

“The Heavyweight Champion of the World”

OT:

Psalms 40:1-11

NT:

John 1:29-42

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The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ ³¹ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” ³² And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³ I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

³⁵ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” ³⁹ He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). ⁴² He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

The Word of God for the People of God. **Thanks be to God.**

(Drum roll...) “The Champ is here”. (3x)

Muhammad Ali was known as someone who introduced himself when he entered a room. He didn’t necessarily have to, because they knew who he was even before he said a word, but his confidence was worn on his sleeves. Ali was, and remains today, known as one of the greatest heavyweight champions in the boxing world.

When we think of champions, we likely turn directly to sports. UVA entered this 2019-2020 Men’s College Basketball season as defending National Champions. LSU is the latest National Champion in College Football. The winner of the upcoming Super Bowl will be crowned Super Bowl Champions. The Toronto Raptors are the reigning World Champions after winning the

NBA finals. The Washington Nationals are the 2019 World Series Champions. Rory McIlroy is the latest Fed Ex Cup champion on the PGA Tour. With the Olympics coming this Summer, we could also move down the line of champions of the Summer Olympics. And we could continue on and on.

Tell me, if any of these, or name your own life champion, walked into a room where you were, what would you do? Would you take your eyes off them? Would you try to meet them? Now, let's say you were invited to follow alongside them to learn what they do, watch them practice, and experience their life; would you go?

Sports champions are held in very high esteem, put on pedestals, and worshipped even. We are glued to the tv and follow them around from city to city, watching them play. But do you want to know something? As great as it is to watch our favorite players and teams perform, and the satisfaction that feeds us when they win, particularly the pride of becoming champions, they don't hold a candle to the one and only true heavyweight champion of the world. And of course, I don't just mean in the sports world.

This morning, our first reading was from Psalm 40:1-11. The illustrations throughout the psalm paint a picture of humanity reaching out to God, asking for an answer to suffering and struggle and the emptiness of sin. "Happy are those who make the Lord their trust." "You have multiplied your wonderful deeds... None can compare with you." All throughout this psalm, the psalmist displays an attitude of gratitude, thanking God for being in his corner and fighting on his people's behalf. In verse 11, the psalmist even lays on an extra plea for God's mercy, steadfast love, and faithfulness to keep them safe forever. The psalmist realizes he is nothing without God and that life is nothing, and quite unbearable, without God on their side.

Then, in our second reading, we get John the Baptist announcing:

Ladies and Gentlemen, "Here he comes".

Wearing pure white with "Lamb of God" and "Great I AM" stitched in gold.

Best known for his power to walk on water, bring sight to the blind and the dead to life; even the waves and winds and seas obey his command.

He is faithful, pure, blameless, powerful, loving, forgiving, merciful, peaceful, full of spirit and truth; the Alpha and Omega, Savior and Messiah.

He got whipped and stripped and knocked down but rose from the grave never to be knocked down again. He takes away the sin of the world.

He is your reigning and undefeatable champion, the one and only son of God, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and Prince of Peace: *Jeeeeeesuuuuuuuus Chriiiiiiiiiiiiiist!!!!*

For John, Jesus is the only event that matters. Notice he doesn't even take time to announce the challenger in black: darkness and sin, greed, brokenness, anger, hatred, trickery and everything false. The challenger doesn't stand a chance, no matter how many times he tries.

Jesus is the greatest champion the world has ever witnessed. The fight Jesus and God won for all, for you and for me, has, is, and will always stand the test of time. God's fight on our behalf has gifted us with not only life on earth with hope and promise, but an eternal award of life everlasting with God.

John the Baptist knows just how special Jesus is and does all the announcing Jesus needs: "Here he comes... (*drum roll*) the champ is here." For any present that day to witness John's announcement, Jesus says "Come and see. There is no one like me. Follow me."

Life was, and still is more often than we like, confusing and challenging. The early Israelites believed in the Promised Land from God but knew the world around them wasn't what it was supposed to be. They prayed and God answered. They wanted a warrior and they got the greatest champion they could ever ask for. True, Jesus did things a little differently, but aren't we glad, because that means we get to be the benefit of Jesus' power as well? God knew, and knows now, that life isn't just a physical fight. The fight is spiritual, emotional, and intellectual. God sent Jesus to be the champion of things no one else could touch.

That day, when John announced Jesus' presence, the disciples were given the opportunity of a lifetime. It was clear they weren't well prepared for what they were going to experience. They were working, doing their jobs and making an honest living. Then comes Jesus and he says "Come and see": walk with me to do God's work. Jesus' invitation to be in his corner was to be a part of the greatest team ever. Jesus was inviting them, through faith and his leadership and power, to come be champions alongside him.

Just like the disciples, we can walk with Jesus and become champions. But what exactly will that require of us?

I came across an article this week by Bev and Harold Herring entitled "7 Characteristics of a Champion" and I really liked how it captures the essence of being a champion. It not only shares what it takes for us to be champions, but more importantly, it defines the characteristics of the greatest champion the world has ever known; the one whose life we are called to follow and embody as best we can. The characteristics of a champion are:

1. **Be willing and committed to rise above average-** Rev. 3:16 says we are not created and called to be "lukewarm". "When a person is average, they're as close to the bottom as they are to the top." Throughout our lives, we are called to be closer to God than to anything else in life. The more we are with God, the more we are champions.
2. **Have the heart-** The heart of a true champion knows that God is his/her strength and empowers him/her to even greater victories. The heart of a champion is someone who rises above the ordinary to do the extraordinary, knows right from wrong, has

renewed his/her mind with God's ways, and is positioned to make life-changing, destiny-shaping decisions. A champion must know that he/she will do the right thing when the time comes. "To be a champion you have to believe in yourself when no one else will" and that belief begins in the heart.

3. **Have the willingness and ability to confront fears-** Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Do the thing you fear, and the death of fear is certain". There are 7 fears that can prevent progress in becoming a champion: fear of failure, being rejected, speaking in public, what's happening or what people say is happening in world events, moving out of your comfort zone with a new job or a new business, the worst case scenario, the known. Start facing your fears today. How? You can begin by talking to God and owning the promises God makes on your behalf. Living into God's promises will make you a true champion.
4. For a champion, **good isn't good enough-** God is great and God wants everything we do to not only be good but be very good.
5. **Be willing to pay the price-** Michael Jordan wasn't just born to be the best, he paid the price to become known as the best in basketball. Tiger Woods wasn't just born to be the best, he paid the price along the way. What does it take for us to become the best we can be? A champion must put in the time, energy, sweat, make a sacrifice, and be willing to follow and learn, stretch and grow, ask questions and dig deep, trust and obey, God's will and way. To do each of these is what it means to pay the price (take up your cross) for an eternal victory.
6. **Believe in excellence-** 2 Corinthians 8:7 says "as you abound, or excel, in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us, so we want you to abound in this grace also." To "abound" means exceeding some number or measure or rank or need; over and above, more than is necessary, superadded; exceeding abundantly, supremely. A champion isn't ok with simply getting by. A champion seeks to excel at everything.
7. **Finish-** Those who rise above the crowd are the champions who go the extra mile while others are relaxing in front of the tv. "The strength of a person's character and drive to success is determined by whether or not they can finish what they started."

Isn't Jesus all these? Here is the good news!! With our faith in him, we not only have the heavyweight champion of the world fighting for us, we inherit the champion pedigree ourselves.

"Here he is... the lamb of God, the Great I AM!!" Will you follow? Let all God's people say... Amen.