**JESUS, LIGHT and DEDICATION**

R. Giglio 12/8/23

*“JESUS AND HANUKKAH” – Modified from an article I wrote in the Courier News a few years ago:*

*As a child, I remember being asked by my friends around December, “Do you celebrate Christmas or celebrate Hanukkah?” It seemed like a sincere, simple question. Maybe because half of my family (my mother’s side) was Jewish, and the other half (my father’s side) was Catholic, they didn’t know which holiday I would celebrate. The truth is, from the time I was 10 years old, I’ve celebrated both holidays.*

*Jesus and Hanukkah, the two are not mutually exclusive. They are more connected than most people think.*

*Jesus was Jewish. He was very Jewish. By that I mean that he grew up in a traditional 1st century Judean Hebrew household. He worshiped at the actual second temple. He was widely considered an established rabbi and teacher of the Torah, even by Nicodemus, a ruling Pharisee in John chapter 3.*

*Jesus also was very observant when it came to Jewish holidays and feasts. He was circumcised on the eight day as required by the law (Luke 2) and celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7). He celebrated Passover as His “Last Supper” (Luke 22) and even directs his Followers to remain in Jerusalem for Shavuot (Pentecost) after He leaves them (Acts 1).*

*But what about Hanukkah? It’s not one of the major feasts put forth in the Torah and there are no references to it in the writings of the Prophets. It’s a feast of dedication, remembering the brave Maccabees who recaptured the temple from Antiochus Epiphanius after it had been taken over and desecrated more than 150 years before Jesus was born.*

*Ancient writings tell us that the eight-day rededication requirement seemed impossible, having only one day’s supply of oil for the temple menorah. Tradition tells us that God miraculously allowed the oil to last the full eight days so that the dedication would be complete. The word “Hanukkah” means dedication and is celebrated each year as the Feast of Dedication or the Festival of Lights.*

*Jesus made sure that He was in Jerusalem during Hanukkah, The Feast of Dedication, as we see in John chapter 10. He did not ignore it, or any of the prescribed Hebrew festivals.*

*During this season, let’s be lights in the midst of darkness. With all the evil, division, oppression and injustice that takes place in this world, it’s important that those who celebrate the lights of this season become the lights IN this season for those around us who desperately need light in their darkness. <>*

My hope for all of us, as we wind down one year and enter into the next, is that we don’t do anything, plan anything, or pursue anything until we first *dedicate* or *rededicate* ourselves fully to God.

*What better time to begin, then HANUKKAH?*

*Hanukkah means DEDICATION*

**Feast of Dedication *(a.k.a. Hanukkah, Festival of Lights)***

* This 8-Day festival commemorates the *re-dedication* of the Temple after it was desecrated in 168BC.
* It is celebrated by the lighting of a Hanukkiah Menorah and telling the story of the miracle of the day’s supply of lamp oil that is said to have miraculously lasted for 8 days*.*
* It’s not a story found in most Bibles, it’s written in the books of 1st and 2nd Maccabees in the Apocrypha. It takes place during the *intertestamental period* (years between the Old Testament and New Testament)

In 167 BC Judea was ruled by Antiochus IV (he called himself *Epiphanes*, which means the manifestation of God) about 150 years after the Greeks conquered this region under *Alexander the Great.*

Antiochus was a ruthless dictator and outlawed the Jewish religion, punishable by death. He captured the Holy Temple and desecrated it, killing its priests and sacrificing a pig on the altar.

A Jewish Zealot by the name of Judah Maccabee and his five brothers started a revolt in an effort to chase the Seleucid/Greek army out of Jerusalem and recapture the temple.

They were miraculously successful even against tremendous odds. They recaptured the temple and rededicated it to the Lord. “Hanukkah” means Dedication.

The miracle of the oil is *not found* in the Hebrew scriptures but *is found* in other ancient writings about this event.

Tradition tells us that the Maccabees only had one day’s supply of oil and needed eight days to dedicated that way *Solomon* initially did it in 2nd Chronicles 7.

We are told that one day’s supply lasted for eight days and they considered it a miracle that should be celebrated every year saying:

*“Nes Gadol Haya Sham*” - *“A great miracle happened there”*

That’s why the Dreidel has the following letters on its four sides: Nun, Gimmel, Hay, Shin. (one representing each word).

*[ Our Family: Lights Menorah for 8 nights, prays specific prayers (Al HaNissim, Ma’oz tzur), We play Dreidel, eat Latkes (oniony potato pancakes) / sufganiyot (jelly doughnuts) , and Kids get presents : ) ]*

Hanukkah is **not** one of the seven annual Hebrew feasts in Lev 23, and is **not** one of the major holidays.

So why should we, as Christians care about this, or any “Jewish” holidays for that matter?

The answer is always very simple…***because Jesus did.***He observed ALL the Holidays!

Jesus was very Jewish as were ALL his apostles. Not only was he Jewish, but he was such an Orthodox (fully-adherent) Jew that:

* He was called upon to speak in the synagogue (Luke 4)
* He was called “Rabbi whom God has sent to teach us” by a well-known Pharisee (Nicodemus in John 3)
* After he was arrested, the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin tried to find any fault with him or His adherence to Jewish law and found nothing. (Mark 14)

What about the apostles? Didn’t they “Jettison their Jewishness” after Pentecost?

No, They were all in Jerusalem for Pentecost (Shavuot) because they were required to be there for the holiday under Jewish law. The Holy Spirit fell in a powerful way on this particular annual Pentecost celebration and they were filled with power and boldness.

But instead of doing away with their Jewishness and starting a separate religion. They continued in their Jewishness having the completion of Messiah and the fulfillment of prophecy (Joel 2) upon them.

In fact, the first thing they did in the chapter after Pentecost (Acts 2), is go right back to the temple to pray, as they normally would (Acts 3)

Even as the church began to grow and expand, and the well-known Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus became a follower of Jesus and a leader in the church, they STILL were considered a “sect” of Judaism.

Remember when Tertullis, the lawyer for the High Priest Ananias was speaking to Felix the Roman Governor? He called the whole movement “A sect of Judaism”, which is what it started out as, long before it was called Christianity.

**Acts 24:5** "We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the *Nazarene sect.”*

We see all through the New Testament that Jewish believers, while no longer bound by the law for *forgiveness of their sins,* continued to honor, observe and measure their seasons according to “Appointed Times”, known as “Hebrew Feasts”. *(Passover, Feast of Tabernacles, etc ...)*

**But what about Hanukkah, why is IT important?**

Hanukkah is not one of the prescribed “feasts of the Lord in the Old Testament. However in John 10, during the Hanukkah celebration in Jerusalem Jesus attends the celebration and while he was there, He made a statement that was probably the most controversial yet profound statement that he spoke up to that point.

**John 10:22-33** **“22**Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, **23**and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon’s Colonnade. **24**The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

**25**Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me, **26**but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. **27**My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. **28**I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. **29**My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. **30**I and the Father are one.”

**31**Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him, **32**but Jesus said to them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?”

**33**“We are not stoning you for any good work,” they replied, “but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.”

John 10:30 ***“I and the Father are one.” !!!***

This single statement ***“I and the Father are one.”*** which he chose to make during Hanukkah, the “festival of lights”, almost got him killed (stoned) on the spot.

What it *did do* was set in motion the plan and the timeclock toward His crucifixion.

The next chapter, *John* ***11*** the Pharisees put the plan in place to kill Jesus.

In *John* ***12*** Jesus rides into Jerusalem openly and publicly on a donkey, essentially giving himself up for the final week of his life before the cross.

This truth about being “one with the Father”, was the very thing that John 1:1 speaks about;

**John 1:1,4,5,9 “**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.  **4**In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. **5**The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. **9**The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.”

This is why it is so appropriate that The Light of the world made His “*Big Reveal”* at his final Hanukkah (also known as festival of lights). He was *one with God* from the very beginning.

*Jesus IS the light of the world!*

**John 8:12** “**I am the light of the world**. The one who follows me will no longer walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life.”

He who was called “the Light of the World” would’ve taken great joy in the Festival of Lights as a celebration of hope and justice against the dark pervasive tyranny that existed in those days.

He told His followers that they themselves were the “light of the world” and should not be hidden away but to be like a lampstand (or menorah) *and “let their light shine before others.”*

**Matthew 5:14-16**“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. **15**Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. **16**In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Jesus was born into a very very dark world. Much darker than ours. It was ruled by **Rome**, The **Herods**, and the **High Priests**.

The brutal Roman Empire had conquered the region in 63BC and placed a cruel dynasty over the region including Herod the Great who was given the title “King of the Jews”. They placed corrupt High Priests in the temple to control the people and extort large sums of money and taxes from anyone who wanted to worship the One True God.

It was so brutal, that even the mention of a baby being born in the kingdom that might possibly be the Messiah, caused Herod to kill all the little boys in Bethlehem 2-yrs-old and under.

That is the type of dark world that Jesus was born into.

Jesus was and is the only light in *our* dark world. Without him there would be nothing but darkness.

***Think about what the world would be like today if Jesus was never born. If Society just got more and more evil every century.***

***Void of love, kindness, compassion, and any kind of goodness.***

***How dark would this world be without Jesus****?*

***ALSO, How dark this world would be without US…***

Jesus shines His light through us!

The prophecies about the Messiah coming into the world, point out how dark the world would be when the Messiah enters into it.

* **Isaiah 60:1-2**
“Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. **2**For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, And deep darkness the people; But the Lord will arise over you, And His glory will be seen upon you.”

***Our logo -***  

When Jesus was born, He was taken by Joseph and Mary to the temple to be dedicated. The *same temple in Jerusalem* that was rescued and rededicated by the Maccabees and consecrated before the Lord.

While they were there they met a very interesting old man named Simeon who was told by God that he would not die until he has seen the Messiah. :

**Luke 2:28-32** **“**Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

**29**“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismissyour servant in peace. **30**For my eyes have seen your **salvation**, **31**which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: **32**a **light** for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.”

Interesting that he said “*For my eyes have seen your salvation*.” Because the name “Jesus” means salvation.

Without Him there is no hope for salvation and our lives are destined for darkness.

Listen to this familiar passage from Isaiah:

**Isaiah 9:2,6** “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.
…For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Hanukkah, the *festival of lights* is the perfect time to ask the *Light of the World* to fill our lives and illuminate that darkness. It’s a perfect time to ***rededicate*** ourselves to God and commit to walking in His light.

As we light the candles of the Feast of *Dedication*, Let’s *dedicate ourselves* to *walking in the light* this coming season so that we can have full fellowship with Him and Each other,

and also,

**let’s *dedicate ourselves* to sharing the light that is within us, through kindness, compassion, generosity, and also speaking the good news of the gospel.**

**Not only with friends and family during the holidays,**

**but with anyone who is walking in spiritual darkness,**

**so they can also share the “good tidings of great joy” of Jesus as well. <>**