

Introduction:

1. We have lots of sports fans in our congregation. What is your favorite sports moment?
 - a. There may be moments we remember in football, basketball or golf. But what is your favorite?
 - b. One of the worst sports moments was the Houston Oilers vs. the Buffalo Bills, January 3, 1993 in the AFC Wild Card game. Ahead 35-3 in the third quarter, the Oilers lost 41-38 in OT.
2. Whether moments of glory or defeat, we live in a world that has fallen madly in love with sports.
 - a. Every year hundreds of millions gather together to play or watch or talk about sports.
 - b. Professional athletes are idolized. We wear their jerseys and proclaim our allegiance. Our culture does not worship Baal or Buddha, but finds new gods named Manning, Romo and Brees.
 - c. Win or lose, teams are celebrated in ways that would have made the old gods jealous. Huge cathedrals are built to worship the gods. They are called Reliant, Superdome or what Jerry Jones says will be “the most visible sports arena in the world,” Dallas Cowboys Stadium.
 - d. Those just mentioned are only the football gods and their temples. Similar things could be said of baseball, basketball and auto racing gods and their holy places.

The Lesson:**I. Sports: A Modern Phenomenon?**

- A. For thousands of years athletes have come together to engage in fierce competition.
 1. The ancient Olympic Games began as early as 776 BC (the same era as Isaiah the prophet) in Olympia. Greece. For more than 1,000 years the games were contested for such prizes as wreaths and ribbons. The games were distinctly religious in nature, honoring the gods. The first marathon (26.2 miles) was also run in ancient Greece.
 2. In ancient Rome, massive, bloodthirsty crowds gathered to watch gladiators compete in the Coliseum. Again, the gods—even the Caesars—were honored by the competition. Some of the earliest Christians were sacrificed to satisfy the bloodlust of the Coliseum.
- B. The Apostle Paul was certainly familiar with the sporting events of his time.
 1. In 2 Timothy 2:5 he refers to the one who “competes in athletics.” The ASV translates this phrase as “contend in the games.” Being a world traveler, Paul certainly knew of the great sporting events held in Greece and Rome. His point in this text is that the preacher of the gospel is a man who must follow the rules; like the athlete in the games, he follows the rules or is disqualified. In this text, Timothy is called to faithfulness as a preacher.
 2. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Paul uses the games as illustrations. He refers to the runner and then the boxer. His point is that we should run our race in such a way that we may obtain a prize that cannot perish (not like the perishable wreath). His reference to the boxer is that we do not beat the air; that is, we do not waste our energy on that which produces no result. Paul’s efforts were put forth to defeat the enemy, even the enemy that might work within his own body. Paul understood that his event—his game—was real and had great consequences; he was in it to win it; it was the real thing and the only thing that mattered!
- C. But Americans have something more that matters in their minds. In our minds, there is something mystical, almost supernatural about sports. It is something that resonates deep within us. The thrill of victory gives us goose bumps; the agony of defeat can bring grown men to tears.
 1. Our love for sports transcends culture, race and politics. We root for the underdog and love it when the weaker team upsets the stronger team (unless it was ours that was upset; and then we demand either a new coach or quarterback).
 2. Statistics are our lifeblood. We may have trouble remembering our anniversaries, but we will remember for decades that Dallas went 9-7 in 2008—in what should have been a year of destiny. Football is in our hearts, minds and in our blood. *And today is game day!*

II. Sports: Does God Really Care?

- A. Sure, we care about it. We can live or die by our teams. But what does God think about it? Is he interested in wins and losses? Does he keep statistics? Would it be a heresy to suggest he does pay attention to sports and does keep stats?
- B. Before we can answer those questions, we must first understand God’s purposes and priorities for us in life. Why are we here? The answer to this question is foundational for our lives.

1. The answer is an easy one for those who follow God and respect His will. It is found in Isaiah 43:5-7. The context is about God bringing His people out of captivity. The principle, however, is the same for us as for Israel.
 - a. Those who are called by the name of God (which we are) are created for His glory. Our mission and purpose is to glorify God. God made you and me *for His glory*.
 - b. To bring glory to a thing means to exalt it and to give it high honor, to show that it is awesome and outstanding. Tonight, one team will win and will bring glory to the city where it is based. The whole city will celebrate for days.
2. Our foundational mission in life is to bring glory to God and to celebrate His praises, 1 Corinthians 10:31; 1 Peter 2:9. Our God is the ultimate being, the amazing, majestic and mighty one who created us and all that is. He made us to bring honor to Him and to worship Him. If we do not grasp that, then we do not understand our foundational purpose.
- C. Back to our question: Does God really care about sports? I would suggest that He does.
 1. If we are personally playing the game, He watches and cares about how we play.
 - a. A ball game (whether Little League baseball or NFL football) is more than just players on a field. It is an arena in which character is formed. The contest in the stadium results in more than mere sore muscles and a mark in the win-loss column. The game shapes our character, in good ways and bad.
 - b. Out of these contests come courage, humility, perseverance, as well as arrogance, anger and hostility. If we would give glory to God as we play, we must demonstrate the qualities found in Galatians 5:22-24. We must avoid the evil qualities found in Galatians 5:20. God's disapproval of ungodly conduct applies to the field of competition.
 2. He watches and cares about how we watch. He cares about our reaction. He watches us to see if we react in a God-glorifying way as we view the competition on the field.
 - a. Remember that everything we do is to be done to the glory of God, 1 Corinthians 10:31. Does screaming at the ref or coach or player on the field glorify God?
 - b. When we watch sports (whether in person or via TV) we focus on the performance of the athletes on the field. We see examples of anger, wrath, arrogance and sinful pride. While we see that on the field, do we not also see that in the stands?
 - c. On the field we may see humility (WR Larry Fitzgerald for the Cardinals actually hands the ball to the ref after a touchdown and doesn't do a dance), self-control and perseverance. Shouldn't those things be seen in those who watch the game?
 - d. And, after a win do we brag about what "our team did"—as though that makes us better people than those who were for the losing team? Do we show arrogance and feel we are superior to others? We all know that's how some people react. Instead of that, why not give glory to God who made men (like Peyton Manning) with the capability to rifle the ball 60 yards for a touchdown? Why not speak of the great God who gave the wide receiver (like Reggie Bush) the ability to run 40 yards in 4.3 seconds?
 - e. As we watch the athletic prowess of such players as Warner and Roethlisberger, remember the God who made man, and made him with marvelous skills, Psalms 139:14.
 - f. In the movie *Chariots of Fire*, you may recall the runner, Eric Liddell. He was blazingly fast, but to whom did he give credit for his speed? For Eric, running wasn't about getting in shape or losing weight. It was about pleasure. In the movie, he made this remarkable statement: "I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel His pleasure." He gave glory to God for his skill. Can we learn from that?
 3. He watches and keeps statistics—not of first downs and touchdowns—but stats on us!
 - a. He keeps track of how many hours we watch football versus time with family!
 - b. He keeps tab on how many days we watched sports versus days reading the Bible.
 - c. He marks down how many people choose to put sports ahead of Him (Matthew 6:33).
 - d. He will look at the attendance record of this church tonight to see how many put worship of Jesus ahead of the Super Bowl. God keeps statistics! What will yours say?

Conclusion:

1. We need to remember that what we do every moment of every day, including watching sports, has eternal ramifications and consequences. What we do does matter to God.
2. Sure, many of us have favorite sports moments. But the moments that matter most in life are those moments where you and I draw closer to God, closer to eternity, closer to heaven. Are you ready?