

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

"Whose Team Am I On?"

My family is a lot like your family. We are always looking for ways to save money and add value. Recently, we made the move to cut cable and go with one of those streaming services. We have discovered Netflix is a whole lot cheaper than standard cable. I think my favorite thing to watch so far is episodes of an old show from the 1990's called "The West Wing." "The West Wing," is a highly acclaimed, award winning drama about those who live and work in the White House. There is this sentence which is repeated throughout the first two seasons that has really stuck with me. The sentence says, "I serve at the pleasure of the President." (pause) "I serve at the pleasure of the President." Sisters and brothers, we are called to serve at the pleasure of the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Our service is not made possible by elections. Our service is made possible by the life, sacrifice, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord. In honor of today's Super Bowl I'll put it another way. We are on God's team because of God's good grace made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Amen? Amen?! Amen! Alright. Now, brothers and sisters, how many of y'all like to win? (pause) How many of y'all like to win?! (pause) I like to win. How many of y'all have ever played on a team that won games? (Raise my hand.) When we play on a team, what comes first; what we want, or what is gonna help the team win? (pause) When we play on a team, what comes first; what we want, or what is gonna help the team win? (pause) It is the same thing with God's team. Sometimes we have to put what we want behind what is best for the team. For God's team, God's kingdom to grow, sometimes we have to put God first. So what does a win for God's kingdom look like and what does it mean to put God's team first?

In the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Jeremiah the prophet complains, "'If I say, I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up within my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot" (v.9). The Apostle Paul shares this sentiment, "For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (1Cor 9:16)!<sup>1</sup> Even Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane prayed, "**My father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt**" (Matt 26:39). In these passages we have a prophet, an apostle, and the Lord Jesus Christ all feeling pressed against this place where they can do what they want or what God asks them to do. Each of them feels drawn and compelled to do what God wants. By a show of hands how many of y'all have ever had a coach tell you to do something you did not want to do to help the team? (pause) How many have had a boss tell you to do something you did not want to do to help the business or your department meet a goal? (pause) How many children or youth have had to do their part to complete a project for school so your group can get a good grade? (pause) Sisters and brothers, how is being a part of God's family any different?

The Apostle Paul is free from all men (1Cor 9:19). Paul is no one's slave. Paul owes no human being anything, and yet necessity draws Paul to push past Paul's comfort zone. Paul is a Pharisee. Paul loves God and God's law. As a Pharisee Paul's job was to hold the Jewish people accountable to the Law of Moses. We talked two weeks ago about how, "'All things are lawful for [Paul], but not all things are helpful" (1Cor 6:12). I think Paul is building on the point by saying, "Yeah, I can do what I want, but if I want to win I need to do something different. I need to do something that pushes me out of my comfort zone." So instead of Paul rubbing in his freedom as an Apostle, the way many Pharisees at the time were doing, Paul steps out of his

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<sup>1</sup> Emphasis mine

comfort zone to meet people where they live. Paul tries to walk a mile with the Jews; with those outside the Law, and with those people who are weak and ignored in the hopes of winning more people for Jesus Christ. Paul is willing to do what is considered shameful by the Jews and outrageous to the Gentiles in order to reach one more for Jesus. That is what it means to put God and God's kingdom ahead of our wants and preferences.

Paul says he made himself a slave to all that I might win the more (v19). Part of this process is recognizing we all have vices and sins we struggle with. While we might not be enslaved to heroin, or crystal meth, how many of us feel the temptation to be enslaved to our screens; our tablets, our phones and our televisions. How many of us have an unhealthy relationship with food, or drink, or money, or fame, or sexual immorality? Everyone faces those challenges. Grace gives us the strength to fight those battles. Recognizing someone else's fight has some of the same challenges as our own is an opportunity to reach one more for Jesus. It won't be exactly the same. Do not pretend it is. However, recognizing our struggle gives us a point of empathy to begin to come along side with others who are also struggling with their sin.

To the Jew's Paul became "as a Jew," while not under the Law, Paul set an example for obedience under the law that those who honor and respect the Law might see Christ in the Law. To those outside the Law Paul became as one who transgressed the Law of Moses for the sake of obeying the Law of Christ which is to, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19). This does not mean Paul would run out and steal a car or sell drugs to reach those outside of the Law. It does mean Paul would not be so concerned with the dietary laws if it meant reaching one more for Jesus (1Cor 8:1-13). Paul says to the weak Paul became weak. Paul is returning to his points regarding those who struggle with eating food offered to idols. The weak are those who are new to the faith and weak in their walk. Their fear is any little breath of temptation might blow them off the path. To them Paul walks in their fear and trepidation with them, and like a big brother tries to set the good example that even more might be saved.

So what does it mean to follow Paul's example in the life of our church? Who are we trying to reach? **Who should we be trying to reach?** Sisters and brothers if our goal is to win for the Kingdom of God then we must follow the directions offered by our Lord and Savior. Jesus Christ went to the cross, died and was resurrected so humanity could have the chance to be saved, to grow in our love for God, and to be entirely sanctified in the love of Christ. That is the win. That is the goal. The objective of the body of Christ is to be the hands and feet of Christ sharing the good news of just how good it is to be loved by God. We are called to serve when we are well and happy. We are called to serve when we are sick and uncomfortable. We are called to serve when we don't want to. Please, hear now this challenge.

Reach one more for Jesus  
Before I close my eyes  
I must reach one more for Jesus  
I won't let another day go by  
That's what I'm living for  
To reach one more, one more for Jesus.

Today is our chance. This moment is our chance to win one for team; to reach one more for Jesus. What else are we living for? In Jesus' Name, Amen.