

The Presence 9-18-05

Matthew 21:12-17 (NIV)

¹²Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. ¹³"It is written," he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'" ¹⁴The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. ¹⁶"Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, "'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise?'" ¹⁷And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

This is one of my favorite passages of Scripture. I preached on it a year and a half ago, so some of this may be a review for you. (How to Make God Really Mad) That may seem strange to you that I favor this passage, but I think you'll understand as you hear about what is happening and how it applies to us. Jesus had been to the Temple for Passover all His earthly life. (Luke 2:41) He observed something as a child and as a young man that stirred righteous anger in His heart. (2 Kings 22:13) What He had been observing was the commercialization of the Temple area.

The first temple was designed by King David and built by his son Solomon. When Solomon dedicated that first temple, he prayed that foreigners would come and offer prayers there, be heard by God, and come to know the God of Israel. (2 Chronicles 6:32-33) That temple was destroyed by the Babylonians. The Temple of Jesus' day was built by Herod the Great. All of Jesus' life, the Temple was continuing to evolve. (John 2:20) It is amazing that God used a man who tried to kill the baby Jesus to build a Temple for Him. (Matthew 2:16) I think our Heavenly Father wants us to understand that He is sovereign over all things. Even when it does not look like it to us, God is on His throne. The Apostle Paul said that God puts rulers on their thrones to serve His purposes. (Romans 13:1) At the time, some of Rome's most vile Caesars were ruling. Paul would be executed by their authority, yet he saw God on the throne of the universe overseeing the affairs of men. There are many things we cannot comprehend, but there are no accidents.

Every year Jesus observed the outer court of the Temple. The court that was to be the House of Prayer for all nations increasingly became a marketplace. There needed to be someplace to buy animals for sacrifice. There needed to be a place to exchange coinage to the proper coin for the Temple Tax, but this was not it. This outer court was supposed to be a place of prayer. (Isaiah 56:7) God's heart for the world insisted that it be that.

The High Priest Annas had developed a very lucrative system. The men that the priests appointed to approve the animals for sacrifice would approve very few that came from the outside. Once your sacrifice was declared unfit, you would have to buy a pre-approved animal inside the Temple that cost seven times as much as one

Commented [notes1]: ⁴¹ Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. Luke 2:41 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ¹³ "Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD's anger that burns against us because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us." 2 Kings 22:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ³² "As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm--when he comes and prays toward this temple, ³³ then hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name. 2 Chronicles 6:32-33 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: ²⁰ The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" John 2:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: ¹⁶ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Matthew 2:16 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: ¹ Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Romans 13:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: ⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." Isaiah 56:7 (NIV)

in the market place. The vendors got rich, and the priests made a killing. (No pun intended.) The exchange rates were unbelievable. A man could make a days wage on an exchange. God is not against business, but this was robbery in the name of religion. If you wanted to keep the Law and please God, you had to make these comen, called priests, rich. Yes, it still goes on today in some settings.

In addition to all that, people had been using this courtyard as a short cut from one side of town to the other. Between the vendors all hawking their animals and exchange rates and all the traffic, you would have a pretty tough time entering into a prayerful attitude.

The very first year of Jesus' ministry, He did something about it. He drove them out. (John 2:14-15) The fact that no one stopped Him makes me think the people approved. They were tired of being robbed. No one else was bold enough to do what He did because no one wanted to be on the bad side of these religious leaders. They could make one's life very miserable.

Apparently, the second year of Jesus' ministry the scam had not been restored. But our passage today is in the third and last visit of Jesus' ministry to the Temple for Passover. I believe this played a big role in their decision to have Him executed. They started up their lucrative ways again, and Jesus chased them out again.

¹²Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. ¹³"It is written," he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'" Combining Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11, Jesus told them God's intended purpose and minced no words in telling them what they were doing. He acted like He owned the place. He does! His heart was a heart for the world to know God as Solomon prayed a thousand years earlier.

Instead of going point by point through the rest of the passage, I want us to focus on God's intention for us. Today, we realize that we are the Temple of the living God, corporately and individually. (1 Corinthians 6:19) It is not this building or any structure, the temple is the living stones that Jesus has assembled into His house. Our outer court is our physical body that comes in contact with the world. That Temple in Jerusalem was a picture of us as believers. When the world sees us, it should not be looking at people motivated by selfishness; it should be looking at a house of prayer. When people look at us as individuals, their impression should not be what great merchants or businessmen and women we are, but what a house of prayer we are. That prayer should overflow onto and into their lives drawing them to know the true God. I often ask people, "Can I pray for you?" and rarely get turned down. Maybe they do not realize I am going to pray for them right then and there. But once you do, it is almost always appreciated. People need God, and most know it.

Why is it that we tend to end up as busy as the outer court of the Temple of Jesus' day? What drives us to this insane pace with constant noise? One of the most difficult disciplines in our walk with the Lord is our time of stillness in His presence. By that I do not only mean a time of meditation. It can happen as you read the

Commented [notes8]: ¹⁴ In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵ So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.
John 2:14-15 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: ¹⁹ Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 1 Corinthians 6:19 (NIV)

word or as you sing a worship song. I do not have a problem finding time to read and study my Bible, journal, even pray for others, but the constant struggle for me is actively listening to the Lord. (Psalm 46:10) How many of you know what I am talking about? I was thinking about this life long struggle and the Lord showed me a few things that are helping me and I think might help you too.

Commented [notes10]: ¹⁰ "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."
Psalms 46:10 (NIV)

This was my question, "Why do I tend to miss time in the Presence?" I have to explain what I mean by the Presence with a capital p. We know that God is always with us. He is everywhere at all times. We know that if we are born again, He lives in our heart. We are always in His presence. But if I am still, if I tune my spirit to His channel, and tune out the world, and if I say like Samuel, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening", (1 Samuel 3:10) then I find myself aware that He surrounds me and fills me. My thoughts turn from the world and focus on what He would say to me. I run out of requests and wait for His requests. I find myself in the Presence of the Living God. I become aware of His love. Just preparing this and writing about it, I found myself there. I want to hear Him. I want to stir up a hunger and thirst for righteousness. (Matthew 5:6) I want to respond to whatever He would speak to my heart. This is where I find inspiration, conviction, and direction.

Commented [notes11]: ¹⁰ The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."
1 Samuel 3:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: ⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Matthew 5:6 (NIV)

Without it I am kind of on autopilot. I know what I need to do and I just set about doing what I think I am supposed to do the way I think best. I am not much of an invitation for others to know God. But in His presence, I get new direction. My priorities are changed. I get inspiration for better ways to go about my God given direction or a better attitude for what lies before me. I am a better testimony to those I come in contact with which in turn invites them to know God. That was the main reason the outer court was to be a house of prayer, to draw the world into a relationship with the living God.

I believe that when the Bible tells us that Enoch and Noah walked with God it is referring this kind of an interaction on a continual basis. (Genesis 5:24) That kind of a life creates a hunger in the hearts of those that witness it. Doesn't it have that affect on you? When you meet someone overflowing with the fruits of the Spirit, doesn't it make you want to get more serious about your own relationship with Jesus? It gives us a holy jealousy for a deeper walk.

Commented [notes13]: ²⁴ And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.
Genesis 5:24 (KJV)

If it is so wonderful being in His Presence is, why do we tend to miss time in the Presence? Here are the reasons the Lord showed me. The first one is that we do not fully realize our need. That is a by-product of pride. Oh, in my head I know without Him I can do nothing, (John 15:5) but do I really believe it in my heart? If we really believe that, we would never miss our time of being still before Him. But what actually happens? We get up, start thinking of all the things that must be accomplished this day, and before we know it we are digging in trying to knock off each line of our to-do list. Our actions declare that we really believe, "If it is to be, it is up to me!" (Isaiah 29:13)

Commented [notes14]: ⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.
John 15:5 (NIV)

A great man of God once said that he had so much to do that he had to spend twice his normal time in prayer. He believed that hearing from God is the way to get things done. We act upon what we truly believe in our heart. We need to be

Commented [notes15]: ¹³ The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.
Isaiah 29:13 (NIV)

convinced in our heart that hearing from God is more fruitful than all our busyness. (Proverbs 16:9)

Commented [notes16]: In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps. Proverbs 16:9 (NIV)

I have to humble myself and realize that though I may perform and things may look like they are getting accomplished, I will never have lasting fruit without following God's direction. (John 15:16) I am not the great, all productive person I have convinced myself to be. If I am His house, then I am a house of prayer, not a factory or assembly line.

Commented [notes17]: ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. John 15:16 (NIV)

I rarely miss breakfast. How about you? That is because we believe we need it and we enjoy it. It is also because we are hungry. Do we believe we need time in God's presence? Are we hungry for the living word of God? If we really are, we will rarely miss a morning in His presence. If that is not the case, we have to ask if we are fooling ourselves.

The next point, closely related to the first is our busyness. What a world we live in today. We run from this place to the next, one appointment to another. We even jet from city to city, watches on our wrist remind us of the passing seconds. Being still is not a part of the world today, but neither are we! (1 Peter 2:11) We get sucked into the world's busyness and think we are more productive if we are on the cell phone while we are driving, while we are listening to a seminar on CD, on our way another appointment and our laptop is with us just in case we get stuck in the waiting room. Busyness is not necessarily productive.

Commented [notes18]: ¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 1 Peter 2:11 (NIV)

We get so caught up in it that we can not imagine being still. Yet, that is what God commands. (Habakkuk 2:20) I have found that being still makes times of action much more productive. If I am busy, I avoid conviction. I avoid responsibilities of sacrifice. It becomes all about me. See Paul run. See Paul accomplish. Paul is important... If I am a house of prayer, I am not frantically running around trying to accomplish things. One thing you will notice in Scripture is that those who are out of God's will hide from the presence of God. (Genesis 3:8) Those seeking to do His will seek His presence. (Exodus 33:15)

Commented [notes19]: ²⁰ But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him." Habakkuk 2:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. Genesis 3:8 (KJV)

Commented [notes21]: ¹⁵ Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. Exodus 33:15 (NIV)

Being still is a concerted effort. It is much easier to fall into busyness. It seems like it would be the other way around. It shows that too much of the time we rely on our own strength. Many times I believe we are unconsciously aware of some area in which we are not right with God so we get busy. We avoid God. (Psalm 10:4)

Commented [notes22]: ⁴ The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. Psalms 10:4 (KJV)

Commented [notes23]: ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. John 15:4 (NIV)

There is one more reason it is so difficult to be still. The enemy of your soul will do anything to distract you from hearing from God. If hearing from God makes us productive and effective for the kingdom of God, imagine how Satan will try to distract you from it. That is the last place he wants you to be. It is where you become fruitful. (John 15:4) He hates that. If he can just get you spinning your wheels, doing things in your own strength, thinking you are doing well when you are accomplishing nothing, he is as happy as can be. But when you fall to your knees in prayer, when you are what the Lord called you to be, a house of prayer, Satan trembles. It should be no surprise then that when you start to pray, every thought of what you need to do pops into your head. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5) Here is a helpful suggestion. Keep a

Commented [notes24]: ³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 (NIV)

paper and pencil with you. When that happens, jot down the thing you need to do and keep praying. That gets it off your mind for the moment. Recognize what the enemy is trying to do and persevere until you hear from God. Every day we should have some impression of what God is speaking to us. (Job 23:12)

If you know you need it, and you know it makes you fruitful, and you know it will help you grow spiritually, why in the world would you not make it a part of your every day? In the presence of the Lord is fullness of joy. Why wouldn't we want that? (Psalms 16:11) Here is a little acrostic to help you remember why taking time in God's presence is wisdom.

W – Without Him, I can do nothing (John 15:5)

I – I have been Invited by my Creator to spend time with Him (Matthew 6:6)

S - Servants need instructions (Psalms 123:2)

D – Daily bread is a necessity (Matthew 4:4)

O – Only Jesus can satisfy my heart (Psalms 103:5)

M – My fruitfulness in life depends on time with Him (Philippians 1:11)

Will you believe this message and get alone with Him every day? It is the most difficult habit in life to develop because of the reasons I have mentioned. It is also the most productive habit you can develop in your spiritual life. What will you do to see that you take the effort to spend time with your heavenly Father? In Colossians 1:28 Paul declared the desire of teaching elders, "to present everyone perfect in Christ." It's to that end that I share this message today with you. It is of major importance to your spiritual growth.

When Jesus chased all that commotion out of the Temple, He was telling us something. He was saying, "I hate all this stuff that distracts you from being with me. I want to spend time with you!" Do you think He was serious about it? He desires to be with you that much! What have you done about it? Are you a house of prayer or a den of thieves? Or are you just an empty house of busyness, running around accomplishing nothing. Your Savior longs to spend time with you. How can we not long to spend time with Him?

Some passages about the presence of the Lord:

Genesis 3:8; 4:16

Exodus 33:14-15

2 Kings 13:23

1 Chronicles 16:27, 33

2 Chronicles 20:9

Job 1:12; 2:7

Psalms 16:11; 31:20; 51:11; 68:2,8;
95:2; 97:5; 100:2; 139:7; 140:13

Isaiah 63:9

Jeremiah 5:22

Jonah 1:3

Zephaniah 1:7

Luke 1:19

Acts 3:19

1 Corinthians 1:29

Hebrews 9:24

Jude 1:24

Commented [notes25]: ¹² Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food. Job 23:12 (KJV)

Commented [notes26]: ¹¹ You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. Psalms 16:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes27]: ⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes28]: ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. Matthew 6:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes29]: ² As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he shows us his mercy. Psalms 123:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes30]: ⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Matthew 4:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes31]: ⁵ who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. Psalms 103:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes32]: ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God. Philippians 1:11 (NIV)

