



JESUS AND THE TEMPLE

Part 9 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 2:22–40 | November 29, 2009

LUKE 2:22-40

²² And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” ²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. ²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

²⁹ “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,

according to your word;

³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation

³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,

and for glory to your people Israel.”

³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

³⁶ And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, ³⁷ and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹ And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

INTRODUCTION

Hi, Pastor Mark here on the southern steps of the Temple Mount in God’s providence, preaching on idolatry with the Muslim prayers of Ramadan in the background. Jesus is determined to get me in as much sanctified trouble as possible. [Laughter] Behind me, to my right, is a mosque. If you hear something explode, it is not likely a gunshot; if so, it is probably for me, and do not worry. But, it is probably fireworks as it is Ramadan, “the holy month,” for some.

As we are here, I am a bit overwhelmed with this opportunity. These are the steps that Jesus Christ himself would have walked up and down, perhaps first in the arms of his mother, Mary, or his father, Joseph. I’ll explain it in the course of the sermon, but these steps are part of the Herodian temple and they are the exact place that Jesus would have been. We find ourselves at the most generous entrance to the temple area, which would have been just on the other side of this wall, the Temple Mount, and it was the workers and the Gentiles and others who would come in through this gate. There were various gates for people to enter into according to their position, religiously and politically, in the society, and this was the most generous. For those of us who are Gentiles, this would have been our entrance. And so, we know that this is where Jesus would have spent a considerable amount of time when we hear of him frequently preaching and teaching at the temple, we can ascertain that much of that was likely done here, because this was the place to gather the largest crowds and speak to the widest audience.

And, as we look out, we see the Mount of Olives; we see the Kidron Valley; we see the City of David. And, I want to share with you, preaching from the same place that Jesus did, which is an unbelievable opportunity for which I am exceedingly glad and in great gratitude to God. I wanted to share with you from the Gospel of Luke, and we will begin in chapter 2, verse 22: the first occasion of the entrance of the Lord Jesus Christ to this place. I feel, however, we should first pray.

Father God, I thank you for this opportunity to preach where Jesus did, to be where Jesus was, to talk about who Jesus is. I pray that you would send

me and us the Holy Spirit; that he would do battle against the demons and the principalities and the powers of the air that even fill the air in our ears in this moment. God, it is a continual reminder that the world does not yet know your Son and though they have loudspeakers, we have the Holy Spirit, and we ask for power in his name, for Jesus' sake, Amen.

JESUS IS DEDICATED AT THE TEMPLE

Luke, chapter 2; what would have happened on this occasion is that Mary and Joseph were bringing Jesus, as a young baby boy, perhaps roughly six or so weeks of age, to be dedicated. They would have started most likely down the hill. There would have been places for ceremonial cleansing and washing and bathing, showing the expiating work that Jesus would accomplish on the cross; that he would cleanse us from our righteousness, that he would wash away our sins. To show that they desired this atoning sacrifice, this penalty payment for sin, they would wear white and then they would ascend the temple steps, just as they would ascend into Jerusalem. If you talk to any Jews, Messianic Jews, to this day they will talk not about going to Jerusalem, but ascending to Jerusalem, a city on a hill. And, they would talk about not going to the temple, but ascending to the temple. And as they would ascend to the temple, it was showing that they were pilgrimaging toward God. And, as they were physically climbing the steps, spiritually, it was expected that their soul would lift in praise and adoration and thanksgiving to God, and if you've read the Psalms, you will read the Psalms of, what? The Psalms of Ascent. And, those Psalms were to be sung, so that the heart would grow gladder and gladder as one made more progress toward the presence of God.

And so, this was the activity of Jesus, mother Mary, and his adopted father, Joseph. Again, he is roughly six weeks old. "And when the time came for their purification, according to the Law of Moses, they brought him," that is, Jesus, "up to Jerusalem"

Now, remember, they are traveling from Nazareth to Jerusalem. This is about 140 miles. This would have taken them roughly a week. This is a very serious, devoted family. This is a couple who greatly loves God. This is a couple that is living in Nazareth, 140 miles away, a small town, perhaps fifty or a hundred people, very small in that day, not a great number of people. They are simple peasants. In all likelihood, both the mother and the father are perhaps illiterate, but they are devoted to Yahweh. They are devoted to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They are devoted to the God of the Scriptures. And so, when their son is born, the Lord Jesus Christ, they do according to the custom of the law of the Old Testament, and they bring him to the temple for his dedication.

"(As it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord)." – Indeed, Jesus was Mary's firstborn son. – "And to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord." Now, as we read the totality of the Gospel of Luke, we hear this phrase mentioned on five occasions, that they did according to what is said in the law of God. And it is showing us the devout nature of Mary and Joseph.

Now, you must understand that Mary, when she was told that she would give birth to the Lord Jesus, she was probably a teenage girl-13, 14, 15, 16 years of age. She is likely illiterate, in a small town that is obscure, far removed from the temple and the religious activity of the day. Coming here would have been a magnificent event for her. Her town is perhaps 100 and this town is perhaps 100,000. This is a simple, young woman giving birth to God incarnate, and carrying him in her arms as his mother in obedience to the Scriptures, because she loves God and she believes the Scriptures. And this statement that she did according to the law of the Lord is articulated five times by Luke to repeatedly, emphatically, and clearly teach us: his mother loved God and his father loved God, and for mothers and fathers who love God, this is the hope, the expectation, the anticipation that our children would grow up to love God, to worship God. And so, when they are in the womb, we pray for them; when they are birthed, we dedicate them. And she is bringing her child here, the Lord Jesus Christ, to dedicate him.

The story goes on. "A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons" were offered. In that day, that was not the sacrifice that was expected. That was the sacrifice that was permitted in the Law of Moses as an exception clause for the poor. Luke's gospel repeatedly mentions the poor. Luke shows Jesus was poor, and he in fact had a heart for the poor and he was oftentimes beloved by the poor. He would feed the poor, care for the poor, encourage the poor, and give the poor promises of God's generous, lavish provision that was forthcoming in the kingdom of God. And Jesus' mother and father, though devoted to God and devout in faith, they cannot afford a typical sacrifice. What does this teach you? That ultimately, it is not the size of the gift, but it is the heart of the worshiper and the degree of sacrifice that determines whether or not one's gift is appropriate in the sight of God. They are poor. They cannot offer a typical sacrifice, and so they give a sacrifice that is for those who are poor.

SIMEON PROPHECIES OVER JESUS

"Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him." This man, Simeon, he loves God. The Holy Spirit is confirmed in his heart, in his soul, in his mind, that he is coming to that point that Paul will later call the fullness of time; that everything is coming together, that he is in a strategic moment, that everything in God's providence and sovereign rule over history is in alignment for something very significant to happen. And, that inaugurates with the Son of God coming to the temple of God. When Jesus and the temple come together, we see the fulfillment of the old covenant and the inauguration of the new covenant. This is a new epoch in human history, this is the fulfillment of all prophecy, and Simeon, because of the revelation of the Holy Spirit, he is consciously aware of this and he is waiting with eager anticipation and expectation for the revelation of God.

"And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ," the anointed one, the Messiah, the Savior, the deliverer, the long expected one. "And he came in the Spirit" – Luke is emphatic to repeatedly teach us about the Holy Spirit. Luke shows that Jesus was revealed by prophecy through the Holy Spirit, that Jesus was filled and led by the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in his baptism, enabling and empowering and encouraging his ministry. He is very keen to remind us continually of the work of the Holy Spirit, both

through what we would consider natural events, those providential moments where God brings people, circumstances, and things together, and those more obvious, supernatural moments where miracles, prophecies, revelations, the combating with demons, those kinds of activities occur.

And Simeon has this revelation from the Holy Spirit. He has a prophecy. "And he came in the Spirit," verse 27, "into the temple," – which in the days of Jesus would have been just behind and above me – "and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and he blessed God and said," – so here is Simeon, holding Jesus. God becomes a man. It is not that men and women become gods as the lie of Genesis 3 says and nearly every religion since articulates and emphasizes; it is that God humbled himself and became a man. It is not that we ascend necessarily up to God, but God descends down to be with us.

And Simeon has an occasion where he gets to hold God incarnate, the second member of the Trinity, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, in his hands, where? In where? The temple, the temple. The story continues. Here is what he said: "'Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen you,' – what? – "Salvation." – This child is my salvation – "that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles," – that's us. A light for revelation to the Gentiles. What an appropriate place to read this verse, on the southern steps of the Temple Mount, the place where the Gentiles were welcome to come to the very presence of God, the closest they could get to the Holy of Holies, the actual presence of God, in glory, in that day, on the earth.

"'And for glory to your people Israel.'" Does God love the Jews? Yes. Does God love the Gentiles? Yes. For whom did Jesus come as Savior? People from every language, tribe, tongue, nation, culture, background, and sub-culture of people. In Revelation, we see that they are all gathered around the throne of Jesus, worshiping him as God.

"And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them," perhaps a pastoral prayer. I mean, being a pastor, one of the great gifts of my life is to actually pray over people, to demonstrably indicate God's affection toward them, God's consideration of them, God's devotion to them. I see Simeon as an old, old servant of God. And this is the fulfillment of all of his life's expectation, and all of the Scriptures' revelation. And I see him placing a hand on Mary and praying for her-she has an enormous job to raise this child-and praying for his adoptive father, Joseph, to be a good father to this boy.

The Scriptures go on to tell us, verse 34, "And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'Behold, this child is appointed,' – he has a destiny, – "for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts will be revealed.'" What he says is, "This boy will grow up to be a man who is the center of extraordinary controversy, conflict, division, acrimony, strife. But he will be the fulcrum on which human history hinges." All of that prophecy of Simeon came true. History is divided into B.C. (before Christ), A.D. (anno Domini, the year of our Lord), around this man, Jesus. In this very place, he is still incredibly divisive. There is great acrimony and strife. We are here as Christians. Behind us is the Wailing Wall with the Jews, and above us to the right is a functional mosque of the Muslims. We all disagree on this man. He is still a point of unity for those who love him and disunity for those who do not.

It goes on to say, verse 36, "And there was also a prophetess, Anna," – great respect given to this woman – "the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day." Do you ever wonder if a grandma's prayers count? They do. This eighty-four-year-old woman had been praying day and night. She would devote herself to intercession that God's will would be done, that God's kingdom would come.

Verse 38: "And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth," about a week's journey back home.

THE "LOST YEARS" OF JESUS

And this is all we know of the early years of Jesus. Luke 2:40 is all we know of Jesus' early years. We know of his dedication and then we know of the beginning of his public ministry at roughly the age of thirty. These are called by some the lost years of Jesus. Many of the cults' false teachers will try to articulate what happened in those years. They'll try to fill them in, saying that he was with the Essenes or he went east. When I did a debate with Deepak Chopra on ABC Television's Nightline, he said that Jesus went to study with mystics and with other communities of magical arts and superstition and paganism, none of which has any historical substantiation-that is all conjecture.

All Scripture alone is God-breathed and profitable. Scripture tells us everything we need to know, and this is all that it says about the early years of Jesus, chapter 2, verse 40: "And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him." All we know is that the Lord Jesus grew physically from boyhood through adolescence to manhood. That he grew spiritually, reading the Scriptures, memorizing Scriptures, praying. And he grew in favor; people respected him so much so that though his was a small town, as I have told you, of perhaps fifty or a few hundred people, they called him a rabbi. Now, he didn't seemingly come formally educated as a traditional rabbi, as a teacher. But in his town there would have been a synagogue that housed perhaps twenty people. They would get together for prayers and readings. These are very simple, rural folk. Nearly all if not all of the women in town would have been illiterate. A handful of men would have been literate. Jesus was among them. He somehow was well educated. Mary and Joseph did do a great job raising Jesus; they taught him, they loved him, they served him, they protected him, they got him an adequate education. We do see glimpses of Jesus as a boy at the temple, talking on a few, at least one occasion, perhaps more, with the scholars and they're amazed at his knowledge. He grew in stature physically, wisdom spiritually, and favor to the degree that he was allowed to read the Scriptures; that in his small synagogue in his hometown, they called him rabbi.

FIVE FUNCTIONS OF THE TEMPLE

Let me pick up this theme. What we have just read in Luke, chapter 2, is this extraordinary event in human history: Jesus comes to the temple. And so, let me explain to you in as much as I am able, some of the theological significance of that moment, of that event. Now, the temple, which in the days of Jesus, as I have said, would have been entered either through the gates to the right or to the left, that are now filled in. We would have entered one way; we would have exited another. This was the thoroughfare for the majority of people who came to the temple. And for them, the temple was the house of God. And I have written five functions for you of the temple.

1. IT WAS A PLACE BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH.

The first is, it is a place between heaven and earth. The temple, particularly the Holy of Holies in the center of the temple, is the connection between heaven and earth; that God is in heaven as Creator, that we are on earth as created, and that God's presence dwelling in the temple of the Holy of Holies is in fact then that sacred, that most sacred place, that connecting place between God and humanity.

2. IT WAS THE PLACE OF GOD'S PRESENCE.

Number two. It is the place of God's presence. It is the place of God's presence; God's presence being held by his own gifting and graciousness in the Holy of Holies. So, literally on the earth, if you want to go to be near God, you have to come to the temple. And, depending upon your religious pedigree and your holiness, according to traditions and ritual purifications, you were allowed to get as close as possible to the Holy of Holies. It is even considered to this day to be so holy that we took an underground tour at night following some of the ruins of the wall, and we came to a place that is perhaps sixty feet from where it is believed-and these are ruins under the current Temple Mount-and it was believed that that place, that section of the wall, was sixty feet from the previous Holy of Holies, and it was filled with women who were touching that wall. One woman was lying prostrate up against the wall, praying. Another woman was bent over and she was weeping. The Holy of Holies is not there, but it was, and they were sixty feet away, and they were to this very day, 2,000 years later, expecting-tragically and wrongly for reasons I'll explain to you in a moment-that being there would get them closer to God. But that level of commitment that we find echoing in our own day, it resounded in the days of Jesus because the Holy of Holies was just behind me and you could get as close to God as possible by being there.

3. IT WAS WHERE GOD'S PEOPLE WOULD COME TO MEET WITH HIM.

Number three. It is where God's people would come to meet with him. Do you want to meet with God? Do you want to pray to God? Do you want to hear from God? Do you want to sing to God? Then, you must go to the temple. You must go there to meet with God. And it is not as much that God needed a house; God is the Creator of heaven and earth. But that God created a place for us to come and to meet with him. And so, it was a meeting place. It was a place that, for those who lived in the rural areas and the villages, they would be peasants and they would save their whole life to make a journey to Jerusalem. They had heard from their parents and their grandparents about what it was like to wash in the pools and to be adorned in white, and to sense something of expectation and ascension, to with God's people sing the Psalms of Ascent and to walk into the great temple, to go from a town of a hundred, as most of the rural villages were, the places where Peter and Andrew and James and John and Jesus were from, and to ascend both physically and spiritually to meet with God, in a town of 100,000, a once-in-a-lifetime event.

4. IT WAS THE PLACE WHERE SIN WAS ATONED FOR.

Number four. It was the place where sin was atoned for. It was the place where sin was atoned for. The ritual purifications, the wearing of white, the offering of sacrifices was done for the remission of sin. That was their expectation, their anticipation. There was an acknowledgement that before a holy, righteous and perfect God, as revealed in the more than six hundred commandments of the Pentateuch, meaning book in five parts, the Law of Moses alone, they were guilty and condemned, they were sinners by nature and choice, just like King David. They knew, as he said in the Psalms, "I am wicked from my mother's womb," that the City of David echoed the sentiment of David about the sinfulness of David and his descendants. And, they would come here to have their sin atoned for, and the way this would happen is the holiest man, at least by tradition, was the great high priest. He had to be a descendant. He had to be a descendant, all the way back to the days of Moses, through the Levite heritage, through the heritage of Aaron. He would be a man who would once a year undergo numerous bathings, cleansings. He would wear simple garments. He would confess his sins. He would be permitted by God's grace one day a year-Yom Kippur, Day of Atonement; the Jews simply called it "The Day"-he would enter into the Holy of Holies and he would sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. This was a place where much blood was shed. When fresh water was found, it was a great gift because there was a need for much cleansing. Many, many sacrifices were given here, and the most important sacrifice was Yom Kippur, Day of Atonement. On that day, two goats would be brought, a goat of substitute and a goat that we will call the scapegoat. Now, the goat of substitute would be prayed over, confessing the sins of the people; this is a national event. And then, that animal would be slaughtered; its blood would be shed, that it would substitute itself, paying the penalty for sin of death. The other goat, the scapegoat; the sins would be confessed and that goat would be sent away. History records that sometimes God's people would literally chase it away. And it was that our sins were atoned for and they are taken away. And, this is all leading up to the coming of Jesus.

So, when Mary holds Jesus tenderly in her hands, a poor peasant girl from the village of Nazareth, and she is ascending the steps wearing white, knowing that this is the sacrifice, her son will ultimately die to pay for her sin. She is carrying in her hands the fulfillment of the entire sacrificial system, the entire Day of Atonement, the entire purpose of the nation of Israel, the construction of the temple, the consideration of the priests, and the sacrifices that are offered. This is magnificent! This is epic! This is historic! This is unprecedented! This is unparalleled! And, all of this culminates, all of the sacrificial system, in Jesus.

5. IT WAS THE CENTER OF LIFE AND FAITH AND WORSHIP.

And, number five. The function of the temple was that it was the center of life and faith and worship. God's people were surrounded by enemies on every side. They were frequently destroyed and attacked; many were martyred and murdered. Some lived in rural villages and when they would come to this place, they could be together as God's people. Does community matter to you? Does fellowship matter to you? Does being with God's people matter to you? When you meet someone who is a Christian, do you feel an automatic connection with them, like you've met a long lost family member? That was the kind of heartfelt community that would be cultivated here. It is where God's people would come to be together. It was the center of their life, the center of their faith, the center of their worship.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE

Let me explain to you then about the temple; there were two. The first temple, the framework of which was given to King David, but he was not permitted by God to build it-why? He was an adulterer, he was a murderer; he was a man whom God loved like the rest of us sinners, but he disqualified himself for that great act. And so then, the task was handed to his son, King Solomon. And, King Solomon oversaw the construction of the first temple, behind me up on the Temple Mount, and he dedicated it to the Lord, and God's glory dropped upon that first temple and the people worshiped God. Over its history, at times it was desecrated. By the times of Josiah, it had fallen into disrepair. There was ebbing and flowing throughout the history of God's people in the Old Testament of paganism and idolatry and lethargy. Ultimately, it was ransacked and looted by Nebuchadnezzar, and eventually that temple was destroyed, until the time of Herod.

Now, the line of Herod-I'll give you a little history-goes all the way back to the times of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. When Abraham slept with two women, he created two families. He created an Arab line and a Jewish line, and there was conflict between those boys. They grew up to be nations: the nation of Israel, the nation of Edom. The Edomites are the line of King Herod; that's why there's conflict between Herod and Jesus, even in Jesus' day. Nonetheless, under Herod the Great, the first Herod, the temple was rebuilt and he expanded the temple so that it was roughly twice as large as the original temple that Solomon built. There are a few reasons for that; one, likely to accommodate more people, and secondly, to include more commerce. He created a second temple and the first portion of it was for sacrifices and the priests and for those who would come to worship God, and behind it was essentially a business district. It is where business would be transacted and it was dedicated to Herod, and this man was a megalomaniac. As we saw, the stones that were cut to build that temple, each of them is marked so that you know that all of these stones belong to Herod. It's his way of stamping his brand on every single stone. He wants you to know that he built this. He wants his monument next to God's. He wants his presence next to God's. He wants his kingdom next to God's.

It originally came out of a vision of Ezekiel; he saw this Herodian temple. It came to pass; it stood for about five hundred years. It was this temple that Malachi prophesied about in Malachi 3:1. He says this, about four hundred years before the birth of Christ, "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to," - where? - "His temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts," the God who rules over all angels and demons. So, four hundred years before the birth of Jesus, the prophecy is given that we'll know who Messiah is, we'll know who Savior is, we'll know who deliverer is, we'll know who God incarnate is, for two reasons. Number one, a messenger will go before him, preparing the way through preaching. Who is that? John the Baptizer. John the Baptizer. Number two, the Lord, and that's ultimately the Lord Jesus Christ, will arrive at what destination? The temple.

JESUS AT THE TEMPLE IN LUKE'S GOSPEL

So again, back to Mary carrying Jesus in her arms, up the steps of the temple, ascending physically, spiritually wearing white, singing and celebrating; she is fulfilling Malachi. She is fulfilling prophecy. And Jesus comes to the Herodian temple; Jesus comes to that place. We see a little later in Luke 2:41-52, that as a young boy, Jesus was in the temple debating with the scholars. He was very theologically astute. He was a very devoted student of Scripture. His parents lost track of him. I'm sure Mary was absolutely terrified. Can you imagine that, just for you mothers, as an excursus, and/or you fathers? You go to Jerusalem, a town of 100,000, you're from a small town of 100. Your son is God and you lose him. [Laughter] That's a bad day! And you're frantic, "Where is he?" You're trying to backtrack and find him. "Where did he go? He was traveling with us, we thought he was in the caravan. Where did he go?"

We had this occasion, yesterday; we were all going to get on the elevator at the hotel from the 18th floor to the 1st. And, my son Gideon, he's about three, he forgot his shoes. I said, "Oh, I've got to go back and get his shoes." One of the kids pushed the elevator button. All of my five kids got on the elevator. I said, "No, no, no, wait." They all got off the elevator, except my youngest daughter, who is five and altogether lovely. And the door shut and she disappeared.

Do you know that feeling, parents? I had flip-flops on. I had been shooting all day. I was absolutely exhausted. And, I ran eighteen flights of stairs in flip-flops. The elevator went down to the first floor. My daughter, who is five, said, "Daddy, I didn't talk to anyone and I didn't get off the elevator, and Jesus just brought me back to the 18th floor." It went to the first floor, opened, doors shut, went back to the 18th floor, opened, she's back to her family. But, even for me, that few minutes-you parents know what that feels like, you grandparents know what that feels like.

Jesus' mother and father, they felt that. They brought him here as a young man, and he is perhaps a teenager, debating and dialoguing, and they lose him. I want to take you through the times that Jesus came to the temple. That's the second that Luke records. And when they find him, they ask, "Where were you?" And he says, "I was in my Father's house." See, for others, this is a magnificent temple, and for him, it is just his dad's home.

In chapter 4, verse 9 of Luke, we see that Jesus goes away for forty days in the wilderness; he is fasting and praying. I would assume, presume that he was studying and memorizing the book of Deuteronomy, because when Satan comes to him, the last Adam, to tempt him and contort Scripture as he did

the first Adam, Jesus repeatedly quotes from the Book of Deuteronomy. And we see in Luke 4:9 that Satan took Jesus and in some miraculous, supernatural way, brought him to what place? The pinnacle of where? The temple, to look over all of Jerusalem. And what Satan offered him was a kingdom without a cross. What he said to him was, essentially, "Jesus, if you will honor me, then I will give you whatever you want." And he was foolish enough to believe that Jesus wanted anything other than the glory of God, the Father. And, unlike the first Adam, the last Adam did not sin, but he was brought to the pinnacle of the temple.

We see as well that Jesus was often in the temple, often speaking in the temple. Luke actually uses these words, "day after day." So, being here in Jesus' earthly ministry, beginning at the age of thirty, for some three years until he was roughly thirty-three years of age—we get that by following the chronology of John and the number of Passovers and some of those variables. Jesus ministered from about age thirty to about age thirty-three. And, it says, day after day, as was his custom, he went to the temple. He preached and he taught and his fame grew and the crowds followed him and the multitudes would come to him. And it is not unlikely or impossible that he preached from these steps as the entry point for the largest number of people. It says this in Luke 19:47; 20:1; 21:37-38; 22:53. Jesus keeps coming to the temple to preach and teach.

And then, something very interesting happens in Luke 19:45. He is filled with rage and anger, and he cleanses the temple because, he says, "You've turned my house, the house of my Father, into a den of thieves and robbers." And that was all the result of Herod. See, the original temple did not have the addition that Herod created. Herod, again, created a business district behind the temple. He expanded the temple to include commerce and selling of goods. It was a very corrupt area. If you come to Jerusalem today, Jesus would have a lot of tables to throw over. This would take him a very long time. [Laughter] Everyone has something to sell, everyone has something to give; everyone has some hook, some angle, some relic, some holiness, some goodness to offer you. "Buy this, it's from here, it's special, it's dedicated to the Lord, it's sacred." Jesus saw that and was furious, and he overthrew the tables; he overthrew all of the merchants and he absolutely rebuked them for using God for gain that was shameful.

JESUS PROMISES TO DESTROY THE TEMPLE

And now I share with you this reading from Luke 21:5-6. In my opinion, these are the most important verses regarding Jesus and the temple in all of Luke's gospel and it is echoed in other gospels. It is so important that the other gospel writers also include this. When we see Jesus first come to the temple, repeatedly come to the temple, everything culminates in this moment. This is Jesus' most important statement regarding the temple. Luke 21:5-6: "And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings," – right? Herod had spent a considerable amount of money. – "He said, 'As for these things that you see,'" and he was showing them the temple. So, you can imagine: we ascended through the gates, we were in the temple, it was twice as large as the first, everything was magnificent, no expense was spared. All of those who came to pilgrimage were absolutely impressed as they stood there gazing at the temple. They said, "This is amazing. We've never seen anything this glorious, tremendous, and phenomenal." And here's what Jesus says, "'As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.'" Jesus promises to destroy the temple. To destroy—I told you—the place between heaven and earth, the place where God's presence dwells in the Holy of Holies, the place where people came to meet with God, the place where sin was atoned for, the place that was the centerpiece of life and faith and worship and community.

He promised that the temple would be destroyed, that not one stone would be left on the other. They were enjoying the temple that Herod had built. For them, it would have been the most horrific thing to hear that, like Solomon's temple, Herod's temple would be destroyed.

Actually, when Jesus is put to death and he is run through a series of false trials, this is one of the charges that is leveled against him in Mark 14:58 and 15:29; among their charges, he claims to be God. They have charges against him. One of them is, he says that he will destroy the temple. Now, his claim to be God got him in trouble with the Jews and the Romans and his claim to destroy the temple got him in trouble with the Jews and the Romans. The Romans had a great financial gain from the temple and those who were Jewish had a great spiritual devotion to the temple, and so Jesus was here declaring war on everyone.

Here's my question to you—and we've come many hours, we've journeyed for many days. We find ourselves upon the steps to the temple where Jesus walked. And the question that I want to articulate in my remaining time is this: why did Jesus destroy the temple? Why did Jesus prophesy and then fulfill his prophecy of the destruction of the temple? Why? That question is the question when it comes to the temple.

What do you think? What do you think? It was an idol. It's still an idol. An idol by definition is something that is created. Paul says it this way in Romans 1:25, they "worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator God, who is to be forever praised, Amen." A created thing could be something that God has made, like the human body, comfort, pleasure. A created thing could be something that is made with human hands. In his great sermon on Mars Hill, overlooking the Acropolis, another great monument to man, Paul said, "God does not live in temples built by human hands."

RELIGIOUS IDOLATRY

As we are here, we find ourselves in the place of the deepest-rooted idolatry on all the earth. Now, let me explain this to you. Before you worship an idol in your hands or with your eyes or with your life or your money, you first choose the idol in your heart. The prophet Ezekiel says this in chapter 14, that God's people took idols into their hearts. That's why all of these religions and all of their rules and all of their traditions are worthless, because they do not address the issues of the heart. They do not address the idols of the heart. Jesus says, out of the heart comes life. And our sinful heart, our natural heart, our birth heart is a heart of idolatry. We are descendants of the first Adam; we are sinners by nature and choice. We were created as the image bearers of God to reflect, to image, to mirror, to echo, to emulate, to show, to reveal, to glorify, to honor, to praise, to serve God. And what happens in sin is that we remain worshipers and we worship things that are created, rather than God. And it starts by taking idols into our heart.

Now, in the west, my hometown, the idols are secular. The idols are sex and money and fame and comfort and power and glory and prominence and prestige and making your own name great and making your own fame great. And, in places like this, the idols are religious, and what tends to happen is that when the Gospel of Jesus, the Good News of Jesus is often proclaimed, it is that sinners need to repent of their sin, and I've said it repeatedly and it is such an important theme of Scripture I repeat it consistently, that religious people also need to repent of their religion; that religion is repugnant and repulsive to God; that, in fact, religion is the great idol. Religion is the human effort to live by rules and keep score and count righteousness, not by the gifting and imputation of Jesus by grace, but by performance and works, by devotion and committed-ness, by wearing of the right hat with the right color that indicates the right rabbi, or five times a day responding to the Muslim call to prayer as we have heard, or going to the holy place or following the holy man or being committed to the holy traditions, all of which is most unholy. It's idolatry; it's the worshiping of a teacher, it's the worshiping of a tradition, it's the worshiping of a religion, it's the worshiping of a place.

I say this not in any hatred, animosity, or anger to our Jewish friends. They have been so gracious to us, and love me well and serve me well. But to go to the Wailing Wall-it's not the Holy of Holies! It's a wall. To see them there, twenty-four-hours a day, seven days a week, bowing, worshiping, crying, screaming, putting their prayers into the wall, thinking that if they put them there, they'll be closer to God because that wall is closer to God, so now the prayer is closer to God; that some will back away from the wall without turning their back on the wall, so that they would not dishonor the wall, as if the wall were God, as if the wall were the presence of God, as if the wall were the mediator of God. And battles are fought and a mosque is built off to my right, and as I preach, Muslims look down on us, both literally and physically. And, five times a day, their cry goes out for the time of prayer and they bow down, worshiping-not Jesus.

The religious ideology is steep, and even Christians are prone to our religious ideology and idolatry. When you think that a Bible translation makes you closer to God, that speaking in tongues makes you closer to God, that being baptized as an infant or an adult by sprinkling or immersion makes you closer to God, when you think that a particular spiritual gift or full-time ministry or the memorization of particular verses of Scripture or the singing of particular songs or being devoted to the old hymns makes you closer to God, you're an idolater. You're not using things to worship God, you're worshiping things as God. And idolatry is the inversion-it is taking God out of the center of our lives, the substance of our identity, the security of our salvation, and it is putting someone or something else in that place. Again, secular people put in that place of preeminence and prominence: food (so that God is their stomach), sex (that's what Romans 1 says), money, fame, glory, power; religious people put their traditions, places, teachers. And the biggest idol on earth was the temple. It wasn't supposed to be. The problem wasn't in the temple; the problem was in the heart of the worshipers. And so, Jesus said he would destroy-he would destroy the temple. Isn't that amazing?

I really want to impress upon you the importance of not just coming to this place and judging the religious people and overlooking the idols that you bring with you in your own heart. We can have that same attitude as the man that Jesus condemns, telling the story that two men went into the temple to pray. One man said, what? "God, thank you, I'm not like everybody else." For us, it would be, "God, thank you, I'm not a Jew. I've met Yeshua, Messiah, Jesus. God, thank you, I'm not a Muslim and have to get down on my knees five times a day to pray eastward to a demon god." – I said it. – "Thank you, God, that I don't belong to one of those whack job cults running around this place." Jesus says there was another man who came to the temple; he had the right attitude. He was less concerned with the idolatry in the hearts of all the other worshipers and he was more concerned with his own heart. Jesus tells the story that that man couldn't even look up; he was absolutely devastated by his sin in the face of the holiness of God, and he simply uttered this prayer, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." And Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, that man and not the other, left the temple justified," the great theme of the Protestant Reformation, "justified in the sight of God." You want to leave here justified in the sight of God? Be careful. Be careful that you don't leave here with religious smugness and pride, but you leave here with humility and repentance.

JESUS DIES AND THE CURTAIN IS TORN

We know then that Jesus ultimately was murdered, crucified. Not far from here in fact, but outside of the city. I went there today; I saw it. There is a debate as to which site is actually the site of the crucifixion of Jesus. The one that we went to, and I believe is likely the place, is currently a bus station. It's a bus transfer station. It's called Golgotha, the place of the skull. If you use your imagination, off to the right in the stone, the natural markings are of two eyes and a nose; it does look like a skull. On the top is a graveyard and to the right is a mosque. No respect at all for Jesus in that place. That's where Jesus was crucified; outside of the city, along a busy street, on a high place, the most excruciating way to die. Excruciating literally means "from the cross." I've shared this with you, but it's one fact that haunts me along the trip. He was beaten, he was whipped, he was scourged, he was marred beyond human likeness. You'll hear everyone in Israel say, "Shalom." There's the Prince of Shalom.

When I was in Ephesus about a week or two ago, we went into that archeological dig and we saw those first toilets. I'm just continually haunted by this fact; that they would take the sea sponge to cleanse, in the public toilets, men and women, and that they would offer that to Jesus in mockery on his cross. I mean, we're just talking the ultimate disgrace, the ultimate disregard, the ultimate disrespect. And what we hear, is that when Jesus died, he cried out in triumphant victory, loudly, "It is finished!" What happened at the temple? See, what happened at the cross echoed in the temple. The voice of Jesus from the cross echoed in the Holy of Holies. What happened in the temple? The curtain that separated the presence, the glory of God on the earth from the people was torn from where? Top to bottom, from God to us. They had ascended up the steps, but God had descended down to them in the God-man, Jesus Christ. On the cross, he atoned for their sins.

We went today to the place where Jesus and Barabbas were exchanged. An offer was given, "Do you want Barabbas or Jesus?" And they said, "Give us Barabbas." Friends, we're Barabbas. We are guilty, damnable; we should go to the cross and we should hang there and bleed and die. And Jesus went there for us. Just as Jesus exchanged himself for Barabbas, so Jesus exchanged himself for us. And, behind me, in the temple, in the Holy of Holies, the curtain was torn from top to bottom, signifying God's presence being unleashed on the earth.

In the very place that Father Abraham had been, in the very place at the top of this mountain, where he was told, "Take your son, your only son, the son you love. Put the wood on his back, have him climb up to this place. Lay him down to be slaughtered and sacrificed." And as Abraham took the knife in his hand, the son of expectation that he had been waiting and longing for, an angel appeared. In fact, it was the angel of the Lord, that is, Jesus Christ. When you hear of "an angel of the Lord," it is an angel. When you hear of "the angel of the Lord," angel meaning messenger, that's Jesus. He's worshiped as God throughout the Old Testament. Jesus comes down and stops Father Abraham on the hill behind me, with the knife in his hand. "Do not kill him." And then a ram was found in the thicket, and that ram was sacrificed and the prophecy was given, that one day another sacrifice will be provided to atone for sin so that the children of Abraham, by birth and new birth, could come to have forgiveness of sin and fulfillment of Scripture.

And here comes a son of Abraham, carrying his own wood; the beloved, anticipated, longed for, awaited firstborn son, carrying the wood to his place of execution. He willingly, just as Abraham's son did, laid himself down, and he died. And the crucifixion of Jesus echoed in the place of Abraham. The sacrifice was offered, the prophecy was fulfilled, the temple was altered, the Holy of Holies was unleashed, the curtain was torn from top to bottom, sin was atoned for, Scripture was fulfilled, salvation was granted, and the earth has never been the same since and neither will it ever be as it was before. Jesus rose from death.

THE ANSWER TO IDOLATRY: "AND THEY WORSHIPED HIM"

Here are the last words of the Gospel of Luke—the last words of the Gospel of Luke: "And they worshiped him." That's the answer to idolatry! You worship him, not food, not sex, not power or fame or glory, the secular idols; not tradition and religion and rules and rituals. That's religious idolatry. You worship him! The only way out of idolatry is to worship him. You can change idols; you can go from an alcoholic to a Muslim. [Laughter] But you can't get out of idolatry unless you worship him, Jesus. And so they began worshiping him, where? "They worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continually in the," where? "In the temple blessing God." So, amazingly, they go to the temple and they realize, "This is all taken care of now. Thank you, Father, for Jesus." That's the right response.

Now, following Jesus' resurrection, they return to the temple, they worship. The early church met from house to house and in the temple courts, and they would gather large and small, and Christianity grew and Jesus ascended back into heaven. Isn't that amazing? Do you know what he'll return to? The Mount of Olives, right there. Zechariah 14 says, Jesus will return, right there. He'll split it in half; he'll create a valley. The new heaven, new earth, new Jerusalem will come down out of heaven and in it, we will worship God. We'll be with him, like him, for him, forever. That temple will not have anything in it, that city of the new Jerusalem will not have anything in it, and this new creation will not have anything in it made by what? Human hands. Nothing there to show, "This is what I've built, this is what we've done, this is what I've accomplished, this is our nation, this is our tradition, this is our religion, this is our greatness, this is our Babel." Instead, it will all be created by God, brought down and gifted to us, literally under the feet of Jesus as he is King, Lord, God, ascended Savior and Christ, ruling and reigning over all of his new kingdom and creation, that he will bring with him upon his second coming.

JESUS IS OUR TEMPLE, HIGH PRIEST, AND SACRIFICE

And, in 70 A.D., what happened at the temple, friends? What happened to the temple? What did Jesus say? Not one stone will be left on another. This temple is going away. This was foreshadowing, this was expectation, this was anticipation, and now it's all been fulfilled; it's all been superseded. The temple was destroyed, just like Jesus said. And it's been destroyed for almost two millennia. Why? We have no need of it. It served its purpose. It, for hundreds of years, prepared people for the coming of Jesus, and once he came, its purpose was fulfilled.

Friends, I have good news to you. We didn't bathe with water; we bathe with Christ. We don't try and simply cleanse our body; we're cleansed from the heart out, through repentance and faith, through giving our sin to Jesus, receiving his imputed righteousness. If we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us, make us clean, wash us clean—from how much of our unrighteousness? All of it. So, we don't bathe in water; we cleanse in Christ.

Number two, we don't go to the temple. Why? Jesus is our temple. I explained the purpose of the temple to you earlier. What is now the place between heaven and earth? Well, it's Jesus. Where was God's presence on the earth? In Jesus. Where do we go to meet with God? Jesus. There's one mediator between us and God: this God who became a man, the man Christ Jesus. Where is sin atoned for? Well, in Jesus. Where is the center of our life and our faith and our worship and our community? Jesus. So, today we don't go to the temple. And I love that Jesus doesn't even give us an option. It's not like we come here, flip a coin, "Do I go to Jesus or temple today?" [Laughter] You go to Jesus or ruins today.

Number three, we're not going to bring out a high priest. I'll tell you why: there isn't one. Because we don't need one. The high priest was the intercessor and the advocate. He would go between the people and God. He would bring the people's sin to God and he would mediate and intercede. And the priesthood came to an end with Jesus. Why? Because he's our great high priest. He's our great high priest. Hebrews says, Hebrews 4:15, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with us in our weakness, but he has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin." Isn't that amazing? See, in antiquity, the high priest would live a separated life. He wasn't exposed to the temptations and the trials and the troubles that the average, common person was. Jesus is a high priest who can sympathize. He's lived in obscurity. He's been poor, beaten, spat upon, mocked, betrayed, disowned, abandoned, suffered, homeless, poor, broke, despised. Boy, there is a God, no matter what your circumstances, he relates to you, you relate to him, and there is sympathy. Aren't you glad that Jesus is our high priest?

And lastly, we do not come today to bring a sacrifice. We're not carrying lambs or pigeons or turtledoves in our hands. Jesus has atoned for our sins. John said it well, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." Paul says, "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been slain." God demonstrates his love for us in this: while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Friends, you didn't bring a sacrifice because Jesus died, Hebrews

says, once for all. Peter says, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God. And here, this is mind bending; this is absolutely stunning, that so many today would say we need clean, ritual, purifying water. We need to rebuild the temple. We need to institute the priesthood. We need to renew the sacrifices. And, the answer is, no, you need Jesus. You need Jesus. Isn't it amazing that all you need is Jesus? That dumb Gentiles like us, who really don't know anything of all this tradition and history, we walk around and say, "That's a big rock. That's amazing." [Laughter] It all looks very old. We're from a country where Sears is old. [Laughter] You realize, people have been here for a long time, a lot of wars have been fought, a lot of people have died, a lot of animals were slaughtered, a lot of Caesars and Herods come and go-can't even keep them straight-a lot of high priests have served, a couple of temples have been built. And if you meet Jesus, you have everything. That's amazing. We have a word for that: grace.

THE TEMPLE OF GOD TODAY

And as we leave this place, I will share with you two Scriptures. First Corinthians 3:16-17: "Do you not know that you," that you and you and you and you and you and you and you are, what? "God's," – What's it say? What's it say? – "Temple."

As we sit here on the steps of the temple that Jesus was preaching and teaching at, as we're in the place that Jesus stood, remember this: through the grace of God and the death and resurrection of Jesus, our high priest, our temple, our sacrifice, we by the grace of God become the temple of God, that the Holy Spirit takes up residence in the sons and daughters of the Father and he makes us the Holy of Holies. He chooses to dwell in us, so that we don't need to go to him, that he has come to us. That we don't need to go to a holy place, but that through the Holy Spirit, we could be a holy people. That's why the Bible says that all Christians are a priesthood of believers, that our whole life is about ministry, that you're all priests in Christ, that you're all temples in Christ.

"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple." Jesus says, "I'll destroy the temple, but no one should touch my people; they are my temple as well."

Secondly, I want you to remember Ephesians 2:19-21, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens," – we're no longer just dumb, pagan, idol-worshipping Gentiles, forced to come up the back entrance and forced to walk through Herod's market and go to the court of the Gentiles, but never really get to be in on the action – "But you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of," – not the stones of Jerusalem, but on – "the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone," – we build everything, our church, our life, our family, our ministry, our legacy, on him – "in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord."

That the church, we collectively-as you see these stones, you're a stone. That the church of Jesus Christ, all languages, tribes, tongues, nations, and peoples-it's no longer about stones, it's about people being stacked one upon another, serving according to their gifts, giving generously, growing to be more like Christ. Don't let these stones impress you as much as your brothers and sisters in Christ, whom together God brings as churches that are the Church. The presence of God, the people of God. He uses this amazing metaphor. I want you to see it while we're here. You're supposed to see one of these stones as you, and the one next to it is your spouse, and the one next to that a son, a daughter, a grandson, a granddaughter, a friend, other people who love Jesus, all being stacked one upon another, to, as the people of God, be the temple of God, for the glory of God, because of the Son of God.

It's overwhelming, isn't it? Am I alone in this? It's overwhelming. Jesus. Look what Jesus has done. We'll be talking about this for eternity. And shaking our heads, completely bewildered at how amazingly gracious and good and generous our God is. That he would save us from idolatry. That as Jesus was adopted by Mary and Joseph, that through Jesus he would become our proverbial big brother, that we would be adopted by God the Father, that we would be the family of God, that we would receive all of the benefits and blessings, that we would receive all the fulfillment of all of the expectation and prophetic anticipation of all of the Scriptures, that God would come to identify with us, that he would die for us, that he would rise and ascend to prepare a place for us, and that together we will rise like Jesus did. And we'll be right to the left of me, in the new Jerusalem, come down out of heaven to be with Jesus. And we will be happy.

Lord Jesus, we ask for your grace over Jerusalem. Jesus, we remember, we remember you weeping over Jerusalem and you do today. May we depart here with tears in our eyes for Jerusalem and gladness in our hearts for Jesus. Amen.

[End of Audio]

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.