

Sermon Title: **“Foundations: *House of Prayer*”**

Series: *Learn, Live, Lead*

Speaker: Pastor Damian Mericka

Text: Matthew 21:12-14

Introduction



“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.” -Acts 13:2-3. In Christ it is never goodbye but *see you later*. Transitions are hard, but at the Spirit’s leading, they can also be fruitful for the Kingdom and Glory of Jesus Christ. This world is not our home, we in Christ are here to take all of Jesus into all the world. Together, we **learn** from Jesus, **live** like Jesus, and **lead** to Jesus. **Foundations** is a final series of messages from my heart, as your Pastor, to you and the continuing ministry of Cornerstone

Chapel. May the lamppost shine brighter and stronger for the Glory of Jesus Christ, His Spirit pouring out in greater stride. *And above all, through fasting and prayer, let us be the Body we are purchased, resourced, and called to be- All of Jesus for all the world- beginning with each of us!*

I. The Heart of the Builder (Matthew 21:12-14)

“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. He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.” And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them.”

-Matthew 21:12-14 ESV

During Jesus final week, He holds nothing back. There is something about those moments when you know you are on your way out, that there is boldness to be brutally honest. I have jokingly referred to such times as a *U-Haul moment*. Even in love, there is the reality that you can lose your job for being honest. *Or in Jesus’ case, His life!*

There is something very powerful in Jesus’ declaration of *My house shall be called a house of prayer*. Yet, before we look closer at this, I want to note his words, *It is written*. This means what He is both saying and doing have shown up before in the Bible. In fact, when Jesus says stuff like this, He wants us to take note- *He is about to illustrate God’s heart to us* in ways a Father does His children. In fact, these words Jesus is both speaking and illustrating find their origin 700 years before this moment in the Temple.

The Prophet Isaiah wrote,

*“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, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—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.**”* The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, *“I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.”* **-Isaiah**

56:6-8

This was the vision God had for what the Tabernacle and future Temple(s) represented; what that physical structure was a shadowed illustration of. The building would not *house* God but provide a place for God and His people to interact- to be filled with Him and overflow into each others lives. Everyone could pray and worship God on their own; but there was a special intimacy and experience when all of the children come together to break bread, pray, and worship together at God’s Table as family.

Yet, even 700 years before Jesus, this was not happening. *Why not?*

“All you beasts of the field, come to devour— all you beasts in the forest. His watchmen are blind; they are all without knowledge; they are all silent dogs; they cannot bark, dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber. The dogs have a mighty appetite; they never have enough. But they are shepherds who have no understanding; they have all turned to their own way, each to his own gain, one and all. “Come,” they say, “let me get wine; let us fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow will be like this day, great beyond measure.” **-Isaiah 56:9-12**

Starting with leadership and flowing downward was a self-focus. They had God’s Word but were not *gripped* and *transformed* by it. *They had His ear* but grew tired of praying, preferring to be the author of their own lives. *They had His eye*, yet cared not how they neglected Him and each other- He saw their empty place at His Table, and the neglected family and neighbors around them. *They Had His promises, His strength, His purposes-* yet they could not be bothered beyond their own interests- everything God was led them to a place of entitlement which in turn closed the door to others hungry to take God up at His invitation.

The problem was the Temple leaders and those that gathered to worship at the Temple. It had become a religion with a building; a duty done only when it was convenient and of benefit to themselves personally. And yet, while it may have become this for the people, ***it never became this for God.*** It was never about a building, nor a religion. It was about God regaining what He created to have- those in His Image sharing in His Person and Presence. It was about God ***with us, in us, and through us*** blessing out into all His Creation. And it was always about accomplishing this through His Son, Jesus.

So, if those invited to God’s Table refuse to come and make excuse, does God sit and wallow in misery and self-pity?

“When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, ‘Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!’ But he said to him, ‘A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.’ And the servant said, ‘Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’ And the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.’” -Luke 14:15-24

Dear saint, every seat at our God’s Table will have an occupant. Each seat came at the cost of His Son’s death on the cross- *blood spilled to purchase what we are newly adopted, named, clothed, and seated into when we embrace Jesus’ work on the cross by faith for our lives.* And it is in this House there is prayer- fellowship between us and God. God filling us and overflowing into each other and beyond, seeing His Kingdom come into this world supernaturally one heart at a time.

Jesus drove out those who made it about themselves in order for those who longed for Him to come in. Driving them out, *the blind and lame came in* and Jesus healed each and every one of them. Note Matthew says Jesus overturned those who sold *pigeons*- this was the sacrifice the poor could offer so they could be included. It was the poor who had their poverty thrown back at them with exclusion- *for the blind and lame could not afford a Temple pigeon.*

“He said also to the man who had invited him, ‘When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.’” -Luke 14:12-14

Thank you Jesus- for I, Damian was the poor, crippled, lame, and blind sinner Jesus made a way for! I could never repay Him for what He has done for me! And in this house of those saved and healed, those seen and heard by God- they prayed- for this was a House of Prayer.

II. New Building Materials

“When the house was built, it was with stone prepared at the quarry, so that neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron was heard in the house while it was being built.” -1 Kings 6:7

Solomon, King David’s son, gifted with incredible wisdom, orchestrates with intricate precision the construction of the Temple. Partnering with relationships his dad had established as king, along with organizing a rotation of specialized work forces and physical labor, all hands

participated in the preparation of the materials. Yet, when it was time to come together, no tool was to be heard as each piece came together, forming the symbolism of God dwelling and communing with humanity once again.

While this may seem incredible, this is of a small measure in light of the Temple God is building today through His Son, by His Spirit! Peter writes that this same off-site work is being done in our lives through the Sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit,

“So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.” -1 Peter 2:1-3

When we submit to this refining work of the Holy Spirit, in Christ we are brought together as His Body, the Local Church - each fitting perfectly in your God shaped place in His family, work, and Kingdom. Peter continues,

“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 2:4-6

Everything God was doing in and through the Nation of Israel leads into this incredible work that you and I are a part of in Jesus Christ!

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” -1 Peter 2:9-10

And this work is not done yet. There are still people yet to hear and respond to the call of Christ- those needing His Saving, Healing, Delivering, Transforming power in their lives! There are still more living stones needing to be shaped and fill the slots of God's House. Only when this is completed- every stone together in Him, will the vision of John come to pass,

*“And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.”
-Revelation 21:22*

Dear Saints, we are not there yet. ***We need to stop living as if we are.*** Often, if we find ourselves not fitting in, the question isn't first what is wrong with the church, but is there more the Spirit is trying to do in my life-my spouse-my children? Am I more focused on my-self, my needs, my perception of priorities more than Jesus'? Again, how is our walk with Christ? How is our Bible time, prayer time, community time- how is our witness for Christ today?

We- you and me in Christ- you and your spouse in Christ- you and your children in Christ- are the building materials of the Temple God is building. ***Where are you?***

III. A House of Prayer

“But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.” -1 Corinthians 11:17-22

Then Paul randomly goes into talking about Communion, or the Eucharist. *Weird!* Back on topic, Damian! (stay on target- turn off our targeting systems and be Spirit led! <-Ha!)

One such local church in New Testament times was that in the city of Corinth. They stood poised to have an incredible impact for the Kingdom of God in that vibrant, metropolitan city. Yet, the potential would never be their reality if their gatherings were times of division- arguing and overindulging. Even those in Christ face the danger of succumbing to the self-focus the Temple leaders Jesus drove out, as well as the Temple leaders and congregation of Isaiah's day.

Divisions and *factions* here in the Greek are like a snowball effect upon the local church. It is when one is not happy, cracks occur within them. When we do not seek to resolve, it continues to grow with more cracks. We invite others into our problems, gaining a community within the local church. As more come together, more look for the reasons to feed the issues until a schism occurs from the inside out.

Jesus said it like this,

“No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made.” -Mark 9:16

The patch is the person with a grievance, and the many loops of stitching are the others who have joined their grievance and the issues pulling and tearing at them until the garment is torn. The condition worse than what originally needed patched.

Why does God- and further, why should we- have a problem with this state of worship?

Because it clogs the flow of God into us and limits His overflowing through us. It prevents those who need Jesus from finding Him and coming to Him. The power and authority found in Jesus ceases to be exercised and demonstrated when congregations pull their hand out of His, making things about themselves more than Jesus. *We must, we must, we must* keep Jesus at the center of it all! He is our foundation, our Chief Cornerstone we are being built upon!

To get back to the passion we had in Christ, to renew in His strength for the mission field in front of us, let us once again lay hold to our greatest and chief role as a local church- that of prayer! Paul laid such a charge on Timothy, to set such an updraft example for the entire body of living stones coming together as the local church in Ephesus- to make prayer the greatest priority.

*“First of all, then, I urge that **supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings** be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling” -1 Timothy 2:1-8*

As we gather as the living stones of Christ's Body, the Temple God is building, we pray! We pray with:

Supplications, which is seeking God to meet our needs, affirming He truly is the source of all that is Good in and through our lives. Our daily bread to overflow to not only meet our needs but to share and meet the needs of others.

Prayers here in the Greek means to gather as a community, to stir one another and focus our eyes upon our source of life- Jesus. This is to gather as family and experience all that Jesus has for us- we pray together, laying on of hands, anointing with oil- petitioning the continuing Saving, Healing, Delivering, Transforming work of Jesus for our lives. It is this same word Jesus uses to describe His Father's house- the place where we gather to focus on and experience Him together!

Intercessions is leaning into each other's lives with God's Will- a strengthening and renewing of faith within each other for God's Kingdom to continue to overflow into our world. It is seeing what is lost become redeemed- marriages, families, communities, nations- Paul would use this word again in **1 Timothy 4:5**, *“For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.”* God chooses to work through our prayers!

Thanksgiving here is *eucharistia*, where we get our term **eucharist** from. It is here Paul tells the Corinthians, is where we can repent and return to experience Jesus at the center of it all! Remembering that we are all sinners- *the poor, crippled, lame, and blind sinner Jesus made a way for! Those whom His servants sought out in the furthest reaches of the gutter. I could never repay Him for what He has done for me- and from this place of gratitude my entire posture takes position, my heart realigns in shape, and my attitude toward my brothers and sisters recalibrates- all in Him!*

Today, Cornerstone Chapel, let us return to make this place, this house, a House of Prayer. Let us be His Living stones, connect to each other, and lift our supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving to the Glory of Jesus, our Chief Cornerstone, in and through us! Come back to church...come back and be *the House of Prayer!*