

COMMENTARY ON JOHN

LESSON NUMBER 26

John 2:21 "But He spake of the temple of His body. ²² When therefore He was risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said."John 2:21-22)

HE SPOKE OF THE TEMPLE OF HIS BODY

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of Jesus was never simplistic or calculated so a child could easily grasp what He said. One only has to read the words of Jesus to perceive this. Sometimes His words were not clear to people considered to have good, even extraordinary minds. Our text is covering a situation like that. He had just cleansed the Temple of a lot of animals and people, and did so in an impressive manner. His disciples observed in Him the fulfillment of the Scripture, *"The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up"* (John 2:11; Psa 69:9). Another place the psalmist also testified to this kind of zeal: *"My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words"* (Psa 119:139). The Jews who beheld this eruption of Divine anger knew someone with authority had done this, but had made no association of Jesus' action with the Word of God, or with God Himself. They asked for some kind of sign that would attest to the authority he obviously possessed. He answered by saying, *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"* (John 2:19). Had He been operating by His own will, He could have healed someone, or multiplied some bread, or even summoned a storm, and then quieted it – but He did not. The people who asked were intelligent, probably above that of common people. They were even in the Temple, suggesting they had some kind of reverence for God. Yet Jesus purposefully spoke the truth in a veiled form, so that it could not be easily understood. In fact, as our text will confirm, His disciples did not even grasp the significance of what He said. If John, moved by the Holy Spirit, had not provided an explanatory note, many professing Christians would still not know what He meant. There is something about Jesus that is essential for us to know. He desires to be known, but not by those who do not believe on Him. He will not allow His Word to be understood correctly by those who are, in fact, alienated from Him, and are not believing on Him. He will hide the truth from all such people, cloaking it with words that cannot be deciphered. Some time later, Jesus would explain this to His disciples, who, at that time, did not understand why He spoke in such a manner (Luke 8:9-10).

AN INSPIRED ACCOUNT

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Pet 1:20-21).

THE WRITING OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN. Like all Scripture, the Gospel of John

was written as the writer was moved by the Holy Spirit. No writer of Scriptures was an historian, like Josephus, a Jew who was born in Jerusalem shortly after Jesus' death (37-100 A.D.). Although his writings were voluminous, none of them were used by the Holy Spirit in the compilation or exposition of Scripture.

It is generally understood that John wrote his Gospel about 65 A.D., which would have been a little over forty years after the events to which he bore witness. **That is a circumstance that forbids an authoritative witness of Jesus relying upon the memory of a mortal man.** It seems to me that this is a deliberate circumstance, requiring that John be moved along by the Holy Spirit in the writing of his Gospel. This would make provision for proper emphasis, correct priorities, and the general accent of the purpose of God, and a representation of Jesus that would be conducive to faith.

While there may be some value to the concept of "the author's intended meaning," the real intent of Scripture is not the explanation or proclamation of the author, but the intention of God. Scripture must be so structured that the Spirit can use it to elucidate the truth *"in Christ Jesus."* The Person, accomplishments, enthronement, and ministry of Jesus Christ is the border within which all Scripture is to be viewed. That is why all Scripture centers in Him (John 6:39), and the *"spirit,"* or life, of all prophecy is *"the testimony of Jesus,"* or *"witness of Jesus"*^{NJB} (Rev 19:10).

When it comes to the utility of Scripture, the Holy Spirit elaborates for us. *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works"* (2 Tim 3:16-17). These objectives call for the unparalleled exactness and focus of *"all Scripture."* It forbids intellectual generalities and appeals that are to mere human reasoning.

In order for these objectives to be realized, a proper view of God and Christ are imperative. That view cannot be filtered through human understanding. The writer of Scripture is not given license to provide a private view of truth. He is rather moved to write by the Holy Spirit. He is not reliant upon his memory, or driven by the process of human reasoning.

The writing of Scripture some years after the recorded events had taken place, requires that the writer be moved along by the Holy Spirit, as compared with relying on the recollection of the events being reported. This necessarily means that no Scripture is irrelevant, or intended only for certain people. The purpose of God is an *"eternal purpose,"* requiring that no Scriptural statement be subject to obsolescence or alteration. Man's association with some texts may change (as in the Law), but the Scriptures themselves remain unchanged:—i.e. The Law remain *"good"* if it is used *"lawfully"* (1 Tim 1:8).

- **DOCTRINE.** Teaching: proper information tailored to meet God's revealed objective.
- **REPROOF.** The conviction of wrong doing or thinking.
- **CORRECTION.** Straightening out, or setting one on the proper course of life.
- **INSTRUCTION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS.** This includes chastening and leading one into an orderly and godly manner of life.
- **PERFECTION.** Mature, or complete; fully grown, and able to function without constant correction; suitable for Divine employment.
- **THOROUGHLY FURNISHED.** Fully equipped for profitable involvement in the good and

acceptable and perfect will of God.

If it is objected that the Law was ended as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4), and the Old Covenant vanished away (Heb 8:13), it must be remembered that the Law itself was not ended, for it can still be *"used lawfully"* (1 Tim 1:8), and the Old Covenant was the agreement to keep the Law, and not the Law itself (Ex 19:8; Josh 1:16).

All of this is intended to prepare us for considering the explanation of John concerning Jesus' statement, *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"* (John 2:19). This statement was made with the purpose of God in mind, not with the understanding of the listeners being the focus. It had to do with the salvation of God more than with what went on in the Temple in Jerusalem. The perception of God and His will was being obscured by those merchandisers. By catering to convenience, they were obstructing the truth of God. That is what constrained Christ to do what He did.

THE TEMPLE OF HIS BODY

JOHN 2:21 *"But He spake of the temple of His body. . ."*

BUT. All 48 versions I have read *"but,"* with the exception of Phillips Paraphrase of the New Testament in Modern English. It reads, *"He was, in fact, speaking about . . ."* The word *"but"* is translated from a particular Greek word [de], which means *"BY WAY OF OPPOSITION AND DISTINCTION,"* ^{THAYER} *"MOST COMMONLY TO DENOTE CONTINUATION AND FURTHER THOUGHT DEVELOPMENT."* ^{FRIBERG} In other words, this word indicates that what was said involves more than appears. In fact, it has to do with something that is completely different than what was said, although it bears some likeness to it. This kind of speaking was common for Jesus, and was, in this case, His way of hiding truth from those God had forbidden to see it. In other words, this was a parabolic saying. Jesus said of such sayings, *"but to others in parables; that seeing they might **not** see, and hearing they might **not** understand"* (Luke 8:10). Jesus declared that this fulfilled a word from Isaiah: *"And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall **not** understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall **not** perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them"* (Mat 13:14-15).

One might wonder if it was even possible for such sayings to be understood by anyone. As illustrated in Jesus' disciples, these parables were explained to them (Matt 13:18-23). First, it was because God had sanctioned their understanding of them (Mk 4:11; Lk 8:10). Second, because they earnestly inquired into their meaning (Matt 13:36; 15:15; Mk 7:17) – something the disinterested never did.

Note that this explanation was not given at the time it was spoken. John, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, now provides an explanation of this veiled saying.

There is another dimension of reality that is not apparent to any facet of the human nature, whether through the senses or by means of understanding. The Spirit speaks of such things as *"your reward in heaven"* (Matt 5:12), *"a house not made with hands"* (2 Cor 5:1), and having *"in heaven a better and enduring substance"* (Heb 10:34). Now, in this world, the redeemed have been given *"the Holy Spirit"* (1 Thess 4:8). The church itself is, in a very definitive sense, *"the body of Christ"* (1 Cor 12:27), the *"temple of God"* (1 Cor 3:16-17), and *"one new man"* comprised of former Jew and Gentiles (Eph 2:15).

Jesus said His *"flesh"* was bread to be eaten (John 6:51), and his blood is *"drink indeed"* (John 6:55). All of these pertain to another domain – an unseen domain, yet one that is very real.

For the ancients there was such a thing as a city that had *"foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God"* (Heb 11:10), and a *"better country, that is, an heavenly,"* for which they longingly looked (Heb 11:16).

HE SPAKE OF. Jesus spoke of something in particular, yet that something was not apparent to the natural senses. For example, when Jesus spoke of His departure from this world, His disciples did not know what He was saying: *"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. Then said some of His disciples 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? They said therefore, What is this that He saith, A little while? we cannot tell what He saith"* (John 16:16-18). They had not yet been *"translated into the Kingdom"* of God's *"Dear Son"* (Col 1:13).

Likewise, in our text, Jesus spoke of Kingdom realities that were not at all apparent to the hearers. Yet, He spoke of them anyway – with the future in mind, when those who received the Son would be given spiritual aptitude, and be able to understand. Jesus spoke with that people and time in mind.

THE TEMPLE OF HIS BODY. When John wrote this, probably over forty years later, he had been given to understand what Jesus meant. *"This temple,"* to which Jesus had referred, was not the temple Herod built– even though that is where He and all the people were standing. There was, in a very real sense, a *"Temple"* standing within the temple.

Jesus referred to His body as a Temple because it was a dwelling place of God. He was an ambulatory Temple. He declared, *"the Father is in Me"* (John 10:38). He referred to *"the Father that dwelleth in Me"* (John 14:10-11). He also spoke of a day when the disciples would know: *"At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you"* (John 14:20). Just as the Temple in Jerusalem was found with undesirable people in it, so Christ's body – His Temple – would be the vehicle to bear the sins of the world. As it is written, *"Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree"* (1 Pet 2:24). Also, the church, which is the spiritual *"body of Christ,"* is a dwelling place for God. It is categorically called *"the Temple of God"* in First Corinthians 3:16-17. However, that temple will never be destroyed.

WHEN HE WAS RISEN FROM THE DEAD

²² *"When therefore He was risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this unto them; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had said."*

WHEN HE WAS RISEN. When Jesus rose from the dead, He fulfilled this saying: *"and in three days I will raise it up"* (John 2:19). He took His life back, as He was commanded to do (John 10:17-18). The message delivered to the women who came to the empty tomb was, *"He is risen"* (Matt 28:6,7; Mk 16:6).

In Scripture, it is clearly stated that God raised Jesus from the dead: *"This Jesus hath God raised up"* (Acts 2:32); *"whom God hath raised from the dead"* (Acts 3:15); *"Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead"* (Acts 4:10); *"Him God raised up the third day, and showed Him openly"* (Acts 10:40); *"But God raised Him from the dead"* (Acts 13:30); *"But He, whom God raised again, saw no*

corruption." Acts 13:37); "wait for His Son from heaven, **whom He raised from the dead**" (1 Thess 1:10). Why, then, did Jesus say "I will raise it up" (John 2:18); and why was His commission to lay down His life, and take it up again (John 10:17-18).

The answer is quite simple. God empowered Jesus to raise from the dead. Just as lame men whom Jesus healed, themselves raised up from their beds, so Jesus was given power to raise up from the dead – to come back from the region of the dead. When Jesus said "I have power to take it again" (John 12:18), He was referring to delegated power. We know this is the case because Jesus said the Father gave Him "to have life in Himself" (John 5:26). "All things" required for His mission had been put into His hands by the Father (John 13:3). All of this was involved in Jesus humbling Himself –laying aside the prerogatives of Deity in order that He might die for the sins of the world (Heb 2:9).

HIS DISCIPLES REMEMBERED. When Jesus was risen from the dead, they remembered this very saying: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). This was not accomplished by the human intellect. It was rather part of the promises Jesus gave them on the eve of His betrayal: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and **bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you**" (John 14:26). They did not remember these words at the precise time Jesus was risen. In fact, they did not believe the report that was given to them of Jesus being risen from the dead (Lk 24:11). The two on the road to Emmaus had not remembered these words (Lk 24:24-25). The disciples and those gathered with them did not remember these words when Jesus appeared to them during the evening of the day He arose (Lk 24:38-45). **I gather that these words were remembered after the Holy Spirit had come upon them.** Even at that, it may have been a while before these associations were made. The point of the text is not the precise time their recollection took place, but that it did not take place until the words had been fulfilled.

THEY BELIEVED THE SCRIPTURE. Other versions read, "they had faith in the holy Writings," ^{BBE} "they trusted in," ^{CJB} "came to believe the scripture," ^{NAB} "believed the Writing," ^{YLT} "realized that what He had quoted from the Scriptures really did refer to Him" ^{LIVING} "believed and trusted and relied on the Scripture." ^{AMPLIFIED}

Believing the Scripture, therefore, is not mere intellectual assent, or the affirmation that one who believes they are true. There is something about believing the Scripture than transcends the human intellect and academics. This is one of the great weaknesses of what is now called apologetics. It is strictly in the field of academics, and really has nothing whatsoever to do with believing as it is used in this text.

What Scripture says is that they believed? There is no record of Jesus pointing out the Scriptures concerning His resurrection prior to His death. However, after His resurrection He did speak of such things. He spoke to the two on the road to Emmaus about entering into His glory (Lk 24:26-27). Later that same evening, "Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, *Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day*" (Luke 24:45-46). The remembrance of the Scriptures, therefore, was not mere human recollection. In order that they might have a proper remembrance, Jesus opened up their understanding, giving them a holy aptitude. This remembrance and believing, therefore, involved the opening of their understanding, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the exposition of Jesus (Eph 4:20-21; 1 John 5:20).

AND THE WORD WHICH JESUS HAD SAID. The disciples also came to believe the word Jesus had said about destroying the Temple, and Him rebuilding it. As with believing

the Scripture, this required the opening of their understanding, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Remember, John is writing this at least thirty years after the occurrence of reference, and yet the report is meticulously accurate, and the believing of it is unquestionably effectual. Those are circumstances that could not possibly have been achieved by natural aptitude, and this must not be approached as though that was possible.