

MARK'S REMARKS

If you want to become a household name over night, I have discovered a sure-fire method. Shut-off your common sense switch, that's the illuminated heavily worn one. Press your 'I deserve to get even button,' located in the electrical panel labeled *IT'S ALL ABOUT ME*, and scramble after a basketball 'fan' like your being electrocuted from behind. I guarantee you will be on the lips of nearly every person who owns a TV, reads a newspaper, listens to a radio, or knows how to turn on a light switch. Regardless if you have never heard of a pick and roll, the set shot, or the follow-through, the name of twenty-five year old basketball player Ron 'I have issues' Artest, is one you have heard or will shortly. Ask your grade-schooler.

Having seen the replay of the mayhem that took place in Detroit last week, I was sadly shocked. Never in the days of Larry Bird, Kevin McHale, or Robert Parish would we have seen a player run into the stands, throw haymaker swings as they've been labeled, and claim his one year suspension is unfair. For that matter, those 5'8" fans swinging at 'Mr. 6'11" I can bench press you basketball players also seem to have a short in their common-sense circuit. What a mess! Sadly to say, it took something of this magnitude to take our attention from the Desperate Housewives promo that included a locker room, Nicolette Sheridan and Terrell Owens. Seems almost eighty-six years ago since the Red Sox's magical post-season.

These were the thoughts I was entertaining as I opened up my devotional My Utmost For His Highest. I should have known. Using Scripture, Oswald Chambers holds no punches himself. I had to reconsider my thoughts as judgmental as I read a quote by St. Augustine, "*O Lord, deliver me from this lust of always vindicating myself*, and these words, "*When we discern that other people are not growing spiritually and allow that discernment to turn to criticism, we block our fellowship with God. God never gives us discernment so that we may criticize, but that we may intercede.*"

Now it didn't take much discernment to see Mr. Artest and some of his teammates were not acting in the fruit of the Spirit. And to see their actions and lack of discipline as spiteful and malicious is not wrong. However to criticize his actions as worse than mine, or to vindicate myself with the words, "*I am not as bad as them*" is to strain my relationship with God. To take the incident that is being discussed over sports bar hamburgers, coffee house apple pies, and bookstore cappuccinos and somehow justify him as a nobody, some one to write off and do nothing more, is to charge into the stands myself and take a haymaker swing at Truth.

Could it be that Ron Artest has become a household name in order that I might understand his need for intercessory prayer? Or is it my need? If his name is on the lips of nearly every person, may his name be on mine for a different reason. As if two direct blows were not enough, Oswald Chambers lands one more; "*You may find that the first person you must be the most critical with, as being the greatest fraud you have ever known, is yourself.*"

Have mercy on us, O LORD, have mercy on us!

For we are exceedingly filled with contempt (Psalms 123:3).

Thankful for His grace,

Pastor Mark