**#UNRESTRAINED**

***Acts 7:48-50***

***(48) However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says:***

***(49) HEAVEN IS MY THRONE***
***AND EARTH IS THE FOOTSTOOL OF MY FEET;***

***WHAT KIND OF HOUSE WILL YOU BUILD FOR ME? says the Lord;***

***OR WHAT PLACE IS THERE FOR MY REPOSE?***

***(50) WAS IT NOT MY HAND WHICH MADE ALL THESE THINGS?***

**What Does it Say?**

 (48) The most high does not dwell in houses by hands (49). Heaven is MY throne and earth, a footstool. What kind of house will you build for Me? What place for MY repose? (50) Was not My hand which made these?

**What Does it Mean?**

A pastor told a story recently in a missions magazine that I read. The pastor is Chinese, living in China and passionate about the church. The church has seen a massive rise in what God is doing despite a restrictive government. The movement of disciples who follow Jesus started in China, underground. Time passed, and now they can have literal church buildings where the attendance has really sky rocketed. While the Chinese pastor praised God for this, something in his soul was concerned. He spoke of how the disciples had become a little bit more relaxed in every aspect. No sooner had he spoken these words, than October 19, 2019, the government bulldozed a 3,000-member mega church because they would not add things the government demanded to the sermons from the pulpit. The church will go back underground. The reaction of the pastor was incredible. Not one tear was shed!!! Can you even??? He was excited to see what God was doing! God was about to increase the number of disciples in the country and he needed to be ready for that. What a reaction!!!! I don’t think that is natural, do you? I think that is ***SUPER****natural*– a true work of the Holy Spirit!!! This pastor said he had absolute clarity for what needed to be done.

 This humbles me. This Acts study was on the verge of being canceled because of a fire. The place the study was to be taught was affected. The timing of this fire was incredible if you think about it. The fire happened after ALL the Christmas outreach functions had been completed. Twenty-four hours after the last function was checked off the list, the very next day we would begin to take down Christmas decor, the fire happened. The only program affected would be the Women’s Bible Study–interesting. If you know me at all, then you know I usually pray for snow days during the study because I am overwhelmed each and every year. I feel like there are so many more qualified women to lead this (and there are!). I have a lot of excuses why I should not be doing this. When the announcement was made that the Bible studies would be canceled, I bet you can hear my sigh of relief. God had another plan and knew I needed another year to get these messages right. BUT THEN…

 My teacher, fellow disciple, and friend, Yaakov Brown, who teaches at Beth Melekh in Aukland, New Zealand, emailed me. The noun burned? What will the verb do? In Jewish culture, he mentioned they never really needed a building. Any fig tree would do to shade from the elements, or in my case since it was winter, maybe a home. I knew he was right. God had already led my heart to it when I read it. I had conflicting feelings over it immediately– excitement and panic. I knew what obedience would look like, but I had an out and no one would think otherwise. Well, as we know, the Bible study moved to my home and we have been streaming it for the past two months. God has wrecked me over His Word and has changed everything because of this. There has been fire of the Holy Spirit and excitement mixed with sorrow and repentance. We have seen God in ways I will not be able to process for a while, I am sure. If you did not know we have been streaming this study, you can absolutely catch up, take your time, find a community group of your own and together see what God will do in your heart, your home and your life.You can find this study here: **www.facebook.com/kendragrahamofficial**

When I read these verses in Acts 7, which are really the verses from Isaiah 66:1-2, I just laughed and cried (yes, I am an emotional mess and I am not an emotional person generally!). These verses wrapped up the study with perfection– who knew?

 Stephen is making his first and last stand before the Great Sanhedrin. Stephen has eloquently and truthfully described the life of Israel and he knows his history! Israel has a habit of rejecting the people God sends to deliver them. They don’t approve of the pedigree, or the people look too foreign, even though they are “of the brethren of Israel.” Stephen has been charged with speaking against the Moses, Torah, and the Temple.

 Stephen just reminds them that at the time of each prophet, their fathers did not accept the prophets, or like them, their fathers actually wanted to kill them! So, if Stephen is being charged with speaking against the prophets, he is right in line here with history. As are they. You see, they did not like Jesus or His message. This should have been a sign to them that Jesus was the real deal! Well, they didn’t like that.

 The leaders also did not like the fact that Stephen was speaking against the Temple. The Temple is a BIG DEAL! The temple they were currently worshiping in was 35 acres of temple complex! That is MEGA of MEGA! Stephen was trying to remind them it has never been about the NOUN! It’s about the verb! IT’s about GOD’s Presence among His people, calling His people to come to Him! It is all about God’s people bearing His name well– not about His people doing church well. Stephen knows he is a nobody, but Isaiah, ***he*** is a somebody!

 The people of Israel did not have an actual temple for a really L-O-N-G time! God called Abraham out– no temple, just God’s presence. God called Isaac and Jacob out, but still no temple, just God’s presence, not even a Torah (first 5 books of the Bible)! God called Joseph out and it was God’s Presence that saved him from all his trouble. God called out Moses and it was again just the Presence of God. I think you get the message. David reigns and after David, Solomon, his son is finally allowed to build the Temple. No sooner is the temple built then it is proclaimed, “***Where is a house you can build for ME***?” You see, God cannot fit into human creation. God fits into His heavenly temple made by Himself! How about that?!?! The earth is His footstool. So again, what noun can we build to impress God? Perhaps it has never been about the noun at all!

 I understand we want to build and give nice things for God. We have certainly tried to build some really incredible places. If you travel, no doubt, you have seen some of them. What strikes me is that many of these gorgeous churches are empty. Isn’t that something?

 We so easily become distracted on the ***what*** and we forget about the ***Who***. Our nouns become things of pride. The ***what*** becomes a golden cow. This is what Stephen is trying to get across. It is not about Moses, it is not about the Temple, it is all about God’s presence and His Son, the Deliverer whose name is Jesus!!! COME TO HIM! This is not a new thing, it’s a fulfilled promise!! Just like all the other fulfilled promises!

 If you read the history that Stephen lays out in Acts 7, you will realize that God always seems to be moving and doing different things, yet staying in complete alignment with the sameness of His character.

 When the “***what***” becomes an idol, God takes it away and moves His people back to their knees so they can once again get reacquainted with the ***Who.***

 We need to be careful that we don’t find ourselves pointing our fingers at “The Sanhedrin.” They were obviously wrong. I think that if we ask God to give us eyes to self-reflect what things have become idols in our lives and in our churches, we would be surprised at the number of things we have in common. We worship our way of worship. We worship our orders of service perfectly timed (if not, the pastor will get an email). We worship our buildings, as well. This is a great opportunity to be real and honest before a holy God. This is hard because we have been so right for a really long time. Our hearts want to worship God in Spirit and Truth, truly. I just think sometimes the nouns get in the way. I pray we can be a people capable of humbling before God and asking Him to be the ***Who*** of our lives, and take whatever “***what***” has gotten in the way of that. It may be different for all of us.

 *As God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion and kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; let’s BEAR WITH one another; if anyone has a complaint against someone else, forgive him. Indeed, just as the Lord has forgiven you, forgive. Above ALL these things, clothe yourselves with LOVE which BINDS everything together perfectly; and let the shalom which comes from the Messiah be your hearts decision-maker, for this is why you were called to be part of a single Body. Let’s together, let the WORD of Messiah, in all richness, LIVE in you, with all teaching and counsel each other in all wisdom as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude to God in your hearts. That is EVERYTHING you do or say do in the name of the Lord Yeshua, giving thanks to Him through God the Father. Portions of Colossians 3:12-17. (complete Jewish study Bible version)*

I pray God shows us how to church– the verb– as we continue in this next year to move beyond nouns, and see the Word of God living **#UNRESTRAINED** in and through our lives as we bear the Name of Jesus well together.

**What Does it Mean to me?**

 When did I care more about the ***what*** than the ***Who***?

 How has God shown me that His presence is beyond my ideas and tradition?

 How have I been trying to restrain the presence of God in my life?

 How will I allow God’s #UNRESTRAINED access to my life?

What is the one thing He has asked me to place off the platform and onto an
altar?

**LIVE IT OUT**

 ***Lord, today help me give you #UNRESTRAINED access to everything, I pray the One thing I hold dear is the WHO which is You. Be #UNRESTRAINED in my life as I move toward You today.***

If you would like to learn from Yaakov Brown you can find his website here: www.bethmelekh

His commentary is incredible. I met him while in New Zealand this last summer. What a blessing his teaching and counsel have been.

If you have not read the book “Spiritual Profiling” there are a few copies left. Such a great historical book as well as a book that shows how deeply you are loved <https://rover.ebay.com/rover/0/0/0?mpre=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ebay.com%2Fulk%2Fitm%2F362872772871>

The Complete Jewish study Bible is amazing and I have learned so much history from the commentary.

The Complete Jewish Study Bible: Illuminating the Jewishness of God's Word; Blue Flexisoft Edition [https://www.amazon.com/dp/1619708698/ref=cm\_sw\_r\_cp\_api\_i\_iOjfEbNR2V066](https://www.amazon.com/dp/1619708698/ref%3Dcm_sw_r_cp_api_i_iOjfEbNR2V066)

DON FINTO’s BOOK: Your People shall be My People

<https://www.amazon.com/Your-People-Shall-Be-Christian/dp/0800797892>

Please go back and check the previous blogs for books used each week of the study. I have used information from these listed here almost every week.