

God's Name for Us



By Dave Butts

The prayer meeting was to begin at 7:00 pm. So why were people lined up on the sidewalk at 5:00 pm waiting for the doors to the church to open? I couldn't believe my eyes. It was a cold December in Brooklyn, New York, and people were huddled together waiting to come into a prayer meeting. That had not been the case in my previous church prayer meeting experiences! But it was Tuesday night at Brooklyn Tabernacle and it was time to pray.

By 7:00 pm the building was filled to overflowing capacity. The next two hours were filled with amazing times of worship and prayer.

That night was not an exception, but the norm at Brooklyn Tab. Every Tuesday, the Brooklyn Tabernacle congregation models a wonderful way for a church to gather in prayer. The power of God is poured out as the people of God seek Him together in prayer.

Choosing a Name

The choosing of a name is very important. We all know parents who agonize over what to name their new baby. Communities often have many meetings and long discussions over how to name

a new facility in their town. Biblically, the choosing of a name often gave special significance or meaning to a person or place. The name was so important, that when there was a change in circumstances, it often meant a name change was necessary.

In Genesis 28, Jacob had an amazing encounter with God in a dream. When he awakened, he renamed the place. "He called the place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz" (Genesis 28:19). Both Jacob and his father Abraham had name changes given by God. In Genesis 17:5, Abram is changed to Abraham and in Genesis 35:10, Jacob becomes Israel.

Any name is important, regardless of who gives it. But there is special significance when God Himself steps in to name someone or something. That would be especially true when God names something that is particularly close to His heart.

House of Prayer

The Bible tell us that God has chosen a name for His own house. In Isaiah 56:7, the Lord says, "These will I 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" (emphasis added).

This straightforward naming of the house of God (House of Prayer) is simply a clarifying of what God had already declared concerning His house. In the amazing encounter that Solomon had with God at the dedication of the Temple, God made it clear that this was to be a place of prayer. Solomon prayed in 2 Chronicles 6:40, "Now, my God, may your eyes be open and your ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place." God's response in 2 Chronicles 7:15 is a resounding "YES" to that request.

Of great importance to us is the fact that Jesus took this

naming seriously. Three of the gospel writers mentioned that Jesus quoted it and all four recorded the cleansing of the Temple where Jesus referred back to His Father's words (Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46; John 2:17). The fact that the Father's house was to be a house of prayer for all nations was so central to God's plan on earth that Jesus responded to Israel's failure in regard to this with a rare display of godly anger. Evidently Jesus believed that the people who were a part of God's house should live in accordance with the naming of the house.

This becomes especially relevant to us when we understand that God's house was not in any way limited to the Temple in Jerusalem. God's house existed long before the Temple or its predecessor, the Tabernacle of Moses. And it exists even now and will continue when this age is over and earth ceases to exist in its current form. It is an eternal house and is forever a place of communion with God.

The Bible is filled with references to God's house. As you read through these it becomes very clear that His house has never been limited to a building. The building was an important visual illustration of what it means to draw near to God and to dwell in His presence. Even at the dedication of the first Temple, Solomon realized this fact as he prayed, "But will God really dwell on earth with humans? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (2 Chronicles 6:18).

As we begin to understand that the Church today, both corporately and individually, is God's house, it is critical that we comprehend what it means to live in or be a house that has been named by God as a house of prayer.

Paul made it clear that we are God's house in Ephesians 2:21-22, "In [Jesus] the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God

lives by his Spirit.”

Paul really emphasized this fact to the Corinthian church:

- “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst?” (1 Corinthians 3:16)
- “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?” (1 Corinthians 6:19)
- “For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.’” (2 Corinthians 6:16)

Peter continues this teaching in 1 Peter 2:5, “you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood.” The Apostle John records the words of Jesus in Revelation 3:12: “The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God.” In the Gospel of John we hear Jesus say to us: “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them” (John 14:23). Can there be any doubt that the Church is the house of God?

Birthday of the Church

We often call Pentecost the birthday of the Church. Have you considered the correlation between the events of that day and the day when the first Temple was dedicated? As Solomon stood before the people and finished praying his great prayer of dedication, there came from heaven what we often call the Shekinah glory of God. Fire fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifices and the glory of the presence of the Lord filled the temple. It was clear . . . God had come to His house!

On the day of Pentecost as the disciples gathered to pray, God

once again dedicated His house. Again, fire fell from heaven. This time the fire didn't come to a building, but instead separated and came over the heads of the believers. A new temple was dedicated! And you are that temple. God's house is now His people, both when we are gathered in assemblies as well as individually. What hasn't changed is the name. God's house is still a house of prayer for all nations.

Can I press in on this a bit? It's too important to let go. There is much discussion and controversy today regarding the nature of the Church. Missional, emergent, post-Christian, simple church, post-modern . . . the list goes on in our attempt to define and describe the Church in these changing times. Where in the midst of the discussions are the leaders who are asking the Lord what He is calling His Church to be in these days?

Could it be that the answer is almost too simple? What if the Lord is saying to us today that we are trying too hard to figure out something that has already been set before us? Catch the beauty of this. The Father has named His house a house of prayer for all nations. When we grab hold of this, it transcends the changing of cultures. We are a praying people. Praying people who walk in intimacy with God will change whatever culture in which they find themselves.

It isn't that other issues are not important. They are. But when we line things up in God's order, everything else begins to fall into place. It's sort of like making sure you button your shirt from the top down, making sure you don't miss one button hole. Making the Church a house of prayer for all nations is buttoning your top button.

When it comes right down to it, it's not a matter for debate. The owner of the house gets to name the house. God has clearly, unequivocally named His house a house of prayer. Our job is to figure out what that means and do it!

Points to Ponder

If God clearly gave His house the name “House of Prayer,” what does that mean for your church?

Is your church a picture of that name?

Where is prayer strong, and where is it weak in your fellowship?

How can you better be a house of prayer?

Dave Butts is the president of *Harvest Prayer Ministries*. This article is taken from Dave’s new book, *Forgotten Power: A Simple Theology for a Praying Church*, a book that needs to be read by every pastor, elder and church leader.