

My House Shall Be Called a House of Prayer

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Matthew 21:12–17 (NKJV) *“Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. ¹³ And He said to them, ‘It is written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer,” but you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’”’ ¹⁴ Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ they were indignant ¹⁶ and said to Him, “Do You hear what these are saying?” And Jesus said to them, ‘Yes. Have you never read, “Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise”?’’ ¹⁷ Then He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and He lodged there.”*

One of the greatest needs in the church today is to return to its foundational ministry of prayer. The church was birthed in prayer: *“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.”*¹ Jesus had given His disciples a commission to go into the entire world to preach the gospel and make disciples. They had authority but they had no power. Their ability to carry out His work would come from the power of the Holy Spirit through a people dependent upon Him in prayer. The church’s need for the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit through prayer has not changed, but it is difficult to see that the church still believes this today. Churches are bigger than ever before, busier than they ever been, and have more resources than they ever had but it seems that they are less effective than ever. The greatest need is not bigger buildings, better programs, or bountiful offerings. Without the involvement of the Holy Spirit, these things only compound the problem. The greatest need is prayer.

When was the last time you heard a sermon on prayer? When was the last time you went to a prayer meeting at your church? When was the last time you spent an hour or more in prayer? Many Christians talk about the moral and spiritual decline in our nation and about the need for revival, but how many of these same Christians are praying for revival as if revival depended upon their prayers? The need for revival is evident to most but the need for prayer is evident to few. In his book *Why Revival Tarries*, the late Leonard Ravenhill bemoaned the prayerless condition of the church saying, “The Cinderella of the church today is the prayer meeting. This handmaid of the Lord is unloved and unwooed because she is not dripping with the pearls of intellectualism, nor glamorous with the silks of philosophy; neither is she enchanting with the tiara of psychology. She wears the homespun’s of sincerity and humility and so is not afraid to kneel.” Ravenhill went on to say, “No man is greater than his prayer life. The pastor who is not praying is playing; the people who are not praying are straying...Poverty stricken as the church is today in many things, she is most stricken here, in the place of prayer. We have many organizers, but few agonizers; many players and payers, few pray-ers; many singers, few clingers; lots of pastors, few wrestlers; many fears, few tears; much fashion, little passion; many interferers, few intercessors; many writers, but few fighters. Failing here, we fail everywhere.”

God has always intended that His people pray. Prayer is the foundation of our relationship with Him. It is men with worldly mindsets who have replaced relationship with religion. During the earthly ministry of Jesus, people were very religious. The temple was filled with religious activity. Instead of being a place of holy worship, Jesus said it had become a “den of thieves.” Such sabotage and irreverence was completely unacceptable to Jesus. He burned with holy zeal to restore His Father’s house to be a house of prayer. He overthrew their money tables and drove out their sacrifices. He disrupted their order to establish His Father’s order. He purged it of everything that His Father did not initiate or ordain. Jesus’ action was a fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy: *“Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming, says the Lord of hosts. ² But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’ soap. ³ He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness. ⁴ Then the offering of Judah and*

¹ Acts 1:14 (NKJV)

*Jerusalem will be pleasant to the Lord, as in the days of old, as in former years.*² The result of such purging was restore acceptable worship and worshipers.

The question needs to be asked, "Is the church today known as a house of prayer or have we made it something else?" If we were honest in our answer, we would have to admit that our churches are often known as houses of great preaching or teaching, houses of great praise, houses of great miracles, houses of unusual manifestations, houses of amazing programs, houses of restoration, houses of fellowship, houses of evangelism, houses of business, or even houses of entertainment. Although some of these things are noble, Jesus said His Father's house will be called a *house of prayer*.

What was the effect of Jesus restoring the temple as a house of prayer? The first effect of God's house becoming a house of prayer is that it *became* a house of His *presence*. Jesus brought the presence of the Father into the temple for He said in another place, "*I am in the Father, and the Father in Me.*"³ What is God's house without God's presence? Without the presence of God, the church is nothing more than another social club or charitable organization. It is the presence of God that marks the difference between the church and the world. Unfortunately, some are content having "church" without God. Jesus stands outside the door of His own church and knocks! We must have the presence of God!

The second effect of God's house becoming a house of prayer is that it *became* a house of *power*. After Jesus entered the temple and purged it, the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple and He healed them. Many have wondered what has happened to the power of God in the church. Does God still do miracles? Yes. The same Jesus who restored miracles in the house of God then can restore miracles in His church today. God's hand is not short that it cannot save. It is our sin that has caused His power to be withheld. As the church returns to God in prayer, I believe we will begin to see that God is more than ready to heal and deliver hurting people in His house today!

The third effect of God's house becoming a house of prayer is that it *became* a house of *praise*. Once the presence and power of God was restored, the praise of God began to sound forth out of the mouths of the children. Children are honest to the dismay of many parents and adults. Adults will manipulate their spirituality to impress others. Not so with children. When children begin to praise God in the house of God, it is a sure sign that Jesus is in the house! When the praises inside the house are real, then the world will not only hear God's excellencies declared, they will see His excellencies displayed.

Jesus said, "*I will build My church*".⁴ Now if Jesus said that His Father's house would be called a house of prayer, then we can be sure that the church Jesus is building will be a house of prayer. Therefore, prayer is Christ's blueprint for His church. Jesus is the Architect. Prayer is the blueprint. We are only contractors working under His supervision to establish a house of prayer in His name. The psalmist declared, "*Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.*"⁵ If we do not build according to the blueprint of prayer, no matter what else the church becomes in the eyes of the world, our labor will be in vain. "*My Father's house shall be called a house of prayer.*" –Jesus

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² Malachi 3:1-4 (NKJV)

³ John 14:10 (NKJV)

⁴ Matthew 16:18 (NKJV)

⁵ Psalm 127:1 (NKJV)