



Sermon – April 18, 2021
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered This Week

Luke 19:45 – 48

Jeremiah 7:11

Isaiah 56:7

As you grab your seats, let me invite you to grab your Bibles. We're going to be in Luke chapter 19 this morning. Luke 19. And didn't y'all enjoy hearing our Hispanic Ministry lead the worship this morning? I just wish they could have a little more energy up here on the stage, right? I love it! It's fantastic. Really enjoyed that experience.

We're going to be turning our attention back to Colossians next week. But before we jump back there, I want to welcome our guests with us this morning. We're so glad you're here. The Bible teaches that when two or three are gathered in Jesus' name, He is here with us. And that means that He is gathered with us together as we open His word. And as we saw last week in our installation service, we were making a commitment, one to another, about this next chapter. And this morning, before we turn our attention back to Colossians, I want to bring before you one of the deep burdens of my heart as your pastor as we begin this next season of ministry together following that installation service. So back just a few weeks ago, we had our men's study. And I had the guys that were there, about 50 or more, fill out a card. And on the front side of the card I just asked them a simple question. What's one thing that if it started happening in the life of your home would change the spiritual atmosphere in your home? What's that one game-changer for you? They took a minute and wrote that item down. Then I asked them to flip over the card and to answer a second question. If you had to rate yourself and your family on how that particular item is going in your home, what would it be? On a scale from 1 to 10. You pick anywhere in between in terms of how it's going in that area that you identified could be a significant spiritual game-changer. And here's something interesting that emerged that morning. There was one subject above all the others that was most commonly written down on the cards as a necessary item to spiritual health in the home. But then when I turned over the backside of those cards after I collected them up, yes, there were a sprinkling of 7's and 8's and 9's that were there on the 1 to 10 scale. But for most of them, they clustered somewhere in the 3 to 6 range. I had a 1 ½ as a matter of fact. That's like a half step from disaster. So what was it? What was this answer that they put down that was on the one hand so necessary and yet admittedly so neglected? The answer was prayer. Prayer in the life of the home. Prayer in the life of their

own heart. And that's what we're going to spend our time looking at this morning, from Luke 19, is the subject of prayer. Because if there is one thing that I am pleading with God for us as a church in our next chapter as a ministry together is that this church would be a house of prayer. Follow along with me here. It's Luke 19 beginning in verse 45. Let's see what happens in this story.

⁴⁵And Jesus entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, ⁴⁶saying to them, "It is written, My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers." ⁴⁷And He was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy Him, ⁴⁸but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on His words.

Let's pray together.

Father, that's the desire of our heart this morning. We want to hang on your words, Jesus. We want to see You and savor You. We want to have our lives transformed by the power of Your gospel. And we're praying now in this moment that Your Spirit will fill us with a hunger for prayer. The desire to be a people of prayer. A desire as a church to be a house of prayer. And not for our own sake, God. But for Your sake only. And we ask these things in Jesus name. Amen.

I want you to think about what's happening here in this text. We have seen right before this in Luke 19 that Jesus has just entered Jerusalem one final time in the triumphal entry. And He enters into the temple. He gathers here and Luke unpacks the last week of Jesus' life. He takes 20% of his gospel to go through these final days. And what he documents is example after example of controversies that emerged starting right here in the temple. Where when Jesus comes into the temple, it launches a controversy with the religious leaders that will ultimately culminate in the cross of Christ. And here's what we're going to find this morning. When we look at Luke 19, what we're going to see is that it lays out for us two essential factors that need to be true if our church wants to be a house of prayer. And I want you to notice the first one with me in verses 45 and 46. We see first that we need to recognize the centrality of prayer. We need to recognize the centrality of prayer. So think about what's happening here. Jesus had been in this temple many times before. As a matter of fact, He had just come in there the day before following His triumphal entry. But He is back now with a different purpose. Do you see what it is back in verse 45. Why does He enter the temple? It says, He entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold. So He comes not to build up, but in order to drive out. And this word in the original language is the word to cast out or to throw away. It's the exact same word, to drive out, that is used over and over again in the gospels when Jesus casts out demons. Jesus has the authority to vanquish those spiritual enemies from the bodies of humans who they have taken captive. And He shows in this passage He has the spiritual authority to cast out the religious leaders who have taken hostage the temple. And who is it that He drives out? He tells us it's those that sold. The ones who are defined by their activity for God. The ones who had begun to commercialize their faith. Raising 4 boys at home, we love to have a little bit of fun. And so you might find us, every once in a while, on a black Friday shopping day when we had nothing better to do, go out to the malls to shop. And we're not really there to buy much. If we happen to see something that's great, we just want to contribute to the chaos on that Black Friday. And I remember we were out on a Black Friday a few years ago and I passed by one of those kiosks in

the middle of the walkway in the mall. And it had all of these different Christian items available for sale. And one of the things that I found there is it had this whole wall where it had these phrases that tapped into different things for different college with a Bible reference on it. So if you're Alabama Crimson Tide fan, it might say, Jesus bled crimson. Or there was another one, it was up in Nashville so there was another one for the Tennessee Volunteers. It said, Jesus is a volunteer. I remember being here locally one time at a store in town that sells Aggie memorabilia and I saw a shirt that said, Jesus. He had twelve men too. You see that kind of thing all over the place. And when we see that, that's the kind of commercialization of Christianity we think about. But there are often subtler ways that people can make a living off of the faith instead of bringing honor to God. And that's precisely what we see here in this text. These people are those that sold. And what is it they're selling? They're selling those items that were necessary for the sacrifices to be contributed. They were exchanging money because the Roman coins of the realm were not accepted as a temple tax because often they had crude mottos upon them. They had legitimate purposes. I mean, who would want to travel into Jerusalem for miles and miles away trying to corral livestock on the way? It would be far simpler to just purchase it there on location. It makes it easier on everybody. That was the idea. And this was taking place, as we know, at a certain location in the temple complex.

So a few years back when I went to Jerusalem, we got to view the outside, from the outside, the temple complex. And in the outermost portion of it, is the court of the Gentiles. They were unable to enter into the inner courts of the temple. But they would gather there to worship or to pray. And this is where the sales would take place in that time period. And lest you think this was some simple quaint farmers market, think about it more like an H-E-B or a Walmart on Aggie Football weekend. It's just swarming with people. In fact, one historian during the time period said, during this period of time in the Passover, they might sell 250,00 animals for sacrifice in this short period of time. It's bustling. It's active. And Jesus walks into this place and He turns over the tables. He casts out the money changers. He flips everything upside down. Why? The problem was that they had moved from what they were intended to do to what they wanted to do. They had previously been selling goods for the sake of God, now they're selling God for the sake of goods. The activity has taken the place of the intimacy. And isn't that the danger in life? Where our activity for God can be a hindrance to our intimacy with God. That's not just the problem back in this temple complex thousands of years ago. That's something that can show up even today, Central family. That's why we need to have a heart check together as a church. What I love about this church is the amazing amount of activities that are going on throughout the week. We have incredible programs for Preschool up to Legacy Adults. We have things going every day of the week. And if we're not careful, our activity could take the place of our intimacy. And that same danger is true, not just for us as a church, but for each one of us as individuals. That we can get in this rhythm of going through the motion, doing what we ought to do, showing up to this church service, this Bible study, this service project, this missions opportunity. All good in Jesus name. But what benefit does it bring if there is more activity without more intimacy? That's why Jesus confronts these people in this moment. And it's one of the reasons why I was so grateful that our church was able to host that community wide prayer vigil just a couple of Friday nights ago. If you remember, we had a tragic mass shooting in our community on Thursday two weeks ago. The loss of life, the shattering of peace in our community, and in response to that Central was able to host over 250 people in this room. We gathered together twelve of our local churches to help lead us through that. And it's not as if we didn't have anything else going on. There were activities that had to

be cancelled and moved. There were schedules that had to be shifted. But here's what we knew. Our community needed the hope of the gospel. We needed a sense of peace in that moment. And we were willing to do whatever it took to overcome the resistance of our activity so that we could experience the greatness of His intimacy. And if we want to be a church that's centered on prayer, then Jesus is calling us to that same reality. That our activity cannot get in the way of our intimacy if we want to experience the centrality of prayer. So Jesus comes into that temple. He turns over those tables.

But I want you to notice what He does in the aftermath of it. Look back at verse 46. On what basis of authority did Jesus act? He tells them there, it is written. He appeals to God's word. And when He uses God's word, He brings together two verses from the Old Testament. Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. We won't turn there to look at them, but you'll see them on the screen in just a moment. He first quotes Isaiah 56:7 and here's what it says.

[7these 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.](#)

What Isaiah prophesied about the future, Jesus is now declaring in the present. He is saying that the temple, the place of the people of God should be a unique place marked by one singular characteristic. And what is that characteristic according to Jesus? It shouldn't be known as a place of worship, a place of sacrifice, a place of ministry. All those things are good and important things, but what is the one thing, the central thing that Jesus says His house shall be? A house of prayer. A house of prayer. A house of prayer for all peoples. That is the defining characteristic that he lays out there after he turns over the tables. And here's what we need to see today. If we look at the New Testament, we see the way that in 1 Timothy 3:16 Paul speaks about how the church is the temple of God. And in 1 Corinthians chapter 6, we see the way that he speaks about how our bodies are the temple of God. And so if Jesus speaks there in this moment when all these tables are turned over and He says, "My house shall be a house of prayer." Speaking of His temple, then He is giving the same word to our church and to each of us. We are now that temple of God and our lives, our leadership, our community of faith should be centered on one thing. Prayer. Prayer for all people. Prayer for all nations. And that's exactly why you might have noticed if you walked in one of these three back doors here that we had tables set up with some of these packets here. Some of these arm bands here. When we leave today, I want to challenge each one of you families to pick one of these packets up. And each one of you individually to take one of these bands. Because what I'm going to do is invite you to join us in a month-long focus on prayer beginning May 1st. And what we have is this material that's taken from our incredible Faith @ Home center is going to give you all the tools you need to be more intentional in prayer in your own life and in your home life. And in addition to that, we're going to have a way for you to text in your number with the word "prayer" to sign up to a daily text exchange in May where we're going to give you a prayer prompt each morning that we can pray through together as a church. And the reason we're doing that is not because you don't know how to pray, it's not because you don't care about prayer, we know you care. We know that you have some of those tools. But we want to equip you to go even deeper with God. To grow in intimacy. And more than anything, to do it together. Jesus, when He speaks here of prayer, isn't speaking about individuals. He's speaking about His house, His

family, that we are to come together as one. He gives them the picture from Isaiah 56 of what His temple was intended to be.

But right on the back of that, if you look back at verse 46, He also pulls from Jeremiah 7:11. Here's what Jeremiah 7:11 says:

¹¹Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robber in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord.

So the prophet Jeremiah anticipates exactly what happens here with Jesus. Jesus comes into the temple and He sees it. This place has become a den of robbers, of bandits, of thieves. This word robbers is the same exact word if you were going to go back to the story of the good Samaritan. Of those thieves that came along the roadside and beat this person, stole from them. That the good Samaritan later on helped. That's the same word that he uses to describe the religious leaders who sell in the temple. He warns the people that there is a den of robbers in their midst. One of the innovations that's come to light over the last year during this Coronavirus season is the idea of contactless delivery. That you can get what you need without the interaction that we don't always want to have. And I'm just imagining wouldn't the people of Israel back in this time period love to have that kind of setup for this Passover time period? So you're making your pilgrimage on the way to Jerusalem and you just pull up your Uber-Sheep app and you mark out what it is that you need and then they assign you a stall. You can go pick it up. You don't have to see anybody. You don't have to exchange anything. It's just right there in the moment. I even saw this week that Dominoes down in Houston has launched driverless delivery. Where a robotic car will pull up to your house and drop off that pizza and you don't have to have the awkward exchange with the pizza delivery guy. See, the whole idea behind contactless delivery like this is that we get the items we want without the interaction we don't. And here's my fear. We can have the same type of mentality when it comes to prayer with God. We don't want the relationship; we just want the results. We don't want the communion; we just want the conclusions. We don't want the presence of God; we just want the provision of God. And here's the reality. Just as these people in the temple were robbing God through their actions, when we pursue prayer as a transaction where we come to God to get what we want, we can rob God of His glory in our own hearts in just the same way. But what Jesus is showing us here is that from Eden onward, there is a pattern where the people of God gathered in the place of God and used the things of God, not for the glory of God, but for their own gain. It began with forbidden fruit. We see it in the tabernacle. It shows up in the temple and it even exhibits itself right here. But what you need to notice is that when Jesus cleanses the temple, He's giving us a foretaste of what He's about to do for us on the cross. That as He comes in with that authority, He flips over tables, He casts out those who in the name of God are resisting God, He goes to the cross, He dies in our place, He is sacrificed for our sins, and He offers us the free gift of faith. A salvation where when we by the power of the Spirit welcome Him into our hearts, what He does is He comes in and He cleanses the temple. He turns over the rebellion in our hearts. He upends the resistance in our spirit. It's like the author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 9:14, how much more will the blood of Christ who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Have you been to Jesus for that cleansing power? Have you been washed by the blood of the Lamb? You see, Jesus in the first part of this passage is calling us to embrace the centrality of prayer.

But what we'll see now in these final two verses is the second key thing that if Central wants to be a house of prayer must be true about us. Because we're going to find next that He tells us that we need to recognize the cost of prayer. We need to recognize the cost of prayer. That's why we see what happens in verse 47. After He cleanses the temple, look at what it says. And He was teaching daily in the temple. That purification now precedes proclamation. And can you imagine what it would be like? Each day He shows up and the people are wondering, what's He going to do today? Last time He cleansed the temple, what's going to happen now? And you can imagine the intensity, the passion of His teaching as He knows that He is soon headed to the cross. And in the midst of that daily teaching, notice how the leaders react. You see it there later on in verse 47. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeing to destroy Him. See, the religious leaders had one thing right. Jesus was a threat to their power. And when they recognized that threat so clearly, they settle on plans that they must destroy Him. Now this is not a new idea for them. You can look in the gospel of Luke all the way back to Luke 6 and see the way that these leaders begin to plot against Jesus. But for the very first time, right here in Luke 19, we see the true intentions of their heart. To destroy Him, to kill Him, to bring this threat to an end. And here's what I want you to notice with me this morning. Is that when they see the authority of Jesus that comes with His presence, they see the threat that it is and the enemies of Jesus begin to resist the movement of Jesus. Now why does that matter today when we're talking about prayer? Well, here's why. When we recover the concept of the centrality of prayer, make no mistake, it comes at a cost. Prayer is costly. In the same way that the spiritual forces resisted Jesus in this time period, they will resist our pursuit of prayer. Why? Because they know that dependence on God in prayer is the greatest threat to the kingdom of darkness. And so if we are going to take this step together, we need to know that if we want to be a house of prayer, it will cost us something.

I've got some friends in the church, we were talking about Valentine's Day not long ago and they told me this thing that they do that I'm going to protect them because I don't want you to judge them in case you think this is a terrible idea. I think it's brilliant. See, you know most people will go out on Valentine's Day and they'll buy each other cards that they'll pay more money than they should for. It will be read for 30 seconds and then it's thrown in the trash. Maybe not right then but after it sits on the counter for a few days. When the other person's not looking, then it's discarded. So what do they do? They just skip it and they go to the card store together. They walk down the aisle. They both take their turns looking for the card. They select one out that they would buy for them. The other selects one that they would buy for them. They exchange cards in the middle of the aisle. They read each other's cards. They express their appreciation for the warm thoughts that were given in those cards. Then they place those cards back on the shelf and leave. Isn't that brilliant? Think about it. Communication without the cost. Expression without the expense. But there's the same danger when it comes to prayer. That we want communication God but only if it doesn't cost of anything. That we want that expression of God's will, but only if there's no expense to our lives. We need to count the cost if we're going to go on this journey together. Right out here in these doors, behind it, that's our prayer room. And I look on that prayer wall every week when I do to pray on Mondays and I see all of these empty slots that could be open for people to sign up to come and pray here for an hour. And I'm pleading to God that more of you will commit an hour a week to pray in that room for our church. But here's the thing. If you sign up to do that, it's going to cost you. It's going to cost you time. It's going to cost you gas money to be here. We just, on our website, introduced a new digital prayer wall where you can give your prayer requests to God for our

people to lift up on your behalf. But if you take the time to do that, it may cost you vulnerability to put your needs out there and to admit to the world the things you're not perfect in your life. Are you willing to pay that cost? Or you might take that Connect Card that's in the seat back in front of you and on the back of it you can fill out a prayer request that we will lift up for you. But it may cost you something. Because when you ask for us to pray for God's will in your life, it might cost your plans, your dream, your intended future for yourself. And if we're going to do this together, Central, if we are going to pursue being a house of prayer, we need to right now count the costs. There are spiritual enemies lurking around us who hate the idea of our church coming together in prayer. We see it right here in this text when these leaders resist Jesus and we will see it in the weeks and years ahead as we pursue Jesus.

But I want you to notice what happens as this text ends. Because, see, these leaders hatch this plan to destroy Jesus but notice what happens in verse 48. They don't take a step. What happens instead, but they did not find anything they could do. After all their plotting, after all their seeking there was no idea they could execute and why is that the case? I love the way verse 48 ends this chapter. Look at what it says. For all the people were hanging on His words. Hanging on His words. You want to know what it looks like to persevere in prayer? You want to know what it looks like to resist our enemy? You want to know what it looks like to follow God in the pursuit of prayer regardless of what it costs? Verse 48 gives us the answer. The ones who persevere are the ones who hang on His words. It's like an Aggie fan that's gripped by the game. It's like a child that's mesmerized by that new toy. We need to be captivated by God's words. But you know what's even more important than being captivated; of us holding on to His words? We don't need to just be captivated, we need to be captured. Not just that we hold onto His words, but more importantly that His words hold on to us. That no matter what we face in this life, we are saying before God and one another that we will keep pressing on holding to these words. Clinging to these promises as we count the cost of prayer. One of the things that I have observed in my first year of being here is that there are a number of times where people will come to the church and they don't know where something is or they don't know how to get into something. And that happened just about a month ago here in our church where one of our Legacy Adults showed up in the middle of the afternoon and he came to that prayer room in order to pray. It was an afternoon. He had signed up for his time slot. But he couldn't remember the code that you have to enter into our private prayer room where we keep all of our prayer requests. And so he happened to come across some of the people on our team and asked them for help. Well none of them could figure out how it is to get into the room. Well, right next to that private prayer room that's restricted only for those who sign up is a small public prayer room. And I love what this man told our team. He said, "I'll just use this little room over here." Referring to the public prayer room. And the reason, he said, "Is because a locked door won't stop me from meeting with the Lord." That Legacy Adult was a man named Jimmie McDonald. If you don't know Jimmie, he went to be with the Lord just a few weeks ago. As a matter of fact, when he came up here to this church on that afternoon to meet with God, he went home and just a short time later, the Lord called him to his heavenly home. And little did he know that in one of his last public acts on this earth he would go to that room right there and speak to a God who just a short time later he would see face to face.

God desires for our church to be a house of prayer. He wants us to lay it all down before Him. And I'm inviting you to join us in that over this next season. What better way to start that process than to go to the Lord in prayer right now?

Let's bow our heads together. And I want to invite you even as you bow your heads, if you're willing to join me, just commit this time, this season, to the Lord. I'm going to be taking a knee up here at the front. If you have the ability and the willingness to do that right there in your own seat, in your own row, I invite you to kneel with me in a physical expression of the surrender that we are making to God right now.

Father, as we prepare our hearts to respond to You, Lord, we are pleading with You. May our church be a house of prayer. May our people be a people of prayer. May the cares of this world, the anxieties of this life, the uncertainties of the future be things that cause us not to turn away from You, but turn towards You, Father. Lord, may the good things that we do in your name not distract us from the pursuit of You. In Jesus name. May our activity not overwhelm our intimacy. Lord, we're pleading with You in this time, both as we finish this service and as we set our hearts on this next month of intentional prayer together, Lord, we're pleading with You now, do abundantly more than we could ask or imagine. We ask it in Jesus name. Amen.