



THE HOUSE OF PRAYER

We see an unusual scene in all four gospels which truly stands out because we see a different face of Jesus than we are accustomed. We are uncomfortable with what we see because it is not the gentle Jesus we prefer. We see a Jesus who is physical and full of zeal to the point of violence with a whip cord towards people in God's temple. The condition of God's House and God's people have Him angry and moved to physical action against them! Here are just two of the four Gospel's presentation of this vivid scene taking place in front of the priest and all the people assembled in the temple. Mark 15-17 says: "Then they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. And He *began* to teach and say to them, "Is it not written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS'? But you have made it a ROBBERS' DEN." In John's Gospel 2:13-17 it says, "The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated *at their tables*. And He made a scourge of cords, and drove *them* all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business." His disciples remembered that it was written, "ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME."

The temple of God had become a place of business, and the religious leaders (priests) were making a big profit from those who were selling items in God's house. Jesus, the Son of God, had zeal for His Father's House quoting from Psalm 69:9! Jesus was grieved that the House of God had turned into the house of man. Instead of holiness in the House of God, it was a house filled with the things of man in accordance with man's lusts and greed. The leaders had lost sight of the purpose of the Temple which is to glorify God! What is extremely interesting is what Jesus said would glorify God. He said that the temple is to be a House of Prayer for all nations. Prayer is what Jesus emphasized concerning the Temple. It is interesting because so many other religious duties and actions were ordained to happen in the Temple. It was to be a place of worship, sacrifice, teaching and preaching; but Jesus was concerned that The House of Prayer was being defiled by greedy men who should have known better.

Why is prayer so important to Jesus? Does God need our prayers? First of all: God does not need anything. He is the sovereign, uncreated, infinitely perfect, eternal being Who created all things, owns all things, sustains all things, and needs nothing. But, God has chosen prayer as a way for man to commune with Him and this pleases God. In the book of Revelation, God keeps the prayers of His Saints in Golden Bowls on the Heavenly Altar! "Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand." Rev 8:3-4. So, God has chosen prayer as the link between created man and Creator God for the purpose of intimacy with God, to seek God's face and favor, and to seek God's provision and intervention for His holy purpose and glory in the life of the saints and of the church.

The two keys and doors to the sanctified life are prayer and the study of God's word. When we look at Jesus and His life in the scriptures, we see Him as the perfect example of the Christian walk; and we see Him praying constantly. Before He chose the 12, He prayed all night: "It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles:" Luke 6:12-13 If the Son of God needed to pray, how much more do His redeemed, regenerated saints?! How many prayerless decisions do we make?!

What is the House of Prayer today since the Temple is no longer standing in Jerusalem? The temple is now inside the born-again, regenerated saints who are filled with the Holy Spirit! 1 Corinthians 6:19 says "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" The Temple is to be Holy. It is to be a House Of Prayer. We can have the same problem the Temple in Jerusalem had! We can allow the cares and sins of the world to distract and dominate our lives, and Jesus may need to come with His whip cord to drive out the money changers in our lives! Do we hear the whip cord coming? How is our Temple?

We now have the individual House of Prayer and the corporate House of Prayer. The individual being the individual saints and the corporate being the body of Christ --the church. Both are essential and both can need correcting by the Holy Spirit. What is the condition of prayer in the Evangelical Church of America today? Barna Research says the average Christian prays 3 minutes a day and the average pastor 7 minutes a day. The average church in America no longer has a Wednesday night prayer meeting. It has been replaced with programs! The Evangelical Church is basically prayerless! Remember: prayer is what God Himself set up for us to commune with Him intimately. Jesus needed to pray daily so I can assure you that we desperately need it. Jim Cymbala, the pastor of Brooklyn Tabernacle Church, stated that the Tuesday Night Prayer Meeting is the most important night of his church's week! He says that the Prayer Meeting is the Steam Engine that drives and runs the church's life! Cymbala's church has become a House of Prayer! Does your church have a Night of Prayer? Do you have a daily time in prayer with the Lord? I can solemnly assure you: if you do not have a daily time of prayer, you are spiritually stagnant or spiritually dying! Prayerlessness is one of the leading causes of the spiritual decline and demise of the Evangelical Church in America.

There are churches who do have prayer nights, prayer teams and prayer chains which are important and good for the body of Christ, but many have only one main focus: physical healing. Physical healing is good and necessary. But it is not the most important thing to be praying for. I am a stage four Cancer survivor, and I cherish every prayer for my healing and God's answer to those prayers! But how many were also praying for the well being of my soul and my perseverance in the faith through adversity? My soul is eternal; my body is very temporary as all bodies are. When I receive a request for someone's healing, I also ask the Lord how I should pray for their soul. People need to be regenerated; they need to have reconciliation, forgiveness, wisdom, discernment, etc. There are millions of lost souls out there but rarely do I see prayer requests for salvation. God can answer all our prayers for people's bodies to be healed; but if they just receive physical healing and end up damned and in hell for eternity, what have we really gained? Matthew 10:28 states "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." We need balance in our prayer and more concern for souls than just physical bodies.

The church in America needs a real revitalization of Godly prayer to come back into its life. *Almighty God, please give us the gift to repent of our prayerlessness and our dependence on programs. May we instead seek You in prayer and may our prayers be pleasing to You and stored in golden bowls in heaven. Lord, are we a true House of Prayer or are we a den of robbers? Does Jesus need to come with His whip cord to us individually or corporately? Lord, please bring us back to you in humble and sincere repentance so that we may again be fruitful Houses of Prayer who seek You early and often and have faith that you are a God who hears and answers the prayers of your righteous ones. Amen.*

