

Worship A Game Of Golf

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Date: 08 September 1991

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[0 : 00] Our God, we often cripple each other by the expectations we have of one another, and yet we have far greater expectations of you, and we ask that our greatest expectations might be met as we turn to you and to your word.

We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. The passage I want to look at is on page 152, the New Testament section of your pew Bible, page 152, and it really starts with Romans chapter 11, verse 33.

I want to talk about worship. We're beginning a series of talks next week on mission, and I was reminded this week that our mission to the other parts of the world is still secondary to our primary responsibility, and that is that our lives should be a life of worship, and that we gather on this Lord's Day morning in order corporately to do what we do throughout the week individually, and that is to worship God.

So that when we're talking about mission, our first responsibility is worship, our second responsibility is to love our neighbor as ourselves, and the third responsibility is to go into all the world and preach the gospel.

And it's important to keep that priority in place because, as you know, lots of people can go on the mission field and lose their priorities, just as lots of people can worship and lose their sense of mission.

[2 : 21] So important. If you run into people like Australian clergymen from Sydney particularly, one of the points they make, and Dr. Bill D'Ambrell made this and others have made it since, is that the thing we do in church is not worship.

And that's very unhelpful, I find. But they insist that there are grounds for believing that, and I'm feeling a little persuaded that maybe they are right.

What we do in church, I think, is summarized by the first verses from the passage today, and that is we contemplate, look at verse 33, we have set before us in church, in the music, the choir, the hymns, the scriptures, everything that's part of the service, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.

We are profoundly reminded, if the service accomplishes what it's supposed to accomplish, of how unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways.

And we are brought to a place of awe and wonder as we realize who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor, or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid, for from him and through him and to him are all things.

[4 : 13] To him be glory forever. Amen. So in those verses, you have what I would like you to think of as a great panorama view of the mercies of God.

And that great panorama view of the mercies of God necessarily comes into sharp focus in the person of Jesus Christ and more particularly in the person of Jesus Christ on the cross.

So that to be aware of the vastness and immeasurable mercies of God, it is important that there should be placarded before you Christ crucified crucified.

So that you will be profoundly impressed with the mercies of God. That will be the thing that happens to you.

And that when you leave the congregation this morning and the building, you will go away with a profound and pervasive sense of the mercies of God.

[5 : 29] So that the whole of your life will then be a response to having seen, held up before you, the mercies of God.

And then you see, you come to chapter 12 where it says, I appeal to you, therefore, by the mercies of God.

This is the thing that motivates you is the awareness of the mercies of God which are set before you in a church service.

That's what's set before you. But then on the basis of that, Paul says, I appeal to you.

I exhort you. And what he's doing is what a coach does for a player.

[6 : 28] He exhorts him so that the thing the player is dying to do, he will do even better and in a more clear and consistent way.

So that if golf is your game and the coach comes along and shows you how to hit the ball better and it's your desire to do that, then what he's doing is what St. Paul does for us when he says, I exhort you to do the thing that you most long to do and to do it more and more and better and better.

That's how the chapter starts. I appeal to you by the mercies of God. Now, what I want to do this morning is to teach you how to play golf.

And in this sense, you know, in the sense in which it's here, I am aware that a lot of you have been extremely indulgent over the summer in recreational activities of one kind and another, sailing trips and mountain climbing and swimming and traveling and doing all the wonderful things that it's possible for us to do in our modern world.

And the difficulty with those things is that they are deeply satisfying. You know, they really meet us at an important level in our lives.

[7 : 59] They really are important to us and we get a lot of satisfaction of them. When you ascend the highest peak as a mountain climber, when you hit a hole in one, when you win a sailing race, when you do any of those things in your recreational pursuits, you will find that at a very deep level, you are vindicated, you are satisfied, you are happy in a way that you're not happy a lot of the rest of the time.

Miserable soul that you are. And that those things appeal to you. So what I want to talk to you about is playing golf.

And I read a book the other day which had the usual thing in the front of it which said, all characters in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental.

And I would like to reverse that statement and say to you, anybody you see portrayed in what I have to say this morning is entirely on purpose and I hope you'll take it home with you.

But what I'm saying and I think what Paul is saying, golf you see for a golfer is something he desperately wants to do well so that you can see him sitting on a bus even going like this, you know, and checking up the angle and flexing his wrists and doing wonderful things like that because the thing that he does he wants to do exceptionally well and every time he steps up to the ball and chooses a club and places himself, what he really wants is to make the most superb shot in the world.

[9 : 46] So he really wants to do it well. If somebody can come along and help him do it, that's sort of what St. Paul does when he says, I exhort you by the mercies of God.

In other words, you are to be motivated deeply by what you are doing. But you are to be motivated in a peculiar way.

You see, you're not being motivated to make golf an end in itself. You are, you are, as Paul says, to present your bodies a living sacrifice.

Now, that's a metaphor which is taken from the ancient world of religion where sacrifices were offered. But he says, what you're to do here is to put your whole self into it.

Every fiber of your being, every thought of your imagination, every power of concentration of your mind, you're to put your whole self into it.

[10 : 50] And if you put your whole self into it, the only way you can do that is if it is, in a sense, a sacrifice of your whole self in order to do what you're doing and to do it supremely well.

So, you put your whole self into it, Paul says. And then he says, you, the sacrifice you're making is not to golf, but to God.

the point I'm trying to get over and you may be completely lost and I may be in a totally irretrievable situation. I have lost the ball, so let's make it hard.

But the point that I'm trying to make for you and with you is in order to do this thing well, you have to be motivated by something which is far more than what you are in fact doing.

In other words, you have to live your life, you've got to play the game with a view to making a total commitment of the whole of your being to a desired object.

[12 : 11] And that desired object is a response to the mercy that God has shown you. God has motivated you to take your life and to give your very best to present your bodies a living sacrifice.

In other words, you put everything you have into it. Now, to put everything you have into playing golf would be stupid. Some people get to that stage, I'm afraid, though.

And that's the trouble. That's why golf clubs aren't nearly as nice as churches. Because churches still maintain some sense of the transcendence of God while golf clubs are fixed on a hole-in-one. That's the ultimate reality for them. And so, this way you're to live your life is to make this total commitment of yourself to a goal which is way beyond yourself and which is a response to something that's been shown to you.

So, you put the best that you have into it. and so that the enjoyment of life is when the whole of your life becomes a living sacrifice.

[13 : 41] You see, your life is not meant to be that God has given you a certain amount and you're to, in a miserly way, spend it out a little bit at a time so it will last as long as possible.

That's not what's to happen. But by reason of the mercies of God, you are to make the whole of yourself an unlimited response to the unlimited mercies of God.

You are to give yourself over and over again in every part of your life, you are to give yourself to God as a living sacrifice. That's what Paul wants us to do.

It's not that we have a little bit that we want to, I mean, you know, most of us look at religion as having a little bit that we want to hold on to for as long as possible.

But that's not what it is. It's the whole of our life lived in response to God's total self-giving in the mercy that he has shown us in the death of Jesus Christ.

[14 : 48] And so Paul says this is your logical worship. friendship. That is, this is the thing you're to do.

Now, when he finishes that, what he means by that is that you were not designed to play golf. You were designed to live a life of total self-giving to God.

That's the logical thing. And most of us recognize that deep down. That's what you're meant to do. You're meant to live your life as a total sacrifice to God.

And when you become consumed with three over par or something like that, it means your objectives have been drastically lowered and that you haven't really very much to live for if that's all you're living for.

But if you were at the same time playing golf to the glory of God and in a total self-giving of yourself to God, then that makes it meaningful. And that makes sailing and swimming and hiking and all the luxurious and wonderful recreational things that we can do that makes them all of supreme importance, not in themselves, but in terms of them being in some way a total presenting yourself a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable unto God because this is, you are worshipping him in what you're doing.

[16 : 20] You see, this is what I think the Australians meant, is that once you have had placarded before you the mercies of God, then you go to your business, you go to your work, you go to your recreation, you go to your home, you go to your relationships and you bring to all of them the response to your encounter with the mercies of God.

God. That's what you bring to all those situations so that if you mess up on that, then life becomes meaningless because life is meant to be lived as a response to the mercies of God and if it narrows down, it becomes pointless.

That's why Paul goes on to say, do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Now, you see, golf is addictive, as are many other recreational pursuits. They're highly addictive and so they tend to conform your mind and after you talk to somebody who becomes obsessed with one of these things, that's all they can talk about, that's all they know about, that's the only relationships they have, their whole world has been conformed to that incidental thing to life.

And so Christians are generally considered to be against all those kinds of things. But it's not being against that, it's to being against the conforming of your minds to narrow understanding of what your life is all about.

[18 : 15] Your life is infinitely more important than that and you're not to allow your obsession with this sport or this thing or that thing to control your life, you're not allow that conforming pressure to bear in on you, but you are to be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you will know what

is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

So that's how God works and I've tried to use, I'm not sure successfully, mine may have just floundered, but what I've tried to use is golf to show you that you can put into even a game of golf the kind of total response of the whole of yourself, of the whole of your being, of the whole of who you are, as a living sacrifice to God, so that your game of golf becomes a part of the worship of your life, a part of a life that is a continuing offering of worship and thanksgiving to God, so that you see it in those terms.

Now, you may think golf is a bit of a silly illustration, but let me tell you, that the rest of your life is to be lived in exactly the same way, Paul says.

So, if you are into chemotherapy, the same thing applies. Beholding the mercies of God, commit your bodies a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable unto God.

bereavement, don't be conformed by the fear which might grip you and leave you in despair, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that in that situation you might see a demonstration of the will of God, and you might in fact be a demonstration to others of the will of God.

[20 : 24] So, in your bereavement, exactly the same thing happens. when people come in their bereavement, you have to say to them, I mean, you have to as gently and lovingly and compassionately as you can, demonstrate to them the mercies of God, so that in the particular trial and difficulty that they are going through in that moment, you say, by the mercies of God, will you offer to God a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving with the whole of your being, because this is what you are meant to do in the situation in which you find yourself even now.

And because you're doing that, you're not to be conformed again to the fear and the misery and the anxiety and the fretfulness that may mark your life, but you're in that very process to be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you are again offering to God the worship of praise and thanksgiving in the experience that he's calling you to.

I'd like to go on and enumerate how you handle bankruptcy and unemployment in the same way, or swimming or fishing or sailing or riding the bus or doing your banking or teaching or doing your accounts.

That's what your life is to be. And what is meant to happen here is that you have portrayed before you so that it never leaves your mind or your awareness the mercies of God as they are set before us in the whole of nature, in the whole of history, in the whole of humanity, but primarily in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

You are to see that and seeing that you are to be motivated to live the whole of your life which you long to do as an offering of praise and thanksgiving to God.

[22 : 58] And that's how you're to do it. That's how we're to live it. And Paul wants to encourage us to do it so that we won't be conformed to this world which is passing, transitory, and ultimately meaningless, but that you will live your life in terms of the logical worship of God being the central activity of your life, so that in your circumstances, whatever they may be, whether it's a circumstance of great joy and great fulfillment, or whether it's a circumstance of great tragedy and great hardship, that in either case you will be knowing the will of God, not being conformed to this world, but being transformed, that you may know in the circumstances of your life the good and perfect will of God.

And as I look at you, I'm aware of what in some cases are great happiness, and in other cases, great tragedy, and a lot of suffering, and a lot of difficulty.

But I think it applies equally to us all, and that what Paul has to say to one, he says to us all, I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies, that is, your whole self, and Paul didn't treat himself and his body as two different things, that's why it's that way, himself and his body are the same thing, so that you can present your old age a living sacrifice, you can present your increasing debilities as a living sacrifice, you can present the encroachment of disease as a living sacrifice, Paul says, and there's nothing else positive you can do with it that I know of, except that, that you present your whole person, your whole being, a living sacrifice, and be not conformed, but be transformed in that experience, and in that experience that you will know and bear witness to the will of God being worked out in your life.

Now, that's what Christian faith is, and I don't think there is anything that even touches it in terms of meaning, and I could appeal to you, that as on this day there are presented to you the mercies of God in the person of Jesus Christ, that your whole response would be the loving response of giving yourself to the thing that you most want to do, and that is to make the whole of your life a sacrifice

of thanksgiving to God, the whole of your being, in every area and every aspect of your life, that this is what you're meant to do with it, it's what you're meant to do with every part of your life, in order that you will not be conformed to the pattern of despair, which is this passing world, but that you'll be transformed by the renewing of your mind to the living hope, which is the will of God in the present and in prospect.

Let me pray. our God grant that we may have a wonderful vision of your mercies towards us, an indelible vision on our minds and on our hearts, that the whole of our life may be a logical, reasonable response, and that we may offer to you in everything we do, we may offer to you a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving in response to the mercies that you have made known, and that in this life, you will not be conformed to this passing age, but transformed by the continuing process of your Holy

[28 : 00] Spirit renewing our minds to the hope that is ours in you, and the working out of your will in our lives.

We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.