

Fulfilling the Covenants

Over the last two weeks, we heard about the Old Testament Covenants that God made through Noah and Abraham. This week, we heard the Mosaic Covenant Where God gave the 10 Commandments to the people through Moses when he was on Mount Sinai. In two weeks, we will hear about the New Covenant that God made with the people through the prophet Jeremiah. In the Noahic Covenant, God promised never to destroy the whole earth again with a flood. In the Abrahamic Covenant, God promised descendants from Abraham and Sarah that were more numerous than the stars and that they would be the ancestors of many nations. Next week, we will hear about what will happen to the people when they became impatient with God and Moses and started complaining about the conditions in the wilderness.

As Christians, we believe that those covenants were fulfilled through Jesus Christ. The Gospel accounts are written in a way to show that connection between the promises of the covenants and Jesus. If one were to compare John's Gospel account with the Synoptic Gospels one would notice that the cleansing of the Temple which we heard today takes place at a different part of Jesus' ministry. John has it at the beginning of Jesus' ministry while the Synoptics record it after Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. From this and other discrepancies between the Gospel accounts, one might erroneously conclude that the Gospel writers were fabricating the story of Jesus, making Him to be the Messiah when He wasn't. This conclusion is wrong because there may have been multiple occurrences of similar events. For example, Jesus may have cleansed the Temple two times. This first time, as recorded by John, Jesus was largely unknown, especially to the Temple priests. When they saw a self-proclaimed Messiah, they

would keep an eye on that person. Most times, they would fade away or their movement would not amount to anything. On the other hand, if like Jesus, they persisted and did not go away on their own, then the religious authorities would step in and take measures to eliminate the threat to their power. John records this incident as the beginning of the tension between Jesus and the religious authorities while Matthew, Mark and Luke recall the later cleansing as the event which galvanized the religious authorities to get rid of Jesus, one way or another.

Before we turn to the exchange between 'the Jews' and Jesus, we must make another note. In John's Gospel account, when we read 'the Jews,' John could actually be referring to different groups at different times. Sometimes, he means all the Jews in the Holy Land. At other times, he refers to just the Jews living in Judea and at other times the members of the tribe of Judah. We need to look at the context in which John is writing to see to which group he refers. In this case, it would be those who are living in Judah. However, it should be noted that it is not all-inclusive; not everyone was against Jesus, regardless of the group.

In the exchange between the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem and Jesus, the conversation proceeds as is typical in John's Gospel account. That is, they talk past or over each other. Typically, those talking with Jesus focus more on the literal, physical understanding behind the conversation while Jesus talks on a figurative, spiritual understanding. They are referring to the physical building of the Temple while Jesus is referring to the spiritual Temple, the real residence of God.

The Temple was an attempt by the people to control, to contain God, to know where God was. It was designed to have different areas where the closer to the center, access was more limited so that at the very center, only the high priest

had access to the Holiest of Holies, the place where the Ark of the Covenant sat and where God was kept.

Jesus, in referring to Himself as the temple has shifted the 'home' of God. Instead of a physical building where people had to come to be near God, God was now wherever Jesus was. Since Jesus had no permanent earthly home, God was not contained in a building. Whoever had access to Jesus, had access to God. This is reiterated in John 14:9 where Jesus says that whoever has seen Him has seen God.

What then are the implications for us? In First Corinthians and Ephesians, Paul extends this concept to include believers as being the temple of God and part of the Temple in which Jesus is the cornerstone. This has led people to state that we should treat our bodies in such a way as to reflect that God is in each of us. This may not have been part of Paul's original intent when writing these words rather he wanted to emphasize that we are united in the body of Christ and thus connected to one another across time and space.

Being a part of the Body of Christ, how is it that we should see each other? While we should see each other as embodying the Spirit of God within us, we should also see that the reach of God is more far-reaching than what we can do as individuals. It is when we see the world as Jesus sees it, see it as the Kingdom of God has come to earth and treat each other as Jesus treated others, that is when we are fully in the Temple of Jesus. We would see that where Jesus is, there is God also, since Jesus is also God. When we see Jesus touch those who were unclean, we see God. When we see Jesus comfort those who are grieving, we see God. When we see Jesus feeding the hungry, we see God. When we do these things that Jesus did, whether it is through our donations or directly participating in helping others, we show God to others. We show others that God is here with us, experiencing life as humans do, the way in which Jesus experienced life.

If we take the approach that we see our bodies as a temple of God and that God resides in each of us, then how we treat others is how we are treating God. Do our actions towards other reflect the love that we have for God? Or when we mistreat others in any way, whether it is individually or corporately, do we consider that we are also mistreating the God who gave us life?

Lent provides us a time when we can reflect and assess how we are treating God by how we treat others and to see where we fall short and ask the Holy Spirit's help in changing. John, in his own unique fashion is telling us that the old ways of making amends with each other and with God are no longer valid. When we leave the process of atoning for our own sins to us, we would make rules and place obstacles in others' paths so that we would control all the variables to atonement. We need to remember that this is something that God did for us through Jesus because of the love that God has for us and His creation. Instead of focusing on rituals and making amends for what we have done wrong, God would rather have us act the right way in the first place. When we recognize that we cannot do this ourselves and that we are dependent upon God for grace, forgiveness and mercy, then we are on the right path.

In Jesus, we can see that God stays true to the covenants that God made with humanity. We need to remember that these Covenants are more than just history, of a God acting in the past; they show us a God who values life, especially human life, and who wants to be in relationship with us not just for a short time, but for all eternity. A relationship that includes all the parts of the Body of Christ.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/6JKH9B5ANcU>

Service: <https://youtu.be/aft68Uu4bWM>