

Christ

Christ Greater Than The Temple

Introduction

When responding to the religious leaders who found fault with the Lord's disciples when they plucked the ears of corn on the Sabbath, the answer of the Lord was in two parts (Matt. 12:1-6). He reminded them of that which David had done (Matt. 12:3-4); of that which the priests do on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:5); and then made the stupendous statement: "In this place is one greater than the temple" (Matt. 12:6). (I am aware that some translations have, "Something greater than the temple is here". However, since it is the Lord who is greater than the temple, I prefer to keep it as the King James Version records.

The word "greater" is used five times in connection with the Lord.

- 1) He is greater than Solomon in His glory and wisdom.
- 2) He is greater than Jonah in the actuality and effects of His death and resurrection.
- 3) He is greater than the temple in its sanctity and as the dwelling place of God.
- 4) He is greater than Jacob for He gives living water.
- 5) He is greater than Abraham for He is eternal.

On three occasions He uses it when referring to Himself, declaring Himself to be: "Greater than Solomon" (Matt. 12:42); "Greater than Jonas" (Matt. 12:41); and "greater than the Temple" (Matt. 12:6). The woman at the well asked Him: "Art Thou greater than our father Jacob?" (Jn. 4:12) Later he is questioned about being "greater than Abraham" (Jn. 8:53).

There can be no questioning of the superiority of Christ, not only to these men, but to all humanity in every realm of life. All judgment and its execution is committed to Him, therefore:

- a) He is superior to all judges.
- b) As King of Kings He is superior to all kings.
- c) As the Prince of the kings of the earth, he is superior to all princes.
- d) As the good shepherd (Jn. 10:14); the chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4); and the great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20); He is superior to all shepherds.

Glorious is the truth that He only has the worthiness to open and loose the seals of the book (Rev. 5:9).

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The question is how Christ is greater than the Temple, and there are a number of answers for that. He is greater because:

- a) The temple had the manifested glory of the presence of the Lord that departed. (Ezek. 10:18)
- b) The temple was an earthly building which was destroyed and never rebuilt. (Matt. 24:2; Lk. 19:44)
- c) The temple was defiled by the activities of man (Jn. 2:16). Christ could never be contaminated.
- d) The temple had a lampstand to give light to the priests, but Christ is the Light not only of the redeemed, but of the whole world. (Jn. 8:12; 9:5)
- e) The temple had a material table with bread, but Christ is the Bread of life. (Jn. 6:35, 48)
- f) The temple had an altar, but Christ provided a superior sacrifice. (Heb. 10:14)
- g) The temple had a laver, but Christ provided a superior cleansing. (1 Jn. 1:7)

The latter four points will not be dealt with in this paper.

The Temple and General Truths

1) The temple had the manifested glory of the presence of the Lord that departed

- a) They were very dark days in Israel's history when they were unaware that the glory of the Lord was departing. Ezekiel, in vision saw it afterward, and as he watched he realized there was a reluctance of God to leave His people for discipline. That departing was in deliberate steps. It was not a sudden judgment, but a slow removing, as God was longing for them to repent. Sadly we read:

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- i) “The glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon He was, to the threshold of the house” (Ezek. 9:3; 10:4)
 - ii) “Then, the glory of the Lord departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubims” (Ezek. 10:18)
 - iii) “The glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain” (Ezek. 11:23). The manifested presence of God was gone out of the city.
- b) There would come another dark day when Christ, the manifested presence of God with man, would be led out of Jerusalem to be crucified. He was:
- i) “Without the camp” (Heb. 13:11)
 - ii) “Without the gate” (Heb. 13:12)
 - iii) “Cut off” (Isa. 53:8; Dan. 9:26).
- As He was led out to be crucified there was the failure to recognize that the man who walked the Calvary Road was none other than the “King of glory” (Psa. 24:7, 8, 9, 10); the “Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8); the “God of glory” (Acts 7:2), and their “Messiah” (Dan. 9:26).
- c) The glory of the Lord departed from the temple but the glory of God can never depart from Him, for He is not only the manifested glory of God, but is God in His fulness (Col. 2:9). John wrote: “We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father” (Jn. 1:14). His was a glory which He had with the Father “before the world was” (Jn. 17:5), and being the unchangeable Christ, the same “yesterday, and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8). His glory will never waiver throughout the ages of time or the unendingness of eternity. He has an unchangeable priesthood (Heb. 7:24), and consequently a glory of office which shall never diminish or diffuse. That makes Him greater than the temple.

2) **The temple was an earthly building which was destroyed and never rebuilt.**

- a) The Assyrian came throughout Samaria and besieged Israel (2 Kgs. 17:5) carrying the house of Israel into Assyria (2 Kgs. 17:6). However, there was still the house of Judah with the temple, the sacrifices and priests. The lovely pageantry was continuing. Having failed to learn the lesson of God’s judgment on His people for their sins, the house of Judah lived in rebellion of God with idolatry and wickedness (Ezek. 8:5-6; 9-13; 14; 16-18). In time God came in judgment using the Babylonians. They came, and having taken out of the house of the Lord the holy vessels (2 Chron. 36:18), they “burnt the House of God” (2 Kgs. 25:9; 2 Chron. 36:19; Psa. 74:7). The beautiful temple Solomon had built was destroyed, never to be rebuilt.
- b) That which the Lord now stood in was built after the Babylonish captivity. Sadly it also was going to be destroyed, and on August 10th 70 (9th Av Jewish reckoning), the Romans, under Titus, razed the city and burnt the temple. It was destroyed never to be rebuilt.
- c) It was about 26-27 A.D. The Lord stood in the temple and to His disgust He saw the money changers and sellers of livestock doing a very profitable business. He threw out the money changers, etc., and thus cleaned the temple. The religious leaders asked: “What sign shewest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest such things?” (Jn. 2:18). The Lord replied: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn. 2:19).
- d) Concerning the Temple of His body, the Psalmist gives a graphic description: “All my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax . . . my strength is dried up . . . my tongue cleaveth to my jaws . . . they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones” (Psa. 22:14-17). Then at the appointed hour He gave up His spirit. Christ died! He was buried and after three days and three nights, early on a Sunday morning, He rose triumphantly from the dead (Mk. 16:9) never to die again. He holds the keys of death and Hell and lives for evermore. With the resounding cry of victory He could say: “I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore” (Rev. 1:18).

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3) The superiority of the Lord within Matthew's context.

- a) For many, the response of the Lord to the religious leaders can be quite puzzling, and consequently hard to follow. On the surface it seems that the Lord uses the example of David and his followers who were doing something the law did not permit to justify the actions of the disciples. Of course such thinking is wrong, for the Lord, being true, would never use an illegal activity to justify an illegal activity by his disciples. What then is the developing argument?
- b) It must be remembered that the religious leaders never asked the Lord a question or made an observation concerning the disciples, it was never as it appeared on the surface. There was always a hidden motive. Therefore, when they, with presumed superior spiritually pointed out to him that the disciples were doing something which was not lawful on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1), it was to exact a response from the Lord indicating the disciples were doing wrong and He was not correcting them. What sort of hypocrisy would the Lord then be accused of, rebuking the Pharisees for breaking the law but not His disciples? What they failed to mention was that the law of God did give permission to do that which was necessary on the Sabbath. Moses wrote: "In the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, SAVE THAT WHICH EVERY MAN MUST EAT, THAT ONLY MAY BE DONE OF YOU" (Ex. 12:16). The law the disciples were breaking was not the law of God but one of their man made laws while ignoring the law of Exodus 12:16. This picking what aspects of the law to apply carried no weight with the Lord. Interestingly, the Lord did not shrug off their accusation but his response was fivefold:
 - i) He spoke of that which David had done and that was something which was contrary to the law of God but fell under the law of Exodus 12:16.
 1. David and his men were on the run from Saul and they were hungry. Entering the Tabernacle they requested food and all there was, was the shewbread which the commoner was not allowed to eat. Yet he and his men ate it. The religious leaders could see the implications, "would they say David did wrong?" They were in a bind. They knew, or at least ought to have known, that David and his men were permitted to eat the shewbread. The disciples of the Lord were hungry, then what was the sin in them doing that which the law permitted?
 - ii) He spoke of the activity of the priests in the temple and what they do on the Sabbath is not breaking the law. Each Sabbath the priests fulfill major functions in the temple. They offer the daily burnt offerings prescribed by law. This then becomes a tension filled "difficulty" which appears to be contradictory. On the Sabbath there is to be no work, but there must be the offering of the daily sacrifice. Both were prescribed by God. Which one takes precedence and is it a sin to break the other? Since it was not wrong for a man to do that which is needful, such as eating, which is the maintaining of the body, then surely the offering of the sacrifice to maintain fellowship with God must be done and takes precedence.
 - iii) He speaks of the greatness of Himself as superior to the temple. Seeing the use of the temple and its ceremonial rituals must take a back place to human needs and spiritual maintenance, then surely it must take a secondary place to the needs of those who follow the Son of God whose glory is superior to that of the temple.
 - iv) The Lord quotes from Hosea 6:6 and points out the seriousness of their sin in that they have viewed divinely given ceremonial rituals more important than mercy and the knowledge of God.

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Lessons

One of the truths we can learn from this passage is to seek the right divine perspective between spiritual rituals and human needs. I recall an incident when a man came to ask my father to bring him somewhere in the car for a relative had been involved in a bad accident, and to get him out a jail bond had to be paid. It was a Sunday morning! Which was the more important, remembering the Lord or helping a brother in distress? The Lord teaches that responding to an immediate necessity takes precedence. May the Lord help us to learn the right perspectives.

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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