

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

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TO BUILD
THE HOUSE
OF GOD

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Anaheim, CA • www.lsm.org

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It is quite interesting to see that in John 2 we first have the case of changing water into wine (vv. 1-11) and then, following that, the case of dealing with the temple (vv. 12-22). We must believe that both of these cases were recorded for the purpose of signifying something beyond the mere account of historical events. In the incident of the Lord's changing water into wine, we can see the principle of life, that is, to change death into life. Why does the dealing with the temple then follow the changing of death into life? It shows that life is for God's temple. In other words, life is for God's building. So, in the case of the dealing with the temple, we see the goal, the purpose of life, that is, to build the house of God.

JESUS CLEANSING THE TEMPLE

John 2:12-22 shows two aspects of the Lord's dealing with the temple—the cleansing aspect and the building aspect. Satan, the enemy of God, is always trying to damage or to frustrate the temple of God. He attempts to defile it with many sinful things. This is the reason that the house of God needs cleansing.

Jesus cleansed the temple at a time when “the Passover of the Jews was near” (v. 13). The Passover at that time was a remembrance of God’s salvation (Exo. 12:2-11; Deut. 16:1-3), through which remembrance the Jews worshipped God in their temple. But when the Lord Jesus went up to Jerusalem, their temple was filled with oxen, sheep, doves, and money-changers. Thus, the temple needed a cleansing, and the Lord Jesus did it.

The Passover was a prefigure of our remembrance of the Lord (1 Cor. 11:24-25). And we are the temple of God (3:16). It is very possible that when we come to the Lord’s table meeting to remember Him, we are filled with earthly things. Thus, we also need a cleansing so that we may be the proper temple of God.

THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

Let us read John 2:14-16: “He found in the temple those selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers sitting there. And having made a whip out of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, as well as the sheep and the oxen, and He poured out the money of the money-changers and overturned the tables. And to those who were selling the doves He said, Take these things away from here; do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise.” The Lord dealt with the house of God by cleansing it with a scourge, or a whip, made of cords. The King James Version says that the Lord made “a scourge of

small cords,” but some versions say that the Lord made a scourge, or whip, out of rushes, which are inexpensive and ordinary. The Lord made a scourge or whip of ordinary things, of rushes, and used it to cleanse the temple. He drove out the sheep and oxen and poured out the coins of the moneychangers. That signified the casting out of all earthly occupations. We are the temple of God, yet we are not filled with God. We are filled with so many things other than God. Although we, as the house of God, should be filled with God, yet the fact is that we are filled with merchandise, money, and tables of the moneychangers. Therefore, the Lord must make a whip out of cords to drive these things out of us.

Often the Lord uses the ordinary and common things, like the rushes, to cleanse us. Sometimes He uses someone common to purge you—such as your wife or husband, your parents or children, your employer or employees. We all have experienced the whip of cords that the Lord has made out of common persons or ordinary things to purge us. Sometimes the Lord comes to interfere with our lives by turning things upside down. He comes to cast out the sheep, oxen, and doves and to overthrow the tables in order to bring confusion into the whole situation. For example, last year you might have gained a lot of money in business, but this year you may lose everything—this is a scourge that the Lord may use to purge you. With every seeking Christian someone or

something is always being used by the Lord to purge him.

Generally speaking, a wife who is a seeking child of God always longs for her husband to be spiritual and to love the Lord, but it sometimes turns out to be just the opposite. A husband who loves the Lord always looks to the Lord that his wife may be spiritual and love the Lord, but it is sometimes contrary to his desire. Also, parents who sincerely seek after the Lord and pray daily for their children sometimes suffer to see their children going astray. The scourge you experience is made by the Lord. If your husband or wife is quite spiritual, the Lord may have no scourge to purge you. If your sons are like Peter and John and your daughter is like Mary, there may be no rushes available for the Lord to make a scourge. If your parents are like Abraham and Sarah, nothing may purge you. On the one hand, you may daily enjoy the Lord as a feast, but on the other hand, the Lord will send a scourge a number of times to purge you. Many times the Lord will even use the brothers and sisters in the church as a whip of cords to purge away the merchandise and the moneychangers that exist within you.

THE LORD'S ZEAL FOR GOD'S HOUSE

Verse 17 says, "His disciples remembered that it was written, "The zeal of Your house shall devour Me." Within the Lord Jesus there was a

zeal for the house of God. This zeal devoured Him, ate Him up, consumed Him. He was absolutely for the Father's house. The Father's house was His heart's desire. When He saw the corrupted situation within the temple, He could not tolerate it but cleansed it, even with a whip. He was driven by zeal for His Father's house to drive all the defilement out of it. His heart was pure for the Father. He could not suffer to see that the temple, His Father's house, was defiled, contaminated by the things of man's greed, so He cleansed it.

Satan tries his best to defile and to contaminate the church life with so many sinful and worldly things. But praise the Lord that Satan's contamination brings in the Lord's cleansing. The enemy, Satan, is always busy. He never sleeps. Wherever a local church has been established, Satan will try to defile it. We should not be discouraged. We should say, "Lord, now is Your time. Lord, come in. Satan's contamination only brings in Your cleansing."

THE BODY OF JESUS BEING THE TEMPLE

Satan's goal was not only to contaminate the temple but to destroy it. His ultimate aim was to destroy the house of God. But what the enemy destroyed, the Lord raised up in three days. This means that in His resurrection life the Lord built up what was destroyed by the enemy. It is

needless for us to worry about the Lord's recovery of the church, because the more the enemy damages, the more the Lord will build up in resurrection. The Lord's word is, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (v. 19). In other words, the enemy may damage and destroy the church, which is the house of God, but the Lord will build it up in resurrection and by resurrection. After the enemy has caused damage, the Lord, in resurrection, will rear up a building on a much larger scale. We should not worry about the confusion that may exist in the church, for the Lord's Body, the church, is in the process of resurrection. The damage done by the enemy is necessary, because everything natural must be destroyed. Only that which is natural can be destroyed by the enemy. Afterward, the Lord will raise up His church in resurrection. Every time after trouble damages the church, the church will be recovered and raised up in the newness of resurrection life. During the past I have seen much damage that really hurt the church, but the more the enemy damaged, the more the Lord built up His church in and by His resurrection.

Do not be disappointed at today's Christian situation. Do not say that the situation is pitiful. That is only one aspect of the picture. Praise the Lord that during the past twenty centuries there has always been another aspect. Do you believe that Satan can defeat the Lord Jesus? This is

impossible. Do you believe that Satan is stronger than the Lord Jesus? The answer, of course, is no. Based upon this fact, I have always been restful. I have the full assurance that Satan can never defeat the Lord Jesus and that the Lord will always prevail over Satan.

The Lord Jesus told His opponents that if they destroyed this temple, He would raise it again in three days. They did not understand what He was talking about. The Lord was saying, "You may put Me to death and you may kill My body on the cross, but I will raise it up again in three days." Do not try to understand the Bible merely according to the black and white letters, for if you do, you will find yourself in difficulty. On the one hand, the Lord Jesus told the people that after they killed Him, He would resurrect Himself (Matt. 20:19; Mark 10:34). On the other hand, we are told elsewhere in the New Testament that God raised Him up (Acts 2:24). In the New Testament there are two ways of recording the Lord's resurrection—that God raised Him up and that He raised Himself up. How shall we understand or interpret this? Did God raise Him up, or did He raise Himself up? In the Gospel of Luke, which shows the Lord Jesus as the Savior who was sacrificed for our sins, we see that the Lord needed God to raise Him up (9:22). In the Gospel of John the situation is different. In John, the Lord was not slain as a sacrifice for sins. Rather, He Himself laid down His life. Jesus

said, "I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again" (10:17-18). In the Gospel of John there was no need for God to raise Him up. As the sacrifice for sins, He needed God to raise Him up; as the One who is the Giver of life, He could lay down His life and take it up again. He could walk into death and walk out again. The Lord seemed to be saying, "In a sense, it is you who kill Me. But in My sense, it is I who walk into death, take a tour of it, and walk out again." Each year many tourists come to Washington, D.C., and look at the White House. Likewise, the Lord Jesus took a tour of the region of death and visited the Black House. The Lord seemed to be saying, "Black House, I have come to have a look at you and to see what you can do. Can you do anything with Me? Since you can do nothing with Me, after My tour I will bid you farewell and return to life again." This is the resurrection in the Gospel of John. The Lord Jesus laid Himself down and raised Himself up again.

THE BODY OF JESUS DESTROYED ON THE CROSS

The physical body of Jesus was destroyed on the cross by the Jews. When Christ became flesh, He took on a physical body. In John 1:14 we are told clearly that His physical body was a

tabernacle. According to chapter 2 of John, His physical body was also the temple. I wish to point out that throughout the New Testament, the temple of God does not denote a place; it denotes a person. When Jesus was in the flesh, His body was the tabernacle and temple of God. Both the tabernacle and the temple are God's dwelling place. Satan knew this. Since Satan realized that the physical body of Jesus was God's dwelling place on earth, he did his best to destroy that body. And he did destroy it on the cross through the Jews. In a sense, Satan destroyed the Lord's physical body; in another sense, the Lord Jesus gave up His body to death. The Lord seemed to be saying to Satan, "Satan, do your best. Let Me see what you can do. Whatever you do will just give Me an opportunity to do something further."

RAISED UP TO BE THE HOUSE OF GOD

After Satan destroyed the Lord's physical body on the cross, His body was put into a tomb to rest there. The Lord Jesus then went into death, took a tour of the Black House, and came out in resurrection. When Jesus arose, He Himself raised up His dead and buried body. The body of Jesus that was destroyed on the cross was small and weak; the Body of Christ in resurrection is vast and powerful. Which do you prefer to have—the body of Jesus or the Body of Christ? After the Lord's resurrection, His Body, that is,

the temple, was reared up on a much larger scale. The body that the enemy destroyed by crucifixion was merely the body of Jesus; what was raised by the Lord in resurrection was not only His own body but everyone who is joined to Him by faith (1 Pet. 1:3; Eph. 2:6). After the Lord's resurrection, Satan had to say, "I lost my case. I was stupid. I shouldn't have destroyed Him." Nevertheless, it was too late for Satan to repent.

The Lord Jesus is always more prevailing than the enemy. Do not be frightened by Satan's work. We should simply say, "Satan, do your best. Whatever you do will simply afford the opportunity for our Lord Jesus to overcome you." Whenever a problem comes to the church, many brothers feel that they should immediately call a meeting and pray. However, you do not need to be that hasty. Be at peace. Do not be terrified by Satan's activity. When the Lord Jesus knew that the Jews were attempting to destroy Him, He did not pray, "O Father, kill all these Jews. Father, save Me and protect Me." Instead of praying that way, the Lord seemed to tell them, "Do your best to kill Me. Be assured that after you put Me to death, I will have the opportunity to increase." No one can frustrate the purpose of the Lord. The more the enemy tries to do, the more he affords the opportunity for the Lord to do something more. Whatever the Lord does is always in resurrection. The Lord builds the temple "in three days," signifying that He builds it in resurrection.

THE UNIQUE SIGN

The Jews asked the Lord Jesus to show them a sign. The Lord answered, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). The resurrection of the Lord is the unique sign. In the building up of the church, often people will challenge us, as the Jews challenged the Lord, to see what miracles we can do. We should not be tempted to try to perform miracles. We have to follow the Lord Jesus and let ourselves be put to death. Then Christ will be manifested in resurrection. This is the miracle, the sign, that is needed in the building up of the church. The unique sign for the building up of the church is life in resurrection.

ENLARGING HIS BODY IN RESURRECTION

Since the day of His physical resurrection, the Lord Jesus has been enlarging His Body in resurrection life. What an immense Body Christ has today in His resurrection! Can you measure the size of the Body of Christ? Although it once was possible to measure the size of the physical body of Jesus, it is impossible to measure the immensity of the Body of Christ. The Lord continues to build His Body in resurrection, and Satan keeps on helping this. The house of God is still increasing in resurrection with the Body of Christ (1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:5; 1 Cor. 3:9; Eph. 2:21-22). Today we are still within "the three

days,” because the Lord is still working for the building of His Body under the process of resurrection. A great part of the Lord’s Body has already been raised, but there are still some members of His Body who are not yet raised. Therefore, the Lord’s Body is still in the process of resurrection. Even with yourself, only a part has been transformed, which means that only a part has been resurrected. The Lord continues to work on you through the process of transformation. You are still in the process of resurrection. The church today is still in the three days’ process of resurrection.

All the damage that the enemy does to the church simply offers the Lord the opportunity to enlarge His Body in resurrection. Let the enemy do whatever he can, for his work simply gives the Lord the opportunity to do His increasing work in resurrection. Praise the Lord! We all must worship Him for His prevailing way. The enemy can never defeat the Lord Jesus. The gates of Hades can never prevail against the builded church (Matt. 16:18). The church is still going on and is still growing. Although the enemy may try his best to tear it down, we will see the victory. We will see not only that the Lord Jesus Himself is prevailing but that the church also is prevailing.

THE BUILDING OF GOD’S HOUSE

In the changing of water into wine, the principle of life was set forth. Now, in the dealing

with the temple, the purpose of life is shown. The principle of life is to change death into life. The purpose of life is to build the house of God. The principle of life is for the purpose of life. The changing of death into life is for life's building, the building of God's house. These two points govern the whole Gospel of John. This is why after the introduction in the first chapter, the second chapter follows to show us these two points by two events. Then chapter 3 through chapter 11 is the record of the nine cases proving how the Lord came into all kinds of human situations and changed death into life. After all the cases have been related and after the last message has been given in chapters 14, 15, and 16, the Lord offered a prayer in chapter 17 to the Father about oneness. This prayer for oneness was simply a prayer for the building. If we are not built together, we can never be one. For example, a heap of materials is not one, because the materials are not built together. A house is composed of many materials, and these materials are one because they are built together. Only when the materials are built up together as one building is there oneness. Oneness means to be built up together. Therefore, the purpose of life is to build up God's house, God's temple, for God's habitation. The purpose of the Lord being life to us is to build the church as God's dwelling place. Life is for the building. Life is for the church. It is for the building

of the church, Christ's Body and God's house,
that the Lord has come to be our life.

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