
Whatever is...

- Please stand as we read from God's Word

Philippians 4:8-9 ESV

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

- This is the Word of God and we are thankful for it.

One of the great times of life for me was brief period in which I was able to officiate football with my dad. He had officiated baseball and football his whole adult life and he took it seriously. I was never serious about officiating anything but when he asked me if I might be interested I saw it as an opportunity to spend some time with my dad.

I trained, tested and before I knew it we were on the road most Wednesday and Thursday nights headed to what ever game we had been assigned. Did I mention he was serious about officiating; we discussed games between games we pre-gamed, discussed games during halftime, and post gamed most of the way home. I had to know how to prioritize what needed to be looked at at any given time.

One particularly memorable game we worked together was the local rivalry; the Pendleton/Hermiston game. I guess it could be the equivalent of the Richland/Hanford rivalry. The game was going to be close and both sides were going to sell their bodies and souls to walk away the victor.

Did I mention I was a Hermistonian who married a Pendletonian? When the day came that I would join my dad as he lead the officiating team for this high

intensity game my wife and in-laws would be sitting in the stand on the Pendleton side of the stadium in their home town.

My job, was on the sideline with the down marking chains. My primary responsibility consisted of watching the snap, watching downfield for the pass, moving the chains and keeping track of “the spot” where the ball went out of bounds if it went out of bounds on my side of the field. Keeping the spot was essential!

From the kickoff the game did not disappoint. These teams hated each another and it was all we could do to contain the intensity within the bounds of the rules of the game.

“Come on ‘A’ move the changes... lets keep up!” He called me ‘a’ not for short... he just could never remember his kid’s full names. I remember during one game the chain crew asked me if he was Canadian.

We were moving and we were keeping up but one wrong move could turn this kind of game sour.

Then I saw it coming... they were lining up to go deep and they were flooding my side. At this point in life I was still faster than my dad but I couldn’t out run a HS receiver. I knew I was going to need to be down field and I needed a head start. I watched the snap and then I ran down the sideline looking over my soldier to watch as the play developed. They were flooding the zone with three receivers and three defenders were all vying for limited real estate.

When the ball went into the air I knew I was in a good position and so I turned to watch. Four players were in the air, eight hands all reaching, and miraculously one of the offensive players came down with the ball the other three players landing on top of him ending the play. The crowd was wild!

And then I felt my flag and in a quick motion not unlike the drawing of pistol it was in the air and in that moment their was silence.

The call was pass interference and it was only visible from my position.

My dad had to communicate the call and so he moved to my position, “What have you got ‘a’?”

“Offensive pass interference.” I responded. The crowd didn’t know the call yet but already the silence was forming into a explicative chant complete with the stomping of feet. I won’t tell you the explicative but it began with a ‘b’ and ended with an ‘s’.

My dad asked, “are you sure?” to which I responded, “yep, it is a good call dad.”

He announced the penalty and administered the yards from the appropriate spot. The chant grew louder and the stomping was so thunderous I wasn’t sure the stands weren’t going to come apart. And from both sides!!!

I knew the police officers that were on duty for security and I’ll never forget Jimmy Allen coming over to me while the penalty was administered and yelling over the crowd, “You know we are not responsible for escorting you out of here.”

After the ball was set but before the snap my dad made eye contact with me and mouthed the words, “are we having fun yet?” and with that he signaled the game back into play.

I was now enemy number one and I was wondering if my wife had already left early to get out safely.

Half time came and went. The game remained intense; back and forth, back and forth. And then I saw it again, they were going to flood my side. I watched the snap and moved out to get down field. I was tired this time but I was again in the right spot. An offensive receiver came away with the ball and was now moving down the sideline. My job was to watch his feet to know when he was out of bounds and then watch the spot. I had a second bean bag to toss down as an aid and it was already in my hand.

The were moving fast and I was trying to stay ahead of them watching, watching, watching and then he stepped out of bounds. I blew my whistle and released my bean bag but it overflowed the spot.

It was at that moment that everyone of those players hit me and we all crashed in one big pile and as I flew through the air I had to keep my eyes both open and on that spot. I exhaled as I impacted so as not to have the wind knocked out of me keeping my eye on the spot. As soon as I could, I got up and placed my foot on the spot.

My dad, catching up with the play, was asking, “Did you get the spot? ‘A’ did you get the spot?”

“I got it dad, it’s right here.” I responded.

“Is it a good spot?” he asked in amazement.

“Of course its a good spot.” I answered. It wasn’t until a friend of mine forwarded me the video that I realized in the impact of the end of that play I was knocked into a cartwheel in which my feet were clearly seen above everyone’s heads as we all flew down the field.

“It was a great spot?”

- Life, specifically the Christian life is not unlike an intense football game from the perspective of an official.
 - We have been entrusted with a truth and a responsibility too grate not to share.
 - We have made the right call and we have to hold the spot?
 - But often, all we see is the chanting disgruntled crowd and the imminent impact of the unfolding play.
 - We know what we believe and yet in declaring it we seem to make more enemies than friends.
 - All we want is what is best for our friends and families and yet in declaring it we seem to only push them further and further away.
 - And to top it off heartache and calamity seem to be just over the horizon...

- What giant football player is bearing down on you not even aware of your existence?
 - Overdue bills?
 - Overdue assignments?
 - Unemployment?
 - Family Estrangement?
 - Divorce?
 - Disease?
 - Mortality?
 - Some one once noted cynically, “Happiness is just sadness that hasn’t happened yet” and it rings of truth because we have experienced it. We seem only to be two steps ahead or flying down the field and our feet over our heads.
- So how do we get through this game?
 - How do we get through the Christian life; making the unpopular calls?
 - We keep the spot!!! We keep the spot!!!
- It would be hard to argue that Paul was not in the game of his day. It would be equally harder to argue that Paul was not serious about the game.
 - Paul’s early life was marked by religious zeal, brutal violence, and the relentless persecution of the early church.
 - He was born Saul in Tarsus of Cilicia around A.D. 1 to 5 to parents who were fervent Jewish nationalist who adhered strictly to the Law of Moses.
 - His family were Roman citizens, but they viewed Jerusalem as a truly sacred and holy city.
 - By the time he was thirteen he had mastered Jewish history, the Psalms and the prophets.

- By eighteen he was a master at dissecting the scriptures.
- He went on to become a lawyer and every indication was pointing to a prominent career and even membership in the 71-man Jewish Supreme Court call the Sanhedrin.
- Saul was zealous for his faith, and this faith did not allow for compromise.
 - He was present at the stoning of Stephen and the flogging of Peter.
- Then, he met Jesus on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus. **From this moment on his life was turned upside down. His feet were in the air!**
 - He began to proclaim Jesus as the Son of God in the synagogue at Damascus.
 - He spent his life proclaiming the risen Christ Jesus throughout the Roman world.
 - But it wasn't an easy game.
 - Five times he received forty lashes at the hands of Jewish leaders.
 - Three times he had been beaten with rods and once he was stoned.
 - Three times he was shipwrecked, and he even spent a night and day adrift at sea.
 - He crossed raging rivers, great wildernesses, and treacherous cities.
 - He was hounded by his own people, whether Jew or Gentile or false brothers.
 - Pursued by kings.
 - Often without sleep, hungry and thirsty, and suffering the heat and cold of exposure.
 - At Philippi, he and Silas were publicly stripped and flogged resulting in open wounds.
 - They were imprisoned and chained in stocks.

- He was familiar with the barracks close to the temple where his residence was not as a soldier or even a guest but as a prisoner.
- Held in Caesarea awaiting trial for two years in which an appeal to Caesar resulted in his transport to Rome.
- In Rome he found himself chained to a Roman soldier.
- Along the way his ministry brought him to Philippi.
 - While there several people placed their trust in Jesus and a local church was established soon after.
 - Later, the church in Philippi had heard of Paul's imprisonment and sent Epaphroditus to minister to him.
 - The book of Philippians might be called a thank you note to the church of Philippi.
 - Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter.
 - It is late in his career and by now he is a veteran Christian familiar with the real meaning of perseverance and patience in the Lord.
 - And Paul, in apostolic fashion took the opportunity of offering them thanks to encourage them to be steadfast in their faith.
- In his concluding statement he urges them to keep the spot...
 - "... whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."
 - Keep the Spot.
 - You see, if you are focused on the right things it almost doesn't matter what is going on around you. If your focus is intense enough you might even lose track of everything that is going on around you.

- But be careful, Paul isn't offering some motivational platitude.

You know the ones I'm talking about. My grandfather had a poster in his shop of a cat dangling by one claw from a knotted rope with the caption, "hang in there."

Sayings like, "If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito" or "the road to success is dotted with many tempting parking spaces" and one of my favorites, "leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it."

- If you remove today's passage from the context of Philipians as a whole you might be tempted to believe that this passage is just another useful and motivational saying.
- No, not only is this passage part of Paul's conclusion but it is central to understanding how Paul continued to remain in the game and in the game intensely.
- Through out the letter Jesus is prominent and He is central to the conclusion.
- J. Vernon McGee captures the meaning best when he paraphrases the passage...
 - "This [passage] has been called the briefest biography of Christ. He is the One who is "true." He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. "Whatesoever things are honest"—He is honest. "Whatsoever things are just"—He is called the Just One. "Pure"—the only pure individual who ever walked this earth was the Lord Jesus. He asked the question, "Which of you [convicts] me of sin?" No one did. He also said. "...the prince of this world comes, and has nothing in me"... He was"...holy, harmless, undefiled, seperate from sinners..." He was lovely which means "gracious." Virtue has to do with strength and courage. He was the One of courage, a real man. He took upon Himself our humanity. "If... any praise"—He is the One you can praise and worship today."

- Paul isn't telling the believers of Philippi to think on whatever is... He is telling them to think on who is...
 - Earlier he said it more plainly. "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."
 - This is the spot! It's a good spot.
- What did you come in with this morning? What challenge, what anxiety was pursuing you across the parking lot this morning as you came into this sanctuary?
 - Overdue bills? Keep the spot!
 - Unemployment? Keep the spot!
 - Family Estrangement? Keep the spot!
 - Divorce? Keep the spot!
 - Disease? Keep the spot!
 - Mortality? Keep the spot!
- You know what's interesting? I think Paul faced all of these things and now as a veteran apostle he is giving the Philippians the secret to his perseverance.
 - Keep the spot!!!

- I drive forty minutes to get to this job and when I'm done I drive forty minutes home. Many of you have asked if we are going to move to Richland and as much as I would love to have those minutes for my family and myself I spend a lot of time in contemplation between here and there.
- I listen to a lot of podcasts on discipleship within the context of our contemporary cultural environment and was recently listening to a discussion on biblical masculinity.
 - Have you heard that the divorce rate among Christians is the same as that among non-Christians?
 - It's absolutely true.
 - But its not the whole story.
 - If you take a closer look at the Christian community, with regard to divorce, and account for those Christians who are committed versus those Christians who are not; ie "nominal" Christians we discover some interesting things...
 - First, we discover that among nominal Christians the divorce rate is by far worse than among Non-Christians.
 - Second, we find that among committed Christians the divorce rate is phenomenally better and statistically close to non-existent.
 - Within the framework of this study they also polled the wives and discovered that those who were married to the committed Christians were on an order of magnitude happier. So were the kids.
- This got me thinking, "what separates the committed Christian from the nominal Christian?"
 - It's the spot.
 - Those who relegate Jesus to anything other than Lord of their lives will forever remain nominal....

- ...while those who have discovered that Jesus is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, pure, worthy of praise and keep Him the center of their focus also discover that over time they become more and more true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and pure...
- ...they become more like Him.
- Keep the spot!!!