

Super Bowl 2014

What Really Matters?

Every few years I decide to preach what I call a Super Bowl sermon. It's been about five years since I've done this. In case you aren't a sports fan or you don't have a television, this is Super Bowl Sunday. More than 100 million people are expected to watch the football game this evening – the biggest sporting event in America. I know it doesn't sound spiritual – to preach a Super Bowl sermon - but remember Jesus used everyday events and circumstances to teach spiritual truths. “The kingdom of heaven is like...” Well, the kingdom of heaven is like the Super Bowl, at least it is for the sake of this message today.

I've called this message “What Really Matters?” 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 cheerleaders, what jerseys the players wear, what food is served at the concession stand, what celebrities are in the owners box, none of that is really important. What matters is the game itself, played on the field. What matters is winning the football game. I want to talk about the stuff that really matters in being victorious in tonight's game and in being victorious in our spiritual lives. Here are some things that really matter.

Fundamentals matter. In every area 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 requires fundamentals, whether it is a race car or a jalopy – start the engine, gears, pedals, steering.

Football is about the fundamentals. Run, pass, catch, block, tackle, kick. Which ever team executes the fundamentals the best tonight will win the Super Bowl. The story is told of the legendary coach Vince Lombardi, that on one occasion when the team had done poorly, he told them they were going back to the fundamentals of the game. He picked up a ball and said, “This is a football.” That's pretty basic isn't it? Run, pass, catch, block, tackle, kick. Those are the fundamentals. You would think from watching professional football that knowing how to negotiate a contract, learning an original move to show after you score a touchdown and getting

high dollar endorsements are the fundamentals of football any more, but the truth is, it doesn't matter how much you get paid, how big your signing bonus was or how many commercial endorsements you have, if you don't carry out the fundamentals of football, you won't win the game.

In your life and walk with God, it's the fundamentals that matter. It starts the same with everyone. We repent of our sins and ask Jesus to be the 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 use those gifts to serve God and others. We give to God and the work of his kingdom. We love God and we love our neighbors. We tell others what Christ has done for us. These are the fundamentals.

One day an expert in the law asked Jesus, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" In other words, "Jesus, what really matters?" Jesus replied, **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."** Matthew 22:36-40

It doesn't get any more fundamental than that. You can't be a Christian, you can't be what God calls you to be if you don't love God and love others. John re-enforces that command in 1 John 3. **"And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us."** 1 John 3:23

Love God and love one another. These are fundamentals of the Christian faith and the Christian life. Run, pass, catch, block, tackle, kick. Like Lombardi's "this is a football", "this is a Bible." Love God, love your neighbor, forgive one another, serve one another, obey the teachings of this book. These are the fundamentals. It is by executing these fundamentals that we live a life of fulfillment and faith. There are no shortcuts. 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.

Consistency matters. Vince Lombardi said, **"You don't do things right part of the**

time; you do things right all of the time.” – Vince Lombardi That’s how you win football games and that is how you walk successfully in spiritual things as well.

Inconsistency is a plague to the success of a sports team. And inconsistency is a plague to the Christian life as well. Wondering why you don’t have spiritual victory in your life? Maybe it’s because of inconsistency in your walk with God. You pray occasionally, you read your bible once a month, you come to church once or twice a month, you give in the offering when you think of it. The rest of the time you are living to please yourself, disobeying God and ignoring his word. Listen: Doing things right part of the time doesn’t lead to victory on the football field and it won’t lead to victory in your spiritual life either. Obedience and consistency lead to victory!

Consistency in your spiritual walk will lead you to maturity, to spiritual growth and insight. It will lead to progress in every area of your life. It’s time we committed ourselves to obeying God and making right choices for him – all of the time! And here is something else you should remember with regard to consistency:

Just because you won last time doesn’t guarantee success this time. Just because you won the last 10 games doesn’t guarantee you will win the rest. What am I saying? Don’t get cocky. You have to be on guard, be diligent, guard your heart and your spirit at all times, be consistent! In football, if you start cutting practice and ignoring the fundamentals, if you stop listening to the coach and stop listening to the other players, if you start trying to show off, it doesn’t matter how many games you’ve won, you are headed towards defeat.

Spiritually speaking, if you drop your guard and start playing with sin, if you start ignoring the fundamentals and stop praying, stop studying the word of God, if you stop meeting with God’s people, if you stop listening to the word of God as it is preached and taught, you stop attending church, cut off fellowship with God’s people, stop giving and serving the Lord, you are headed to defeat, regardless of the spiritual success or victories of the past..

Listen to the apostle Paul: **“So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” 1 Corinthians 10:12** Friends, the devil is going about as a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Don’t give him an opportunity! Stay close to God and God’s people. Guard your heart. Guard your spirit. Guard your prayer life and your devotional life. Don’t let wrong attitudes creep in.

I don't care how long you've been a Christian or what your position is in the church, the warning goes to all of us: "Be careful that you don't fall!" "You don't do things right part of the time, you do things right all of the time." But what if we failed? Is there hope for us? Of course. Paul went on to say that "God is faithful...when you are tempted he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." We can make it, but it requires faithfulness and attention everyday. It requires consistent devotion and commitment to the Lord. What really matters?

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 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. In the game tonight there will be a two minute warning. Perhaps in a spiritual sense we are close to 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. Perhaps we don't have another half or a full quarter to play. The spiritual game clock is winding down. It's time for a hurry up offense. People are dying everyday without Christ and there is only 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 their teammates on the sidelines, arguing with the coaches and each other. They let pride and arrogance get in the way. "I'm not going back out there unless he throws the ball to me!" Some are wanting to change the color of their jerseys. Some are whining about the Gatorade flavor. They forget they only have two minutes to play and the end up losing the game. That would be silly. And sad, unfortunate for some, but it wouldn't really be tragic.

I'll tell you what would be tragic. Tragic would be the church in the closing days of time, standing on the sidelines of history, fighting with each other because we can't agree on 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, trying to please the crowd 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. 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 – another half or quarter of the game to play.

“They’ve been saying that stuff about the end of the world and 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.

Every play matters. At the end of the game tonight, someone will likely 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 executing the fundamentals, that may end up costing your team the game. “If only I had caught that pass. 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. It was only one time, one relationship, one sin, one choice, one moment. But remember every play matters and the price is high, the cost and the consequences can be 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.

Winning matters. 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 really matters 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 enough that you looked pretty throughout your life and 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 only game that matters.

Coach 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 interesting that at the end of the game tonight, the winning team will celebrate. The commissioner will award the trophy to the team owner, the players all get a big ring and a huge bonus. The president will call the locker room to congratulate them. And the losing team, they just go home to lick their wounds. They are the second best team in football. That should count for something, but it won’t. Second place. Almost. It doesn’t count.

I read that when the Titanic went down, they posted lists of the passengers on board in both America and England. They weren’t listed by class or passage, by cabin or deck. They weren’t listed by status or social position though John Astor and other wealthy folks were on board. There were simply two lists posted, two categories – **Lost. Saved.**

When it comes down to it, there are only two categories. Saved. Lost. There is no category or list for almost saved, tried but failed. There is no second place. No almost. Just saved and lost.

All these thoughts are tied to a game of football and it’s just a game. It doesn’t really matter. But life isn’t a game and eternity is forever. It really matters. So let me ask, Have you made Jesus the Savior and Lord of your life? Are you living so that at the end, when the clock runs out, you will be with Jesus in heaven? You can make that choice, that decision today.

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 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?

I’ve heard players on both teams talk about having to battle through adversity and injury to get to the Super Bowl. You may feel like giving up, like not trying anymore. Life is hard sometimes, but battle on through the adversity. Trust the Lord. Surrender your life to him and

keep living for Jesus. It's worth the battle, the effort, the struggle. It's about eternity remember
and that's what really matters!