

Lord, Prepare Me

***Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary
Pure and holy, tried and true
With thanksgiving, I'll be a living
Sanctuary for You***

The chorus above has been a favorite among church worship services since it was written in 1982. At the end of May of 2020, after following recommendations of suspending our church services and providing virtual services for two months, we started public worship services again by meeting in the Fellowship Hall by following the protocols of social distancing and guidelines to meet safely due to the recent Covid-19 outbreak. Recent conversations concerning the return to our church sanctuary has caused me great concern, but not because of Covid-19. Let me first state I fully look forward to the day we return to worship in our church sanctuary. We are blessed with a beautiful place of worship, but will we return with the right focus. The word sanctuary means, “*A place set aside as sacred and holy, especially a place of worship.*” The meaning of this song now becomes, Lord prepare my life to be a sacred and holy place of worship!

I am one who believes that worship takes place wherever the spirit of the Lord is worshipped, His name is praised, and the Holy Spirit is present. It is not based on conditions of a place, personal preferences, the right technology, or a great speaker. God can speak to the heart even in faulty worship services, if we prepare to worship. I have even experienced worship while driving my car. Recent comments such as “I can’t worship because (the seats are uncomfortable, it is too hot/cold, of the technology issues, the message is not feeding me, the songs they sing, etc.)” These complaints were about our church sanctuary but now they have become about our present location in the fellowship hall. One person even joked that worshipping in the Fellowship Hall was like having church in the cafeteria.

Have we made our church sanctuary an idol? Do we truly believe we can tell God “these are my conditions for worship?” The Bible gives us the history of the Israelites’ failures to honor, worship, and follow God, and we are doomed to repeat their mistakes if we don’t repent. In **Isaiah 5 and Jeremiah 5-6** the prophets warn the nation of Judah of their sins and called on them to repent or face the consequences of their rebellion. **Isaiah 5** speaks of their injustice (**vs.7**), greed (**vs.8**), pleasure seeking (**vs.12**), blasphemy (**vs.19**), moral perversion (**vs.20**), pride (**vs.21**), intemperance (**vs.22**), and political corruption (**vs.22**). **Jeremiah 5-6** states the same but adds three more to the list with immorality (**5:7-8**), religious corruption (**5:30-31**), and closed minds (**6:10-11**).

How did the people respond to Jeremiah’s warning? We read in **Jeremiah 7:3-4**, “***This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words and say, ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!’***” The people of Judah believed that God would never allow His Temple (sanctuary) to be destroyed because His Glory resided in there. They had placed their acts of worship and faith in a building. Both prophets called on the people to repent, but in the end they rejected to follow and obey the Lord. Soon thereafter, just as prophesied, the Temple was utterly destroyed and the Israelites were conquered, captured, and scattered by the Babylonian Empire.

There can be no greater ambition for a follower of Christ than to be a living sanctuary. With a true understanding of eternity and the saving grace of Jesus, our life only has real purpose as we live each day to bring Him glory and honor – by living each moment in praise and worship, no matter what circumstances may come. The way we walk through our trials as well as how we accomplish our daily tasks, ministry activities, or times of prayer and study should all be done through a heart devoted to worship. Let’s allow our soul to sing out with praise and worship – not just for a few set hours each week, but every day with every word, thought and deed. Let’s patiently trust Him in all areas of our life (**Proverbs 3:5-6**) and ask our Father to teach us to live as a living sanctuary.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” Romans 12:1 (NIV)

Fight the Good fight,

Bro. Andrew