

Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up

Hindsight is a great thing, and John does not hesitate to admit it. The disciples, he being one, did not realise the significance of all Jesus said until after the resurrection (22). It was only once the seventh sign had been given that they understood the full import



of the previous six. Something similar is true of all of us: it is not until we know Jesus as our risen Lord and Saviour, and are born of his Spirit, that we begin to truly comprehend the glory of the Gospel (see 1 Cor 2.6-16).

One thing the disciples can't mistake though is Jesus' zeal for God's house. It consumes him, boiling over in a physically violent display of anger. He speaks not of God's house but "*my Father's house.*" This is intensely personal for him; his Father's house is his own home (cf. Luke 2.49). It also recalls the words of Malachi, "The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to *his* temple... But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? (Mal 3.2)." God's wrath is compatible with his love, and he *does* care what we offer as worship.

Jesus' words (16) evoke Jeremiah's prophecy (Jer 7.11). In Jeremiah's day the people of Judah presumed upon the presence of God's temple to protect them from disaster (unlike the northern kingdom of Israel which had fallen to the Assyrians in 722BC). As long as God's dwelling place was physically present in the land, surely his people's place there was guaranteed also? God's word through Jeremiah is, in summary, "Not so. Repent and amend your ways or destruction will come." Two behaviours are singled out: corrupt temple religion and violation of the commandments. Interestingly in the light of yesterday's reading, the list of consequences for continued disobedience concludes with "I will

silence... in the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the bride.” (7.34)

Jesus’ cleansing of the temple provokes his first confrontation with the Jewish religious leaders. They demand to know by what authority he acts as he does, asking for a sign. Jesus’ response is to say that “after three days” (cf. 2.1) he will himself replace the temple as the locus of God’s presence in the world, and of all true worship (cf. 4.23f.). Because they misunderstand him they see no sign. Nor will they recognise Jesus’ authority, even with hindsight, when the sign is given.

While Jesus performs many signs, demands for a sign are at best unwelcome (2.4), at worst rejected as a sign of evil unbelief (Matt 12.39). The point is this: the signs Jesus has already given are sufficient for faith, both for those who see them and those who hear the apostolic testimony to them (20.29). Jesus knows all people too well, and that signs alone do not make true disciples (24f.)

To ponder

How consistent is the way we live (think, speak and act) with what we say and do in worship?

To pray

Father, forgive me when I have not worshipped you in spirit and truth, and not repented of my sins. May all I offer in worship, indeed my whole life, please and glorify you. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen

Reflection