

Breaking Out of the Huddle

Acts 1:6-11

James 2:14-26

September 27, 2009

As most of you are probably aware, we've begun a new football season. Some time ago I heard a story about a most unusual game.

After taking the opening kick-off, the home team went into a huddle, as usual, to get the call from the quarterback and to encourage one another. Then came the unusual. The team did not break out of the huddle to move into action! Soon the penalty flag was dropped, and the referee stepped off the penalty for delay of game. What happened (or did not happen) next was talked about for years! The team still did not leave the huddle! They seemed to be talking among themselves and encouraging one another, but it appeared they had forgotten that the object of the game is to advance the ball across the goal line. Again the penalty flag went down! Another five-yard penalty! The crowd howled!

At this point the team was overheard talking about ways to improve the appearance of the huddle. As the crowd watched with amusement, the team changed the shape of the huddle from a circle to a triangle and then to a square! But they never left the huddle to move into action. Their coach watched them with a hurt look on his face.

Then several players moved out of the huddle up to the line of scrimmage. They wanted to get in the game but their teammates would not join them. So they returned to the huddle to try to persuade the team to move toward the goal. And the talking continued. Another flag and another penalty!

The amusement of the crowd gave way to exasperation and then to anger. First they pleaded, then they booed until they were bored. But the team kept talking in the huddle and patting each other on the back. Then came the unbelievable conclusion. The referee ruled that the home team had forfeited the game, and he awarded the victory to its opponent. The crowd filed out of the stands, but the home team, still in a huddle, still talking, did not seem to notice that the stadium was empty.

We must be careful not to let this be the story of Christ's church. The people out in the community know what the church is about – what we're supposed to be doing. They may not know all about Christ, but they know that the church is supposed to act compassionately toward the downtrodden of the world. They know that Christians are supposed to act differently than other people. They may not believe what we believe; however, they should not doubt that *we*

believe what we profess to believe. And when they don't see *us* acting in expected ways, then they may feel that we are not sincere in our beliefs.

James reminds us:

What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

James tells us that our faith should lead to action. Be very careful here. Do not interpret this teaching to say that you are, in any way, *saved* by your works. The only work resulting in salvation was performed by Jesus Christ himself. We merely need to have faith in the person and work of Christ to be saved.

So, back to James. He teaches that we should have faith that leads to works. But faith in what? Well, I've already said the object of our faith is the persona and work of Jesus Christ. But I want to add something.

I want to add a descriptor – sacrificial. We are to have faith in the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ. Why would I add that word? It's because we need to understand the true nature of the person of Jesus Christ and the work he performed on our behalf – it was sacrificial.

The church universal, including Sunrise, is full of people who believe in Jesus and claim to want to be made like him. But if that is true, why does the Pareto Principle (aka the 80/20 Rule) seem to apply in congregations of believers?

It's because we are taught something about serving in the church. I have taught it, and will be very careful about the way I teach it in the future. We are taught about Spiritual Gifts and about following our God-given passions when it comes to service. Now, what is the problem with that?

We *are*, in fact, given Spiritual Gifts by God. But I can find nowhere in Scripture that commands us to only serve in places or ways that we can use our gift.

Christ and His work were both characterized by being sacrificial. We know that Christ did not always enjoy what He was doing, but He was always passionate about it. To know this is true, we only have to look at His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. His voicing the plea, "*O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.*" (Matthew 26:39)

Jesus always served in a zealous way because of His passion – doing the will of His Father. This is different from the way we have taught you to follow your passions (seeking to serve with children, or in missions, or in areas of music, etc).

Folks, if we truly want to be made more like Christ, then we are saying we want to be made more sacrificial. Our faith should be sacrificial in that we will sacrifice our own will and faith in ourselves (or other worldly philosophies) in favor of Jesus Christ.

This mindset will lead to works that carry the thread of sacrifice. It's good to do simple acts that are good, but if we are allowing the Spirit to make us more Christlike each day, then our works should be sacrificial as well.

So continue to serve in areas that you enjoy. And my challenge to you is to ask God where He wants you to serve in a sacrificial way. What does He want you to do that is a sacrifice for you with respect to your time, your talent, and your treasure?

You know these things; blessed are you if you do them.