



## The Cross in Prophecy

# “Destroy This Temple . . .”

*“The Jews then said to Him, ‘What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ The Jews then 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. So when 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” (John 2:18–22).*

Early in our Lord’s ministry, near Passover time (John 2:13), perhaps during the first trip to Jerusalem of His ministry, He “cleansed” the temple (John 2:14–17). Money-hungry men had turned the outer court, the court of the Gentiles, into a secular marketplace, a place of buying and selling, filling it with a litany of unholy activities. He bound together “a scourge of cords” (John 2:15a) and drove the cattle out, released the pigeons, overturned the tables where money was changed from foreign currency into Jewish money, and sent the cattle salesmen and exchange merchants on their way. He had come to the temple to find it doing the will of God, but had found it to be a corrupted place, a virtual den of thieves. The selfishness and greed of men had turned this temple of prayer and sacrifice into a court of merchants, a place of avarice and profanation. Motivated by righteous indignation and a zeal for His Father’s worship, He cleansed the temple in the sense of removing its secular and sensual clutter and giving it the opportunity to turn back to its sacred use.

Later in the day, the Jews accosted Jesus with the question, “What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?” (John 2:18). They wanted to know what authority He had for taking charge of the temple and repairing it in the way He did. “Could He not give us some sign that would show His divine authority for doing what He has done?” they asked.

Our Lord answered them in cryptic lan-

guage. He said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). In time, they would have every opportunity to see His miracles and, if open minded, be convinced by them of His authority. Speaking of His activities that followed at the feast, John wrote, “Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His *signs* which He was doing” (John 2:23; emphasis mine). Thus, in His answer, He chose to go past the immediate question that they had asked to the far greater question of why He had come into the world. At this beginning point in His ministry, He elected to use as His response to their question a veiled depiction of His death and resurrection: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

His figurative reference to His body as the temple and to His three days in the tomb would stick in their minds for the remainder of His ministry, although they would never come to understand it. It was used at His trials as an accusation against Him (Matthew 26:60–62; Mark 14:57–60); it was used as part of the taunting at the cross (Matthew 27:39, 40; Mark 15:29, 30). His disciples also remembered it, but even they did not grasp its full meaning until after the resurrection. John added these words as a kind of commentary to what He had said, “So when 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" (John 2:22). John might have been referring to what Jesus had said in answer to their question as the Scripture that the disciples had remembered or he might have been saying that they remembered one of the Scriptures that predicted His resurrection, such as Psalm 16:10, 11. One thing is sure: John said that the disciples never forgot this unusual saying of Jesus. They held that saying in their minds until they saw its fulfillment at His resurrection.

The implications of what Jesus was saying with His remarkable words, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," bring to us one of Jesus' most powerful messages about His cross. What was He saying?

*Obviously, His words were anticipatory.* From the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus looked toward His death. He saw the end from the beginning. His cryptic words pointed to what was going to come.

As He entered into His ministry, He announced what He had ultimately come to do, and as He ended His ministry, He also pointed to the climax that He had been moving toward (Luke 9:51). He described His whole earthly journey with the one poignant phrase, "To give My life as a ransom for many." He told His apostles as He entered into the last week of His life, "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28; see Mark 10:45).

*Furthermore, His words were explanatory.* He implied that His death would fulfill the meaning of the temple. The first word that John used for temple is *heiron* (John 2:14), which is a word for the temple complex. The word that Jesus used is *naos* (John 2:19), which is the word for the sacred enclosure, the Holy Place and the Holiest Place. His death would be the fulfillment of the sacrifices that were at the heart of the temple activities. Jesus' body was the sacrifice that the Father would give to complete all the sacrifices that had ever been offered to Him by worshipers under the Patriarchal and Mosaical Ages. Rising up to this lofty thought, Jesus spoke of what the cross would do. Through the offering of His body, Jesus would bring to an end the sacrifices offered at the tabernacle or the temple.

*In addition, His words were revelatory.* He implied that His death would be crowned with victory, for He would rise from the death that He would experience. The resurrection, His raising "this temple" in three days, would be the validation of His death. This high point, this most significant moment of all time, would prove that His Father in heaven had accepted His death.

Two truths were bound together by our Savior in this first prophecy concerning His death. Here, at the outset of His ministry, He declared that He had come to offer Himself as the greatest sacrifice, the finalizing, fulfilling sin-offering, of God's great plan of the ages. However, He did not make this declaration without conjoining it with the proof that would be needed. He coupled His sacrificial statement with His promise of the resurrection, that is, His being raised up within three days.

One day Jesus looked at a paralytic and said, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5b). One could say, "It is one thing to say 'You are forgiven,' but it is another thing entirely to give the necessary evidence that you have the right to make such an affirmation." Our Lord never sidestepped the evidence required to prove His deity. He therefore immediately told the paralytic to take up his bed and walk. The man did, and those who looked on believed. His healing the paralytic proved that He had the power to forgive sin. Jesus told those who were looking on, "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . . I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home" (Mark 2:9-11).

Jesus words were cryptic words, but they contained much truth that would be later confirmed. His words were anticipatory, explanatory, and revelatory. He declared what was to come, how it was to come, and the circumstance in which it would come. He foretold His death, explained it, and announced the confirmation of it.

Eddie Cloer



*At the trial, it was said that He said that He would destroy the temple or that He was able to destroy the temple. He said neither. "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands'" (Mark 14:58). "But later on two came forward, and said, 'This man stated, "I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days'" (Matthew 26:60b, 61).*

*At the cross, it was said that He was going to destroy the temple and rebuild it. He did not say this*

*either. "And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads and saying, 'You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross'" (Matthew 27:39, 40).*

*What did Jesus say? He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). They, that is, the Jewish leaders and multitude that cried "Crucify Him!" did destroy the temple of His body and He did raise it up as He had promised! He fulfilled every promise that He made, not the least of which was this first prophecy concerning His death.*