

HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL NATIONS

Mark 11:12-26 (Key verse 17a)

*“And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written:
‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.’”*

Do any of you know what building in the bible was called “a house of prayer for all nations?” Yes, it is the temple in Jerusalem. The question is.... why did God call His temple a house of prayer? It was because, it was the only place for people to approach God and draw close to Him. However, as we will see in today’s passage, this earthly temple could never be house of prayer for all nations. It merely foreshadowed Jesus. Jesus is the spiritual temple – our true house of prayer – through whom all nations can now approach God and draw close to Him. I pray that through today’s passage, God encourage you to pray more and so experience His presence in your heart and practically in your lives. Amen.

Today’s passage is a continuation from the previous passage. Can you still remember what happened in last week’s passage? Yes, Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. And what was the first place Jesus visited after arriving in Jerusalem? (Do anyone remember?) Right...it was the temple of God! Verse 11 reads, Jesus went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything....But since it was already late, he went out to Bethany (a small village near Jerusalem) to spend the night.

Look at the verses 12-13. The next day Jesus was in such a hurry to return to Jerusalem and visit the temple that he forgot to eat breakfast. Consequently, as they were leaving Bethany..... Jesus was hungry.....and He looked around for something to eat. Then He saw..... in the distance..... a fig tree that had many leaves..... So, naturally, Jesus went over to see if he could find any figs.... But...when he reached it, Jesus found nothing but leaves..... because (although the fig tree was in leaf) it was not the season for figs.

Here, we would expect Jesus to simply move on....right? But, to our surprise, Jesus did something quite unusual.....Look at verse 14. Then Jesus said to the tree, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” Now.....why did Jesus react in this seemingly unreasonable manner? I mean....verse 13 clearly states that it was not the season for figs. So why would Jesus curse the poor and innocent fig tree like this?!!.....It was because.....the fruitless fig tree reminded Jesus of the fruitless temple in Jerusalem. Moreover, the author includes this event at the fig tree to help us understand Jesus clearing of the Temple....in verses 15-16.

But before we look at verses 15-16, let’s consider the temple in Jerusalem. It was a massive structure that could be divided into three areas.....the outer courtyard (where the altar for burnt offerings were located) surrounded the temple building.....then as you moved from the courtyard into the temple building.....one would enter the holy place.....and right at the back of the temple building.....behind the curtain where the ark of God was located.....was the most holy place. (2 Chronicles 2-4) Then why did God instructed the Israelites to build this temple? What was God’s purpose.....(do you have any idea?).....Look at verse 17. God’s purpose for this temple in Jerusalem was to be a house of prayer for all nations. (17) In other words, God wanted this temple to be a place where people from all over the world could come and dwell with Him and draw closer to him.

In a way, we can say that the temple reveals the heart of God towards sinful people; like you and me.....think about it....God is holy and omnipresent.....yet He has a desire to have a personal relationship with

sinful people, like you and me.....and for this purpose God built a temple in Jerusalem.....a so called house of prayer.....whereby people from all nationscould draw close to Him..... **through sacrifice and cleansing**.....In this context the temple is a symbol of God’s love for the nations. His love is expressed in that *God does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us for our inequities.... For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so high is His love for those who fear Him.....as far as the east is from the west.....so far has he removed our transgressions from us.* (Psalm 103:11-12) So that He can have a personal relationship with each one of us.....What a wonderful privilege!! **The temple, therefore, shows us who God truly is..... Though God is Holy, He is also very kind.....exceedingly loving and compassionate.....moreover, He is an intimate and personal God.....who more than anything wants us to know and enjoy Him..... now and forever.** For this purpose, God instructed the Israelites to build the temple in Jerusalem – as a house of prayer for all nations – whereby all nations could come to Him..... know Him..... and dwell with Him! Amen!

Yet, when Jesus visited the temple....this was not what He found! Look at verses 15-16. Instead of finding a house of prayer for all nations.....Jesus found a market place for all nations.....with people buying and selling there.....with money changers everywhere.....and people selling doves and carrying merchandise through the temple courts..... This was an absolute tragedy!!

But the question is, if God’s purpose for the temple was to be a house of prayer for all nations..... (in other words a place through which God could have a relationship with people like you and me) why did Jesus curse the fig tree saying - May no one ever eat fruit from you again? I mean, if the fig tree symbolises the spiritual condition of the temple – was it not enough for Jesus to just drive out those who were buying and selling there....and overturn the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and prevent anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts? (15-16).....Exactly as Jesus did when He entered the temple area. Surely, Jesus could then somehow restore God’s temple as a house of prayer for all nations!? And allow people to draw close to God???.....Yet, why did He curse the fig tree so hard that it *withered from the roots* – and completely died? (22) **It was because, Jesus had no intention to restore the temple in Jerusalem as a house of prayer for all nations.....but to REPLACE it with a NEW temple.....a spiritual temple that could be an eternal and incorruptible house of prayer for all nations!**

The truth was, the Temple in Jerusalem could NEVER be a house of prayer for all nations. There were just too many obstacles....too much corruption.....too many limitations. For starters, non-Jews like us (the so called Gentiles) would always be excluded to the outer courts.....barred from the sanctuary of God.....and warned with the penalty of death if we dared to enter the holy space where only the Jews worshipped..... **Secondly**..... the temple in Jerusalem could never be a house of prayer for all nations....because it was location specific – and only people who could visit Jerusalem could draw close to God. **Lastly**, at the temple in Jerusalem..... animal sacrifices were made to restore and maintain the relationship between the holy God and sinful people. But as we know, animal blood can never be sufficient to pay for our sins..... For these reasons, Jesus cursed the fig tree – saying..... May no one ever eat fruit from you again? Because Jesus would replace the temple of God in Jerusalem.....WITH HIMSELF.....as the means through which all nations can draw close to God.

The temple and its rituals and prescriptions were merely “a copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (Hebrews 8:5). Now Jesus has come and

has fulfilled all this, and therefore the temple with its sacrifices are not necessary anymore. Because Jesus has opened a “new and living way” towards God. If we believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, we can *go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ’s blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.* (Hebrews 10:22). That is why, we don’t need a physical temple in Jerusalem anymore.....to draw close to God.....because we have Jesus...as the way to approach God. Amen! **So many times, you and I feel cut off from God.....helplessly alone.....and not knowing how to draw close to God. But here we can learn, that God** replaced the old temple in Jerusalem.....with His Son Jesus.....so that you and I can have free and unrestricted access to Him! Isn’t that amazing! We can approach God whenever we want.....as many times as we want.....and as long as we want.....because Jesus has **become a house of prayer for all nations** – through which people from all around the world can confidently approach the Almighty and Holy God! Including you and me. Amen!

In vv20-25 we can learn with what attitude we should pray as we approach God in Jesus? Look at verses 20-21. [The next day]...in the morning, as [as Jesus and His disciples] went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!” Peter was very surprised by the power of Jesus prayer. Usually, when he prayed nothing seemed to happen.....yet, when Jesus prayed that the fig tree should never bear fruit again.... in a period of 24 hours..... the tree withered from the roots!! (It was dead.....dry.....) Peter was so amazed! How could this happen? Look at verse 22. “Have faith in God.” Jesus answered. Here we can learn, that “faith in God” is the foundation of prayer.....*since without faith it is impossible to please God... because anyone who comes to God..... must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek him.* (Heb 11:6) In other words, God will definitely answer our prayers – just as He answered Jesus’ prayer.... when our attitude in prayer is that of faith in God!

But what does it mean to have faith in God? Jesus knew we would ask this question. So in verses 23-25 He explains that to have faith in God is to not doubt God (23) it is also to believe that we have received what we have asked of God and lastly (24).....to have faith in God is to forgive others. (25)

Look at verse 23. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Humans are powerless to move mountains, but faith in God trust that God has the power and willingness to do it. In this sense, to have faith in God.....is to challenge our human limitations.....by trusting God to do what we are unable to do..... let’s look at the verse one more time.....Jesus said **and does not doubt in his heart..... but believes** . Doubt prevents us to trust in God.....and makes us try to do things our way, the human way, the way that makes sense. Yet, if we have doubt in our hearts about God’s ability and/or willingness to move our mountains, we can be certain (that even if we pray in Jesus) our prayers will remain unanswered.....more than that.....we will remain stuck and hopeless.

Look at verse 24. Jesus said. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it (v24). After overcoming any doubt in our hearts, we must believe that we have already receive what we asked our Heavenly Father. Even though we don’t strictly obey the Law and we don’t make atonement for our sin by sacrifices like under the old temple system, we believe that our Father hears our prayers. It is because we simply accept Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection that gives us confidence

and assurance.

This humble trusting faith would reflect in an attitude of forgiveness towards others. Look at verse 25. When you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. As God sacrificed His Son to forgive us and restore His relationships with us, so we who have faith in God.....must also restore broken relationships with others..... by forgiving those who sin against us. If we follow these three practical ways to express an attitude of faith in God through prayer – we can be certain that the living God will hear us and answer our prayers powerfully and clearly! Therefore, let’s not doubt God. Let us believe that we have received what we have asked of God in prayer and lastly...let’s forgive those who sinned against us – just as Jesus forgive us who sinned against Him. Amen.

In conclusion. It is amazing to think that God wants to have a personal relationship with you and me. And when I say a personal relationship, I mean God wants us to personally experience His presence – in our hearts and in our lives. Sinners like you and me can never ever have even dreamt of having such an intimate and personal relationship with God.....Yet, by God’s grace and according to His unfailing love – God replaced the old temple in Jerusalem.....with His Son Jesus.....so that you and I can have free and unrestricted access to Him! Isn’t that amazing! We can approach God whenever we want.....as many times as we want.....and as long as we want.....because Jesus has become a house of prayer for all nations – through which people from all around the world can confidently approach the Almighty and Holy God! Amen!

However, to know this truth is not sufficient to experience God’s presence personally in our lives. Jesus also said that we must have faith in God – as we come to Him in Jesus. This is our biggest challenge – and one that will define not only our prayer life but also the extent to which God can work in our lives. For this reason, we must hold firmly to God’s promise word to overcome any doubts we have of Him.....we should firmly believe that God will answer our prayers in His time and according to His will and lastly, we should actively forgive others as God has forgiven you and me. If we follow these three practical steps to have faith in God, God promises to dwell powerfully within our hearts and in our lives. So much so, that we can overcome any and every mountain-like problem or challenge in our lives. Amen!