

Devotional

The Prophecy No One Understood

John 2:19

"Jesus answered and said unto them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'"

The first recorded prediction that Jesus spoke was misunderstood by friend and foe alike. The temple was extremely important to Jesus. He had just performed a messianic sign by cleansing the temple in Jerusalem of its corrupt money changers and profane animal vendors. The disciples remembered king David's words in Psalm 69:9, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." The best texts of John's gospel change the tense of this Old Testament quote to future. (See the NIV.) The meaning, then, would be that Christ's fervor for the temple would eventually lead to His death. The temple was the place where man and God met to make atonement for sin; where priests mediated man's repentance to God and God's forgiveness to man; where innocent animals died as a symbol of the sacrificial substitute for man which God would one day provide. Jesus knew that He would fulfill all that the temple represented and anticipated, including His sacrificial death.

He also knew that His death would come at the hands of men in rebellion against God, such as the ones who were demanding from Him a sign to authenticate His authority to cleanse the temple. The second half of Psalm 69:9 goes on to say, "and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me." The apostle, Paul, quoted this part of the verse in Romans 15:3 and applied it to Christ. Jesus gave them a sign, but they did not understand it. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The word Jesus used for "temple" literally means "sanctuary," the inner part of the temple where only the priests were allowed to enter; including the "holy of holies" where God manifested His presence. Jesus meant that God was dwelling in His body. "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (II Corinthians 5:19). In a similar way He would later dwell in the bodies of Christians in the church. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (I Corinthians 3:16)

The Jews misunderstood Jesus and thought He was referring to the literal temple. When they finally brought Him to trial for His life three years later, they twisted his words and tried to use them against Him. "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.'" (Mark 14:58) Even His disciples did not understand this statement until after His resurrection. "When, therefore, he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said." (John 2:22)

Christians have the privilege to serve in the greatest cause, the most noble movement in all of history. Yet, some Christians become more excited about a football or hockey game than they ever do about their Christian faith. They watch their church or denomination abandon the clear teachings of the Bible, and hardly raise an eyebrow.

May God give us the fervor, the commitment, the submission to the Father's will that Jesus had in His ministry. We may be misunderstood as He was. Those who are opposed to Jesus Christ will be opposed to Christians who actively serve Him. Nevertheless, Christ's resurrection vindicated His authority as the Son of God, and assured His ultimate victory. The same Spirit of God who lives in Jesus, will enable us to serve Him fervently in life, and assure the resurrection of our bodies as well in death.