

Turned Right-side Up

9/17/23

John 2:13-25

Sunday AM

Most of you know I'm a huge baseball fan, especially when Camden is playing. Yet baseball is a difficult sport. In fact, DYK the best players fail 70% of the time – this yr, only (9) players hitting better than .300. and only (4) pitchers have an ERA better than 3.

Recently, I came across a story of a pitcher I found particularly interesting. Arguably, the greatest knuckleball pitcher ever was Hoyt Wilhelm – at least, he was the first knuckleballer ever elected to the Hall of Fame. Yet he didn't start his career as a pitcher but as a hitter. On April 23, 1952, he came to the plate for the 1st time as a hitter – and on the very first pitch he ever saw, he hit a HR over the RF fence. And why was that so unusual? B/c in his (21) seasons, over 432 at-bats – he never hit another HR.

Talk about making a grand entrance. There's no better way to debut in the MLB than to hit a HR in your first at-bat – you couldn't script it any better.

As Jesus entered the Temple courts for the very 1st time as a newly minted Rabbi w/ shemika, He apparently was swinging for the fences – wreaking such havoc, that it goes w/out saying that He left a lasting impression as He began flipping over tables and chasing the moneychangers out of the area. The question is WHY did He do this – what was the point?

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts, He found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So, He made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep/cattle; He scattered the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves, he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then responded to Him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in 3-days." They replied, "It has taken 46-years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in 3-days?" But the temple He had spoken of was His body. After He was raised from the dead, His disciples recalled what He had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words Jesus had spoken. John 2:13-22

As you know, last week we started a series to walk in the footsteps of Jesus to learn how to follow Him. And as I shared last Sunday, the inspiration of this series began a few yrs ago, when I was compelled by the H.S. to strap on my sandals to become the 13th disciple to follow in the footsteps of Jesus as He mentored the 12. Along the way, the Lord has so greatly enriched my walk w/ Him that I had to share it w/ you. Of the many lessons God has used to speak into my life, today was one of the most important for my growth/intimacy.

Of the most sacred places on earth, it's fair to say the Temple Mount on Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem takes the prize as it is home to the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Islam – as well as the most sacred revered location in Judaism/Christianity – where the Jewish Temple housing the Holy of Holies once stood. Of course, for the Jews, since the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 – and the great Diaspora, some 1,897 yrs passed in which the Jews had no access to this most sacred land. But since the 6-Day War in 1967, the Jewish people have gained control over the 37 acres even though today, the Israeli gov. still allows the Muslims to use the Temple Mount b/c of the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Of course, if you were to go there today, you'd find a huge courtyard on the western side of the mount where Jewish Rabbis and citizens are found praying every day, 3-times a day, for the rebuilding of the Temple at what is known as the Western Wall – asking God, "May it be Your will that the Temple be speedily rebuilt in our own time."

In fact, it's well known that for the past 43 yrs, the **Temple Institute** in Jerusalem has been making plans to build the next Temple. All the Temple implements used for worship have been recreated according to the specifications in Exodus/Leviticus. Already priests have been trained, architectural plans have been drawn, and building materials stockpiled for the day when the Jews can rebuild their sacred Temple.

Whenever I ponder this scene, I can't help but think of the (12) and what they must've been thinking. Were they freaked out? Had they thought they'd made a mistake in following Jesus? Were they looking for the closest exit or trying to find a table to hide under? I can't say for sure, but what is certain is Jesus was sending a huge message to all of us.

The key to appreciating this text is understanding the purpose of the Temple in Israeli life. The Temple was central to Jewish life. The Holy of Holies was where *God's glory/presence* was to reside – making it a House of Worship. The Holy Place was where priests offered *sacrifices* – making it a House of *Forgiveness*. The Inner Court/Court of Women were where men/women were called to pray/hear the Scriptures taught – making it a House of *Instruction*. And, the Gentile Court was where God's name was to be shared w/ the nations – making it a House of *Proclamation*.

So, when Jesus arrived that day in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover – He was greatly troubled by what He found going on in the Temple b/c it had drifted so far from the heart/plan of God.

REMINDE – The Passover was the most vital of all the Jewish feasts as it celebrated Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage. If you remember, the Lord told Moses to have the Israelites sacrifice an animal and then paint the blood over the doorpost so that when the death angel passed – the firstborn would be spared.

So, upon His arrival, w/ the city bustling w/ people, Jesus couldn't help but be frustrated by what He was witnessing. Instead of finding a holy place of worship, sacrifice, and G.C., God's Temple had been turned into a den of thieves w/ the outer Gentile court being used exploit/gouge the people for personal gain.

So, in a controlled, holy rage, Jesus began turning over tables and scattering the merchants, *calling the people back to God and to the heart of worship*.

I believe – Jesus was not only sending a message to the people that day, but He was also sending a message of expectation for you/me as His followers. **WHY?**

I **UNCONCERNED** w/ the Presence of God

Obviously, by the fact that the religious leaders were the ones running the Temple – when Jesus arrived, instead of finding a reverence for the Temple, He found it being misused for all the wrong reasons.

Remember – the Temple was to be a place of worship, prayer, sacrifice, instruction, and G.C., yet the Jews were using it as a place to do business b/c they'd lost sight of the presence/mission of God.

I often wonder if we've once again lost the purpose of God's church and the wonder of worship? Or are we treating the Sabbath and God's church as less than God intends by becoming too casual w/ spiritual things?

Let me ask you a dangerous question – why do you go to church? What are you hoping will occur when we gather? And why do we choose the churches we choose? For if our worship is more about us than it is about Him, then we've **become** nothing more than consumers seeking entertainment to gratify ourselves.

A church that can't worship must be entertained, and men who can't lead a church to worship must provide entertainment. *A.W. Tozer*

II UNRESPONSIVE to the Person of God

The reason things had gotten so bad in the Temple was b/c the spiritual leaders of Israel, for the most part, had lost their connection w/ God. There was religion void of relationship – and Jehovah was absent. This was magnified by the reality that the Ark of the Covenant wasn't present in the Holy of Holies in the 2nd Temple.

For the Israelites, this afforded them the opportunity to take an inaccurate view of God. Simply put, they began to see God for who they wanted Him to be instead of for who He really was – hence, they missed Jesus b/c God came to them in a way in which they were not looking for Him to come.

LISTEN – If we're ever to bend our knees/bow our hearts to God, *it'll be b/c we begin to see Him for who He is instead of for who we want Him to be* – and in turn, we'll choose to be CAREFUL w/ His glory.

III UNINTERESTED in the Truth of God

On the whole, when Jesus arrived on the scene, the people had all but forgotten God's Word. It wasn't vital to them. The Torah had become rote and useful for manipulating/controlling the people. As a result, little if any teaching was taking place.

They didn't see God's Word as *a lamp unto their feet and a light unto their paths*. They view it as vaguely helpful yet mostly antiquated/irrelevant. They saw it as a helpful guide of fairytales instead of as imperative Truth essential for life – *sound familiar?*

IV UNRELIABLE w/ the Mission of God

Often missed was the purpose of the Gentile Court (where this incident took place). As the nations came to Jerusalem, they were allowed access to the Temple where the Jews were expected to share the name of Jehovah w/ everyone. Yet, when Jesus entered that day, it was obvious that they had lost their sense of mission/conviction – and the Jews had no concern for the lostness around them.

When God's people lose sight of the mission, they're certain to lose their way. We must never lose sight of the need for the Gospel and our role in living/sharing the hope of Christ w/in us to others. We must never lose our burden for the lost or become unconcerned or dismissive of the spiritual needs of others.

We discussed this last week – what was God's mission in Jesus – it was *to seek and to save the lost*.

Jesus didn't come to be a great teacher, political figure, or conquering hero – He came to be the sacrificial lamb and the Savior of humanity. His plan was to meet every person at the point of their need to meet their greatest need – forgiveness thru salvation by grace thru faith – and then invite them to participate in living and sharing His love/grace to the nations.

The Israelites had lost sight of this purpose.

Instead, they had made life about themselves and their comforts/conveniences – which is the nature of man – to satisfy themselves. Thus, amidst their ambitions, they lost sight of God and His mission.

This brings me to the punchline of this message – and what the H.S. put His finger on in me.

Where is God's Temple today? **1 Corinthians 6:19f** says – *Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the H.S., who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you've been bought at a price. Therefore, honor God w/ your bodies.*

If you've received Christ as your Lord/Savior – you are the place where God's presence now abides. The H.S. dwells in you to accomplish God's work both in and thru you.

IF you're a Christian – you're His Temple and a part of His royal priesthood. Listen to **1 Peter 2:4-6, 9-10**:

As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by humans, but chosen by God and precious to Him. You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering sacrifices acceptable to God thru Christ... You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

This means, like the Temple, we're to be **concerned** w/ His presence, **responsive** to His person, **interested** in His Word, and **reliable** w/ His Mission. We're to be a living sacrifice... holy and pleasing to Him.

I urge you, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God for this is your true and proper worship. Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing, and perfect will. Romans 12:1-2

If your Temple isn't properly aligned w/ His will and Word – don't be surprised if the H.S. begins to turn over tables and drive out what's not of God in you.

Rest assured – God will never give up trying to get your attention to turn your heart towards Him.

Here's what I've learned in my 44 yrs of following Jesus. If God has to bless you to get your attention; He will bless you. If He has to break you to get your attention; He will break you – He'll do whatever it takes, turning over any/every table to disrupt the moments of your everyday life to turn your heart towards Him – but He'll never beg, He'll never barter, and He'll never bully. And yet, He'll never, ever stop pursuing a love relationship w/ you.

Consider the words of God to the prophet Jeremiah:

Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength – whose heart departs from the Lord. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land which is not inhabited. But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked – who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart. I test the mind – even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings. Jeremiah 17:5-10