

2012.07.22 Sermon-MattHall

Glory and Sacrifice

The Summer Olympics begin in just a few days. Athletes from almost every nation will travel to London to compete for a slice of Olympic Glory. I have to admit that I have found myself caught by the Olympic Bug. I am eager to see how Michael Phelps does in the pool. And I am excited to cheer for hometown hero Kerri Walsh in Volleyball.

These athletes have been training their entire lives. The stakes are high. They have made huge personal sacrifices in order to compete at this level. Michael Phelps would train for hours each day, rising early in the morning seven days a week. Gymnast Gabby Douglas, at just 14 years old moved from Virginia to Iowa, without her family, to train with a coach who could help her reach her Olympic dreams.

What drives these athletes to move from their families, forsake the rhythms of normal life and spend countless hours in training? They are after the Olympic Dream. They are looking for that moment of glory on the podium.

One of my favorite Olympic Moments came in 1996 at the Atlanta Games. Women's Gymnastics. USA vs. Russia, gold medal on the line, and our girls were suddenly and surprisingly failing at the vault. We were about

to lose our gold medal. It all came down to one gymnast. Kerri Strug. If Kerri could score a 9.41 we would win the gold.

Kerri ran towards the vault, flipped over, and fell. She quickly got back on her feet, but it became clear that she had hurt her ankle. She had one last chance. What followed was high drama being played out on live television in front of a worldwide audience: Strug standing at the foot of the runway. Her coach urging her on, telling her she could do it even though no one knew if she could run, spring and land on that injured left ankle.

And then, without hesitation, she was off. She ran, she sprung, she landed, she lifted her tender left ankle in the air as she turned on one leg to salute the judges.

And then she collapsed. 9.712. She'd done it – she'd clinched the United States' first Olympic gold medal ever in the women's team competition, and with room to spare. It was glorious.

I saw an interview recently where she said that there was never any doubt in her mind that she would attempt that vault. She said that when you're an athlete of that caliber you can't not try. Crazy. Brave. Heroic. Willing to sacrifice her ankle for a shot at Olympic Glory.

I don't think that our attraction to and pursuit of glory is an accident. I think it is part of who we are. **We were created by God to worship him.**

To give him glory. To pursue the glory of his name. – And being sinful, we can get off track – but deep within us we long to be consumed by glory.

Mark Driscoll, a pastor in Seattle, once said, **“As a Christian, when God gets glory, we get joy. When God is worshiped, he is glorified and we are satisfied. That’s what he made us to be and to do.”**

Mark is just echoing scripture. We are told over and over again about the importance of worshiping God. I love this scripture from **1 Chronicles (16:28-29) that tells us to, “Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength, ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come before him; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.”** -

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name. God deserves glory. Think about it. Think about everything that God has given you. Everything that God is. When we reflect on his character, we should be so moved to worship. God deserves glory; he deserves our worship from a place of humble gratitude.

But there is more to worship than just glory. The athletes at the Olympics know that often the other side of glory is sacrifice. Scripture reveals this dual aspect of worship in the book of Romans. **“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be GLORY forever. Amen. I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to**

present your bodies as a living SACRIFICE, holy and acceptable to God, WHICH IS YOUR SPIRITUAL WORSHIP.”

It bothers me that when I think of worship, I like to think of the glory. I like to think of singing songs about how great God is, and talking about how great God is. But I am not really eager to experience sacrifice. That doesn't sound like fun.

Of course, when I think about the Olympians sacrifice that makes sense. The hours in the gym, moving across country, vaulting on an injured ankle – risking permanent damage – that starts to make sense when we look at the potential for personal glory. But what about when that glory is focused elsewhere? I think that's more difficult.

I think deep within us we understand that glory and sacrifice go together. The sacrifice might even make the glory better.

So what does sacrifice look like for us? I would argue that **every moment is a sacrifice to something**. There are only so many hours in each day and days in a life. There is only so much money and energy to go around. And to choose to use that time/money/energy for one thing is to withhold it from everything else thus everything is a sacrifice for something.

It is an act of worship when we sacrifice time and resources to devote to God. I think **it is also an act of worship when we devote our time and resources to do the things of God.**

We worship a God who meets the needs of his people. The foundation of our faith is that our sin separated us from God, so God sent Jesus to be the needed sacrifice, so that we could have a relationship with him.

When we sacrifice what we have, to meet the needs of others, it is a reflection of the character of God, and it is, a spiritual act of Worship. The young adult bible study recently read through the book of Ruth. Ruth finds herself without husband, without any means to support herself, and a mother-in-law to care for. She is extremely vulnerable.

But in the midst of this need, there is Boaz. Boaz is a relative of her deceased husband. And Boaz, being a Godly Man, provides for her. He provides her protection and food. When we look at the story closely, you see that Boaz is willing to sacrifice not only his resources for Ruth, but he is even willing to sacrifice his family lineage for Ruth.

God shows his kindness to Ruth through Boaz. Boaz being willing to be used by God in this way is worshiping God. He is bringing God glory. God is glorified in Boaz's sacrifice. I was reading a devotion recently that

said, **“God is kind to Ruth and Naomi through the kindness and obedience of His People. We are to show the same kindness towards others, especially the vulnerable. This creates an attractive community of kindness. God is revealed as a God who liberates and protects, and people of all nations come to him for Refuge.”**

Boaz sacrificed in an act of kindness to Ruth – and God was glorified. That is worship. Boaz’s faith was more than just lip service. It was more than just singing songs and declaring the goodness of God. Boaz responds to God’s goodness, by mirroring the character of God. Boaz sacrificed for Ruth as God sacrificed for him. And God was Glorified.

You and I have the opportunity to worship in this way as well. You and I can worship God – bring God Glory – through sacrifice. We can sacrifice our time and devote it to God – and we can sacrifice our time and devote it to God’s work.

This next Sunday our church will not meet in this room. We will gather out in the courtyard and then disperse on several service projects. We are going to go out into the community and reflect God’s character of kindness and service. We are going to be a blessing to people, reflecting the blessing that we have experienced in Christ.

We will sacrifice time and we will sacrifice resources. But in doing good works, in serving our community, in addressing the needs of our community, we will be worshiping God. I invite you to participate. Sign up for service project. Serve the community. Show God's love through service as an act of worship.

This next week the Olympics begin, and we are going to hear a lot about Olympic Glory, but what I'm really excited for is the glory that we are going to give God through loving our neighbors.

Will you pray with me?