

## *Draft Day*

Shepherd's Grace Church

August 31, 2014

<sup>21</sup>From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the [hands](#) of the elders and [chief priests](#) and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. <sup>22</sup>And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." <sup>23</sup>But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

<sup>24</sup>Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup>For those who want to [save](#) their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. <sup>26</sup>For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? <sup>27</sup>"For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. <sup>28</sup>Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."  
(Matt. 16: 21-28)(Also read Rom. 12: 9-21)

This year, our family, my two daughters, sons, sons in law, Rochelle, and a few others of us are playing "Fantasy Football." Draft day for our league is just a couple of days from now and I must confess, I am a little nervous. I have never played, never had any desire to play but the girls seemed to have such fun with it last year that when they asked I immediately said yes! I mean, what could be better than a chance to talk a little trash on Sunday and do some Monday Morning Quarterbacking on Monday! It promises to be great fun and a different way to encourage some conversation in our family!

The whole season will begin with that draft that will take place soon. The draft is essential to a team's success. The available players are all the players in the National Football League but the only ones it makes sense to draft are those who can score points. You score points with touchdowns, extra points and safeties so to draft offensive linemen, as valuable as they are to the team in real football makes no sense in fantasy football.

Quarterbacks, running backs, wide receivers, tight ends, kickers and defense; these are the point scoring parts of a fantasy team. Everyone wants to draft the best of the best in these positions. At quarterback, Peyton Manning will be the first player taken. He has thrown more touchdowns in the past few seasons than any other quarterback in the history of the league. Robert Griffin III will probably go high. He can

score with both his arm and his legs. Tony Romo has a flair for the dramatic and can score from any place on the field. This makes him an asset. At running back, Adrian Peterson will be the top pick. He is a superstar and a first round hall-of-fame player. Jammal Charles from Kansas City will go high as well! Megatron from Detroit will be one of the first wide receivers. All of these players are superstars and anyone would want one or all of them on their team. The problem is there are 12 teams in the league and only a handful of superstars. Not everyone will be able to get Peyton Manning or Adrian Peterson!

No doubt, the superstars I mentioned above will all score their points each week and we know what we can expect from them. The winning team however will be the team that can effectively select from the middle of the pack. The winning team will be the team that finds a hot player that not everyone knows about or expects. The winning team will be the team that finds the next superstar! The winning team will be the team that drafts players with great desire and heart! The winning team will be the team that anticipates players coming through at unexpected times and generating results that no one expected them to generate.

To find those kinds of players, the players in the middle that will perform, the team owners must do their homework. They must look at the intangibles of the league and understand factors outside football that might detract from or add to a players opportunity to perform! Players who have had off-field issues in the off season might still be distracted by those issues! Players who have been involved with drugs and alcohol and have court cases and possible suspensions might let those issues take away from their performance. Players that have put in the extra practice time to make their game better, who might be ready to take their game to the next level; those players will be the difference makers. The smart owner will look at the factors outside football and think about how those factors might affect the play of their projected picks!

Before we go farther, let me apologize to those who are not sports fans. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> week out of the last three that I have used a sports analogy to make the point of the gospel. I know that not everybody is a sports fan but you know what they say; "sometimes sports imitates life, sometimes life imitates sports." In a society where we often times find ourselves confronted with sports on the front page of the newspaper, where we are surrounded by stories of million dollar babies, it is important to recognize that in sports, in life, the middle and the margins are more about reality than the artificial and superficial lives of those few who mistreat and misunderstand what it means to be a participating part of society and not just an image or idol which has always been worshiped!

Understanding the middle and even the margins, that is where our gospel and “Draft Day” meet. Drafted players will be expected to perform and to perform at high levels. They will be prepared and will be expected to execute. Such is the case for Jesus this morning. He and his disciples are still in Caesarea Philippi. He is preparing them. They are in training camp if you will and last week at camp they learned the fundamentals. They learned who Jesus is. He is Messiah, the anointed, the “Son of God” who will save the people from their sins. (1.21) He is “God with us!” Emmanuel! They all got credit for the response, though it was Simon who actually professed the answer out loud. The reason they all get credit is because they had all worshiped Jesus after He walked on water. (Matt. 14)

The disciples also received instructions about the remainder of camp. Knowing who Jesus is apparently is not enough! Knowing who they want Jesus to be for the world is not the whole playbook. Jesus is going to build on their understanding but the information they received, the information they professed is part of the secret playbook and apparently more information is yet to come! They are not to reveal what they know. They are not to speak to the press or send a message out on twitter. They are to tell no one! (Matt. 16. 20)

Even though that part of the message was in last week’s lesson, I believe it is important to consider it with this week’s message. Jesus has praised the ones in the middle, the ones putting themselves in a position of persecution (Matt. 5) for professing their faith in Him and almost immediately after praise there is strong admonition! Why does Jesus sternly command his disciples to tell no one that He is Messiah! Isn’t that the whole point of his coming? Isn’t that how the game will be won?

I did not say much about this admonition last week. I left it hanging there as a bit of information for you to ponder. I do not know if anyone left wondering about it but if you did, perhaps we can seek some clarification from the message Matthew brings to us this morning. Perhaps even thinking about “Draft Day” will assist us. You see, “Draft Day” is about who makes the cut, it is about who gets on the team. If we are not drafted, we do not get to play. If we do not understand the rules, we have less chance of being drafted. If we do not know how to play the game, if we do not know how to live the life, we cannot be as useful to the “Owner” If you didn’t leave with that question in your mind last week, perhaps we can cause you to wonder about it this morning!

So from that time on, Jesus began to teach his disciples that the “Son of Man” must go to Jerusalem, undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed and on the third day be raised! Even though Jesus has shared this information before, it apparently is received in a new way by the disciples. Now, knowing for sure who Jesus is, they hear of his game plan. He wants to go to

Jerusalem. Jerusalem, the city that kills prophets, that city where the marginalized and the middle are not welcome, that place of power where those who oppose power are disposed of, dismissed and denigrated as less than's! Jesus wants to go to Jerusalem!

Why? God has a special place in God's heart for Jerusalem. God knows that even though it is currently in the power of people who have misinterpreted God's instructions, that it is currently in the hands of those who would continue to oppress God's chosen people (Zech. 1), that Jerusalem's leadership continues to try to move out those who are in the middle; Jerusalem is that place from which God's purposes will be announced. Jesus goes to Jerusalem because it is the will of God! This is a play that was called even before the beginning of time, even before the creation of the world!

The disciples must learn, the church must learn that the game God is playing does not keep score according to conventional methods. God's victory comes not by might or by power but by humility and submission to God's plan for the world according to the leading of the Spirit of God! To accomplish the coming of the Kingdom, to cause others to see the Love of God shed abroad in the hearts of humanity, to rejoice in the presence of God is the objective of God's game!

God's will has nothing to do with worldly victories and demonstrations of power. God is the mighty warrior (Hag. 1) to be sure but God fights in a different way! His tactics are not our tactics. God's ways are not our ways and God's thoughts are not our thoughts. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so are God's ways above ours! (Is. 55) God knows how we are created. God knows the freedom we possess. It is, as expressed by the founding fathers of the United States, an inalienable right, a right given by God. For God to force by might or strength would be the equivalent of God participating in a cosmic rape of all humanity. God's will has everything to do with people choosing to come to him, with people recognizing that He has made them worthy by His forgiveness and Grace, by recognizing that God's goodness is to bless them and allow them life! The meaning of the word Jerusalem is "City of Peace." God's will is that this city, God's city fulfill the mission for which it is created!

As Jesus teaches this, He goes on to say that in Jerusalem, he must undergo great suffering at the hands of the powerful. The elders, the chief priests, the scribes are among the wealthy and elite. Their objective has become maintenance the status quo, protection of the things they have come to treasure. In Matt. 6, Jesus tells us "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." The powerful have begun to worship the god of power. Jesus' mission is to shake that power, to cause it to be refocused on God!

He is to be tortured and killed. The worldly powers believe this will eliminate the problem. As the disciples hear it, they imagine it will eliminate them as well. They are so focused on the seeming facts of life and death in the world that it is doubtful they can even hear Jesus tell them that God's power can overcome death with life. The disciples hear the play. He must go, and suffer and be killed, but they never hear that He will be raised; that He will overcome! Their training will not allow them to hear. They are worldly people not other-worldly. They cannot comprehend what they are told! The play Jesus is going to run is not one that has ever been practiced!

The church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has a difficult time with this play as well. Today, the church has become so entrenched in the center of the world that the concept of suffering, struggle, sorrow over those who cannot care for themselves has been lost! The church in this world worries about building maintenance and budget shortfalls. So frequently the church concerns itself with humanitarian projects far away while the people across the street find themselves struggling to feed their families! The church wants to portray a position of power in the face of the status quo all the while forgetting the One from whom all true power comes! In twenty one hundred years, the church has not learned much. Disciples still struggle to recognize that God plays the game by a different set of rules, rules which have been given but rarely followed!

Simon, the newly named rock, failed to understand this as well. He pulled the "Son of Man," the affirmed Messiah, the Son of the Living God away from revealing the will of God and began to rebuke Him! "God forbid it! This should never happen to you," Peter said! Jesus said to him, to the church, to you and me, to all who might want to be drafted today, "Don't get ahead of me!" "Don't pull me off task!" "Get behind me!" Learn to listen! Learn to understand the plays before you try to run them. These things take practice. Get behind me! The words are the same as those used in Matt. 3 when Jesus tells Satan to get behind and are very close to the Greek that Matthew uses to portray Jesus' invitation to the disciples, to the church, to the rock...Follow Me!

Peter either heard this invitation again, or decided he had much to learn about this Messiah who did not meet his expectations. Peter did not say another word. Instead, he learned to listen, to take to heart the call of the Christ, to seize the opportunity to follow Jesus! So how about you? Will you be Peter? Will you be the rock? Will you be the church upon whom (Yes, I said whom...the church is not a building the church is not a steeple; the church is not a dwelling place, the church is the people!) Christ will build the Kingdom of God? Sure, your immediate reaction is YES! Yes, Lord! "Draft me!" Use me. Before you answer so quickly, look at what lies immediately ahead!

Jesus says to the disciples, "Let any person who would follow me, first deny themselves." If we want to play on Jesus' team, we have to learn to play a team game. This business of salvation is not an individual sport. We are to be drafted onto a team. We are to work together for the coming of the kingdom. We are to pledge our lives, our resources and our prayers to the success of the mission of Jesus Christ. To be Messiah apparently means to teach others to do what Jesus was sent to do. Self-denial has long been an understood concept of Christianity but I believe it has been mis-understood for almost as long.

Self-denial does mean in part that we are to share from the gifts we have, the material and worldly gifts but it means more. It means that we share in our spiritual gifts...that we spend time teaching others what the benefit of following Jesus really is. Martin Luther said, "to know Christ is to know His benefits!" Our job then is to deny our own salvation, put it on display for all if you will so that all might be saved! John 6 tells us that the will of God is that none should be lost! If we concentrate only on our own salvation, our own knowledge of Christ without sharing that knowledge, that privilege we diminish the power of God's message. God so loved the WHOLE world that He gave His Son! The power of self denial is in our willingness to share God with all so that all might know and believe! To deny oneself means to step to the back, to be humble and let others come to recognize by your Love, by our Love the Love of a savior who is willing even to give His life for us!

When Jesus is looking at those whom He wants to draft onto his team, he is not looking for the superstars. Is there anyone who believes Jesus is not the ultimate superstar? Jesus is looking for those on the margins and in the middle who have found a grace beyond grace, a love beyond love and are willing to share that which they now possess with others. Love is not love unless we deny it from ourselves and give it away! Do you want to be on Jesus' team? On "Draft Day" will you give away yourself so others can come to know the gift of God?

Will you take up your cross and follow? Will you get behind Jesus? Will you not try to be out front proclaiming the message of the first church of (insert name here)? So often the church takes up the message of the world and tries to make it the message of God. So often we do the same things. It is hard not to do this. We believe that we are always aligned with God's will and that what we want must be what God wants. The responsibility of the church is to get behind Christ! The responsibility of the church is to set its mind not on worldly things but on divine things. Today's church seems to frequently fall into the trap of criticizing things. We criticize the behavior of others...illegal immigrants, homosexuals, adulterers (though when was the last time you heard a pastor really preach from the pulpit about adultery?), war mongers, peace lovers! We are great at criticism! Look at the scriptures! Look especially at the gospels! Jesus did not criticize. Jesus lifted and loved. The cross is not a reaction

to criticism. The cross is a response in love! If you are not willing to respond with love and leave the criticism and judgment at the door, you will find it very difficult to be on Jesus' team!

Whoever would save his life, that is, get out in front of Jesus and put himself/herself above the will of God will gain reward in this world but will lose life! They will not taste death, all will be raised to eternal life, but they will lose the joy of life in Jesus Christ, life in giving, in loving! To lose life for the sake of Christ is to find the example Christ sets out ahead of us and follow that. In following we gain perspective, knowledge, sense of purpose. Life in Christ lets us experience all these things! Life in Christ allows us to live by his example and then live as his example!

As Jesus prepares his team, he asks, "What does it profit a person to gain the whole world only to lose life?" Of course there is no logical answer to the question. No person would choose knowingly to take all the world has to offer only to wind up unable to enjoy it. The thinking worldly person would stop just short of all! The thinking church often does the same thing. We hold out our ministries to the world as an example so we can be praised and honored. We partner with people of the world to accomplish medical and many other miracles so we can tout those triumphs and gain membership. Today's generation of seekers know that game. The denominational churches are declining because they cannot fool the person looking for something other than the world. Advertising campaigns and presence on social media do not make for ministry. Ministry from the back, quiet, humble, following the lead of Christ makes ministry. Willingness to give everything we have learned, willing to be open and honest, willing to recognize the stranger in our midst is ministry.

So, today is "Draft Day"! Jesus is going to select his team. In a fantasy league, there are many owners. In Jesus' league, there is only one. God owns the team. Jesus is the superstar! He does things in a different way. He does not seek fame and glory but only those who will walk behind him, learning from him, running his plays and not making up their own. He has examined all the possible draft choices. Just as in "fantasy football" he has taken a set of criteria for looking at those in the middle and on the margins. The criteria include some of the items you heard mentioned in Romans 12 today.

Be genuine, hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good, love one another! These are a few of the things Jesus investigates about His draft choices. He seeks after those who genuinely seek after Him! He looks for those who have a heart for the poor, who resist evil and fight against it, those who genuinely try to "Love One Another!"

At the end of the conversation, Jesus has only one strategy. There is only one way to score. He must go to Jerusalem, He must be persecuted, he must be put to death. This is the only way God can win! God cannot tolerate sin and God can only win when sin is eradicated. Jesus knows he must take on the sin of the world in order for the fullness of God's kingdom to be realized, in order for God to score the victory that God has promised. He is willing to take on the world, and all the sin of the world in order for God to accomplish God's plan. He is the star who must act as the decoy in order to allow all the other members of the team to score!

Today is draft day! Jesus is choosing His team! He wants to choose those who will set themselves behind him so they can be sheltered by His grace and love. He wants to choose you! He wants to choose me! Do we meet the criteria...NO! But we can accomplish all things through Christ who takes on our sin so that we might be worthy to be on God's team! In this fantasy draft, there are two draft choices. God has chosen us. Will we choose God? You are on the clock! Amen!