

THE MOST IMPORTANT VICTORY

Saturday night saw a recurring theme happen to me once again. It seems every time I cheer for a team to win an important game; they end up losing. This time I am not talking about the Toronto Maple Leaf's since they did not even make the playoffs. Saturday night was Game 7 in the western conference finals in the NBA between the San Antonio Spurs and the Oklahoma City Thunder. My daughter and I have been cheering for opposite teams in this series so naturally one of us has been happy after each game and the other has been disappointed.

It did not surprise us that these two very evenly matched teams had to go to a Game 7 to determine who would move on to face the New York Knicks in the finals. I had a bad feeling before the final game that my preferred team would not win since this seems to be the case with teams I cheer for and sure enough, they did lose. After the game I found myself wondering why I even bother cheering for teams when they always seem to end up on the losing end.

This was the case when I cheered for Team Canada's hockey team at the Winter Olympics and of course last fall with the Toronto Blue Jays in the World Series. On Sunday morning I was still making this same comment to people at church about no longer investing myself in cheering for certain teams. If I did so, I would certainly save myself a lot of disappointment, but I would miss out on the enjoyment I get following a team and cheering for them to win. It has taken me two days to get over the disappointment of seeing another one of my teams end up losing the big game, but God used that experience to remind me of the most important victory we can ever celebrate.

We find this victory in Jesus' words to the seventy-two messengers He sent out on a missionary journey to all of the towns and places He planned to visit. He started off His instructions before sending them by saying, **“The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So, pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask Him to send more workers into the fields.”**

Jesus was instructing these followers that part of their work and calling for Him was to pray for new disciples and help these newcomers learn the Christian way of life. Jesus then instructed them to let those who welcomed them into their homes know that God's peace was upon them, to heal the sick, and to let

the people know the Kingdom of God is near. When the seventy-two disciples returned, they joyfully reported to Him the victories they achieved while witnessing in His name. Jesus was equally excited at the victories they achieved, but He then went on to tell them which victory they should rejoice the most about:

But don't rejoice because evil spirits obey you; rejoice because your names are registered in heaven. (Luke 10:20)

Jesus did not want these disciples in the midst of their excitement to lose sight of the most important victory of all: having our names registered in heaven.

Just as Jesus instructed these seventy-two followers to go out into places to witness for Him, He expects us to do the same as His believers. There may be times as His followers when we are excited to see our efforts make a positive influence on the lives of others. There are other times when we can come up against many challenges and disappointments in living our faith daily and feel our witness is not bringing about victories for His Kingdom.

On those days when we do experience blessings and victories in witnessing our faith for Jesus, may we know that He is just as excited as we are. On those other days when our efforts at being Christ-like hit a few bumps and roadblocks making it seem like a loss rather than a victory, may we remember that Jesus is encouraging us on from the sidelines to keep up the effort and faith. We have our shares of victories and disappointments when it comes to witnessing our faith for Jesus, but let's make sure we always remember the most important victory we will ever achieve is being registered as citizens of heaven because of our faith in and love for Jesus.

When it comes to cheering for various teams in sports, I seem to have more losses and disappointments than wins and celebrations. Maybe I am going to have to stop cheering for the Leafs. I wonder if this will be the difference in them finally winning another Stanley Cup. If I don't get that victory celebration in my lifetime, I will enjoy the most important one of all thanks to Jesus.

Keep safe and God bless,

Pastor Dean