

August 03, 2008 – SERMON SUMMARY

Champions of the World: Moving Up to the Next Level (Jn.13:33-38, Php.3:10-14, 1 Jn.5:3-5)

Introduction: Spain seems to be on a roll this year: Spain won the European cup, then Rafa Nadal took Wimbledon, then Carlos Sastre won the Tour de France. The top song in Spain seems to be "Campeones, campeones."

▪ A champion is defined as someone who has won 1st place in a competition, or is dazzlingly skilled in any field, or someone who fights for a cause. The medieval Latin champion meant a warrior or defender, one who does battle for another's rights or honor; only in modern times has "champion" acquired its latest meaning of "a 1st place winner in competition, or one who shows marked superiority." Jesus is our champion in every sense of the word; in fact, He's the only winner of the "human race"; the prize He won for us is our salvation, Life abundant & eternal. There's never been a champion like Him in all of history who so selflessly shared his victory with others. The victory that overcomes the world is our faith. "Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes in Jesus as the Son of God" (1Jn5:5).

▪ So the real "champions of the world" are those who put their trust in Jesus as Lord. God's intention is that we fully participate in Christ's victory, starting right here & now; but we must never forget that His victory totally contradicts the world's way of winning! His victory was the cross – precisely where we get connected up to God's way of winning & God's way of making us champions! Resurrection power means having the power to live like Jesus lived! Will we follow Jesus the crucified & resurrected Lord, or fall back into default mode & try to be champions our own way?

1) Peter wanted to be a champion: the best fisherman on the Sea of Galilee, the best disciple in the pack. The disciples frequently argued about who would be at the top of the organizational chart in the Kingdom of heaven; probably several of those discussions were provoked by Peter's ambition & ego.

▪ Whatever the causes behind Peter's character (both assets & liabilities), Jesus chose him & called him; the final verdict of his life would be determined not by what he brought to the table, but by the one whom he followed in life, the one who held his deepest loyalty. And so it is with us: it's not what we have or who we are that matters most, but whom we follow, whose cause we champion & pour our energies into, who holds our deepest loyalty!

▪ Jesus knew that Peter had a long way to go to become a champion after God's own heart, usable in God's Kingdom. So Jesus constantly challenged Peter's way of thinking, his carnal mentality, his egocentric frame of reference. If Peter was going to measure up to the hardships & blessings that were headed his way, he needed to grow up, move on to the next level of spiritual maturity, to be ready for the new things God wanted to do in his life.

▪ Computer games always entice the player up to the next level: if you win at this level, you can move up higher; if you overcome the obstacles of this level, you can take on a new challenge! It's the same with us in our spiritual life: we should already be persons of wisdom & depth; God challenges us concerning our vision of life, discipline, & fruitfulness. In our life as a church we're also facing big challenges this fall as we move to two services, seeking to be on track with what God wants to do in Madrid; but it all depends on having the volunteers to work with children, as ushers, in hospitality, etc.

2) In Jn.13:33 Jesus gives His disciples some foreshadowing of what's about to happen: He's going away & they cannot come with Him. But this is only a preparatory statement, intended to whet their appetite for His most important commandment – "love one another as I have loved you" (vv.34-35).

- This was Jesus' keynote message for that moment, but Peter's response was, "Lord, where are you going?" (v.36). Peter totally missed Jesus' important word about love, because Peter feared Jesus' going away somewhere that Peter couldn't come along. So his response to Jesus' greatest commandment was, "Hey, where you going, Lord, that I can't come with you?"

- Jesus reiterates to Peter: "Where I'm going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later." Peter, however, keeps on insisting (v.37): "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I'll lay down my life for you." Peter's problem was that he grossly over-estimated his own ability & readiness to serve the Lord, so Jesus' words about his not getting to come along were devastating to Peter. Finally Jesus has to be very blunt with Peter: "You believe you're ready to lay down your life for me? Sorry to have to inform you, but before dawn tomorrow morning you'll deny me 3 times!" Peter wasn't ready for the next level! But we too deny our Lord. Every time we fail to practice His commandment to love, we fall into the same trap! Jesus was on His way to the cross; nothing could deter Him from that. But Peter was not ready for the cross in his life (too often we aren't ready for it either!).

3) A little later in Jn.16:12 Jesus told His disciples, "I have much more to say to you, more than you can bear now." Jesus had a lot more to say to those men, but they weren't ready to hear it; they couldn't bear it at that moment.

- They had too many false expectations, too many carnal paradigms, too much that had not been corrected in their lives or submitted to Christ's Lordship. So they weren't ready to hear the "deeper stuff." Do you ever wonder why God doesn't teach you more truth or lead you into deeper understanding? He knows our limits; He knows when we're ready for more & when we're not. So He waits patiently until we actually want to move up to a new level, tired enough of the old level & our old failures that we're actually longing for a fresh power in our lives, a new challenge. That's the teachable moment & Jesus takes advantage of it.

- In my own life I hear the Lord telling me the same thing: "I've got more to teach you, but you spend 'way too much time poring over the garbage dump of self-worship & flesh-centeredness, nostalgia & sentimentalism: your comfort zone. How about let's move on up to the next level?!" God's grace is greater than all my sin because Jesus doesn't give up on me!

- Jesus didn't give up on His disciples just because they weren't ready to hear everything right then – He said, "You can't bear it now, but I'm going to send you the Spirit of truth, who will guide you into all the truth & its application to your life." This powerful promise means it's the Spirit's job to keep opening our eyes, waking us up, giving us more hunger & thirst for Jesus, so He can move us on to more understanding & a deeper practice of His presence & His love!

- You can't give people what you don't have, & people need God's perspective more than they need yours; they need God's power & God's message, especially when they're afflicted, confused, traumatized, agnostic. God is longing to give you all these things if you're ready to move up to the next level with Him. He longs to share His heart with His children, with those who will care about His agenda of saving the world, & seek to get on board with what He's doing!

- So when you read the Bible, are you eagerly seeking God's thoughts to inform your mind, shape your heart, & guide your way? Or do you just read the Word to get some devotional

thought to help you through the day, & then you're out the door & on to your own business? He wants to take us deeper, but the means He chooses to use are His Word & His Spirit.

Conclusion: *Too often we're just interested in being champions – the kind that always take 1st place or have to win the prize. God wants us to be champions – but not that kind (at least not now); He wants us to be the kind of champion that does battle for the sake of others, fighting for their salvation; the kind that champions the cause of Christ & does it His way, by taking up our cross. I hear Jesus calling me to a new level of spiritual growth & passion these days; anybody else out there like that?*

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