

Is Your Head in the Game?

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As a parent living in the United States of America I have experienced the perspective of growing up playing sports as a kid and now taking my children to sports and watching them play. It can be both a joyful and a painful experience at the same time. Besides the thrill of watching your child compete and learn a new sport, I also found that one can learn a lot about life from these events.

I recently watched my son's little league baseball game while working on my latest book called Walk in the Spirit. I was amazed at the similarities that I saw between this baseball game and our walk of faith that is supposed to be a community of saved individuals operating within an eternal kingdom serving the same King. In theory, we should all be functioning in one accord in selfless unity. What we see in reality is a lot like my son's little league baseball team.

When they are on the field it is actually like watching 7 separate circus acts at the same time. Since the coach is the one pitching, the honorary "pitcher" stands there with a batting helmet trying not to get hit by a line drive. The third base man is rambling incessantly with the base coach while the short stop is wearing his glove on his head, talking to himself like a crazy person. Meanwhile, the second base man is sitting on the ground playing in the dirt. The outfielders are all in left field . . . if you catch my drift. They have no clue what is going on because the ball never makes it to the outfield. Instead, they spin in circles and try to catch butterflies with their hats.

The only one's really playing are the catcher and the first baseman. The catcher is in survival mode because the coach, as acting pitcher, keeps firing pitches at him. He's just trying to get his body in front of the pitch and keep from getting clobbered by the batter. The first baseman has to be ready at all times because everyone keeps throwing the ball at him. He has no choice but to pay attention.

When there is a hit either nobody moves or the entire team converges on the ball as if it were a 5 ounce nugget in the California gold rush. It is pure carnage as the players converge upon one another and wrestle for the ball. When the victor finally emerges with the prize he rarely knows where to throw it. Sometimes the kids just watch the ball sail past them if it is beyond their reach. They usually don't think about actually moving their feet. If it doesn't go straight to them, then it must be someone else's problem. Their reaction all depends upon their mental condition at any given moment and how much sugar they consumed while they were last in the dugout.

One time a young slugger hit an infield pop fly that went high in the air and the trajectory looked like it was headed straight toward the second baseman. This

could have been his time to shine, but sadly he didn't even know that the ball had been hit. As the ball began its decent from the stratosphere, sure enough, every parent in the stands did the math and their calculations were confirmed. They knew the fate of the doomed player who was completely oblivious to his ill-fated destiny. He just stood there like a mannequin, staring straight ahead with his hands to his side. As all the parents sat there helplessly with gaping mouths, the fate of the young boy's head and the ball converged. Fortunately, no ambulance was needed and an ice pack sufficed. One can only hope that he learned a lesson to keep his head in the game and his eye on the ball.

When my son's team finally gets their turn to hit, it is like watching a bunch of monkeys at happy hour. The multicolored Gatorade drinks flow freely. They all swing bats and climb fences while eating snacks and chatting about their favorite cartoon. No one has a clue what is happening on the field because they are not even watching the game. When their name gets called to hit they go out and take some swings, maybe even hit the ball and get on base. They go through the motions but once they get off the field it's right back to the party and they quickly get reabsorbed into the conversation without missing a beat. Most do not even know when the game is over.

Of course this is all a part of the process of learning to play the game. You have to start somewhere and these beginning stages are often messy and even funny. There is only so much the coach can do at this point. The process is much akin to herding cats. Some kids are naturals and have the fire in their belly. You can already see it in them, but there is little they can do when the rest of their team is in outer space. You almost feel sorry for them as they try to emulate their favorite major league player. It doesn't matter how well they field a grounder if there is no one capable of catching the ball and completing the play.

Some of these kids will move up and increase their knowledge and skills while others will drop out along the way. Eventually those who continue to advance and improve will learn the concept of teamwork, and how to fit in and perform properly in their different positions. It is imperative to understand that no one person can function as a team. As is often stated: "There is no 'I' in team." When they figure this out, they will see the benefits and they will start to win.

As I stated earlier, this all got me thinking about the Kingdom of Heaven that I was supposed to be a part of. There are, no doubt, some useful parallels to be examined. If we are in the Kingdom we are part of a "team" – a family. This is not limited to a church or congregation. It is much bigger than that. In fact, denominations and separate church buildings have been the greatest source of self inflicted division that the Body of Messiah has experienced. Now that many people are abandoning traditional "church" buildings and assemblies, they are becoming even more isolated from the greater body, although I believe that there may be a purpose in this as they learn to hear the voice of the Great Shepherd Who is leading His sheep into the Kingdom.

If we are His sheep, then we are supposed to be a nation of set apart priests with one unified goal. Just as a baseball team looks to add points on the board and win the game, those in the Kingdom should be seeking to advance the Kingdom in one direction according to the leading of the Shepherd.

In many respects the American Christian Church along with the various off shoots and movements, such as the Messianic Movement, are much like my son's little league team. Many are not even in the game, they are simply spectators. Some show up, but miss the game because they do not know the schedule. Others show up for the game, but they do not participate. While some have their head in the game, others are just there with a uniform and a glove. They look the part but they do not add anything to the effort. Many could care less about what the other player's do or what the score is – they are simply there for their own personal gratification and satisfaction. They have not yet grasped the concept of a team.

When considering the Kingdom of Heaven, it might be helpful to ask yourself where you fall in this scenario. Are you working as a team or simply doing your own thing? So many are caught up in hectic lifestyles that they do not have time to participate in the Kingdom of Heaven. They are simply too busy building, maintaining and advancing their own kingdoms. Others are so self-centered and focused on their problems that they never even think of the needs of others.

I get frustrated when I meet so many brethren with blinders on, oblivious to the Creator's Calendar that provides the schedule, as well as the needs of their fellow servants. These individuals may be focused on their specific ministry, project or gimmick, but if you do not fit within their "mission" then they have no use for you. Well it doesn't work that way in the Kingdom. We need to help others within the Kingdom and lead people into the Kingdom. We need to be cognizant of the needs of others and pray about meeting those needs if it is within our power. I see people abounding in wealth, waiting to use those funds to "save the world" at some unknown time the future when they are surrounded by people already doing the work with little to no resources.

If you are in the Kingdom, then you are in a community of faith. You must be working with others and using the resources that you have – not to build your own ministry, business or kingdom - but rather the Kingdom of Heaven. Everyone has different giftings. Some can speak, some can write, some pray while others feed the hungry and clothe the poor. Some have money that can be used to help others fulfill their roles in the Kingdom. The list goes on and on but the point should be evident. We need to be working together and helping one another.

The Messiah clearly stated: *"For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more."* Luke 12:48. If you have resources and abilities that are not being used for the Kingdom, then you will be held accountable. We are in the final inning and those with resources had better use those resources to do something or help those who are already doing something.

The Messiah strictly warned: ¹⁹ *Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;* ²⁰ *but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.* ²¹ *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*” Matthew 6:19-21. Wherever you are spending your time, energy and money is a direct reflection of your heart.

We live in a society obsessed with the “American Dream” of building our own kingdoms, but this notion is in direct contravention with the instructions of the Messiah. We are very much like those living in the days of Noah. We are so busy and distracted with the affairs of life that we cannot see the storm clouds building on the horizon. Sadly, most will be completely unaware of what time it is until the raindrops of judgment begin falling upon them. Those who are wise will heed the words of Messiah, see the signs and use their resources before they vanish and it is too late.

The Messiah said: ²⁶ *And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man:* ²⁷ *They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.*” Luke 17:26-27.

We are living in perilous times and yet many are not cognizant that the game is almost over. It is time for us all to examine our level of participation, get our head in the game and keep our eye on the ball - otherwise we may end up getting knocked out like the unwitting second baseman without ever knowing what hit us.