

Hardball

“Equipping You to Beware”

I. SCRIPTURE

Matthew 10:16-17a – “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men...”

II. WHY ARE YOU AND TODAY?

Why are you here today? If you are hearing this message today, either you are in our local body today, or you are watching remotely? Chances are very good that you and I have either met in person at some time in our lives, or we have gotten to know each other through someone (or a situation) that is common to us. Many of you know, I am here today and doing what I can each week to serve each of you, because I have come to the realization that my family and I are supposed to be here and do what we are doing for a while, to serve YAHUAH [God] through the GFAN (Gospel for All Nations) network. (I’m not sure if you feel that this a curse or blessing?) As you know, my service to you includes me providing you with weekly bible-based spiritual message every weekend, and during our mid-week service. Often, I am also serving you through a personal spiritual message, through some other interaction that we have together.

III. MY ROLE AS YOUR PASTOR

A “pastor”, by definition, is a “leader of a Christian congregation who also gives advice and counsel to people from the congregation or community”. The bible defines the role of a pastor, in Ephesians 4, this way...

“And [the MESSIAH] Himself gave some *to be* ... pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of MESSIAH [Christ], till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of ELOHIYM [God], to a perfect man [or woman], to the measure of the stature of the fullness of MASHIACH [Christ]; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men [and women]...” (Ephesians 4:11-14a)

Even before “pastoring” the (local and international) GFAN body, I had been called upon by other churches to “pastor” their congregations. Either they had no official pastor, or the official pastor was assigned serve a territory that included more than just one church, and so was spread too thin to pastor the local congregation every week. So, I was called upon, together with my family, to serve their flock. I remember being told by one pastor that it should be easy for me to put together a weekly sermon because there were many “cookie-cutter” sermons available from which I could just choose. I remember that when he told me this, I felt that if YAHUAH [God] wasn’t going to provide me with a special message that He wanted me to deliver to His people that I served, then I would not be the one who was supposed to give them His advice and counsel. For the purpose of His message is to “equip” His saints, to “edify” His body... so that they then... and so that you now might come into a “unity of the faith and of a [personal and loving] knowledge of the Son of ELOHIYM [God]”, until you are “a perfect man [or woman]...”

Even now, while serving the GFAN congregation as its pastor, many times I am asked by individual members of our body to preach about certain topics that were of interest to them. I always listen, but often refused to go there unless YAHUAH [God] directs me there. I do remember two (2) specific requests where He said that I should answer someone’s request: one (1) was a message to celebrate a loved spouse’s birthday, and one (1) was an appeal for the baptism of a loved spouse. For these, YAHUAH [God] gave His permission. When I reflect on these two (2) exceptions, it amazes me that both were for an expression of love between husband and wife. For the other requests, because YAHUAH [God] has yet to fail to supply me with His words to you each and every week, I have not yet been led to entertain the thought.

IV. BASEBALL SEASON

The official national sport of the United States is baseball. This year, the normal baseball season has been postponed because of the Corona virus pestilence outbreak. (Insert: 5.5 Richter scale earthquake this morning in Puerto Rico, US) Each year, the regular baseball season would normally run from late March / early April to late September / early October, followed by the postseason which can run until early November.

Hydie (my wife) and I learned a few years ago that our youngest daughter Rica had both a talent and interest in playing sports, and she had expressed an

interest in learning to play baseball. Approximately 10 million children and adolescents play baseball as part of a team or in backyards each year. While baseball can be a great way for people of all ages to get out and get some exercise, injuries can and do occur:

- More than 110,000 U.S. children younger than 18 years of age are treated each year in emergency departments for baseball-related injuries.
- The most common mechanisms of injury are being hit by the baseball and being hit by the bat.
- The face and the upper extremities (shoulders, arms, hands) are the most commonly injured areas of the body.

When one plays professional baseball, the game uses a very hard baseball and many of the major league pitchers are able to pitch these hardballs faster than 90 miles / 145 kilometers an hour, which seems superhuman to the rest of us. So someone like Rica, who wants to learn to play baseball for the very first time, will usually start by playing a game called T-ball. T-ball is a team sport that is geared toward children, usually between the ages of 4 and 6, that is based on, but simplifies baseball and uses a soft ball. T-ball is intended to develop baseball-game skills and allow very young children to have some fun too. So, in T-ball, instead of having a hardball that is pitched toward them at very fast speeds, these young children will have a larger and softer baseball placed on a Tee, which is a height-adjustable, flexible tube, with a movable base. Since the soft ball is on top of the T, which is stationary, it is easy to hit it with a bat, so that the child can proceed the game's goal of running around three (3) bases, and then eventually, hopefully reach the fourth (4th) home base where they can achieve a home-base score. If they hit the ball hard and far enough, they can even achieve a "home" run, where they are able to run through all three (3) bases and arrive at and score at the final "home" base, once any and all other players on those bases who are ahead of them, arrive at the home base first.

After one masters T-ball, they will lose their tee and playing the game of Softball. And then, eventually exchange they will exchange their soft ball for a hard ball, pitched at the super-human speeds, and place professional baseball.

V. HARDBALL

The word Hardball, besides being a very hard ball that is used in professional baseball – that can sometimes hurt when it hits you – is also a word that is often used to describe spoken words that are challenging, difficult, and outspoken...

As your pastor, I continually pray to YAHUAH [God] that He always supply me with just the right words to speak to you... in each and every forum and context in which they are to spoken to you. Often, I realize, that you are hearing words from Him through me that are His frank, critical opinion of you and your behavior. And for these, I do not apologize... for they are not my words.

Often, you will express to me *your* opinion that the words that He has provided to you are too harsh... that they don't always express a "meek and mild" YAHUSHA [Jesus], and a "warm and fuzzy" RUACH HA'QODESH [Holy Spirit]. Often you will try to debate with me about whether the messages that I deliver to you personally, although they are often delivered to a group of "saints", are theologically inaccurate, or that they are not really intended for you at all. You will sometimes complain that the words coming through GFAN, through me are not like the words that you have heard and liked somewhere else, that were easier on your ears, and on your conscience... that were smoother... more like "easy listening" music on the eardrums, instead of as the "hard rock" you are hearing. And to this criticism, I will respond this way: except for the frailty of *my* human vessel, and in what errors I make in the way I construct *His* message – for which I can apologize – I will tell you that you should rather take your criticism and your complaints to YAHUAH [God] Himself, Who supplies them to me to deliver to you, in the best way I can do that as an imperfect person. And why am I so sure that this advice I am giving to you now is accurate... for you and for this body today? It is because we are told that there are "those [others] who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you [have] learned, and and that we are to avoid them." And who are these others? They are "those who are such do not serve our ADONAI YAHUSHA MESSIAH [Lord Jesus Christ], but their own belly, by smooth words and flattering speech [that is intended to] deceive the hearts of the simple." (Romans 16:17b-18)

As your pastor and friend, I am reminded now of the proverb "better is open rebuke than hidden love. [For] wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies [their] kisses." (Proverbs 27:5-6)

I am reminded, too, that you are no longer to children playing softball, who are being “tossed to and from and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of [others], and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” [you] (Ephesians 4:14)

But instead, you are to be reminded that you are now grown-ups... who need to start learning to playing hardball, to be able to understand the hardness and the speed of the hardballs that are being thrown toward you, so that you are not only able of avoid being hit by them, but that you learn to be able to see each one that approaches, and understand how you can use them to your advantage, to be capable of hitting each and every on of them squarely on and out of the park... so that you can proceed through the bases, and then ultimately make it to the home base where you will score, and you will be cheered on my your team and recognized your trainer, the team Captain. Your trainer: Team Captain? And Who exactly is your team Captain? Is He YAHUSHA [Jesus], the “gentle, meek, and mild” One? Or is he someone else, and is your team a different team than the one that YAHUSHA [Jesus] leads?

VI. YAHUSHA [JESUS]: OUR ROUGH & TOUGH TEAM CAPTAIN & TRAINER

There is a hymn by Charles Wesley, that has a verse that talks about YAHUSHA [Jesus], that describes Him this way:

**“Lamb of God, I look to Thee, Thou shalt my example be;
Thou art gentle, meek, and mild, Thou wast once a little child.”**

And then there’s the hymn, “Once in Royal David’s City”, written by Cecil Frances Alexander that contains this verse:

**And through all
His wondrous childhood,
He would honor and obey,
Love and watch the lowly mother,
In whose gentle arms He lay.
Christian children all should be,
Mild, obedient, good as He.**

These are both very beautiful and appropriate hymns... if you are still on the T-ball team. But after you graduate from the T-ball team, that was geared toward training children between the ages 4 and 6 by-the-way... you need to another

model than the One Who was set up as an example for children. By the time you have gone through and graduated from Softball, remember that you are now playing in the major league. By now your Team Captain is a different role model and trainer. By now you can recall the story of the YAHUSHA [Jesus], Who made a whip and attacked the market traders in the Temple. During this time and event, was He timid, meek, mild, or even obedient to His elders? No! He was not!

And then, by what we little we know YAHUSHA [Jesus]' childhood, don't we remember that story of Him as a boy in Jerusalem? Who stayed behind in the Temple? who was kind a telling His parents off when they came back for Him? Asking them, "where did you expect Me to be?" So, by the time we are experience life in the major league, we sometimes need to forget that Victorian invention of YAHUSHA [Jesus] and remember His other side: not meek and mild, but tough and strong. Yes loving and loyal, but with a real temper at times. A temper that was set-off by hypocrisy... by all who corrupts what is good and holy... Who says that someone who leads the innocent astray would be better off with a mill-stone around their neck and drowned!

Remember, please that YAHUSHA [Jesus], our Team Captain and Trainer, was One Who went around Palestine, a land that was infested with bandits with armed followers. And, there's *no* mention in the Bible of Him and His followers being attacked. Do you recall any such stories? I don't! So, I suspect it is a clear conclusion that YAHUSHA [Jesus] and His friends were not an easy target. That YAHUSHA [Jesus] and His team were the sort of men [and women] that were best to be left alone.

YAHUSHA [Jesus] was a no-nonsense sort of guy. The sort of man... a *leader* that would challenge His team players, men and women, with tough teachings that they didn't like or understand. He was a leader Who after He spoke of His followers as having to eat His flesh and drink His blood in order to stay on His team (John 6:56)... offended them by the truth (John 6:61)... Yes, He offended many of them so much so that they chose to leave Him, giving up their chance for a score at home base, who instead "went back [to their former life] and walked with Him no more" (John 6:66).

Yes, YAHUSHA [Jesus] was a man who saw through lies and half-truths, to get to the truth: good or bad. Yes, YAHUSHA [Jesus] is Someone who won't let me get away with the half-truths. Yes, this is YAHUSHA [Jesus] Who, if you and I stay with Him, will help you and me to uncover all the things that stop us from being

holy like Him... honest like Him... strong like Him... and yes, sometimes even as angry as Him at the injustices in this world... and angry at the holy things that are profaned. And when I allow YAHUSHA [Jesus] to uncover all that I keep hidden, then He allows me to find out even more about Him. It is then, that I learn that He is loving and forgiving.... that He is loyal, even when I am not... that He is the sort of Savior I want to be close to.

VII. CONCLUSION

As you prepare to leave this place, or to finish viewing this video today... I hope that you will accept YAHUSHA [Jesus] and His Truth complete... and to use His discipline... to use His rough and tough love given to you because He is your team Captain and personal Trainer. That you will learn more about Him and His character. For as you get to know Him better, you will be able to recognize others, who do not know Him or belong on His team, for who they really are: those who in all actuality are on the opposite team. They are actually the ones with multiple kisses, who are throwing the hardballs at you... trying to defeat you... trying to keep you from scoring at home base.

We are told by the apostle Paul that Satan and his team are here “with all unrighteous deception among them who [are perishing] because they did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved. And, for this reason [we are told that] YAH [God] will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12)

So today, dear brothers and sister in RUACH [Spirit] and Truth...

I hope and pray that you will use the discipline of our Trainer, our Captain, to learn more about YAHUAH [God]’s Son: YAHUSHA [Jesus]... that you will allow Him to draw you unto Himself... that you will eat of His body and drink of His blood today and going forward, so that you will be able to abide in Him, and be completely healed of all that is wrong inside of you.

Amen.

Credits:

- 1 “Pastor”, Wikipedia
- 2 “Major League Baseball Season”, Wikipedia; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major_League_Baseball_schedule
- 3 “How Are Major League Pitchers Able To Throw So Fast?”, Will Robins, April 6, 2017, Feedster; <https://www.feedster.com/entertainment/how-are-major-league-pitchers-able-to-throw-so-fast/>
- 4 “Baseball-Related Injuries”, Nationwide Childrens’; <https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/research/areas-of-research/center-for-injury-research-and-policy/injury-topics/sports-recreation/baseball-related-injury>
- 5 “Tee-ball”, Wikipedia; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tee-ball>
- 6 “Hardball” definition, dictionary.com; <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/outspoken?s=t>
- 7 “Outspoken” definition, Oxford dictionaries; Bing Translator; <https://www.bing.com/search?q=define%20outspoken&qsn&form=QBRE&sp=-1&pg=define%20outspok&sc=4-14&sk=&cvid=0E18A15527524BA5869559F0AA006615>
- 8 “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild? Really?”, KungFuPreacherMan, March 11, 2012; <https://nigeltuffnell.wordpress.com/2012/03/11/gentle-jesus-meek-and-mild-really/>