

“PREPARATION” (ON OUR WAY TO EASTER)

Isaiah 56:1, 6-8; Matthew 24:36-44; John 2:12-16.

The story of Jesus cleansing the temple has always been connected to Jesus' ride into Jerusalem. Not so in John's Gospel. John recalls this outburst at the front-end of Jesus' ministry, immediately following the first miracle at Cana, where He had changed water to wine. This happened suddenly in a family time. He was with His mother and brothers. The gospel is telling us that Jesus was ALWAYS preparing for His cross, right from the very beginning. That, early on, He was making his way to the fullest experience of His work for our salvation. Jesus was single minded in purpose. His life is always our shining example!

You and I cannot prepare for Easter unless we keep Jesus at the center of all that we do. There are only 1 or 2 such religious seasons in our year, and always the outward trappings threaten to take our attention from the inward experience. How can we be truly ready to grasp the meaning of these days? Jesus' experience tells us to **start with the temple of God**, and **get it ready** for the wonder of a witness to the great miracle of redemption's story. How well we know the story:

- *The march to the Passover with His disciples
- *the prayer of agony at Gethsemane,
- *the betrayal and arrest there by his own,
- *the brutal court room and the scourging by the soldiers,
- *the cruel way up Calvary's mountain (the Via Dolorosa),
- *then the nails, one by one, the pounding, the jeers,
- *the anguish as he hung there in such misery and physical suffering, rejected, alone, for each of us...while crying out for their forgiveness
- *then a death and a borrowed tomb...and finally His release

from death, *a defeat that stunned even the most devoted of his followers and still baffles the world today....a **resurrection** from the grave, leaving the death clothes in a pile, emerging a victor over the impossible enemy..... *rejoining His disciples and teaching them to follow Him!

But Jesus started PREPARATION with the Temple of the Lord! He knew the Word of the Lord in Isaiah, *"My salvation is near! My Righteousness will be made crystal clear, and seen by all....because my House shall be called a **House of Prayer** for everyone!"*

As Jesus walked into the temple that day, it was anything but that. There were people working the religious culture of guilt and paybacks in the temple. The priesthood had settled into a moral management role and were so entrenched in the political scene that they had made a nest for themselves, one far better than the people they served, and a far cry from the life of sacrificial concern for them. It is little wonder that these people were hungry for hope, thirsting after righteousness, starving for salvation, because they were essentially without favor in the temple, AND THAT threatened to make them without voice before their God. The land was rich, but the hearts of people were impoverished.

"Start with the temple!" Jesus would tell us today. Don't spend all your time planning for eggs and excitement. Uncover the promise of new life and God's miracles in this day of Resurrection! This is God's day! Come prepared to worship Him, to learn what gives life its true meaning. Come mine for the values that fill our lives with fullness. Start with the temple, your own life!

This story is told so routinely among us, that we miss its power. Jesus seems surprised by abuses of this high day of memory, the Passover, that he reacts in a startling outburst! /Upsetting all the accepted business practices and their tables, /spilling their hard won monies, /scattering their commodities-all this was unacceptable in anybody's code of ethics. /He was only a very young man of no reputation, but he had an expectation from a very pure heart.

How did he get away with such an unseemly outburst? Wasn't it because they heard his accusations, and they knew in their hearts that he was right!

What about our preparation for Easter? Remembering what Jesus said to the moneychangers, is it to revere the House of God? Is it to love the church? They did love their church. It provided for the livelihood of many, it was a center of activity for people who needed time with each other. It gave them a place and a purpose.

It is just that it wasn't God they found there. It was religious and social security, something far less than the joy of a personal relationship with God. They were serving themselves, not serving God! They needed a cleansing of their sacred places, their hearts.

How can we prepare personally for Easter?

This is a call to give your life to the Lord again. Let the Lord come and cleanse your heart. Let Christ show you what is unworthy in your life, His temple. Come honestly seeking. Jesus alone can cleanse the temple.

*Within us all are UNWORTHY MOTIVES.....

..... IMPOSSIBLE PRIORITIES.

..... Choices that do not reflect Christ.

Preparation is a cleansing of the temple of our hearts.

Believe me, the whip of cords could not feel any worse, but the absence of His presence within us would be a far worse burden to bear. When Easter comes, we want to be better prepared to receive His glorious promises than were the temple regulars in Jesus' day.

So let's give ourselves to the Lord again. Here are 3 ways:

1. Be SURE and be PURE. Be sure of what He wants you to be doing right now with your life, and be pure in a single-minded pursuit of it! *I think of the child, Jesus, who stayed behind in the temple debating with the priests, missing the return home with his parents! He was simply going about His Father's business! Nothing could allure Him away from arguing for the truth when it was being wrongly represented right in God's House!*

Be Sure, and Be Purely after what you are sure he wants you to be doing. *It may be a humble ministry within the body of Christ, or it may be to address an injustice that you know exists. It may be about forgiving someone long since overdue in your heart. Whatever it is, He will show it to you with expert clarity, like a refiner's fire! Be sure and be pure. Then be glad He found you worthy to take on this very thing that will bring glory to His Name.*

2. Second, DON'T BE SURPRISED OR COMPROMISED! We are told if we try to do what is right we will be treated like Jesus. The world loved, then hated Jesus. You will

have some opposition, because the cause of goodness and truth is hard, and a self-seeking world doesn't like it when God's people lives like the Master! You become worse than their conscience. Don't be surprised by the opposition and try to run and hide. When you do God's bidding, He will not forsake you. You will have opposition!

And beware of the temptation to compromise. If there is any thing worse than failing, it is pretending to be winning and fooling yourself. The Pharisees in every generation are like the hollow men that Jesus had to fight tooth and nail to bring God to people. They were afraid of losing control, afraid of letting go and trusting God. They were the ultimate losers. Don't be surprised or compromised.

3. Third, and lastly, MAKE A BEE LINE FOR THE CROSS! Jesus knew exactly what His mission was and cut a path unafraid straight for the cross! Charles Spurgeon preaching to 1000's at the turn of the century said, I pick a scripture and make a bee-line straight for the cross. If we don't have the mark of the cross in our lives, we don't have anything of Christ in us!

When Jesus went into the temple, it was likely the week of Passion before He was dragged into court to face His accusers. Jesus tampered with patterns of personal and spiritual comfort! *"But if they had only known what we know,"* we might say! If they had known *that the Lord God was about to unleash His unbridled fury against the enemies of Evil and Death, *that God was about to rend the temple veil that separated us from the Holy, Living Presence of God, *that God was to extend His mercy to cover the sins of all people everywhere, *that HIS

SALVATION WAS COMING NEAR, and *that God's
RIGHTEOUSNESS, the mighty power of His love was truly
about to be seen by all! ***If only they had known!***

But they did know....they just weren't prepared to accept it!

That is why Jesus burst out in angry response. They knew,
but they didn't care enough. They had become too busy.

WE KNOW! And we can prepare now for This great
wonder to fill our lives again with hope!

We get ready for birthdays, anniversaries, for corporate
meetings, even ball games. Let's get our hearts ready by
drawing near to Christ, His Cross, our Redemption, and the
awesome power of His resurrection. Easter is coming soon.

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