**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 2-25-2024
Jesus and Hanukkah**

Last week we began a new sermon series here at Chestnut Grove Church. This series is called *Jesus and the Jewish Calendar*. Jesus was and is a Jew and He observed the Jewish calendar. And I believe there is value in seeking to grasp the significance of each of the special days in the Jewish calendar, especially in the light of Jesus and all that He said and did.

We began last Sunday exploring the weekly special day known as Sabbath. As Christians we are not required or mandated to keep the Sabbath, but there is value is being intentional in building rhythms of rest into our lives. God made the Sabbath as a gift for the Jews, and Christians can be blessed by the discipline of Sabbath-keeping, as long as it does not become legalistic. And we also highlighted how Jesus Himself is our Sabbath rest. He alone is the One who offers rest for the soul, as people come to Him in faith and submission.

Today we are exploring another Jewish special day – or in this case, 8-days. This festival is known as Hanukkah. Now growing up, I knew very little about Hanukkah. I knew it was around Christmas and perhaps knew that it was a Jewish Christmas alternative. I knew that it was 8 days of celebrating and gift giving and there was a light that was lit each day through this time.

That was pretty much the extent of my knowledge of this festival. Many of you can identify with me.

But what really is Hanukkah anyway? And just as important, what relevance should it have in the life of the Christian?

First, it is important to note that Hanukkah is not viewed as one of the major Jewish celebrations. In fact, it is not even prescribed by God in the Old Testament. But Jesus did celebrate Hanukkah. So He found it significant. And if it mattered to Him, it is important for Christians to understand.

The story of Hanukkah actually began well after the close of the Old Testament. This time is often referred to as the intertestamental period. If you are familiar with the Greek and Alexander the Greek. Alexander led the Greeks to conquer much of the known world. After Alexander’s passing, different Greek leaders ruled over certain areas.

One of these rulers by the name of Antiochus IV Epiphenies, was ruling over the region of Israel. This man was trying to force the Jewish people to follow the pagan gods of Greece. In 168 BC, this man went up into the Temple in Jerusalem, took control over the Temple, and then went into the Holy of Holies. He erected an idol to Zeus. And he sacrificed a pig on the altar, they are very unclean animals according to the Law of Moses.

Then, in 167 BC he ordered his soldiers to go from town to town and declare that it was now against the law to study and keeping of many of the precepts of the Torah (the 5 books of Moses). He also commanded the elders and leaders of the towns to offer a sacrifice to Zeus and to eat pigs. And many people cowered in fear and compromised and gave in. This was a scary time. The Greeks were the superpower of that day.

But they came to one town, the town of Modaein, and there was a godly priest who refused to bow down. And he said that whoever is for God should join him. And people came to him and this ragtag group of freedom fighters defeated the superpower of the day. They were led by a man named Judas Maccabeus. You can read about these events in the books of the Maccabees. These books are not considered to be Scripture by most people, but they are viewed as historical accounts of these events.

 In any case, they recaptured the Temple from the Greeks and then overthrew them. And for many years the Jews were self-governed.

But then they captured the Temple and saw that the 7-branch candelabra, or Menorah, was not lit. This Menorah was supposed to remain lit as being symbolic of the light of God’s presence. They only had enough kosher oil to last 1 day. But a miracle happened and the oil for one day burned for 7 more, making a total of 8 days. It was after these 8 days that enough Kosher oil was able to be produced and brought to the Temple.

Hanukkah means “dedication.” It is called the festival of dedication, because they dedicated the Temple back to God. It is also called the festival of lights because of this supernaturally long time that the oil was able to continue burning.

Because of the 8-days of burning, the Jewish people developed special Hanukkah menorah’s that have 8 candles to be lit, one for each day. This is the history of how Hanukkah celebration came to be.

We must remember that Jesus Himself celebrated Hanukkah. If you turn with me to the Gospel of John, there is a fascinating story of Jesus that took place during Hanukkah. Please turn with me to John 10:22-39 as we read John’s account of this scene during Hanukkah

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

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

**31Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him, 32but 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.”**

**34Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I have said you are “gods”’? 35If he called them ‘gods,’ to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be set aside— 36what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’? 37Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. 38But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.” 39Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.**

So what is happening here? We see that Jesus is in Jerusalem. The Jewish people are celebrating Hanukkah and the overthrow of an evil tyrannical ruler.

God had saved them from an evil tyrant. But now there are other tyrannical rulers that are controlling Israel – namely the Romans. Was God preparing to save them again? And would Jesus be the next King David or Judas Maccabee to do this?

One popular view of the Jewish Messiah was that He would be a great military leader that would resemble King David and Judas Maccabee.

Rumors were swirling about Jesus. Was He the long-awaited Messiah? And we see that some Jews that were present asked him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

These Jews were looking for a sign. During that first Hanukkah, there was the sign of God’s blessing over Israel in the miraculous burning of the candles. Was Jesus going to do something similar to prove that He is the Messiah?

Jesus tells them that He did tell them plainly through the works that He has done in His Father’s Name. In other words, Jesus had already given many signs that He was the Messiah. Anyone who refused to put their faith in Jesus as Messiah, it is because they choose to ignore the many signs.

This conversation would eventually led to these Jews accusing Jesus of blasphemy and preparing to stone Jesus, before He escapes their grasp.

The big question that we are left with, then, is what are Christians to make of Hanukkah?

**Well, just as Christians are not obligated or bound to keep the Jewish special days that God explicitly gives, so also Christians should not be expected to celebrate Hanukkah as well**.

But is there a benefit to understanding Hanukkah especially in light of what Jesus chose to say about Himself during Hanukkah? Absolutely.

I would like us to consider a few takeaways from Hanukkah, in light of Jesus.

**One takeaway is to stand against evil and oppression**. One of our vows of membership here at Chestnut Grove is to resist evil in whatever form it presents itself.

Historically, God has used nations at times to stand against evil and oppression. On Hanukkah we remember the overthrow of the Greeks that happened in Israel. We can remember that God heard the prayers of the oppressed and He is at work for their deliverance from bondage.

But also, in light of Jesus, we must remember that the normal way that Christians are called to resist evil and injustice is not through violence, but through courageous love. Jesus resisted and overcame evil by speaking the truth of God in love to others. He resisted evil by laying down His life on behalf of sinful humanity.

As Jesus’ followers, the main way that we are all called to resist evil is by following Jesus’ example and being filled with the unconditional love of God. We overcome evil with good. We pray for those who persecute us. We practice mercy and forgiveness. We turn the other cheek. We seek to be true peacemakers. We pray against the works of the enemy and we pray for the advancement of God’s kingdom on earth. And we must be willing to pick up our cross daily, and suffer unjustly. In these ways, we resist and overcome evil.

So first, reflecting on Hanukkah can remind us to stand against evil.

**Second, Hanukkah should remind Christians of our calling to purity and dedication to God.** Again, Hanukkah is associated with cleansing and dedication when it came to the Temple in Jerusalem. Reflecting on Hanukkah through Jesus can remind us to come to God for spiritual cleansing. Allow the Lord to convict you of anything that He would find to be not pleasing to Him. And then, we are called to dedicate ourselves fully to God and His service. Just as they rededicated the Temple, we are individually and collectively the Temple of the Lord today. We are to honor God with our body and our mind. Hanukkah can remind us of this in a similar way that Lent should call us to purity and dedication to God.

As Christians, we are individually and collectively the Temple of the Holy Spirit today. And God calls us to walk in purity and holiness as an expression of our love toward Him.

**And third and finally, this feast of Hanukkah should call Christians to reflect on the many signs of Jesus**.

Again, at Hanukkah we think of the miracles of the candles miraculously burning for 8-days with only enough oil for 1 day. The miracle was a sign from God that He was at work among them and that He blessed that unwillingness to follow the evil commands of a tyrant.

Looking at Jesus, His miracles were signs as well. And these signs revealed Him to be the Messiah and the one in whom the Jews and all the nations were to put their hope.

As Jesus told His Jewish opponents, He did tell them that He was the Messiah. He did through the many miraculous signs that He performed among them. Think of all His miracles.

This truth should cause Christians to study and meditated upon the many signs that Jesus gave in revealing His identity. Each of these signs are gifts to help people to better know and love and serve Jesus as Messiah and Savior.

I encourage you this week to take time to read and pray about at least one of Jesus’ signs found in the gospels. Each of these moments are there for our benefit to strengthen our faith.

One way for you to remember these things would be to mark your calendar for Christmas Day 2024 through January 2, 2025. You can choose to reflect on these things throughout Hanukkah. You could purchase 8 little gifts to gift out to others if you’d like.

None of these things are required or expected for Christians, but it is an invitation that is there for us to take part in.

Finally, remember to resist evil. May the love of Christ compel us and guide us.

Remember, you are a temple of the Holy Spirit and you are called to purity and dedication to the Lord every day.

And remember, Jesus has given many signs. May we reflect on those signs and grow in our walk with Him each day.

Let’s pray…

Resources:

[www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)

The Gospel of John: A Commentary: Volume One by Craig S. Keener

The Gospel According to John by D.A. Carson