

THE POWER OF OUR PRAYERS

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Our God is the God of promise! He has made such amazing promises to His people. Two weeks ago I spoke of one of those He made to His covenant people, Israel. God uttered it in the ear of Solomon on the day in which he dedicated the Temple he had built in Jerusalem.

Surely, it is near the top of the list of promises known and loved by God's people still.

2 Chronicles 7:14

(When disaster strikes and times become difficult and disheartening,) if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray, and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sins and heal their land.

As wondrous as this is, there is still more to it, as the next two verses will show.

2 Chronicles 7:15-16

*My eyes will be open and my ears attentive to every prayer made in this place. For **I have chosen this Temple and set it apart to be holy**—a place where my name will be honored forever. I will always watch over it, for it is dear to my heart.*

God chose the Temple that Solomon built in Jerusalem as *the place* He would meet with His people—forever.

A little background will be helpful now: The Temple originated as a house *for God*, among His people. King David had planned the House of Worship, but was not permitted to build it because of the blood on his hands. It was for his chosen son, Solomon, to complete the task. Here's what Solomon said in the previous chapter:

*2 Chronicles 6:1 Then Solomon spoke: "The Lord said He would dwell in the dark cloud. ² I have surely built You **an exalted house**, and **a place for You to dwell in** forever."*

Solomon aspired to build a marvelous structure ("an exalted house") that would appeal to God and inspire worshippers... forever.

But here's what God had to say about it...

Isaiah 66:1 This is what the Lord says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Could you build me a temple as good as that? Could you build me such a resting place?"

However noble the aspiration, humans simply do not have what it takes to impress God the Creator. So God had another idea. An idea yet to be revealed. Fast forward 750 years to Jesus' visit to that very Temple in Jerusalem. A man with passion for God, He was shocked by what He found.

John 2:13 It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the Temple area he saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices; he also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money. ¹⁵ Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep and cattle, scattered the money changers' coins over the floor, and turned over their tables. ¹⁶ Then, going over to the people who sold doves, he told them, "Get these things out of here. Stop turning **my Father's house** into a marketplace!" ¹⁷ Then his disciples remembered this prophecy from the Scriptures: "**Passion for God's house will consume me.**"

Consuming passion for His Father's House drove Him to drive out the moneychangers and the merchants. Neither the merchants nor the leading priests were happy about that.

John 2:18 But the Jewish leaders demanded, "What are you doing? If God gave you authority to do this, show us a miraculous sign to prove it." ¹⁹ "All right," Jesus replied. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ "What!" they exclaimed. "It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you can rebuild it in three days?" ²¹ **But when Jesus said "this temple," he meant his own body.** ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered he had said this, and they believed both the Scriptures and what Jesus had said.

In the time that it took Jesus to speak twelve words ("Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."), a phenomenal spiritual transition was unveiled, for His words revealed that the Temple of God was no longer one that had been built with stones and metals by human hands, but it was the human body that God made for Jesus ("He meant His own body").

If the Temple in Jerusalem was so precious to God (He chose it and set it apart), how much more the Temple which is His Son, His Chosen One?

Yet God did not intend for us to worship a man or the physical presence of a man—not even the greatest man who ever lived, the God-Man Jesus.

A seemingly random encounter with a Samaritan woman at the Well of Jacob near Sychar provided the lecture hall for Jesus to further explain this transition...

John 4:19 “Sir,” the woman said, “you must be a prophet.”²⁰ So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?”

The Samaritans were a mixed race (part Hebrew and part Gentile), whom the pedigreed Jews despised. As a result of their animus, they forbade the Samaritans from participating in worship in Jerusalem’s Temple. Jews were not even to speak with Samaritans. So the Samaritans built their own place of worship for Jehovah on Mount Gerizim. This only deepened the schism between the two groups, and created further religious controversy.

But Jesus had come to unite the two opposing families—in fact, unite the entire human race through His saving work.

There is a lot of concern today about what (or who) really *matters*. Well, here’s what Jesus said should *not* matter:

John 4:21 Jesus replied, “Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when **it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem.**²² You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews.²³ But the time is coming—indeed it’s here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way.²⁴ For God is Spirit, so **those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.**”

It now no longer matters *where* you worship the Father, but *that* you worship Him in spirit and in truth. This attitude and activity—I’ll call it an attitudinal activity—attracts the presence of Almighty God and transforms *any place* into the Father’s House—a Temple of Worship and a House of Prayer.

The Apostle Paul understood this and revealed in it as he wrote to the church in Ephesus.

Ephesians 2:20 Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself.²¹ We are carefully **joined together in him, becoming a holy temple** for the Lord.

No longer a geographical place, but a joint attitudinal activity—worship in spirit and in truth. This is why we meet together for worship. And this is what happens when we do—whenever and wherever: we become a holy temple for the Lord.

Remember that verse we read from Isaiah 66? Now hear the rest of the story...

Isaiah 66:1 This is what the Lord says: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Could you build me a temple as good as that? Could you build me such a resting place?”

² *My hands have made both heaven and earth; they and everything in them are mine. I, the Lord, have spoken! “I will bless those who have humble and contrite hearts, who tremble at my word.*

Isaiah 66:5 I will give them—within the walls of my house—a memorial and a name far greater than sons and daughters could give. For the name I give them is an everlasting one. It will never disappear!

Isaiah 66:22 “As surely as my new heavens and earth will remain, so will you always be my people, with a name that will never disappear,” says the Lord. ²³ “All humanity will come to worship me from week to week and from month to month.

Together, week by week and month by month, we are His House, that Temple. What was it that God said to Solomon?

2 Chronicles 7:15 My eyes will be open and my ears attentive to every prayer made in this place. ¹⁶ For I have chosen this Temple and set it apart to be holy—a place where my name will be honored forever. I will always watch over it, for it is dear to my heart.

No longer confined to a single place or structure on the planet, but now *any place* where God’s people gather in His name and for His glory to express their worship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Matthew 18:19 “I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. ²⁰ For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.”

This is the power of our prayers. Not *your* prayers, but *OUR* prayers. When we “gather together” as followers of Jesus and “agree... concerning anything” we ask.

So I am calling you to join me and the Holy Spirit on Friday, August 19, at 6:30pm, for an evening of worshipful prayer. We need what God has promised. But we will not receive it if we do not ask for it.

Let’s begin to prepare right now by declaring together four statements of faith. Say these out loud to the Lord right now.

- *Father, we are your House—chosen and set apart through Jesus Christ.*
- *We are a people created for Your worship, created for Your praise.*
- *We worship You in spirit—our spirit with the Holy Spirit.*
- *We worship You in truth, for Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*

We are God’s Temple. Consider this as you prepare for meetings of the church. This is not just a religious function; it is a supernatural happening! Let’s live like it!