

Sermon for August 17, 2015 – VBS Sunday

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (NIV84)

Theme: God's Chosen Champions . . .

- 1) *Are focused.*
- 2) *Train Hard.*
- 3) *Compete with Determination.*

<sup>24</sup> *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. <sup>25</sup> Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. <sup>26</sup> Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. <sup>27</sup> No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

Imagine Packer general manager Ted Thompson appearing at your door one day telling you that they want you on their team.

“Who me?” I would probably ask. “Alright where are the cameras! This is some sort of joke, isn’t it?”

Imagine that it wasn’t a joke – that the Packers really want you. Now, that would certainly be a great honor – but a scary one too! I could just imagine telling Mr. Thompson: “Why me? I am a horrible player and would probably make you guys lose!”

He replies: “No, nothing is going to make us lose. Make no mistake: Aaron, Jordy, Eddie and the rest of the crew will win the Super bowl for us this year – I guarantee it! We don’t necessarily “need” you, but want you and have even prepared a special place on our team - just for you. If you are willing to give us your all – striving to do better than your best both on and off the field – then we would be happy to welcome you to our organization and guarantee that one of your fingers will be wearing a Super bowl ring by this time next summer.”

Wow, what would you say to this? I don’t know about you, but I would want to play. I would also want to do my best for the team – thanking them for letting me be a part of their Super bowl run.

Now, the likelihood of Ted Thompson asking any one of us to be a part of the Packers this year is extremely low. But, VBS children, someone has visited you this past week and asked you to be a part of His team. Who is that? God himself.

No, God didn’t ring your doorbell at home to talk with you. But make no mistake, you did meet with Him. Through all the lessons you learned in VBS, God has been inviting you to join the likes of Caleb, Joseph, Andrew, Timothy and Naaman’s servant girl. He knows you, loves you and has even created a special place for you on Team Jesus – and this is a far greater honor than playing for the Packers.

“Why is that?” you might ask. Because God is God; He is the most powerful person there is. He is the almighty King of Kings who created the whole universe and controls it. All the mountains and seas, the moon and stars, every wonderful sunset and sunrise – God created it all for us in love. And He has promised us much more: eternal life to all who look to His Son Jesus in faith.

Sadly, however, the very first people that ever lived (Adam and Eve) sinned against God by doing the very thing He commanded them not to do! This act of disobedience had a devastating effect on the whole human race: it separated us from both God and heaven. Because of this disobedience all people are born sinful and there is all sorts of evil in the world. Because of this sin there is death and the threat of hell.

But God does not want anyone separated from him in hell. Knowing that there is no way we could save ourselves, God the Father asked his Son to be our Champion. He asked Jesus to be born like us so that he could live the perfect, sinless life we all failed to live and, having accomplished that, take all our sins upon himself in order to suffer the eternal consequences we deserve because of them.

And do you know what? Jesus did everything his Father asked. He paid for the sins of all by living, dying and rising from the dead. He did this so that who ever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

Jesus, our great champion, has already won the crown of eternal life – something far more valuable than any Super bowl ring. Jesus won heaven and wants you to have it as well! He wants you to share in his victory over sin, death and the power of the devil. No, God doesn't need you; He doesn't need any of us! But He most definitely loves you, wants you and has even prepared a special place for you on His team.

If you believe in Jesus, then you are already one of God's chosen champions in Christ – a member of Team Jesus who is assured victory over sin, death and the devil. Let us now learn how we can thank God for this great honor by doing the things He wants us to do as members of His team. Let us learn that: **God's chosen champions . . . 1) Are focused 2) Train Hard 3) Compete with Determination.**

### Part One: Are Focused

The apostle Paul was one of God's chosen champions in Christ. In a letter that he wrote to a church in Corinth, the apostle Paul reminded the Christians there that being a member of God's Team is an honor that none of us deserve! Earlier in this letter he wrote: *Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.*<sup>1</sup>

Just as there is no way that I am even close to being good enough to play for the Packers, even more so there is no way any of us deserve to be on God's team. Understand, then, that being called to faith in Jesus is a great honor and a privilege – one that should motivate us to work hard at glorifying his name.

This is why the apostle Paul writes: *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.*

“But wait a second,” you might be thinking, “Didn't you say that we belong to team Jesus? When a team wins doesn't everybody win?” Why yes, this is true! “Then why does Paul say that only one gets the prize, and that an individual should run in such a way as to get it? Is he saying that we have to beat other people to get to heaven?” No, this is not what Paul is saying. What he means is this: that we should be so focused on the prize of heaven that Jesus won for us, that we do everything in our power to get it – and not just let our team drag us along for the ride! Let me explain what I mean with an illustration:

The Packers are a team and yet, in training camp, each player works hard in his position as an individual – as if everything depended on him; and in a certain way it does, because if a player doesn't give it his all in camp, he might get cut from the team. Playing for the Packers is an honor, but being on Team Jesus is an even greater honor. And so, just as every Packer fan wants every player to play his position better than

anyone else – focusing on winning - so God wants us to focus on receiving the prize of heaven that Jesus won for us. He also wants us to work hard at winning other souls for his kingdom by sharing his Gospel with our family friends and neighbors. Yes, we belong to a team, but as members of this team God wants each of us to individually live to his glory – ever focused on the prize waiting for us at the end of our lives and striving forward to get it.

### Part Two: Train Hard.

The apostle Paul continues: *Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.*

Professional athletes train hard both on and off the field. They know that every decision they make, from how much sleep they get, to the food they eat, to the weights they lift, to how far they run, bike or swim, will affect their performance.

What is true for the elite athlete is also true for the Christian. Being a member of Team Jesus means more than just coming to church on most Sundays. It means that our whole lives are dedicated to him. Every choice we make in life - from the TV shows we watch and music we listen to, to the career choices and friends we make – all has an impact on our faith. And it's important for us to realize this. Why? So that these choices don't tempt us away from the privilege of being on God's team.

Think of it this way: If a Packer player decided that he could do whatever he wanted after training, and he stayed up late partying every night, wouldn't you agree that this would affect his performance? Of course it would! And if his team warned him about it, but he didn't change . . . does he really value being a part of the team? No he doesn't.

God has graciously called you to be a member of Team Jesus – one of his champions! Understand the honor this is and train like a champion. And how do you do that? First and foremost by studying God's Word both at Church and at home. The Gospel is powerful. It is the only means the Holy Spirit uses to create and strengthen saving faith in our hearts. The Gospel tells us everything Jesus did to win our salvation. It tells us that, through faith in Jesus, we have become children of God, princes and princesses of heaven who have been adopted into his family. The Bible encourages us to stick to Jesus by avoiding sin and, if we do sin, looking to Him in repentance and faith for forgiveness. God's wonderful promises motivate us to train both on and off the field. His promises, with the Spirit's help, move us to live every aspect of our lives to God's glory.

### Part Three: Compete with Determination.

St. Paul writes: *Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

Elite teams like the Packers don't compete aimlessly. Aaron Rogers doesn't just throw the ball hoping that someone will catch it. When Aaron Rogers throws the ball he knows exactly to whom he is throwing it. The Packers always have a plan and they are confident that, if they follow their plan, they will win. Everything is done for a reason. Every play is rehearsed over and over again so that, come game day, they are a precision machine – every player's motion having a purpose to get the football to the goal line.

In the same way God wants us to live our lives with determination. We read the same Bible stories over and over again – starting when we are young and only ending when we die. Why? So that we don't live our lives aimlessly. All of us have a purpose. What is it? To live for Christ – using our various places and callings in life to His glory. And the Bible tells us how we can do this. In a certain way the Bible is like a play book – instructing each of us as to how we can do our part to witness the Gospel of God's love through our words and actions. The primary purpose of the Bible, however, is to tell us what Jesus has done. It shows us where the victory is and encourages us to receive it.

This is why, even if you feel yourself getting tired of studying the Bible, keep on studying it - reviewing it over and over again so that, come game day, you'll be ready. Then you will be able to encourage the family member who got sick. You'll be able to comfort the friend whose parent died. You will be ready when friends try to tempt you to do things that are wrong, and be ready to confess Christ's forgiving love when, filled with guilt, they see how their sinful choices led to very bad consequences. With the Spirit's help, you'll be ready for everything – confident of the victory you have in Christ. And, in the end, you will hear Jesus himself say: "Well done, my good servant! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, receive the crown of life that I promised you. 'Come, and take your inheritance, the kingdom that prepared for you since the creation of the world.'" Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:26-27 (NIV84)