

Sermon 3-17-19
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W. Hempstead, NY
Based upon 1Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19-20 and 2Corinthians 6:16

Not Our Own

Jerusalem is a very old city. It's at least 3,500 years old, and has gone through a lot of trouble, warfare and disaster.

What we learned today from our first lesson and our gospel lesson is that the prophet Jeremiah and Jesus have something in common. They both predicted a total destruction of the city of Jerusalem. Jeremiah proclaimed that Jerusalem would be destroyed because of Israel's fascination with paganism and idols. Jesus proclaimed that Jerusalem would be destroyed because Israel had rejected their Messiah.

Jeremiah prophesied prior to the destruction of the first temple in 587B.C. – the temple that King Solomon built. A second temple was rebuilt around 500B.C. and greatly expanded by Herod the Great just before Jesus was born. Jesus prophesied the destruction of this magnificent second temple in 33A.D. a prophecy that was fulfilled in 70A.D. To this day, no third temple has been rebuilt.

Today, the area of Jerusalem called the Temple Mount is an area of dispute and conflict. On the highest part of the mount there's a large flat, platform-like area where there are two Moslem mosques. At the foot of the mount on the western side is a retaining wall made of giant cut stones. This is called "The Wailing Wall." It's where Jews go to bemoan the temple's non-existence and to pray.

The exact location of the first and second temples has been lost to history. Many assume it was on the highest platform of the Temple Mount where the mosques are. However, there's reason to believe that the correct location is on another platform at a lower elevation just to the south of that highest platform. If the reasoning behind this lower location is correct, there would be nothing to stop Jews from building a third temple. There would be no interference with Muslim buildings.

We come to an important question. What exactly is a temple? This is what Yahweh says in Leviticus 26:11-12, "11 I will put my *dwelling place* among you, and I will not abhor you. 12 I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people." Therefore, a temple is a place of divine residence on earth – a place where God dwells among His people. There are many other passages of scripture that confirm this.

Now, there are many Christians today who believe that a third temple must be built before the Lord Jesus returns. That's entirely possible. However, Lutherans don't consider a third temple absolutely necessary for a particular reason found in the New Testament.

Consider the following verses. 1Corinthians 3:16-17, "16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple." 1Corinthians 6:19-20, "19 Do you not know that your body is a temple

of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” 2Corinthians 6:16, “What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.’”

All these passages from Corinthians indicate that in the New Testament – the New Covenant – God’s abode is with the Jesus believer and in the believer. Through Christ’s magnificent work on the cross, these sinful bodies in which we dwell have been cleansed in baptism and designated the temple of God, the abode of God. We are God’s temple. These verses and others that support them are game changers.

Remember. The world into which Jesus was born was entirely pagan except for the Jews. The Jews were the only people on earth who exclusively worshiped an uncreated, eternal, self-existing Creator of heaven and earth. Everyone else worshiped gods, goddesses and spirits within the uncreated, eternal, self-existing universe of paganism.

Yet, it is prophesied in Isaiah 49 and elsewhere that when Messiah finally came, He would be a light to the gentiles. Peoples from every nation on earth would turn to Messiah, abandon paganism, and thus embrace their Creator.

St. Paul knew this. In Acts 13, Dr. Luke, the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, records St. Paul’s teaching on Isaiah 49. Indeed, Jesus personally commissioned Paul as His apostle to the gentiles in fulfillment of this prophecy. Therefore, Paul preached to gentiles that the time for paganism was over. Jesus, the Messiah, had come. And the history of the world bears out this prophecy. Christianity is still advancing against paganism the world over.

Now, when non-Jews steeped in pagan doctrine, began to convert to Christianity, many things changed for them. In particular their pagan worldview, culture and way of life was replaced by a Christian worldview and way of life. Thus, the new believers actually began to create a new culture – the first Christian culture.

This new culture was so threatening to paganism that some people in the Greek city of Thessalonica tried to get a Roman judge to condemn Paul and those with him. They said to the judge in Acts 17:6, “... ‘These men who have turned the world upside down have come here....’” Yes. By preaching faith in Christ they were turning pagan life, worldview and culture upside down in every city they visited.

This was and remains God’s plan. Isaiah 49 has not changed. Even in the present time, the forces of neo-paganism loose in Western culture ultimately cannot succeed.

Now, in the first century, a big change for the formerly pagan Christian converts came from this major teaching we’ve just read from the Corinthian letters. I believe that if we look into it carefully, it will be a major change for us as well.

Here’s the really huge first step of the teaching. *We are not our own.* That’s a shocker. Isn’t it? I am not my own. Neither are you. The reason is simple. We exist because we have a Creator. Without Him, we are nothing. We don’t exist. Nothing exists. We are not our own. We are not on our own.

Thinking we are our own is and always has been an illusion of the sinful nature. It’s what Satan thinks. Indeed, this way of thinking and believing originated with him. It is the fundamental essence of sin.

Satan tempted Adam and Eve to be on their own. He claimed they would be more like God if they determined good and evil for themselves. And while that's true in a certain sense, who else except the Creator of this universe can determine what truly is good and evil?

Thus, the core essence of the sinful nature we've inherited from Adam and Eve is its belief that we are our own and are entirely on our own. There is no Creator God. This is especially true for we modern Americans who have woven an incredible economy of plenty around ourselves.

There's nothing particularly wrong with plenty. Scripture doesn't warn us against plenty. But it does warn us about the deceitful way the sinful nature interprets plenty – namely that having plenty proves we are really on our own and beholden to no “imaginary” Creator.

That's the fatal spiritual deception the sinful nature weaves around wealth. And this deception is nowhere better exposed than in the face of death. As Yahweh says to the rich man in Jesus' parable in Luke 12:20, “... ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’” It's also why Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 to the devil saying, “Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”

So, thinking we are our own is the bitter essence of our sinful nature. It's the very thing that Jesus came to redeem us from.

We are not our own. We belong to our Creator. And even more incredibly, He belongs to us. I tell you this. If you leave here this morning with those words firmly planted in your heart by Lord Holy Spirit, it will turn your life upside down.

Remember the three stages of faith? We're hearing the news of this teaching this morning. Can you believe the teaching in the Corinthian letters that you're not your own? Probably. It sounds logical if Yahweh exists. Right? That's the first stage of faith.

But let's move up to the second stage of faith by confessing this Word back to the Lord. You say I belong to you, Lord. You also say that You belong to me. Does that confession of God's truth find a firm place in your soul?

Now, in order to move up to the third stage of faith, we must recognize that the whole matter of you belonging to Yahweh, and He belonging to you, is possible only through the forgiveness of sins won by Jesus Christ on the cross. Repudiation of our rebellion and the raging desire to be our own must be brought to the ear of our Lord in a confession of sins. And for the sake of Jesus Christ, Lord Holy Spirit will forgive us and apply the righteousness of Christ to our lives.

And, then, in the humility that comes from the forgiveness of sins, we move up into the scary third stage of faith that makes all the difference in the world. I am Yours, Lord. Do as You want. Let me be to You what You desire. For You have given Yourself unreservedly to me upon the cross.

Indeed, this scary part is what eternal life in Jesus Christ is all about. For, Christ in me, and I in Christ is existence as it was meant to be. It's the only reality those who have died in the Lord know. It's the only reality those resurrected in Jesus Christ will ever know. There will be no more of this being our own thing.

On the other hand, there is a place prepared for Satan who desires to be his own. That same place has been prepared for all angels and humans who, following Satan, also desire to be their own. They will truly be their own and totally on their own. And, apart from Yahweh, the only source of goodness, it won't be good.

But by grace through faith this will not be so for those who have believed upon the Savior of the world. Instead, we will be caught up in the joy of our Creator. For, He is our God, and we are His people. Being in Him and He in us is human existence as Yahweh always intended it to be.

Now, the Spirit showed Saint Paul something important. If we are in Christ and Christ is in us, then we are the abiding place of the Lord on earth. This makes me the temple of the Lord and you the temple of the Lord. Together, we are His temple, His abiding place on earth.

And if these bodies are temples of the Lord, how then does a temple of the Lord live in a fallen world? That's the main issue Paul was tackling for the believers in Corinth. He was warning them against desecrating the temple of God, their own bodies, by sinful attitudes and rebellious behavior.

Because of the incredible power of the sinful nature to resist God's Law, we are only the temple of the Lord in this world by the grace of God through faith in the work and righteousness of Jesus Christ. As it says in Ephesians 2:8, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God..." It is only in this context of grace, then, that we read in Ephesians 2:10 that we are God's workmanship prepared for the doing of good works.

Paul clearly taught the Corinthians and us that sexual purity is one of God's good works prepared for those saved by grace. And in the Corinthian letters Paul made the point that sexual purity or impurity occurs in the context of our bodies as temples – residences – of the Lord. Therefore, any form of sexual impurity desecrates the temple of the Lord – the dwelling place of God on earth.

In pagan first century Corinth there was a severe difficulty with sexual purity for new Christians that we don't quite yet have in this culture. The old pagan gods and goddesses acted like sexually debauched human beings. There were also fertility gods and goddesses. Religious devotion to such gods and goddesses required ritual religious acts of sexual debauchery.

So, a new convert to Christianity had to draw a deep distinction between his or her previous religious devotion to the pagan gods and goddesses, and the new way of Messiah Jesus. This is why Paul taught them and us to draw the distinction based upon the life-changing teaching that we are not our own.

Again, in the initial creation our Creator designed and purposed us to be in close and blessed relationship with Him as His dwelling place. Indeed the redeemed of the Lord will be His dwelling place forever. However, in this life our rebellion and sin drives Yahweh and us apart. But Messiah Jesus came so that through the divine miracle of conversion and the forgiveness of sins the separation would be ended. Yahweh can actually dwell in our bodies as His temple by grace through faith.

For this reason, in Christ the goodness of the holy estate of matrimony is the divinely blessed expression of sexual purity and commitment for one man and one woman. It is our Creator's plan whereby we may flourish sexually. Anything else desecrates the temple of the Lord.

Notice that this goes absolutely in the face of everything that first century paganism and twenty-first century neo-paganism would teach us about human sexuality. And for this reason historic Christianity is despised and attacked.

However, God never lies. There is nothing in His Word that is false. First century Christians could experience being the temple of God if they repented of their paganism. It's no different in the twenty-first century. As it says in Hebrews 13:8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." In the midst of the present sexual wasteland that neo-paganism has created, God's Word on the matter may even be a welcome good news. And sexuality is not the only area affected by being the temple of the Lord. Everything in life is. Everything changes if we will receive this teaching on the third level of faith that God plainly intends for us.

Isaiah 49 has not changed. The time for all paganism, old or new, is over. God is calling. Therefore, it's time to look deeply into the things of God again so that we and others might flourish spiritually, and in all the other ways Jesus has purposed for us. God is building His holy temple soul by soul, body by body. Let us rejoice and be glad in what He is doing. His church, His temple, His people, whom He has called by His Name can and will flourish in His righteousness, by His grace, even in this time and in this place. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the NIV.