

SERMON: November 18, 2018 Whether or Not You Score -
TEXT: Philippians 4:10-13
SUBJECT: Living humbly before God
THEME: We honor God most when we live humbly
PURPOSE: That we would make God's priorities our priorities.

Have you ever seen this happen?

(ACT OUT A KICKER GETTING READY TO KICK THE WINNING FIELD GOAL)

“Well, this is it – 4th quarter, Lions ahead by 2. If Johansen can make this kick, Dallas will win this game and go on to the divisional title. If he misses it, they go home and come back again next year.

(PLAYER – “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me...”)

“It's up – it's going – it's good! Dallas has won the division!”

(CELEBRATION)

“I'd like to thank Jesus, who helped me to make that kick! And we won! Woo-hoo!”

How do you feel about that?

This scene plays itself out time after time on the football fields, the baseball diamonds, the rock climbing walls, even in the courtrooms and business meetings of America. We have come to adopt this phrase as our personal mantra in order to guarantee success in whatever we attempt to accomplish.

But it bothers me. When I hear someone say, “I won because Jesus helped me”, I cringe inside. Is that really what Jesus is all about?

Let me put this in perspective – just recently we were talking about blind Bartimaeus, and Jesus asked him the question, “What do you want Me to do for you?”

What did Bartimaeus say? “Lord, I want a nice, cold cappuccino with a Boston Cream doughnut on the side.”

“Jesus, I want to be able to run out-patterns and score touchdowns every time I touch the ball.”

“God, I want to be successful in business and have millions of dollars to leave as a legacy when I die.”

Is that what Bartimaeus asked for?

When I was going down to Cuba to visit the sister church of one of my congregations, I was warned that the people down there will ask if they can pray for you.

Warned? Yes, warned. I was warned that they take prayer seriously down there. If you ask them to pray for you, they will go without food for up to 48 hours, kneeling in prayer and offering up your request. So I was warned – don’t ask them to pray for anything that you aren’t serious about.



https://c1.staticflickr.com/4/3828/10349169984_060c437123_b.jpg

I tend to pray for things that, when I think about it, don’t really seem to matter. I lose my keys – what do I do?

I’m anxious about a meeting – I will pray. I want to get a good parking spot in front of Publix –

You get the idea. It’s not that any of these things are bad – these are a normal part of life. It’s good to be in a continuing conversation with God.

Let me put it this way – ***It’s not a sin to pray for a parking space in front of Publix. It IS a sin if that’s the ONLY thing I pray for!***

Paul wrote these words at a very difficult time in his life. He was in jail again, most likely in Rome while he was awaiting execution. He was reflecting on all that he had done – the successes, the failures, those things that he really didn’t know which column to put them in yet.

The church in Philippi had heard about his struggle and his impending death. They were one of the closest to Paul’s heart. He had started that church from a combination of wealthy women who met outside the city limits by the riverside, and a bunch of prisoners and the prison guard he had spent time with during his arrest in Philippi. What an interesting combination!

They had heard about what was happening to him, and they were in agony over it. Imprisonment was not easy. This particular time it was harsh, and they knew that Paul was old and that his body couldn't stand up to the abuse as well as he had done in the past. They were worried about him.

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Paul hears about their distress, and he reflects on it himself. He wants to let them know that he is okay. He's not particularly happy about being in prison, but he has a source of peace in being there. Paul writes –

¹⁰ I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. ¹² I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Now – in that context, is this about scoring the winning touchdown?

This is not a feel-good, self-help slogan that Paul just happened to come up with to help him finish a 5-mile bike ride. This isn't an inspirational phrase that Paul coined to help him win the game. As a matter of fact, when we take this verse out of context, it starts to mean the exact opposite of what Paul intended!

This is not about motivation to power through any difficulty and to end up victorious – this is Paul saying, ***“No matter what happens, I belong to Christ.”***

If I win, or if I lose – that's not important. If I live, or if I die – that's not what's at stake here.

This world is temporary. This government, these rulers, this nation, these problems – all will one day pass away. The only thing that matters is being true to Christ.

When I was a child, I confess that I would hear the scriptures the way that I wanted to hear them, and sometimes pray meaningless prayers.

Remember when Jesus said, “Ask anything in My name, and I will do it for you”?



<https://pxhere.com/en/photo/801827>

So, to a child, that means I can say, “Dear Jesus, I want a pony. In Your name I ask, amen.”

Did Jesus give me a pony? Well, He HAS to! I asked in His name, right? Didn’t He say, “ANYTHING”?

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Is that what that verse means? I think that asking in Jesus’ name is not about using the magic words, “In Your name I pray,” but rather asking for the things that will bring more honor and glory to Jesus!

It’s not my job to get God to conform to my will, but the other way around. I confess that I am not smart enough to know what’s right and what’s wrong – I need Jesus to direct me.

The problem with taking this verse out of context – “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” – is that it makes US the center of the universe! It makes my will and my desires the focus the center of my world. “I need to kick this field goal”, “I need to land this contract”, “I can do ten more pushups”.

And as I said earlier, none of those would be bad prayers, but if those are the only prayers I pray – prayers about things that will benefit me – then I have missed out on what faith is all about.

God is not a lonely old soul who is so desperate for affection that He will do anything we want just so that we’ll worship Him! God is not a magic vending machine, who, if we just say the right words in the right order, has no choice but to fulfill our request.

No, God is God – the Creator of the universe and everything that is in it. God created and chose to share it with us, so that we can live and laugh and love and experience everything that He has to offer. But in the end, God is the only thing that matters.

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<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/51/Horse-racing-5.jpg>

Let me come at this from a different direction – suppose you bought a thoroughbred race horse. It’s a champion, at the peak of its strength and vitality. It cost you millions of dollars, plus another couple of million every year for care and handling. It is strong and powerful and able to win any race that in which it enters.

And let’s say that you take this racehorse – and you only use it to saunter down to Winn-Dixie to get groceries.



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/72/Fresh_Cut_Christmas_Trees%2C_Winn_Dixie%2C_N_Ashley_St%2C_Valdosta.JPG/1600px-Fresh_Cut_Christmas_Trees%2C_Winn_Dixie%2C_N_Ashley_St%2C_Valdosta.JPG

Are you wasting this horse’s potential?

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So it is if the only thing I ever pray for is for God to help me find my keys or to get a good parking spot! Those prayers aren’t bad by themselves – sauntering to the grocery store can be a nice break for a thoroughbred!

But there is so much more that God has to offer, and He chafes at the bit when we don’t give Him a chance to work!

The only limits to God’s power in your life and in this church is our willingness to let Him be in control!

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We’re looking at a building project coming up in a few months. We’d like to enclose our narthex, improve our bathrooms, add a couple showers, and renovate the Fellowship Hall.

But all through this I have been asking those involved with the planning, ***“How is this going to bring people closer to God?”***

That’s our purpose. It’s not to build a nice place for ourselves where we feel comfortable and where we get the most benefit. If that’s all we plan on doing, then I can’t be a part of it.

But if we are building this with the prayer of, “Lord, how can You use this place to draw people closer to Yourself?”, then we’re on the right track. We start to see things

differently, and we start to ask the questions of what we need to do in order to reach those who don't know Christ yet.

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I learned in fishing that you don't put on the hook what you like to eat; you put on the hook what the fish like to eat! So if that means changing the style of worship or the way we dress or the times that we meet or even where we meet in order to reach people who don't know Christ yet, then we've got to be all-in.

Jesus never told us to build an aquarium for those who are already saved. He calls us to be fishers of men.

I asked the group on Wednesday what they thought Christ was saying to us through this scripture for this week. We wondered how much of this message was meant for us who are already here, and how much of it is meant for those on the outside?

What they were hearing was, ***“Without Christ, everything is a problem. With Christ, nothing is insurmountable.”***

That's not about football games or parking spaces; that's about life. When they hear that they have cancer; when their child cuts off all communication; when their business is in trouble; when they feel that everyone has betrayed them and there is no hope –

Without Christ, every little thing can feel like the end of the world. But once I came to know Christ and began to trust in Him, all of those things shrank next to Him.

Do you know someone who needs to hear this?

At Ron Burger's service earlier this week I said that, at the end of my life, I want for people to say, "I am closer to Christ because of him." I believe that's how Ron lived. The number of people who were here to honor him, to say that their lives were enriched because of his influence –

That's a life lived in prayer. That's a life lived in Thanksgiving. And I want for people to be thankful for me, not that I have done something nice for them, but that I have brought them to meet the Lord who can make all the difference in their lives.

"I can do all things..." Paul had been imprisoned, in hunger, in need, and facing the end of his life. But he wasn't complaining – he was stating that he had been through so much pain and trouble that now he had a clearer perspective on what was really important in life. It wasn't scoring the winning touchdown or getting a big contract; it was quietly and humbly serving Christ in everything. That was what was most important to him.

Whether he won or he lost (according to the world's point of view), Paul was going to give praise to God.

We will be celebrating Thanksgiving this week. Our community service is Tuesday evening at 7:00 at the Jewish synagogue. I hope you can make it.

And the thing I want for you to think about this week is this:

As we come up to Thanksgiving, who will be thankful for you?

And what will they be thankful for?

I want to help people to find hope and healing through Jesus Christ, and I pray that I can live my life humbly and faithfully so that God can work through me.