



The Online Library of T. Austin-Sparks

Published as a PDF by Austin-Sparks.net
Email: info@austin-sparks.net

In keeping with T. Austin-Sparks' wishes that what was freely received should be freely given and not sold for profit, and that his messages be reproduced word for word, we ask if you choose to share these messages with others, to please respect his wishes and offer them freely - free of any changes, free of any charge (except necessary distribution costs) and with this statement included.

The Cleansing of the Temple

by T. Austin-Sparks

Edited and supplied by the Golden Candlestick Trust.

Reading: John 2:13-22.

It is doubtless known to you that on two occasions the Lord cleansed the Temple in Jerusalem. The first occasion was that of which we read in this passage in John's Gospel. The second, and the last occasion, is mentioned by the other writers of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. John does not repeat in his record that occasion, and they do not touch upon the first occasion. John wrote so long after the other three that doubtless he knew what they had written, and therefore much of what he wrote was supplementary. He knew what they had left out, and puts in a very great deal that they had not recorded. This is one of those things peculiar to John's Gospel.

There is a significance about the fact that the Lord Jesus cleansed the Temple twice. Perhaps the significance attaches, in the first place at least, to His having done it at the commencement of His ministry, and at the close, for John puts this cleansing very early in His public life. The record of the second instance comes right at the end, amongst the final scenes of His life in Jerusalem; and that He should have made it one of His first activities in Jerusalem, and one of His last, carries with it a meaning which is not far to seek, and the significance of which lies very near the surface.

It would say to us that the Lord had His Father's House very much in view from the beginning, and that all His life activities were in that direction. We may say that foundationally His life and ministry had to do with the House of God, and that He never departed from that early position which He had adopted. Right at the end He came back to it. We are told that He was moving to and fro between Jerusalem and Bethany, and in that final week of His life, one evening He went into Jerusalem and into the Temple and looked round on all things, and then went out to Bethany without doing anything. But the next morning He went in and evidently put into a very definite and strong form of

expression the results of His having taken account of the situation, and purged the Temple once more.

His life here on earth, then, was bounded, we may say, by His relationship with and attitude towards His Father's House. If it be true that the Father's House was set in His vision in a very definite relationship in His life from start to finish, and that His life at both ends is found in relation to that House, then it is important to notice what His attitude towards His Father's House was as to His spirit. He was consumed by a great devotion and passion for the House of God. His life, as represented by this twofold activity, from beginning to end was a life bounded by zeal for God's House, intense and fervent, so that it could be said that it consumed Him.

For what did that zeal exist? What was it in relation to the Father's House that was consuming Him? What was the nature of His devotion? Clearly it was the holiness of His Father's House; its absolute sanctity, its perfect cleanness, its complete separation from the influences and orders of this world, and from all personal interests and elements. Those things are represented by what was taking place here on both of these occasions. A worldly system had crept in, and it was being pursued for personal ends. All such things in His mind were unholy and vile. It was the holiness of His Father's House which was the character of His consuming zeal.

Then one more thing is seen in this attitude towards His Father's House, and that is His assuming authority over it. There is here a foreshadowing of that word in the letter to the Hebrews: "But Christ as a Son over God's house...". He is speaking of this Temple as: "My Father's house". He is *the* Son of the Father. What is His place in it as *the* Son of the Father? It is the place of absolute authority: "A Son over God's house...". And here He assumes His authority in the House of His Father, and His authority is to deal with everything that is out of harmony with that House. That is the position with which we meet immediately as we read of these instances.

Then, as it always is with John, the thing is never left there in the realm of earthly, temporal history. John never leaves things with the illustration or the type, because John is not on the earth. The other three may be giving us historic records, but John is not just doing that. John always gets out of the merely historical, earthly, and carries things through into the realm of the universal, the spiritual. He shows us what is not shown elsewhere, and gives us a meaning related to this thing which we do not find elsewhere.

We could imagine John perhaps reading the narrative of one of the other apostles, or through the oral Gospel (as it was called) having the whole thing repeated to him, and he would say: I wonder why they missed out that first cleansing of the Temple! I wonder why they did not put that in! They have overlooked that, and it is very important; I must put that in! And so he would put it in, and in his mind there would be this far greater connection, and he would put down what the Lord Jesus said, not only what He did, as the larger significance of His act. He follows through, as you notice with this: "The Jews therefore answered and said unto him, What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." We are not sure whether the Lord Jesus was purposely throwing dust in their eyes, speaking enigmatically. They took Him up as speaking of the Temple which He had just cleansed, but He was not meaning that, and this is where John gives a comment of such tremendous importance: they thought that He spoke of the Temple at Jerusalem, "but he spake of the temple of his body". What has happened with the follow-through? Everything has been transferred to Himself. He has taken it all over in His own Person. The Temple is not this Temple outwardly, about which they were thinking. *The* Temple of God was Himself.

You notice how all the way through the Gospel of John things are transferred to Christ. It does not matter where you touch a thing that belongs to the Jewish system, it is transferred to Christ every time. In chapter 4 the Temples in Samaria and in Jerusalem are mentioned, and John adds: "Neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem...". You see He has come, and so here everything is transferred to Christ. He takes the place of the Temple; He possesses the whole thing in His own Person. Of course they could never understand, because they would not accept Him. He speaks of the Temple of His body and says: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

That is the value of John's record, and, remembering that that stands right at the beginning of His life, it is of tremendous importance that the Lord Jesus has come, and has come in relation to the House of God, and the zeal for His Father's House is consuming Him. He is the embodiment of all that that House means. It is all gathered up into Himself. It is transferred to Christ.

We now have a fuller revelation of that truth, and with our fuller revelation in the Epistles we know two things.

We know now fully how Christ *is* God's Temple. We have come to see the full meaning and value of the fact that God was in Christ making reconciliation of the world unto Himself, and that all that that Temple in type stood for was Christ. In Him is all the value of shed and sprinkled Blood. In Him is all the value of Mediatorship, Priesthood. In Him is all the value of the provision for the Lord's people. In Him is every thing that was in that Temple in type. He is that to the full. God is only found by us in Christ.

Then we have another aspect also of the one revelation, and that is that Christ has constituted the House of God by uniting with Himself a company called His Body; "the church, which is his body"; "Whose house are we", says the writer of the Hebrew letter. The Body of Christ is now constituted corporately the House of God, God's Temple.

That truth is familiar to us, and we only mention it on the way to the thing which is central to this consideration.

Note now these other factors as they are in John's Gospel.

In the first place, when you recognise Christ and His members as constituting God's House, you see that this House — Christ and His members — is constituted upon the basis of resurrection, that sonship relates thereto. "Christ as a Son over God's house". "What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?" In other words: By what authority are you taking this position over the Temple? You virtually establish yourself as Master of the House of God! On what ground? The answer is: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." He is saying: My authority is a spiritual authority, and it is on the ground of resurrection. Sonship and authority are here closely related to resurrection from the dead.

Do you catch the suggestion in His declaration: "Destroy *this* temple and... *I* will raise it up"? He is speaking of Himself as though He were two: His body, and His power over His own body to raise it up! It is Christ within a Temple, in the power of resurrection. Paul gives us the larger explanation when He says: "The exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead...". *The* Temple which we are is brought into being as the dwelling place of the Lord of life, by reason of our spiritual resurrection from the dead.

What does all this amount to? It means this, that authority in Christ, and the very constitution of His House, the Temple, the Body of Christ, is upon the basis of Christ having met all His enemies, and all their destructive power, and all the power of death, having overcome them, and brought into being something which they had sought to wipe out of existence. In other words, as Mark says about this thing: "The chief priests and the scribes sought how they might destroy him." He says: "In three days I will raise it up." What does that mean? That destruction is destroyed, that death is vanquished, and that if there is something raised upon that basis, if that is the nature of the existence of the very thing, it in its very existence testifies to the absolute supremacy of the Lord Jesus over all powers to destroy, and over all workings of death.

Gathering that all up together for an immediate application to us, it means this, that if we are really, livingly, spiritually joined to the Lord Jesus as a part of His Body, we are of that Temple of which He said: "I will raise it up"; that is, we are with Him on the ground where nothing can destroy, and where death has been itself robbed of its power to overcome this thing. We stand (and we must learn how to stand in the good of this great spiritual reality) by our very risen union with the Lord Jesus, on the ground of authority over death, of power over destruction. That is one of the great factors, if it is not the greatest of the factors, of which faith has to lay hold. Day by day we are called into the conflict which rages by reason of the challenge to that position, the challenge to our position in union with Christ in absolute victory over death.

We are not referring merely to physical death, but death as a power; and the Temple, the House, exists because Christ has conquered death, and because the power of destruction has been broken. Our attitude has to be, in solid faith, continually: Death for us is vanquished, and destruction is destroyed. In many ways every day we shall be confronted with the necessity for affirming our position on that ground. But that is, after all, by the way.

The point which is especially in our heart is this: This House of God is the place, the sphere, in which Christ, in His authority as Son over God's House, confronts everything that is not in keeping with that House. This is something which we must continually bear in mind. That House demands that everything shall be in keeping with it. "Holiness becometh thy house." The Lord Jesus has assumed the authority in the House of God, to deal with everything unholy. He is no less zealous now than He was when He was on the earth. There is no less zeal about Him for the House of God now than there was then. Surely we can say there is infinitely more. At least we can say this, that His relationship to the Temple in Jerusalem is only an illustration. He knew quite well that that no longer represented the House of God. He knew quite well that it had passed out of that sphere where it truly was the House of God. The very words with which John introduces this fragment are: "The Passover of the Jews was at hand." That was always called "Jehovah's Passover" in the days when the thing was right. It was the Lord's Passover, but here John says "The Passover of the Jews...". In the same way this Temple was no longer the Lord's House in reality.

The Lord is acting towards this Temple in representation of His attitude towards that spiritual House which was coming in with His own Person, and His attitude towards the spiritual House is with no less consuming zeal. It can be said of Him now: "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up"; as He assumed the authority as a Son of the Father's House to deal with everything out of keeping with that House. That is His position now. Christ's authority, Christ's very position as the Son over God's House is in the first place to deal with everything out of keeping with that House. Just as He confronted all the flesh, and arrested all the traffic of the world in that Temple, so He stands in the way of that in the spiritual House.

The point is this: It is one thing to have a teaching and a doctrine, and a system of truth about the House of God, and get off scot-free. It is quite another thing to come spiritually in a real and living way into that truth; and if you do you will never get off scot-free. These are two realms.

One realm is, after all (although it may not be in the architecture of marble stone, in material things), a structure of teaching, a structure of truth, of doctrine about the House of God, and that may all be still outside of the Spirit. It may be thought a lot of, and its holiness may be talked about, just as much as ever Jews talked about the Temple in Jerusalem. It might even be grieved over, just as the Jews go to the Wailing Place now and wail over the departed glory; and still it may be an objective system of truth, and there may be no impact, no challenge, and all manner of inconsistencies be got away with in that system, so that there are terrible contradictions.

But there is another realm. It is the realm where every bit of this truth lives, and if we come into the living reality of the House of God we are going to find that there is One established there in authority, Who challenges and meets everything that is out of keeping with the House. Mark says: "And he would not suffer that any man should carry a vessel through...". I can see Him; not only capsizing those tables, and scattering that money, but arresting a man carrying something to do with that merchandise, and saying: "Take that outside!" and the man, under the compulsion of that divine authority, slinking away. Wherever He saw a man carrying something to do with this thing He said, in effect: Take it out! It does not belong here!

The Lord Jesus will confront us, if we come into this livingly. It is a terrible thing to come into spiritual truth. The glory is another side; it is a great privilege; *but* it is a *terrible* thing to touch anything in God's House with the hands of flesh; to bring in what does not belong there as of this world, as of ourselves. He stands there to meet it. The Corinthians met it: "For this cause many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep." "Holiness becometh thy house." It is good that it should be so. It is very blessed that the Lord Jesus should have this matter in His own hands, to deal with these things.

Perhaps you ask the question: Why are you saying all this? It means this, that you and I want to have the testimony maintained in life. It is not worth having something that is only a system of truth and does not work. We want to be at the place where the thing lives, but, oh! what that involves! We cannot gather round this and say: This is beautiful truth! No! This is awful; this is terrible for the flesh! We cannot be in anything of that kind and any bit of our flesh get off free. We are simply going to be ground to the last fragment in the realm of our flesh if we come into that which is wholly of God. We must be prepared for that. It is a part of the very living character of this thing.

Then it prepares a way for so much more. It brings us into the place of authority in Christ. If He is there as the Son over God's House, and we are sons in God's House, by that very relationship we come into that authority of Christ. What is our authority? That no power of Satan can work on us, because there is no ground for him to take. Authority is not a phraseology, a tone of voice, an assertive manner. Authority is a state of heart, a state of life. Authority is that the testimony is living, because the ground of death has been destroyed. Resurrection in Christ means that the death ground has been put away.

When you seek to have things like that, what do you expect? You will get (whatever you expect) what He got! "Then the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might destroy him." If we give ourselves to the matter of the holiness of God's House, the purity, the cleanness of God's House, the absolute consistency of everything for the testimony, to have things living, what shall we meet? We shall meet an attempt from the devil to destroy us! If we have touched something that is evil,

something that is out of keeping with the House, and we have sought to put that right, we shall get a kick back from the devil every time; and we shall find that every effort to clean things up in the House of God is a thing which is set against our very life. You cannot be devoted to this, and have the zeal of God's House eating you up, without having a great determined purpose of the enemy to destroy you.

In some place there may be something that is evil which has come into the House of God, and you seek to have that thing cleaned up. It is not long before you meet something as the return of that upon yourself, and you feel that you are a marked man, or a marked woman. It is not easy to try and get things according to God's mind. The enemy hates that.

The Lord give us grace to receive this word. "Holiness becometh thy house." How are we going to be an instrument, a voice for the Lord? It is this: "If thou take... the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth." If you cut clean in between what is of the Lord and what is not, and have things in complete separation unto the Lord: "Thou shalt be as my mouth." It is worth anything to be the Lord's mouth in this world to His people. That requires that there shall be an uncompromising attitude toward anything that is not in keeping with the Lord's House spiritually. The Lord bring us into the place where everything is holy. "Holiness becometh thy house."

Is your home a holy place? Is your meal table a holy place? Is the conversation a holy thing? Could hungry, needy children of God come to your home and get spiritual help? Or are you discussing things that are not helpful, not building up; things which may be real, may be actual, but there is nothing to be gained by discussing them? Are you only talking about all the generalities of daily life? Is your home a house of Bread, or is it a house of criticism, a house of scandal, a house of gossip? "Holiness becometh thy house"; and that relates as much to our domestic life as the Lord's children, as it does to our being in the assembly.

You will have a testimony if you look after the Lord's things. You will be the Lord's mouth if you seek the things which are according to the Lord's mind. Your testimony will only be destroyed if things are out of keeping with the truth which you teach or accept. The Lord bring things into a very living state with us.