

The Temple: Then and Now

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[0 : 0 0] well do you know what the most fought over place in the world is the most hotly contested location in the world can you think of it the most hotly contested piece of real estate well i'll tell you what it is it's this it's the temple mount in jerusalem currently the location of the al-aksa mosque and it is such a tense place to visit at any point there could be fighting that erupts there i actually had the privilege of going there in 2005 and i had my bible confiscated by the israeli army which is one of my cooler traveling stories which i'd be happy to tell you more details at a later stage but it's a really tense place to visit there's always protests or things going on there but for thousands of years it's been a tense place people have fought over this little piece of real estate the assurians the babylonians the romans the crusaders throughout history even in our own century as recently as 1967 the end of the six day war was a battle a pitched hand-to-hand battle that took place on that location on the temple mount and the israelites the israelis won the six day war you might know about it in six days against a huge alliance of middle eastern nations that outnumbered them and the modern map of israel actually is a result of that war so if you look at it this is israel in the blue and palestine with the occupied territories in the green and in the middle there where there's that little spike inwards is the city of jerusalem and as we zoom in what we see zoom in again right in the center of the conflict between those two nations is the temple mount in jerusalem it is a critical place and it has always been a critical place in history and we've got to ask why why has that location of all the locations in the world been something that people have become so obsessed with well the reason is because god used to live there god used to live there and so it's no ordinary place and it never will be an ordinary place because it is the one place god chose of all the places in the world where his presence would dwell for a time in history literally it was the meeting place between god and humanity which was the one place for a time in history it was the one place god had chosen where human beings can come and in a very real way meet with him and that is why when we come to mark 11 and we come to the story of jesus entering the temple it's it's so important it's so critical we don't appreciate the gravity and the importance of this location but the people then did and so we need to understand why this is such an important event jesus coming into this temple but it also explains why jesus got so angry with what he finds there he got really angry uncharacteristically so let's read from verse 15 and see what happens you can follow along in your bibles mark 11 from verse 15 they came to jerusalem and he went into the temple and began to throw out those buying and selling he overturned the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves and would not permit anyone to carry goods through the temple and he was teaching them is it not written my house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations but you have made it a den of thieves okay this is this is the the rabbi who had healed people who had been patient with people who had held children in his arms and now he's tearing through

the temple throwing things left right and center shouting and screaming and we want to ask whoa you can imagine his disciples what is happening here why has he suddenly snapped and and something obviously got to jesus as he came into the temple but we don't have to guess why he's so angry because he tells us he explains why he's doing what he's doing in verse 17 when he quotes from two different old testament passages and remember whenever we find a quote from the old testament the new testament we need to go and read that old testament passage to understand what it's saying and so jesus quotes from verse seven in verse 17 from from isaiah and from jeremiah and he says my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations that's the isaiah quote but you have made it a den of thieves or a den of robbers that's the jeremiah quote so let's quickly go into those old testament passages and see what they're about maybe we can understand why jesus is getting so angry the first passage isaiah 56 actually explains what the temple of god is meant to be what god has had always intended for his temple in jerusalem to do and it says this isaiah 56 you can just listen along if you're not there from verse 6 and 7 says this as for the foreigners who join themselves to the lord to minister to him to love the name of the lord and to become his servants and verse 7 i will bring them to my holy mountain and let them rejoice in my house of prayer that's the temple their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations and so god wanted his temple in jerusalem not just to be for the jews not just to be for israelites but to be a place where anyone in the world could come and access god and find atonement for their sins because the deepest need of any honest human being no matter what their nationality no matter what their culture no matter what their religion their deepest need is atonement for their sins to to have their sins against their creator forgiven and so the temple was a place where people from all the nations could come and access god because of the atonement that happened there but jesus comes there and what he finds is people trading people conducting ordinary business and and this trading by the way people often understand jesus to be angry because they were trading and exchanging money but the activity itself is just normal business activity they would have done it somewhere else and jesus wouldn't have had a problem it's probably just uh paying the temple taxes selling the necessary sacrifices for the passover which happened at that time of year jesus wasn't so cross with what was going on but where it was happening that's the important point we've got to get it was at the temple and more specifically it was almost certainly in the what was called the court of the gentiles so there was this big area outside of the inner court where people from all the nations could gather and pray and and that that area had a lot of space to accommodate all the people who would come but now this space wasn't being used for that it was being used for normal commercial activities and that's what jesus is getting angry with because they're buying and selling and using that area for that activity prevented the temple being the very thing it was meant to be which was a light to the nations a place where the nations could come and know god and that's the problem that they were getting so caught up in all this other stuff that had to happen they were forgetting their purpose they were forgetting what the temple was meant for which was to be a place primarily where the nations could come to know god i wonder if the church

today makes the same mistake often when we forget why we're here and we get so caught up in all the stuff we do and all our activities that we actually make ourselves a barrier to those outside i wonder if we make the same mistake as the israelites did then when we forget that we are actually here for the people outside the church what we do here coming and listening to the bible coming and singing coming and praying on a sunday morning is actually for the people out there and we mustn't forget that the one of the past archbishops of canterbury a guy called william temple which is a appropriate name he famously said that the church is the only organization that exists primarily for those that are still outside of it think about that every other organization in the world exists for its members tennis club company its shareholders its employees but the church is different it's the only organization that exists primarily for those who are not inside it and it doesn't seem that way does it it doesn't seem that that is our purpose when for example a regular who's been coming to church for 30 years and sitting in the same seat suddenly finds there's a visitor sitting in their seat and they get all grumpy well that's just one of the indications that we've forgotten just like the temple in jerusalem had forgotten that we are here for those outside that's the first thing jesus is angry with the second thing so is isaiah explains what the temple is meant to be then he quotes from jeremiah which actually explains what the temple is not meant to be used for so let me read from jeremiah 7 we read it earlier i'll just read from verse 9 this is god talking to the people who were misusing his temple and he says this do you steal murder commit adultery swear falsely burn incense to baal and follow other gods that you have not known then do you come and stand before me in this house that bears my name and say we are rescued so we can continue doing all these detestable acts has this house which bears my name become a den of robbers in your view yes i too have seen it this is the lord's declaration a den of robbers the same that's what jesus quotes in the temple now a den of robbers you know what it meant in this context it was uh when someone would commit a crime in the city then to avoid prosecution avoid being caught they would run away to a cave in the mountain and there would be specific caves that fugitives would run to to escape the police essentially to escape being caught and prosecuted kind of like what my dog does when it does something naughty often um finnan our dog he'll he loves he loves chewing things that he is not supposed to chew he's he's really taken a liking to our spatulas our silicon and our bamboo spatulas and sometimes we'll find there's this broken chewed up spatula on the ground but the dog nowhere to be seen and i look around and i call him no sign of him and then i go out into the back and i look in the corner of the garden and he's hiding under a bush because he knows prosecution is coming and so he has found a little den that he can hide away and hopefully escape any consequences of his actions that's what jesus says that these people were doing with the temple of god that they were going out in the week they were committing injustice they were cheating people they were being nasty they were not loving their neighbors they were committing idolatry they were

worshiping other gods other than the god of israel and then they were coming to the temple to hide away from any prosecution and go oh we're in the temple of the lord the temple of the lord surely we're fine we're safe they were using it as a den of robbers and they were having false confidence in this temple and in their religion to cover over all of their sins surely god will forgive us we're in the temple of the lord i wonder how many christians treat church that way as adrian said earlier i wonder how many people who are sitting in church right now have spent the week being unjust being unfair being horrible nasty unnecessarily to other people committing idolatry worshiping other things in the world more than god putting more attention and focus on the things of the world than god and then they come to church and they sing the songs and they say confession and everything's fine and nothing changes well jesus you know what he's saying here he's saying that's not going to work because god can see right through that it doesn't fool god he knows what you did in the week he knows where your heart is so no matter what you do on sunday no matter how many songs you sing you can't hide from god don't treat church like a den of thieves that you can just hide away from prosecution from you know jesus says the same thing in matthew 7 21 he says to people don't think you can call me lord lord but not do the will of my father in heaven he says many people will call me lord lord but then on the day of judgment i will say depart from me you evildoers i never knew you because you never did what god wanted and that's that's what's going on here and so that's what jesus is criticizing the temple in jerusalem for they are not what they're meant to be and in fact the people there are misusing the temple but he's doing more than just criticizing the temple he's doing more than just waving his finger and saying naughty naughty he's doing something profound and a key point in the whole history of the bible and in the whole history of theology he is announcing god's final judgment on the temple in jerusalem and this is a big thing we need to understand and we know this because of what happens before and after this very strange story did you notice it in mark 11 before jesus goes into the temple he has a little fight with a fig tree and we're going what's going on here why does mark decide to include this of all the things mark could have written down why this let's read it and try understand what's going on from verse 12 the next day they went out from bethany and he was hungry seeing in the distance a fig tree with leaves he went to find out if there was anything on it when he came to it he found nothing but leaves for it was not the season for figs so he said okay and he walked away no verse 14 he said to it may no one ever eat fruit from you again and his disciples heard it you can imagine his disciples stopping in their tracks and going what did he just say did he just did he just shout at the fig tree and then the temple thing happens that we just saw but then the fig tree is picked up again afterwards from verse 20 early in the morning as they were passing by this is the morning after jesus went to the temple they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up then peter remembered and said to him rabbi look the fig tree that you cursed has withered a miraculous that actually the only miracle of destruction in the gospels normally jesus miracles are miracles of creation when he does something supernatural with the divine

power that he possesses he does it to heal he does it to fix he does it to restore here the only miracle in the gospels that he uses his power to destroy and we've got to ask why was he just having a bad morning did he get up on the wrong side of the bed and he and he's hungry and so he tries to get food and there's none on the tree and he's just grumpy so he just uses his his miraculous power in the wrong way that would be pretty scary if jesus was a person who could use his miraculous power because he was grumpy but we know that that's not the character of jesus so something else is happening here jesus is not overreacting it wasn't just that he had a bad morning jesus is using this fig tree to teach us and his disciples something he's using it remember it's on either side of the story of the temple because jesus is using this fig tree as a parable to explain what's really happening in jerusalem and what's really happening in the temple in jerusalem and it's this he's saying just as the tree is in a time where it has has leaves but no fruit so before the fruit would come the leaves would show the tree to be healthy and it would look all healthy but it had absolutely no fruit on it and just as the tree had a whole lot of leaves but no fruit jesus is saying the temple religion in jerusalem is also full of leaves it uh it has fancy clothes it has so much activity all the shiny buildings and all the priests with their garbs and all their religious services and all of their sacrifices and all of the religious things that they do and all the people come and are so overwhelmed by all this it's all very leafy but underneath if you look it has no fruit it is bearing no fruit in other words it wasn't producing what god was looking for just as this tree wasn't producing what jesus was looking for despite all its leaves so the temple of god the religion of judaism in the time of jesus wasn't producing what god was looking for and so like the tree the temple has now been judged by god never to work again and the disciples they're shocked i mean they're shocked that the tree actually died after jesus rebuked it because who wouldn't be okay but if they understood what it symbolized they would have been even more shocked that the temple has essentially been fired by jesus the temple of jerusalem that has stood for centuries as the meeting place between god and humanity jesus has now come and announced judgment on it that it shall never work again he's fired it i don't know if you're familiar with the uh reality show the apprentice it's in the states it's in the uk um and it's a basically a bunch of business people who are trying to make it big and they have to go through a whole lot of business tasks and at the end of each episode one of them is fired by lord alan sugar in the uk or donald trump used to do it in the u.s uh and the funniest thing on that show is when you find these apprentices who are so full of themselves they are so smug and they come there and they think that they're the best thing that's ever happened to business and they think that they are indispensable and that lord alan sugar surely won't fire me because i'm so useful i'm going to be i'm going to make him so much money and then the end of the first episode they get fired and it's it's actually very satisfying to see them humbled like that but the israelites would make the same mistake they were thinking that their temple is indispensable their religion is indispensable it's the one place where where god and humanity can meet god would never fire us we're indispensable but now jesus is coming and saying you're fired and that is a huge thing and that's what the disciples are are thinking if the

[20 : 19] temple is no longer functioning how will people be able to know god anymore how will anyone be able to know god this is the one place in the world that god has made himself accessible the temple and now if the temple is no longer well then how can anybody come and approach god and know god and how can anybody have their sins forgiven if the sacrifices at the temple are no longer available if the temple doesn't work thanks if the temple doesn't work then god is unavailable and that's why the disciples are shocked you see you see the problem here right i need you to see the problem before we can understand how jesus replies to them because he says something very interesting look at verse 22 to 25 and look at how strange and unexpected it is so peter verse 21 peter says rabbi look the fig tree that you cursed is withered and they're waiting for jesus to explain why he did it verse 22 jesus replied to them have faith in god truly i tell you if anyone says this mountain be lifted up and thrown into the sea and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen it will be done for him therefore i tell you everything you pray and ask for believe that you have received it and it will be yours and whenever you stand praying if you have anything against anyone forgive so that your father in heaven will also forgive your wrongdoing that's a very strange answer it seems to have nothing to do with the fig tree or the temple but it actually has everything to do with it you see what jesus is saying the disciples are coming and they're thinking well if the temple is gone there's nowhere to access god what now and jesus is replying and saying yes the temple in jerusalem is passing away but don't worry because a new way of accessing god will replace it because of what jesus is going on to do in jerusalem a new kind of temple will be raised where you can have such access to god's power that you can do things you never thought possible and have access to god's forgiveness without the temple sacrifices and we know why he could say that to them because the new temple he's talking about will be him when he goes to the cross when he atones once and for all for the sins of his people that the temple sacrifice is pointed towards and when he rises three days later from the dead he raises a new temple in place of the old that is what scripture teaches over and over again in fact mark points to that when jesus is dying in mark 15 29 he's on the cross and those who passed by were yelling insults at him shaking their heads and saying ha the one who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days save yourself by coming down from the cross what they didn't realize is that him staying on the cross was actually him starting to be the new temple the new way that people can access god and have their sins atone for and his resurrected body and the community of people who gather around him and receive the spirit of god anywhere in the world are going to be the new temple so that is what the new testament teaches i'll take you to some verses because it's so important that we get this one corinthians 3 16 says this don't you yourselves know that you are god's temple and that the spirit of god lives in you you are god's temple don't you know that and then uh ephesians ephesians 2 from verse 19 paul writes this to the ephesian christians because they needed to get this and so do we so then you are no longer foreigners and strangers but fellow citizens with the saints

and members of god's household built on the foundations of the apostles and the prophets with christ jesus himself as the cornerstone now listen to what he says in him the whole building being put together grows into a holy temple in the lord in him you are also being built together for god's dwelling in the spirit you not just talking to the ephesians now but talking to any christian who has received god's spirit in in them the point was that each christian who comes under the lordship of christ receives the spirit and then together when they come together each of them with god's presence and spirit in them what happens in him you are also being built together for god's dwelling in the spirit you become the new temple we are the new temple this is an amazing truth if we understand the significance of the temple as we saw at that video earlier and as we as we considered to think that we are the new temple now today christians are the new meeting place between god and humanity the only true meeting place between god and humanity we are the new place where the nations out there can find god and find forgiveness of their sins if there were no christians in the world there would be no access to god and no forgiveness because christians are the ones telling people the gospel of jesus christ which is the only way they can find forgiveness through faith in him if there are no christians telling that gospel there is no way that the nations can find god and find forgiveness we therefore the new temple we are the new place where the nations can find god have you considered yourself as a meeting place between god and the people around you during your week at school at work at the sports club if you're a christian if you have received the spirit if you have not and all this is foreign and weird to you then come talk to me because jesus has done the only thing that can pay for your sins against god and give you eternal life so you need to trust in him as your lord and savior because he's coming back to judge and you need to be ready for that but if you are a christian i'm talking to you now have you realized that you during the week wherever you go you are the meeting place between god and the people around you because if you haven't realized that if you don't consider yourself as the meeting place between god and the people around you you need to do that if you're a christian because that's exactly what you are and because that is such a high calling and such a high responsibility and it might intimidate us to think that god has given us access to incredible power to use and that is what jesus is saying here so in mark 11 i'm going to read read again these incredible words these incredible promises that he says listen to what he says mark 11 23 to 24 truly i tell you if anyone says to this mountain be lifted up and thrown into the sea and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen and it will be done for him therefore i tell you everything you pray and ask for believe that you have received it and it will be yours hey have you done that have you ever told the mountain to move into the sea has it has it worked is jesus exaggerating here is he is he lying no he's not he's giving an amazing promise but it's not by itself he talks about prayer throughout scripture and whenever jesus gives a promise about prayer we need to read it in light of what else the bible says about prayer which which teaches us that effective

prayer prayer that works the kind of prayer jesus is talking about and makes us promise for first assumes that we're praying what god wants not what we want because that's why this verse has always been taken out of context and used by prosperity gospel churches you know you know the types i'm talking about you see them on the tv you see the preachers going if you have enough faith and you just believe hard enough anything you pray for will be yours all you've got to do is visualize it pray for it and god has promised to give it to you whether it's a new bmw whether it's a mansion a yacht a helicopter it'll all be yours and if it doesn't come to you then obviously you're not paying me enough money or you don't have enough faith that's that's generally how it works because they're taking this verse out of context and forgetting that effective prayer always assumes you're actually praying for what god wants one john 5 14 john gives the right context to what jesus is saying here and he says this one john 5 14 this is the confidence we have before him if we ask anything according to his will he hears us and if and we know that he hears whatever we ask we know that we will have what we asked of him of course if we ask anything according to his will god will answer that prayer because it's according to his will that's the qualification that we've got to remember and remember how jesus taught his disciples to pray right hallowed be your name your kingdom come your will be done before we pray anything else we the the foundation of true effective prayer is it's it's prayer that prays for whatever honors god's name whatever advances god's kingdom and whatever accomplishes his will okay and when god's people pray like that as his representatives on earth his promise here is that he will put all of heaven's resources at their disposal to do things that they would never think possible and that are actually not possible prayer makes the impossible possible that is what jesus is saying here that is why he's using the this this extreme illustration hyperbole of a mountain being thrown into the sea he's thinking he's saying the things you think could never be possible god has actually given you the power in prayer to make those things possible as you pray according to his will like i've taught you jesus would say so it's it's what he's saying a modern example would be like a soldier calling in an airstrike against his enemies have you ever watched those war movies maybe vietnam or world war ii or whatever and you see these soldiers they're hunkered down in the trenches and the enemy forces are coming over the hill greatly outnumbering them there's forces coming over and they're going to come and slaughter them but then he's got a radio and he calls home base and he calls in the location and airstrike and just before the enemy forces reach him you've seen the movies just blows up the enemies are just wiped out because of an airstrike that comes just in time that lays waste to the enemy forces something the soldier could never do in his own strength we could do so much damage to the enemy if we only believe that prayer can do that if we only believe we could do so much damage to the enemy in this world but do you believe that about prayer if you are a christian do you really believe that because look at what jesus said is the first requirement for that kind of prayer in mark 11 verse 22 you see what how he started have faith in god verse 22 have faith in god do you have faith in god to move mountains when you pray and then do you use prayer for what it's meant for you know we've been given prayer for a reason

and it's not primarily to pray for ourself god does hear and answer the prayers we pray for ourself of course as a loving father but the main reason he's given us prayer is for the temple work that we're on earth to do as the meeting place between god and humanity to bring the nations to meet god that is why he's given us the power of prayer primarily so realize prayer is not given primarily to pray for your own life and as i said you know god welcomes and answers those prayers from his people that for their own concerns and stuff but sometimes no not sometimes almost all the time we make that the sole focus of our prayers don't we at home in our prayer time i've got 10 minutes to pray okay well what do i need what worries do i have what do i need god to help me with maybe i'll pray for my wife and children but that's kind of where it ends whereas in fact if what jesus is saying here is true and it is the reason we've been given the power of prayer is to use for our task as god's temple on earth as the meeting place between god and humanity and the best way to make sure that you are praying prayer properly that you are using prayer for that those bigger things the easiest way and the best way you want to know what it is pray with other christians meet with other christians and pray because then even just meeting with one or two other christians suddenly your prayers become a little less selfish and you start to pray slightly bigger things maybe for them and their lives you ask them what they can what they need and then you maybe start to pray for for the non-christians that you that you know and then maybe you start to pray for missionaries and christians in other nations you see when you the more you meet with other christians the bigger and more effective your prayers become because you start praying them for the reasons god has given you prayer that's why on sunday when we gather we pray together you notice that every time we're praying prayers together and that's so important because not only are we learning the right things to pray for through the prayers we pray on sunday but god hears these prayers even though they're the words on the screen and we're all saying the same thing and we're reading a prayer that is written before god doesn't mind he still hears prayers that are prayed through jesus christ and he answers them our prayer meetings that we have once a term come to them because that's where we get to do this temple work in an intense way and our growth groups our growth groups i think we've made the mistake and it's not just us generally bibles christian bible studies and growth groups all have this tendency of tacking prayer on at the end you know we actually come there just to learn about the bible but actually we don't only come there for that we come there to do the work of prayer together and to pray for the big things and often our prayers are reduced into just praying for the immediate needs of our own lives and so what i want to do is i want to talk to our growth group leaders and all of us i want to make an effort to include bigger prayers when we pray together because because we we don't realize just how powerful those prayers can be and that god will use them to move mountains when we pray in faith that's what jesus is saying here when christians pray together things happen and so are you doing that are you meeting together even if it's just with one other prayer partner in a week with your husband or your wife if you're married and praying for the big things doing the temple work that only we can do because only we have the spirit of god in us and it's when we're doing that that we get to be what the temple in jerusalem failed to be and instead of being leafy religious people but with no fruit we actually get to be god's powerful

saving presence in the nations and so let's go out and do that will you pray with me now oh lord what a privilege that you've given us lord we we're we're shocked with the disciples when we when we consider that you went and pronounced judgment on the temple in jerusalem but we thank you that through your death and resurrection we are the new temple and it's through us that the nations can meet you and find forgiveness lord help us to remember this as we go out into the new week help us to consider the people around us and to realize that we are the place that they are to meet god and help us to live appropriately and to use prayer for that purpose so that through us as a church both here on sundays and during the week wherever we find ourselves we pray that we would be the meeting place of you and the nations and that you would be glorified in jesus name amen