

## Midweek Message

*“... for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” (Isaiah 56:7 ESV)*

We've been looking at some of the characteristics that are to be part of our mindset when we come to the Lord in prayer on Sunday mornings. As I've stated before, there simply isn't any way we could ever exhaust all that the Bible teaches us regarding prayer in any series of messages. That's also why we're following up the Sunday messages with a few more thoughts about prayer in the Midweek Messages. It's interesting to me from Isaiah that the Lord considers His house to be a *“house of prayer for all peoples”* and is what Jesus quoted when He drove out the money changers who were cheating the people with the sacrifices they were selling. That quote from Isaiah 56 is in the midst of Isaiah telling us of the Gentiles who would also be welcomed into the family of God and join with God's ancient people, Israel, in worship and in prayer. Now, when we think of God's house, we often think of the building that was used for worship. Certainly, there's truth in that understanding even today as Christians dedicate their facilities to the glory, honor, and praise of God. However, do you realize that God also considers His redeemed people as His house? We see this in several New Testament Scriptures and especially in the Apostle Peter's letter when he writes:

*“As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:4,5 ESV).*

The writer to the Hebrews writes this as well in his letter when he says:

*“For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope” (Hebrews 3:3-6 ESV).*

Quite amazing, don't you think? We, as God's redeemed people, are the dwelling place of God having been built together as God's house. And as God has declared, His house is to be a house of prayer. Now, having established that wonderful truth, let's look at four aspects of prayer that should be true of us as we continue looking at God's Word regarding the great gift of prayer.

**First**, our prayers should be purposeful. In other words, we should always seek one main goal when we come to the Lord in prayer. Jesus tells us: *“Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it” (John 14:13,14 ESV).* One of the most misunderstood aspects of prayer is in our ending of prayer as we close praying in Jesus' name. Now, I want you to understand that we should close in Jesus' name, but we must also understand what Jesus means by telling us to ask in His name. Did you notice the purpose Jesus states regarding the reason behind our asking in His name? He tells us, quite plainly, that it's so the *“Father may be glorified in the Son.”* In other words, when we come to God in prayer, we must always seek that which would honor, praise, and glorify the Lord as revealed in His Word. James says much the same thing, although from a different angle, when he writes: *“You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions” (James 4:2b-3 ESV).* You see, when our prayers are self-centered, God will not grant what we ask because we're only seeking to satisfy our sinful pleasures. Our prayers should always be such as would be glorifying to God as well as for the good of His people.

**Second**, our prayers should be passionate. Let me ask you something. How deeply do you want God to answer your prayers? Sometimes we can come to God with a kind of shopping list, mentioning all the things on the list, but doing so without any sense whatsoever of actually desiring God to act in accordance with our requests. It's almost as if we pray over issues simply because we may have said we would pray for somebody, but we do so without really wanting what we're asking. It's almost like having a take or leave it attitude regarding our prayers. James again has something to say to us when he writes:

*"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (James 1:5-8 ESV).*

For us to pray in faith is for us to be focused and passionate in what we're asking of God. It's not an emotional outburst per se, although our emotions could certainly be involved in our prayers, but comes from deep within our souls as we pour our prayers out to the Lord, believing that He not only hears us, but will also answer in accordance with His will.

**Third**, our prayers should be persistent. There are so many Scriptures that speak to this issue as we do have a tendency to be inconsistent in our prayer lives. The Apostle Paul tells us: *"praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ..."* (Ephesians 6:18 ESV). You may have heard the acronym PUSH which stands for Pray Until Something Happens. It would seem that's what the Apostle Paul is talking about when he calls us to "keep alert with all perseverance" in relation to praying for all the saints. The truth of the matter is that if we really do want God to act and answer our prayers, I believe we would also keep praying until He does. When Jesus wanted to get this point across, He told the parable of the persistent widow as found in Luke 18. The point is that we must keep praying until God answers, one way or the other.

**Finally**, our prayers should be personal. What do I mean by that? I mean that we should remember that we're having a conversation with God as we commune with Him. One of the issues Jesus had with the Pharisees was that they would pray in public in order to be noticed. He speaks to this issue when He tells us:

*"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Matthew 6:5, 6 ESV).*

Jesus isn't telling us we should never pray in public but is, instead, telling us that our prayers, whether public or private, are first and foremost to be between ourselves and the Lord.

Obviously, there's so much more to talk about when it comes to our times of prayer and we'll talk about a few more things in the weeks to come. However, as God's house, His beloved and redeemed people, the very apple of His eye, we should know that He waits to hear from us even though He already knows all about it. We should never cease to take the time to come before the throne of grace.

***Pastor Mark***