My House Shall be Called a House of Prayer

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Matthew 21 contains one of the clearest predictions in Scripture of a global movement towards prayer that must occur in the church before Jesus comes.

"He said to them, "It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’...” (Matthew 21:13 ESV)

B. In order to understand just how significant Jesus’ statement is in Matthew 21, we have to recognize the dramatic events that occur in Matthew 21-23. In that passage we find some of Jesus’ most shocking rebukes as well as significant insight into what must happen in the earth before the return of Jesus.

II. THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

A. Matthew 21 begins with Matthew 21:1-11, a passage, usually referred to as the “Triumphal Entry.” In this passage of Scripture, Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem the way the ancient prophet Zechariah prophesied that Messiah would enter - riding on a donkey.

"Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’ " (Matthew 21:5 ESV)

B. The disciples, who have been frustrated for years with Jesus, can hardly believe their eyes. He is entering the great city just as the prophet said the Messiah would. Hope begins to fill their heart that Jesus is finally going to begin the process of defeating the Roman oppressor and establishing His political rule in Israel.

C. The people have grown weary under Rome's oppression and they too are longing for a savior. In the hopes that Jesus of Nazareth might be that Savior, the people begin to respond to Him with praise, celebrating His arrival with the hope that perhaps He really is the long awaited Messiah.

"And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" 10And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?"" (Matthew 21:9-10 ESV)
D. As expectation begins to rise in the hearts of both the disciples and the people of Jerusalem, Jesus enters the city and He goes to the first place you would expect the Messiah to go - the temple. However, what happens here shocks everyone. Jesus begins driving people out of the temple overturning the tables of the money changers. Jesus rebukes the leaders of the temple for the condition that it is in. It is hard to imagine a more staggering contrast to the welcome Jesus had received just moments ago.

12And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 13He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.” 14And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. 15But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant, 16and they said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, “Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise?” (Matthew 21:12–16 ESV)

E. After rebuking the temple leaders, Jesus turns and walks out of the city, not doubt leaving both his disciples and the people who had welcomed Him into the city speechless.

17And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there. (Matthew 21:17 ESV)

III. JESUS’ CONTROVERSY WITH HIS PEOPLE

A. The following day Jesus re-enters the city and Matthew 22-23 records the confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders of the city. These confrontations clearly illustrate the the leaders were not responsive to the rule of Jesus. They were out of sync with His priorities and unable to receive Him for who He was. In short, Matthew 22-23 illustrates precisely why Matthew 21 ended the way it did. There was deep disagreement in the city over Jesus and His leadership. While the people welcomed the hope of political deliverance, they were not yet ready as a people to welcome Him for who He is.

B. After delivering Jesus’ scathing rebukes in Matthew 23, the chapter ends with a deeply emotional exclamation by Jesus.

37"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! (Matthew 23:37 ESV)

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1. Jesus longed to be the protector and defender of Israel. He longed to regather the Jewish people and end their exile in the nations and their suffering.

2. Jesus’ deep pain is plainly evident in His final four words “you were not willing.”

3. The people want a deliver, but they are not willing for Him as the deliverer. They want a different deliverer - a different kind of Messiah. They are not in agreement with Jesus.

C. Matthew 21-23 reveal that the people are not yet ready to receive Jesus as their king. They are out of sync with Him. They are not in alignment with His priorities. They are not ready, or willing, to truly receive Him as king.

D. Jesus finishes His rebukes in Matthew 22-23 with a stunning conclusion in Matthew 23:39:

> 39For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’ “ (Matthew 23:39 ESV)

1. To understand this statement, we have to understand that this is Matthew’s conclusion to the entire narrative that begins in Matthew 21. Jesus is not simply referring to the people seeing him again physically because they will see him crucified in just a few short days.

2. He is referring to them seeing Him come into the city as king. Jesus entered the city the way Zechariah said the Messiah would enter. However, He was not received and therefore He will not enter the city again in the way Messiah must enter until they are in agreement with Him.

E. The fact that Jesus says they will not see Him again “until” is a statement of assurance that they will see Him again. The conflict of verse 37 will be resolved. A day will come when they are willing to have Him deliver them and rule over them. The people assumed that the Romans were their biggest problem, but Jesus identified their primary issue as the lack of agreement with His leadership.

F. Jesus will not rule over Jerusalem until the people welcome Him by saying “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” By blessing Him, it means a day will come when Jesus’ people are in agreement with Him and welcome Him for who He is.

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G. It is not accidental that this controversy occurs in the city of Jerusalem. Because He is the Son of David and the King of the Jews, He must be received in Jerusalem by the Jewish leaders. He must fulfill the promise of salvation for the Jewish people because He is designated to rule and reign in that location over that people.

H. At the same time, while this verse has a specific application for the Jewish people, Jesus is not just making this statement to the Jewish community or the city of Jerusalem. He is making the statement to all those who are His people. The work of the cross has opened the door for the nations to become part of the people of God, so it is not enough for the Jewish people to come into agreement with Him. The body of Jesus in the nations is also called to “bless” Jesus by coming into agreement with His leadership and laboring for the things that are precious to Him.

I. Because this passage has an application for the entire body of Jesus, it is important that we understand and respond to this passage. Because we want to be in agreement with Jesus’ leadership and because we love Him, it is incredibly important that we respond to the issues that Jesus raises.

IV. **MY HOUSE WILL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER**

A. Like any good leader, as Jesus begins to address the reasons the people are not ready for His leadership, He begins with the most important reason first. He knows that as we resolve the most important issue, it will resolve many other lesser issues.

B. That’s why it is important to notice that the first thing Jesus does is head to the temple. He’s communicating something very important with His actions. As He addresses the things that must be resolved before He can be received as King, the first thing on His mind is the condition of His house.

C. As Jesus goes directly to the temple He immediately confronts the activity in the house of God. He then makes a very clear prophetic declaration over the temple that was first prophesied by the prophet Isaiah:

> 12 And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 13 He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.” (Matthew 21:12-13 ESV)
1. When Jesus thought about the areas where His people were out of sync with His priorities, the first thing that was on His heart is that He wanted His house to be called a house of prayer.

2. This does not mean that every congregation needs to go by the name “house of prayer,” but it does mean that the nature and character of each congregation should be such that when people think of a congregation the thing they most naturally call it is a “house of prayer.”

D. Why does Jesus care so much about His house being centered around prayer? Because prayer is the evidence that His house is God centered and based on relationship.

1. The more focused we are on ourselves, the less we pray. The more God-centered we become, the more we pray. As the church becomes more God centered, prayer and worship increases in the church. Heaven is the most God-centered environment and every time we get a glimpse of heaven we see the centrality of the beauty of God and the response of His people.

2. Jesus asked us to pray with Him that earth would become like heaven (Matthew 6:10) and that is precisely why He wants His church to become known as a house of prayer.

3. In passages like Isaiah 6 or Revelation 4-5, when the Bible pulls back the veil on heaven we see the revelation of the beauty of God and the response of His people to His beauty. Jesus is declaring that this is to be the essential nature of the church.

4. In order for the church to primarily be a place of prayer, the people must have motivation to pray. Biblically, God uses two things to motivate His people to pray: the revelation of His beauty and crisis.

5. When Jesus predicts that His house will become a house of prayer, He is predicting that the church will have a revelation of His beauty that will cause them to pray.

6. Prayer is not only a response to God’s beauty, it is also a place of relationship because, when we love someone we want to talk to them. When love blossoms you find two people suddenly engaging in deep conversations. They naturally want to hear each other’s voices. Those who are our closest friends in life are the ones we talk to the most.

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7. Jesus wants His house to become a house of prayer because He cares about relationship and intimacy with His people. He wants us to talk to Him and He wants to talk back.

E. The church will become a house of prayer before the return of Jesus, because the church will transition to a place where God is preeminent over all. The day will come when the church is not known primarily for preachers, worship leaders, or ministries, but simply for God because God is fully committed that the proclamation of the beauty of Jesus will ultimately overshadow everything else that the church does.

F. When Jesus declared that His house should be a house of prayer, it is significant that He quoted Isaiah 56:7.

> “And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants...?these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” (Isaiah 56:6–7 ESV)

1. Jesus, like all Jewish teachers in His day, referenced His passage with the expectation that His hearers would understand the entire passage.

2. When we look at Isaiah 56 we can see the focus is that God's house is a house of prayer for all nations. Jesus’ rebuke is clear. His house is not just for one city, it is for the nations.

3. Not only will Jesus not return until His house becomes a house of prayer, He will not return until it becomes a house of prayer for the nations.

4. Jesus is prophesying what will become more apparent as the New Testament develops. God is going to invite the nations into His house. He wants the nations gathered in the place of prayer worshipping the God of Israel.

5. Not only do the Jewish people have to come into agreement with Jesus before He comes, the nations must also come into His house before He will return.

6. He is also going to make the nations joyful in His house. The gentiles are going to receive the great joy of being invited into the family of God and respond in praise to the God of Israel.

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Isaiah 56 does not just mean that gentiles will visit God's house in Jerusalem or that Jerusalem will pray for the nations. When we consider other prophetic passages like Malachi 1:11, we see that God does not just want the nations to visit a single house of prayer in Jerusalem to pray for the nations, He wants a house of prayer in the nations. What must happen in Jerusalem must also happen in the nations.

11 For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 1:11 ESV)

What must happen in Jerusalem must also happen in the nations. Malachi prophesies that God wants worship in every place not just Jerusalem. Malachi 1:11 helps us understand the reach of Isaiah 56. It is more than gentiles praying in Jerusalem. It is a great prayer movement among the gentiles.

After making the declaration that His house should be a house of prayer, Jesus confronts the leaders of the temple over their refusal to recognize His identity.

13 He said to them, "It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers." 14 And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, 16 and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, " ‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise'?" (Matthew 21:13-16 ESV)

1. Jesus is identifying the foundation on which His house of prayer must be built.

2. The house must be built on the revelation of who He is. Because the leaders are refusing to acknowledge who He is, His house is not a house of prayer because joyful prayer, the kind that Isaiah 56 prophesies, is a response to the revelation of the beauty of Jesus.

3. Because there was not revelation of who Jesus was in the temple, the temple failed to become a joyful house of prayer.

4. The revelation of who Jesus is and the release of His power makes His people joyful and enables them to sustain the kind of house of prayer He desires each church to be.

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H. What is staggering is that after Jesus declares His declare for a house of prayer for all nations and confronts the leaders over their refusal to acknowledge Him for who He is, He simply turns and walks out of the city.

17\textit{And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.} 
\textit{(Matthew 21:17 ESV)}

1. Matthew 23:39 is the verse that helps us understand the significance of what Jesus does in verse 17. Matthew 23:39 tells us that Jesus had identified key areas where His people are not in agreement with Him - key issues that must be resolved before He returns.

2. The issue of His house and it's nature is so significant to Jesus, that He simply turns around and walks out of His house and leaves the city. He singles out this issue and makes it preeminent above all the rest. The fact that Jesus came to the temple first is significant, but the fact that He singled out the issue of the temple and then left the city shows us just how central the issue of His house was to Jesus. He could have begun addressing other issues, but He chose to begin and end with just one thing.

3. The various areas of our disagreement with Jesus’ leadership flow from how we function in His house. If His house is rightly aligned with His priorities, then it solves a number of other areas. If His house is not in alignment with His priorities then we must address that issue first.

4. In His actions, Jesus was emphasizing that He wants this issue to stand alone and be addressed before we consider the other issues He raises in the rest of the passage.

V. \textbf{HE WILL COME AGAIN}

A. To correctly understand Matthew 21-23, we have to understand that it is a prototype - it is a foreshadowing of Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem to rule and reign. Jesus enters the city as Messiah and the rightful king of the city. He is celebrated as that king - as the “Son of David” - because He is the king. Matthew is careful to record for us their declaration that He is the “Son of David” who is the long promised heir of David who will be God’s King because Matthew wants us to see Jesus that way.

B. All who saw Jesus enter the city on that day were shocked to hear Him actually rebuke the leaders of the people rather than take His rightful place and rule. Matthew records the rebukes of Jesus and the controversy over Jesus that follows His entry into the city in Matthew 21-23.
C. The final words of Matthew 23 give us Jesus’ statement regarding the end of the controversy:

39*For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’*” (Matthew 23:39 ESV)

D. Jesus tells the people that they will not see Him again until they are in agreement with Him. This is a clear statement that Jesus will come again. He will enter the city again as its rightful king. He entered on that day long ago to make the statement that He is the king, but He did not begin His reign because His people were not ready for it.

E. A day will come when Jesus enters the city and His people are in agreement with Him and, in that day, He will begin His reign from the city. His entrance into the city in Matthew 21 and His statement in Matthew 23:39 form a solemn promise to enter the city again as it’s King and to deliver Israel and the nations.

F. Jesus will enter the city again when His people are in agreement with Him. Knowing that, we are to carefully consider the issues that Jesus addresses in the passage because these are all issues that prevent Him from ruling over His people. If we love Him and if we miss Him, we will look carefully at the issues that are keeping Him from taking His rightful place and, in agreement with Him, seek to bring all those issues under His leadership.

G. The chief issue that Jesus addresses in Matthew 21 is the nature of His house. Because we love Him, we want to recognize how Jesus wants His people and His house to be known. He says that He wants it to be known as a house of prayer before He returns, and therefore we are called to labor until the church expresses itself as a people of prayer in the nations in agreement with the desire of Jesus.