

PLAYING FOR HIM

Back in September I shared with you that the hardest part of being a basketball coach was making the final cuts of players. At the end of tryouts, I had to decide which of the final two players would get the last roster position. When I made my final decision and informed the player's mother that she made the team I realized at that moment that God had influenced my decision. When I shared the good news, the mother told me my call had come on the one-year anniversary of this girl's stepfather dying from cancer. I had no idea about this when I shared the good news. God did and knew the perfect timing to share this good news.

This is the first year this player has played basketball at the rep or all-star level. I knew this when I selected her but saw in the tryout her love for the game, and her dedication to keep improving. She has worked so hard over these past four months. She listens well to instruction and works hard at improving her skills and getting to know how to play the game better.

Last weekend we had two games on Saturday in Toronto. In between games I had the chance to talk to this player's mother. She opened up a bit more about the stepfather's death a year ago. I was told that he was a basketball player and loved the game. It was his love for it that drew the daughter into wanting to play. In fact, she spent a lot of time with her stepdad learning how to play and they became quite close as a result.

As you could imagine, it was hard for this young lady to experience the loss of her stepdad being as close as they were. Something the mother shared with us this weekend was how her daughter wanted to honour her stepdad by making a rep level basketball team and play for him. I have been impressed by this young lady ever since she first made the team. Hearing about her commitment to play in her stepdad's memory has left me even more impressed.

I have been thinking since Saturday about what she has committed to do. It made me begin to wonder if we have made the same commitment when it comes to Jesus. Jesus has done so much for us just like this girl's stepdad did for her. Jesus has taught us God's truths, has shown us the way that

leads to eternal life, has revealed to us the Father's character, and has revealed His desire to have a relationship with us. Of course, He has also shown us how much He loves us by dying on the cross for our sins. Jesus did die for us but rose back to life, and now has ascended back into heaven. Considering all of the things Jesus has done for us, have we committed to live the rest of our lives playing for Him and His ways? I think it is an important question we need to ask ourselves at this point in our lives. What better commitment could we make to play out the rest of our lives living in a way that would please and honour Jesus. If this is a commitment, we want to make going forward in life then there are three different parables found in **Matthew 25** that reveal how we can play for Jesus.

The first parable Jesus told in Matthew 25 is about ten bridesmaids who all took their lamps to meet the bridegroom. Five of the bridesmaids were wise by bringing along extra olive oil for their lamps, but the other five were not as prepared and had to run back to buy more oil for their lamps. Sure enough, the bridegroom came when the five unprepared bridesmaids were still back in town buying more oil, and they missed out on experiencing the wedding feast as a result. Jesus wanted to show in this parable how every person must be responsible for their own spiritual preparation as they await His return. The parable reveals if we want to get the most out of our relationship with Jesus and live life in a way that pleases Him that we will have to be prepared to **work at it every day**.

The second parable Jesus told in Matthew 25 was about how a man entrusted different amounts of his money to three of his servants. Each was given an amount based on their gifts and abilities. Two of the three servants invested what they had been given and doubled the amount. Their master was very pleased with how well these two servants used what was entrusted to them. The third servant however did nothing with what was entrusted to him. This story of the three servants was meant to show how we are to use the gifts and talents that God has entrusted to us well.

The final parable Jesus told in this chapter was about His return. In this parable, Jesus told that on Judgement Day there will be a separation between those people who inherit the Kingdom and those who do not. One of

the criteria will be based on how we have served others in need out of our love for Jesus. This is what Jesus said to those who were allowed to enter into the Kingdom:

For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me. (Matthew 25:35-36)

When they asked Jesus when they did these things for Him, He replied:

I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it for me! (Matthew 25:40)

These three parables reveal for us how we can play out the rest of our lives committed to honouring Jesus:

1. To **work** at growing in our faith and relationship with Him every day.
2. To use the **gifts** He has given us for His glory
3. To **show love and care** to others in need out of our love for Him.

A certain player on my team is playing for her stepdad now in heaven in order to try and make him proud. She is doing a great job at this. She scored several baskets on Saturday despite her inexperience. I am sure he smiled in heaven. May we follow this young lady's example and commit to playing out the rest of our life honouring and pleasing Jesus.

Keep Safe and God Bless - Pastor Dean