

**This One Thing:
A Pastor's Challenge
Matthew 21:12-17**

August 13, 2017

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Text: ¹² Jesus went into the temple complex and drove out all those buying and selling in the temple. He overturned the money changers' tables and the chairs of those selling doves. ¹³ And He said to them, "It is written, My house will be called a house of prayer. But you are making it a den of thieves!"

¹⁴ The blind and the lame came to Him in the temple complex, and He healed them. ¹⁵ When the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonders that He did and the children shouting in the temple complex, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant ¹⁶ and said to Him, "Do You hear what these children are saying?"

"Yes," Jesus told them. "Have you never read:

You have prepared praise
from the mouths of children and nursing infants?"

¹⁷ Then He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

Introduction:

The year 1856 marked the thirteenth straight year of decline among the major denominations of the United States. In 1857 a businessman left his career to become a missionary in New York City. His name was Jeremiah Calvin Lanphier. Noticing the downcast countenance of businessmen in NYC, Lanphier decided upon a noon time prayer meeting to invite others to come and pray with him. (Roy Fish, *When Heaven Touched Earth: The Awakening of 1858 and Its Effects on Baptists*, p. 33)

Lanphier's strategy was not a new strategy. The Church's chief strategy should always be prayer. If our chief struggles and adversaries are spiritual, then our chief strategies should also be spiritual.

Consider our text today and note with me several aspects of this wonderful text.

The Call of Jesus Concerning Prayer— According to the New Testament, the Church has several important purposes. The Church is to be a place of worship, evangelism, prayer, teaching (or discipleship), fellowship, and ministry. Out of all these Biblical and practical purposes, Jesus chose one to speak about as He cleared the temple this day as recorded by Matthew. Jesus said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer." Of all that the Church is supposed to be, on this important occasion, Jesus said that the Church is to be a place of prayer. The challenge for the Church to be a place of prayer still faces us today. I want to call you to become a person of prayer and do your part in helping your Church become a people of prayer.

Any measurement of a church and a disciple must include how we are doing in this area of prayer.

The Context for the Call—In Matthew 21 we see that Jesus is displeased when He walked into the temple. Often I have heard people say that Jesus was displeased by the buying and selling going on in the temple. However, buying and selling would have been quite common throughout the period leading to Jesus' entry into the temple. More than the buying and selling of goods, Jesus was displeased with the manner in which this exchange was being carried out by those involved. People were being cheated! This is what made Jesus angry. Well-meaning worshippers had come to give their offerings to God, but some were using this as an opportunity to cheat and steal. Here is the source of the anger: God's house was being used for purposes never intended. Thus comes his follow-up statement—"My house shall be a house of prayer."

The Change that Occured—What follows in this passage is a description of what a Church becomes when that Church becomes a place of prayer. First, that Church becomes a place of power. "And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them." Second, that Church becomes a place of praise. Acts 2 tells us that there was a sense of awe. When we begin to see the power of God, praise is going to follow. So, in summary, notice the progression: Prayer Power Praise. Wouldn't you like to see that happen in your church?

We cannot guarantee these same results, but we can guarantee how not to have these results. We cannot guarantee revival to come, but we can guarantee why revival will not come. G. Campbell Morgan, a preacher of another generation, said, "Revival cannot be organized, but we can set our sails to catch the wind from heaven when God chooses to blow upon His people once again.

That's what I'm asking.

The Caution

I don't want to spend a long time on the caution this morning, but I do want to call your attention back to the text. Look what happened when order was restored in the Temple. There were some who didn't like it. I pray that not be the case on the human level in our church. I don't really anticipate that to be the case. You want the same things I want. But, I will say this. I intend to lead you in the next few months and years to pray in such a way that we make the Devil mad. Let's be ready for that. People are going to be saved, and the Devil won't like that. People are going to get freed from addictions, and the Devil won't like that. Marriages are going to be healed, and the Devil won't like that. People are going to repent of sin, and the Devil won't like that.

A Specific Challenge

The Big Question is How are we to pray?

As we consider a study on prayer, to simplify this matter, I want to call your attention to three general New Testament principles on prayer. They all come from Paul's writings.

- 1. Pray without Ceasing.**
1 Thessalonians 5:17 simply says, "Pray without ceasing."
- 2. Pray about Everything.**

In Philippians 4:6, we are taught, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

The following verse tells us what happens when we do pray about everything. “And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

3. Pray for Everybody.

The third general overwhelming principle is given in 1 Timothy 2:1. “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men . . .

So, now, let’s see. The New Testament has instruction for us to pray all the time, about everything, and for everybody. Does that task seem impossible? Does that task overwhelm you? Can I ask you a very practical question? How are we going to do that?

Start Where You Are! Start Where We Are! Help me to make FBC a House of Prayer!

For a little motivation, think about the following written by Joe McKeever, one of my favorite authors.

“PRAY ANYWAY!”

“When you don’t know how to pray, pray anyway.
IGNORANCE IS NO EXCUSE.

When you don’t feel like praying, pray anyway.
DEPRESSION IS NO EXCUSE.

When dullness sits on you like a vulture, and you can’t muster enough enthusiasm to change channels, much less to pray, pray anyway.
BOREDOM IS NO EXCUSE.

When you see no need to pray and no reason to intercede for those about you, recognize this as a sign of impending danger, and pray anyway.
BLINDNESS IS NO EXCUSE.

When you’ve grown spiritually lazy and feel that you’ll never be able to pick up your Bible and read it the way you once did, pray anyway.
LAZINESS IS NO EXCUSE.

When you don’t understand what the big deal is about prayer, and you think it’s overrated because it never did you much good, pray anyway.
IMMATURITY IS NO EXCUSE.

When you’re too tired to remember your own name, and you know God will understand if you don’t pray, pray anyway.
FATIGUE IS NO EXCUSE.

When you're embarrassed to be back before God confessing the same sins and admitting the same failures, come on and pray anyway.

SHAME IS NO EXCUSE.

When you've been unfaithful and you know it and you feel that burden of guilt that makes you want to run and hide under the porch, pray anyway.

SIN IS NO EXCUSE.

When the nagging voice of the enemy keeps telling you there is no God and even if there were, He'd never have anything to do with a nothing like you, pray anyway.

UNBELIEF IS NO EXCUSE.

A Specific Challenge—So What?

I am challenging you to 3 specific action steps as we seek to be a church that is a House of Prayer.

1. This One Thing—Each week we will have a church-wide specific prayer objective. This week our central prayer objective is praying for First Baptist Christian School. So Pray. Pray every time you pray for this one thing.
2. Prayer Revival—October 8-11—This is a specific set of days given to prayer. Unlike most revivals where a guest revivalist (evangelist) is enlisted to lead us, we are inviting guest prayer leaders to lead us in prayer. I am asking that you prioritize these dates on your calendar. Protect these dates. Be here those days. Let's have a prayer revival.
3. A Personal Prayer Commitment—In the coming weeks, we will be unveiling week by week, personal prayer activities. One will capture your attention and you will commit to this being your personal prayer activity.

What will be different? Our focus will be from now until December 1, but I pray that we are never the same again. I pray that these next 16 weeks change us forever.

Jeremiah Lanphier set September 23, 1857, as the day of his first prayer meeting. At 12 noon, Lanphier was alone at the appointed place of prayer. The weeks of passing out flyers inviting people to the prayer gathering had brought no one. For thirty minutes Lanphier prayed anyway. At 12:30, he heard some footsteps. A few minutes later, another set. By 1:00 p.m. six men had gathered. One week later, twenty men gathered. When 100 persons showed up for the third meeting, the decision was made to begin praying daily instead of weekly. By the end of October multiple locations had to be offered to accommodate the crowds. By the end of six months, on some days, as many as 50,000 persons were meeting somewhere in NYC to pray.

As Roy Fish noted in his book on this prayer movement:

There was no hysteria (uncontrolled emotionalism), but rather a hunger in the hearts of thousands to pray. They wished to pray; they felt impelled, by some unseen power, to pray; they felt the pressure of the call to pray. A place of prayer was no sooner opened than Christians flocked to it to pour out their supplications together." (Fish, 34-35)