display to the people (Ex 4:8-9).

SEEING THOU DOEST THESE THINGS. The cleansing of the Temple was an obvious display of remarkable authority, and those who witnessed it knew it. Here was a single Man, driving out animals, overturning tables, and driving out merchants, without a single dissenter lifting his voice. This was authority of such an order that no one questioned it, or refused to yield to it. This was true of everything Jesus did, whether it was dismissing

diseases or demons, rebuking a fever, calming a storm, or multiplying bread and fish. There was never a contest when Jesus worked.

In the history of the world, there had never been a Person like Jesus. Neither Moses nor any of the prophets conducted themselves with such authority as to leave their opponents so *"they could not answer Him"* (Lk 14:6). After Jesus' ascension into heaven, the *"high priest and captain of the Temple, and the chief priests"* arrested Peter and the apostles, and commanded them not to teach in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18; 5:28). **However, these men did not here, or at any other time, command Jesus not to speak or act as He did.** Throughout His ministry, no Jewish leader or authority ever commanded Jesus not to speak. They spoke against Jesus for healing on the Sabbath day (Lk 13:14). But no one ever commanded Him not to heal, or forbade Him to speak. And why was this so? Because Jesus taught and spoke *"as One having authority"* (Matt 7:29). That *"authority"* was unquestionable and very obvious, so that no effort was made to stop Him until the hour came for Him to lay down His life. At THAT time Jesus said to those arresting Him, *"Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take Me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on Me"* (Matt 26:55; Mk 14:49; Lk 22:53; John 20:18). Once, a little later, and in Nazareth, they led Jesus from the synagogue to the *"brow the hill"* on which the city was built, to cast Him off – but could not do so. Even then, His authority became obvious.

DESTROY THIS TEMPLE, AND I WILL RAISE IT UP

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

JESUS ANSWERED. The words *"Jesus answered"* occur sixty-four times in Scripture. When applied to Jesus, the words *"He answered"* are found thirty-six times in Scripture. That is one hundred recorded answers given by Jesus. By way of comparison, when applied to God, the words *"He answered"* occur twelve times from Genesis thru Malachi, *"God answered"* occur twice, and *"the Lord answered"* thirteen times. **That is twenty-seven times a Divine answer was given over a span of 3,600 hundred years, as compared to Jesus answering men one hundred times over a span of a little over three years.** There you have a perspective of the massive change in heaven's dealings with men commencing with the ministry of Jesus. By way of comparison, the words *"God said," "Lord said,"* and *"He said"* occur seven hundred and forty-three times from Genesis thru Malachi. This reflects the lack of reconciliation during the times of Moses and the Prophets. Men were blessed to hear from God, but there was not much actual communication with Him.

Now, with the advent of Jesus Christ, a period is introduced in which there will be dialog with men – some favorable, and some unfavorable. However, it is the prelude to the day of salvation in which there will be *"fellowship"* with the Son of God (1 Cor 1:9), the *"communion of the Holy Spirit"* (2 Cor 13:14), and *"fellowship"* with the Father (1 John 1:3).

Something else to be noted here, and developed later, is that **this word was not given for the sake of the ones asking the question. Rather, it was given for the sake of His disciples, as verse twenty-two confirms.**

DESTROY THIS TEMPLE. Other versions read, *"Send destruction on this Temple,"* ^{BBE} *"Destroy this sanctuary,"* ^{CSB} *"Destroy this temple sanctuary,"* ^{IE} *"Destroy this temple sanctuary,"* ^{WEYMOUTH} *"loosen this temple,"* ^{ABP} *"Tear down this Temple,"* ^{GNB} *"Dissolve this*

temple,"^{JUB} and "Destroy (undo) this temple."^{AMPLIFIED}

Among other things, this tells us that the word "destroy" does not mean annihilation, as some affirm. The word translated "destroy," means "TO LOOSEN, UNDO, DISSOLVE, ANYTHING BOUND, TIED, OR COMPACTED TOGETHER,"^{THAYER} "LITERALLY, AS BREAKING SOMETHING UP INTO ITS COMPONENT PARTS, DESTROY, TEAR DOWN, BREAK UP; AS BREAKING UP A CROWD DISMISS, DISPERSE; FIGURATIVELY, AS BRINGING SOMETHING TO AN END. DO AWAY WITH, UNDO."^{FRIBERG} The idea is that of something losing its utility, for when the harmony of a thing is broken up, it is no longer useful.

Jesus has just finished cleansing the Temple, and now He refers to "this temple." Of course, the listeners will conclude that He is speaking about the Temple where they are presently standing. The very thought of such a destruction would have jarred the minds of the listeners. But what He has said is nothing compared to what He will now say.

IN THREE DAYS I WILL RAISE IT UP. Because of further revelation, we know what Jesus was saying. He was referring to Him raising from the dead after the Jews had "killed" Him (Matt 16:21; 17:23; Mk 8:31; 9:31; 1 Thess 2:15). This He announced in a veiled word some time before there were really efforts put forth to kill Him.

This was the sign for which they had asked – a sign that would confirm He did have the authority to cleanse the Temple – His "Father's house." When the time came for Him to die, it would, according to appearance, look like the people and Pilate had the authority over Him. For three days it would appear this was the absolute truth. Jesus of Nazareth would appear as though He had no authority at all, and was nothing more than an imposter.

However, in a grand show of Divine authority, Jesus would take back the life that He laid down, for this was the commandment He had received from the Father (John 10:17-18). The people would think they had rid themselves of Jesus, but He had really laid down His life. It would appear as though Pilate's sentence was carried out to the satisfaction of the people –but Jesus would really have laid down His life.

Further, the sign – when Jesus took back His life – would **not** be seen by His enemies. They asked for a sign, and a sign would be given – **but not to them**. That is God's manner: "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing" (Prov 25:2).

As Jesus would confirm later, after feeding the five thousand, He purposefully confuses those who have not received the love of the truth, and do not follow Him for proper reasons. When Jesus spoke of people eating His flesh and drinking His blood (John 6:53-57), He was addressing them in the same manner as He did these people. The truth of the matter is that He did not want them to perceive what he was saying, so He concealed the truth by wrapping it in a parable. That is precisely the kind of thing He was speaking about when He answered His disciples' inquiry of why He spoke to the multitudes in parables. "And He said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand" (Luke 8:10). From another vantage point, Moses said it this way to the unbelieving Jews: "Yet the LORD hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day" (Deut 29:4). **Hardheartedness and unbelief prohibits people from being able to understand the truth of God.**

CARNAL REASONING

²⁰ "Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?"

THEN SAID THE JEWS. When the disciples did not understand what Jesus said, they were known to ask, "Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field" (Matt

13:36). Other versions read, *"Explain to us."*^{NKJV, NASB NIV} Again, when Jesus had taught, *"Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch"* (Mat 15:13-14), Peter answered and said unto Him, *"Declare [explain^{NKJV}] unto us this parable"* (Matt 15:15). Once again, when Jesus said, *"There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man"* (Mark 7:15), *"His disciples asked Him concerning the parable"* (Mk 7:15-17). On the eve of His betrayal, when Jesus told them, *"A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father"* (John 16:16), they reasoned among themselves: *"What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me: and, Because I go to the Father? . . . What is this that He saith, A little while? we cannot tell what he saith"* (John 16:17-18). Jesus, however, knew they wanted to know what that meant: *"Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye inquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me?"* (John 16:19). He then took the time to explain the matter more extensively to them (John 16:20-25).

Right here we see, however, that the Jews did not think as the disciples did. The disciples knew that Jesus spoke the truth. When they did not understand what He had said, they sought for further insight. But, hear these Jews. That is not how they respond. They do not ask Jesus what He meant, and therefore seek further understanding. Father, they judge what He says strictly according to appearance.

FORTY AND SIX YEARS WAS THIS TEMPLE IN BUILDING. Other versions read, *"It has taken forty-six years to build this temple,"*^{NKJV} *"This temple has been under construction for forty-six years,"*^{NIV} *"It has taken forty-six years to build this temple,"*^{ESV} *"`What!' they exclaimed. It took forty-six years to build this Temple."*^{LIVING}

Their primary reference point was the circumstance, not Jesus and the truth of God. This is a Satanic snare into which many have fallen – assessing things with the present circumstance in mind, and not considering that *"with God, all things are possible"* (Matt 19:26). Remember when Jesus told His disciples stood before 5,000 men, besides women and children, and said to His disciples, *"Give ye them to eat"* (Mk 6:37)? They answered, *"Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat?"* (Mark 6:37). John adds, *"Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little"* (John 6:7). When Jesus asked them how much bread was available, they said, *"There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?"* (John 6:9). They were assessing the situation with only the circumstance in mind.

Sometimes I am alarmed at how frequently this kind of reason surfaces among professing believers. However men may choose to justify such reasoning, it seems to me that it is more appropriate to say, *"Help Thou mine unbelief!"* (Mk 9:24).

WILT THOU REAR IT UP IN THREE DAYS. Unbelief cannot reason correctly. Why did not these Jews balk at the idea of themselves destroying the Temple, taking it down and destroying its utility? Why did they not express doubt that they were capable of taking the Temple down – at least not within any foreseeable time?

Actually, these words were intended to dismiss what Jesus had said He would do. So far as they were concerned, the sign Jesus had mentioned had nothing to do with reality. Their lives were wrapped up in the natural order and appearance, and anything that

was apparently incompatible with how they were living was simply discarded as irrelevant. The words, *"Wilt Thou rear it up in three days"* were a taunt, not a true question. They were much like the taunts that were shouted when Jesus died: *"He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him: for He said, I am the Son of God"* (Matt 27:42-43).

Later during His ministry, He stated before the scribes and Pharisees, *"But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned"* (Mat 12:36-37). Certain of the scribes and Pharisees answered, *"Master, we would see a sign from Thee."* Jesus replied, *"But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas"* (Mat 12:39). That was the same sign that He mentions here.