

It All Comes Down To What Matters Most

As I looked back over the years, it looks like about every three years I preach some version of a Super Bowl Sermon. 2009 is one of those years. This is Super Bowl Sunday. Two teams are ready to play in what has become the biggest sporting event in America each year, the Super Bowl. I know it probably doesn't sound very spiritual – to preach a Super Bowl sermon - but remember that Jesus used everyday events and circumstances to teach spiritual truths. “The kingdom of heaven is like...” Well, the kingdom of heaven isn't anything like the Super Bowl, but there are some truths for our life that we can discover today as we look at the game of football.

I've called this message “It All Comes Down To What Matters Most.” You see there are some things about the game that really don't matter too much. All the pre-game hype, who is singing at halftime, the commercials, the cheerleaders, what jerseys the players wear, none of that is really all that important. I want to talk about the stuff that really matters, in tonight's game and in our lives.

1. What's on the inside matters. This is a football. It looks okay. It feels okay. It has all the right marking on it. The laces are right, the name is right. Everything about the outside looks right to us. But the truth is, it's what's on the inside that makes all the difference. If it doesn't have the right stuff on the inside - if it isn't filled with air, this ball is worthless in a football game.

Without being filled with air, this ball can't fulfill its purpose. It can't truly be what it was designed to be.

May I tell you, it doesn't matter that much how you look on the outside, but it's what's on the inside that matters most in your life. You may have all the right looks, all the right markings, but if your aren't filled with His life, you can't fulfill your purpose. You and this football were both created for a reason, with a purpose in mind. But you can't be what you were designed to be without the breath and life of God and His Spirit filling your life.

This football makes a great football, but it makes a poor hat, a poor door stop, etc. It needs to get filled up with air and then it can be all it was meant to be. And we need to get filled up with Christ and his forgiveness, his cleansing, his love and his life and then we can be all he meant us to be. What do we do?

We come to him in humility, in repentance and in faith. We repent of our sins and ask Jesus to be the Savior and Lord of our life. Ask him to come into your heart and life today and you will become a new creation in Christ. Your sins will be forgiven. Ask him to fill you up with his life and his light. Your Spirit will be reborn (we call it being born again - being made new.) Your mind will be renewed as His Spirit and word begin to fill your life and your mind with a new perspective, a new way of thinking. Your emotions will be refocused, your will is redirected to want to do what is right and pleasing to God and helpful to others. Your whole body and life and soul and spirit then belong to Christ. Your life will be under new management. You will have someone new calling the plays for your life.

You see, when we repent of our sins and invite Christ to save us and come into our life, he breathes his life into us. That's why we call salvation being born again. He takes up residence in our life and gives us a new life, a new purpose. When we open our life to him in this way, we are filled with life, filled with power, filled with purpose. And when you are filled with his life, you are fulfilled as well. You step into your purpose when you discover God's saving purpose for your life. Anything less than being filled up with Jesus will keep you from your full potential and purpose. It will keep you from really living. It matters. What's on the inside matters the most!

2. Fundamentals matter. In every area and facet of your life, fundamentals matter. You learn how to walk as a baby and every time you walk - from the first steps to your walk down the aisle this morning – you rely upon the same fundamentals of balance, coordination, gravity, and momentum.

How you eat and drink relies upon the fundamentals. There is not much room for innovation here. Lift, aim, insert, close mouth, chew, swallow. Fundamentals. Driving a car = start the engine, gears, pedals, steering. Playing the piano is about fundamentals. Everyone starts by finding middle C. You can't play if you don't know the fundamentals.

Football is about the fundamentals. Pass, catch, run, kick, block, tackle. Which ever team executes the fundamentals the best tonight will win the Super Bowl. How well you can dance or celebrate after the touchdown depends upon how well you can execute the fundamentals.

The fundamentals of your life and walk with God matter. It starts the same with everyone. We repent of our sins and ask Christ to be our Savior and Lord of our life. Then, we introduce the fundamentals into our relationship with Christ. We pray, talking to God regularly and consistently. We read and study the Bible so we can learn what God desires of us and we apply it to our life in obedience. We learn to walk in faith. We spend time in worship and giving praise to God. We connect with fellow believers in fellowship. We discover our own gifts and we share those gifts with others. We give to God and the work of his kingdom. We love God and we love our neighbors. We share with others what Christ has done for us. These are the fundamentals. The bible says, **“And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who obey his commands live in him and he in them.” 1 John 3:23.**

This is how you keep your life filled with the right stuff. We live in him and he lives in us. It is by executing these fundamentals of the faith that we live out our life successfully, filled and fulfilled. Let me caution you about those folks who are always looking for the shortcuts and for the secret things. Beware. It's still about the fundamentals. It's about executing the fundamentals. You've heard me say it often, “the plain things are the main things and the main things are the plain things.” Stick to the fundamentals.

3. The clock matters. In the game tonight there are two clocks that matter, the game clock and the play clock. The game clock lets us know how much time we have left to play the game. 15 minutes. 2 minutes. The strategies may need to change for playing the game depending on the time left on the clock. We need to know what time it is on the game clock.

We believe Jesus is coming soon. We don't know how much time we have left, but the signs around us certainly point to the Lord's return and the end of days. Jesus said of many of the things we are witnessing now in our world, **“When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” Luke 21:28**

Be aware of the time on the game clock. It appears to be winding down. We have shared a number of sermons over the past year or so that point to possible end-

time scenarios. So many things in our world line up with biblical prophecies concerning the end times. How late is it? We don't know. Only God knows, but he has given us signs and warnings in the Scripture.

The Bible speaks of a day when the Lord will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it. It's pretty easy to imagine that day coming, isn't it? With so many nations expressing their hatred of Israel, with Iran's president trying to acquire nuclear weapons, with Russia's behind the scene deals with some of the middle east nations. But Zechariah says of that day, "then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem...on that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem...on that day, the Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord and his name the only name."

In the game tonight there will be a two minute warning. Perhaps in a spiritual sense we have heard the two minute warning. There doesn't seem to be much time left for this world and we must devote ourselves to the work of God and his kingdom as never before.

If we are down to the two minute warning, then as the church we need to examine our play strategy. We don't have a whole other half or quarter to play. The spiritual game clock is winding down. It may be time to try a hurry up offense. Can we reach the lost of this world before time runs out? People are dying everyday without Christ and there is just so much time left. We need to give it all we've got.

We don't have time for fussing and fighting among ourselves. The seconds are ticking away on the game clock and what can be done must be done. How foolish if in the last seconds of the game tonight, while the game could still be won, one team starts fighting with each other on the bench. They start making stupid mistakes. They forget the fundamentals. They let pride and arrogance get in the way. They start showboating, showing off for the cameras and they forget they only have two minutes to play and the end up losing the game. That would be sad. Unfortunate for some, but it wouldn't really be tragic.

I'll tell you what will be tragic. It will be tragic if the church stands idly by, staring at the game clock, either fighting with each other on the sidelines because we can't

agree upon the color of the team jerseys or whether the programs should be printed using King James English, or showing off for the tv cameras, spending our time and money and resources to gain fame and acceptance while the remaining moments of time slip away and a lost world perishes without ever hearing the news that Jesus died on the cross to save them and forgive their sins. That would be tragic. The seconds are ticking away on the game clock and it matters how we respond.

But there is another clock that matters. That is the play clock. The rules say “the clock begins at 40 seconds at end of the previous play unless there is an administrative stoppage including a change of possession at which time 25 seconds is used and clock begins after the referee declares the ball ready for play.” The quarterback has to know how much time is on the play clock. Regardless of how many minutes are on the game clock, the play clock tells him he only has a matter of seconds to snap the ball before he will be penalized for delay of game.

The play clock effects us personally. We don't know the day or the hour when Jesus will return for his church. Although it looks to me like the game clock is winding down, the truth is Jesus might wait another millennium before he decides to come again, but that doesn't change the fact that the play clock is still ticking away for me and for you personally. I am running out of time, just like you are. If you are counting on making things right with God at some later date, you might ought to consider the time on the play clock instead of the time on the game clock. Some of us are living like the only clock that matters is the game clock. We think we still have plenty of time – a whole other half or quarter of the game to play.

“They've been saying that stuff about the end of the world and about Jesus coming for 2,000 years and he hasn't come yet, so what's the big deal? I've got plenty of time.” That's deceptive. You're only looking at the game clock. Look at the play clock. Time may be about to run out for you personally. What are you going to do? Have you made things right in your life? Are you prepared to stand before God? Are things right with family and friends? Are there too many important things left undone, unfinished? The play clock is running down for you and for me. It matters what time it is, on the game clock and on the play clock. Are you living your life wisely? Are you living in light of eternity? Is Jesus pleased with how you are living your life? Are you

making your life count for time and for eternity? The clock is running down. The time on the game clock and on the play clock both matter and we are almost out of time.

4. The referee matters. The teams tonight don't just play the game any old way they want. There are rules and consequences for breaking the rules – penalties, loss of down, loss of yards, being ejected from the game, fined. There are rules and there are officials, referees that enforce the rules. What the referee says matters.

There are referees in our life of faith as well. The bible says to let the peace of Christ rule in your heart. One translation reads, "Let the peace of Christ serve as the umpire in your heart." Live so the decisions you make produce peace. Will that behavior produce His peace or will I grieve the Lord and disappoint him by my choices and actions?

The Holy Spirit is a referee that convicts us of sin, that warns us "don't go there, don't do that, don't cross that line." Pay attention to the leading of the Holy Spirit in your life. The Word of God shows us the rules to live by in our life. Know the rules and avoid stupid mistakes and costly penalties. You have to play by the rules and listen to and obey the referee.

5. Every play matters. At the end of the game tonight, someone will be saying, "If they had only made that extra point, if they had only caught that pass, if they had only gone for a field goal instead of trying that fourth down play in the third quarter, if only...." The thing is, at the time, it probably didn't seem like such a big deal. It was just one play out of dozens of plays called in that quarter. But the truth is, every play matters. You can't afford to coast for awhile in the middle of the super bowl. Every down matters. That one play where you stopped caring, stopped concentrating, stopped playing, that may end up costing your team the game. "If only I had stayed in the game. If only I had remained focused on that one play. If only I could do that over."

"If only" is perhaps the saddest phrase in the English language. If only I had lived for Jesus. If only I had obeyed God's word in this area of my life. If only I had stayed true to God's word, to my marriage vows, to my commitment to Christ – but it was only one time, one relationship, one sin. But remember every play matters and the price is high, the cost is painful. It might even cost you the game. Be faithful. Be consistent in your life. Every play matters.

I remember hearing the fire chief here in Tulsa speaking to the new graduates from the fire academy. He told them that over all the years he had been on the department, it wasn't poor performance or failing to do the job that got people fired. Almost 100% of the time it was character issues that got you dismissed from the fire department. It wasn't mistakes on the job, it was a lack of character in your life. It might have been that one wrong choice, one wrong play, but it could cost you the game. Live a faithful, consistent life – a life committed to Christ, because every day and every play matters.

6. Winning matters. I don't really care who wins the game tonight. The Cardinals haven't won in 60 years or something and I usually pull for the underdog. I don't know if God cares who wins the super bowl tonight, but I know he cares whether you go to heaven or not. He cares so much that He sent his Son to this earth to die for you so you could be saved and have a new life in Christ.

When we get to the end of the game clock tonight, the only thing that will matter is - who won the game? When we get to the end of the game clock in our life, there is only one thing that will matter - do we know Jesus Christ as our Savior? That's all that will matter. It's not good enough if you looked pretty good throughout your life and if you tried to be a good person and you helped a few people along the way. That's not enough. You can't be good enough to earn your way into heaven. All that matters is - have your sins been forgiven through your faith in Christ as your Savior? Regardless of how good a player you are, without Jesus, you lose the most important game ever - the game of life. And when you lose the game of life – you lose forever.

The legendary coach of the Packers Vince Lombardi said, "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing." Well folks, Eternal life with Christ in heaven isn't everything, it's the only thing. If you miss heaven, you've missed it all."

It's up to you today. We are under the two minute warning. The play clock is almost down to zero for some of us and the game clock is almost out of time as well. What are you going to do? Will you surrender your life to Christ? Will you give him everything? Will you start living your life in a way that pleases him, that fulfills your purpose, that counts for time and for eternity? The choice is up to you but remember, this isn't about a trophy or a ring – this is about heaven and eternity. Your life matters. Your choice matters. What will it be?