

Palm Sunday

3/16/08

Matthew 21:1-11

Opening Gates

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Movement 1

One common misconception is that all of civilization went from stone age to bronze age to iron age to jet age all at the same time. Archeologists tell us this is not true. Stone age and bronze age and iron age civilizations lived beside each other. Advanced civilizations and stone age civilizations still live beside each other even today: witness third world countries. Jerusalem was an iron age city before the nomadic King David conquered it. David and the children of Israel may have conquered the city of Jerusalem, but the iron age culture of Jerusalem conquered David and the children of Israel. After David walked into defeated Jerusalem, he and the children of Israel became city dwellers. This is often the case when primitive war-like cultures invade more civilized - citified cultures. Witness the relative domestication of Genghis Kahn's descendents after they came in contact with civilized China, Roman culture after it came in contact with Greece, the Huns after Attila the Hun conquered Rome, the Scottish tribes after they came in contact with the Anglo-Saxons of Britain. When the Bronze age descendents of Israel, conquered Jerusalem, they became citified.

We also learn from those we have arguments with, don't we? If only we would keep an open mind. If only we would keep open hearts. If only we would really listen, we might learn something, and we might reconcile with the one with whom we are in conflict.

Movement 2

The city of Jerusalem, central to Jewish worship 2000 years ago, is mentioned 650 times in the OT. But is mentioned only twice in the first 5 books of the OT. Did Jerusalem exist when the first 5 books were written, probably about 3000 years ago? Archeologists tell us Jerusalem is 5500 years old, and was 2500 years old when David conquered it. But the importance of the shared, community living of the city over the hunting, gathering, and shepherding way of life, the iron age mentality of city living, had not occurred yet in the minds of the children of Israel in 1000 B.C. By 1000 years later, when God in the body of Jesus walked the earth, Jerusalem was the center of both commerce and religious life. Jerusalem was truly the center of Jewish culture, and Jesus was born a Jew. Jerusalem was the center of life, where every Jew wanted to live or at least visit. Sort of like Orlando for young families, or NYC for business people, or Hollywood for actors. Sort of like Washington DC for politicians, or Nashville for country music singers. It is the city where everyone wants to live or at least visit.

In fact, because every one wanted to live and visit Jerusalem, it, like all cities of the day, had walls around it, to keep out the war-like stone-age nomads, and the riff-raff itinerants like Jesus and his band of 12 disciples.

We build walls around us also, don't we? To keep out the conflict that might help us grow. We build walls around our hearts. And we build walls around our small circle of friends, unwilling to let anyone else inside. We build walls to keep out riff-raff like Jesus and his band of 12 disciples.

Movement 3

But to get inside the city, the city-dwellers built themselves gates. Gates with special keys, or gates so narrow that only a few people can come in at one time. Gates with someone stationed who asked for the password. Gates to allow entrance, but only for the few and the proud. Gates that kept out conflict and riff-raff. Gates that limited the growth of their city.

We build narrow gates also, don't we? We narrow build gates limiting access to our hearts. We build narrow gates limiting access to our circle of friends. We build narrow gates because we are afraid. We are afraid of conflict. We are afraid of people different than we are. But when limit access to our hearts and our circle of friends, we limit our emotional and spiritual growth. Just like narrow gates limit the growth of a city.

I read a funny the other day. The joke goes like this:

Q: "Can you define propaganda?"

A: "PropaGANDA is a socially correct duck."

"PropaGATE" is another such a word. The dictionary says it means "to cause to continue, carry forward, transmit." We propagate our fortunes, the family line, the faith. Well, if propaGANDA is a socially correct duck, then propaGATE is the correct way to enter.

The Psalmist tells us about entering Jerusalem through gates of righteousness, through proper gates.

We enter through the Lord's gates of righteousness. The Lord's proper gates. Through his birth, life, words, ministry, sacrifice, and resurrection by God, God through Jesus makes us right. Makes us righteous. Makes us proper.

We long to enter into a relationship with Jesus. What is the "proper gate" to entering this relationship? Scripture tells us. Readiness to hear Jesus word, openness to change - these provide an "acceptable entrance" to a growing relationship with Jesus. Worship, prayer, and Bible study. These are the gates to relationship with God. The gates to God's city.

And God does not just open the gates. God rolls out the red carpet. With all the heavenly host, God waves palms and the heavenly host sings.

Yes, Jesus enters Jerusalem. And calls us to open the gates to our cities as well. Open the doors to our homes. Open the doors to our church. Open our eyes and open our ears. That is, open the gates to our hearts and minds.

So we do not just open the gates, we roll out the red carpet. We wave palms and we shout,

"Hosanna Heysanna Sanna Sanna Ho,
Sanna Hey Sanna Ho Sanna,
Hey Jesus, you're alright by me,
Sanna Ho Sanna Hey Superstar."

There are many places we long to be and situations we long to enjoy. We long for a good career and we desire good friends. What are the "acceptable entrances" by which we move into these things we desire? Let's see: education, experience, and work ethic are "acceptable entrances" to

good careers. And, attention to others, respect, and care for their concerns are "proper gates" to friendship.

We make others righteous. We make people not like us righteous. We make the those born before WWII righteous. We make baby boomers righteous. We make Gen X and Gen Y righteous. We make Millennialists righteous. We make all age groups righteous. Those born before WWII, and those born after 9/11. Like God, we make all righteous.

We do not just open the gates, we roll out the red carpet. We wave palms and we shout,

"Hosanna Heysanna Sanna Sanna Ho"

Conclusion

Jesus comes to us every day. But when Jesus comes, we do not always recognize him. Not only do we see Jesus in the face of the hungry, the sick, and those in prison. We also see Jesus in the face of those not like us. We see Jesus in the face of those born before WWII, and those born after 9/11. Jesus says, "Suffer the little children to come to me." We open the gates of our hearts and our church to all age groups.

We do not just open the gates, we roll out the red carpet. We wave palms and we shout Hosanna. We build playgrounds. We sponsor worship in nursing homes. We sponsor Bible study in senior living facilities. We feed the homeless at soup kitchens. We open wide our gates.

Our Palm Sunday scripture reminds of which gates are proper. We enter gates of relationship with God through hearing God's Word, being open to change, letting Jesus and those different from us into our hearts, that is, true hospitality. In opening wide the gates of our hearts, we make a grand entrance for God, for others, and for ourselves!

All Glory be to God, Hallelujah, and All God's children say ...