

“Survivor” (Game Time! – Pt. 4)
(Philippians 3:7-14)

- **Game Time!**

- Well, we’ve reached the *finish line* of the *Game Time* series (pun very much intended)! And we saved the biggest and best for last—*Survivor* has got to be the *mother* of all “reality competition shows”. Simply *iconic*! It just hit *50 seasons* this year. Season 1 aired way back in 2000 (AD) and it was a game changer: it set the gold standard for these modern game shows and changed the playing field. *Survivor* represents the ultimate *competition*—it takes grit, skill, focus, luck, intelligence, strength, and lots of resilience. 20 people on an isolated island have to endure some of the toughest physical, mental and social tests to become the *sole survivor* and win the million-dollar prize. That being said, I think *the ultimate survivor* has to be Jeff Probst (**Pic**)—the guy has hosted *all 50 seasons* since the beginning, that’s just impressive!
- We humans put *so much* into *playing games*. Isn’t it kind of wild? Whether it’s entertainment like these shows, or video games, board games, sports, playing a part on stage, playing an instrument, playing in the backyard. *Play* has been a part of human culture for as long as human culture has been a thing. You know, this past World Cup apparently generated 11 billion dollars in revenue for FIFA—and for the hosting nations, it brought over 40 billion for local economies. That’s just *one sport, one competition*. *Survivor* has garnered several billion for CBS. We say, “it’s just a game,” but those numbers say something more!
- Great thinkers have tackled this subject of “Play” as an academic study, because they saw how deep the connection is between *games* and *what it means to be human*. There’s the book *Homo Ludens* (“the playing human”) by philosopher Johan Huizinga, or *Theology of Play* by Jurgen Moltmann. George Bernard Shaw said, “*We don’t stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.*” Thomas Aquinas believed that *play* is an essential part of our humanity. A modern proverb (falsely attributed to Plato) states, “*You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.*” (There’s something to

that if you watch a family play Monopoly, right?) Huizinga said playing games creates a “*Magic Circle*” where ordinary rules are temporarily suspended, and we enter an alternate reality with its own laws, logic, and meaning. When you’re inside that circle, it means *everything*—when it’s over, you wake up and it’s just a game, but it taught you something about life, the good and bad.

- So, we play and watch these games because we learn something about life, about ourselves. We watch people compete on shows like *Survivor* because it reveals something. We see people pushed to their limits and wonder about our own limits and choices. Games like *Survivor* remind us that life is about *more than* survival. Temporary prizes remind us that there’s something ultimate, some greater story, some greater glory to this life, and we get caught up in the game.

- **The Ultimate Prize**

- It’s no wonder that the New Testament uses this metaphor of competition and winning the prize to teach us about the Gospel and our ultimate hope. They didn’t have things like *Survivor* or the World Cup in those days, but they did have elite competitions in the Greco-Roman World. Since *Survivor* is the ultimate competition show, today we’re looking at one of the most powerful metaphors of competing for the ultimate prize in Philippians 3. But as we always do, let’s pause before we explore the Scriptures and pray.
- Here’s Apostle Paul, Philippians 3: ***“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of*”**

it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:7-14)

- Here’s the thing about entering that “magic circle”: when you’re in the game, *that prize means everything!* The greatest competitors on *Survivor*, the greatest athletes and teams, they make *winning their life*. For as long as that game or that career lasts, everything revolves around it, everything goes into that all-important goal. And even if they don’t finish on top, even if in the end they get beat by the other team, they want to know they gave *everything* to try! That mindset is everything in the competition.
- Paul is saying that the hope of Jesus Christ is that thing worth giving everything for—that even as you watch elite athletes train their entire lives and strain for the prize, the Gospel is the kind of thing that summons that response out of each one of us (even if you’re not naturally competitive or athletic). Why does Paul think this about Jesus and the Gospel?
- Well, this amazing passage actually uses two very different but highly relatable metaphors: the first is, believe it or not, from the *accounting* world, the second is from the world of *competition*.
 - In the first half of the passage, he’s talking about “gains and losses.” The fundamental accounting principles are the same today: you track what comes in compared to what goes out. Even today on your banking statement, it’s listed in some form of “debits” (or expenses, or losses) in one column, and “credits” (or income, or gains) in the other column. You compare those two amounts, and you get a balance at the end, and you pray it’s a positive number rather than negative! So, here’s the crazy thing Paul says: earlier in Philippians, he listed *all the reasons* he used to have to think he was something special. The way he used to “account for” the value of his life as a faithful Jew were based on his own self-righteousness, his own ability to keep the Law of Moses. In that system, it was all based on *your* inputs: your sins and failures on the side of the debits (the losses, debts), and your righteous acts and rule-keeping on the side of the credits (the gains). In the end, you hoped that the scales would tip to the good, that the bottom line would end up

positive. And maybe you could reach the glory of heaven, the resurrection to eternal life. What Paul discovered through Jesus the Messiah was that all of our accounts are already in the negative, and we don't have the resources to get out of that debt on our own. The whole system of the Law and history of Israel was meant to show that we don't have the resources to do it on our own—we're going to need some *amazing grace* from God to have any hope at all. Once Jesus took hold of Paul's life, he discovered something incredible: it's not our own righteousness that gets it done, it's the righteousness of Christ that comes to us through faith. Here's what it looks like: your statement shows your sin in the one column, and your righteousness in the other—and the bottom line is *way in the negative*. You're going bankrupt. But Jesus, through His incarnation, death, and resurrection has done something for you that means if you put your total trust in Him, He transforms the whole bank statement of your life: at the top of the "credit" line, now it shows "Jesus Christ" which means *infinity, perfection, never-ending goodness*. Now the "debit" line is completely wiped out and clear. You're free forever. And what you used to account for in the "credits" with your own self-righteousness now look like losses because they were just getting in the way of you living in the infinite righteousness of Christ. That's why Paul says,

"...whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith." (3:7-9)

- The Gospel is so amazing! We start out *spiritually bankrupt* but through faith in Christ, we *get everlasting life*. We start with this debt we can't pay and by His own suffering and victory, we get *eternal glory*. *He is so, so, so, so good!* That's why Paul shifts the metaphor in the next part to say, *you know how athletes lay it all on the line, give everything just to cross that finish line? Well, that's how worthy He is, that's how great His reward is—when we know what He's given us, and what's*

awaiting us in glory, we're going to want to press on toward that prize with everything we've got! No matter how much we have to suffer, no matter what we have to give up on the way, this is worth everything, He's worth everything! **"I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."** (Phil. 3:10-14)

- Have you ever seen how elite runners cross the finish line? If you take a snapshot of that moment, they're *leaning forward*, straining across that finish line to win the prize. So, what's that prize for us? It's *knowing Christ and eternal life with Him*. It's knowing the One who *suffered and died* so He can credit His righteousness to your bankrupt account. It's crossing the finish line one day when He raises you up to share His resurrection life in a new creation free from sin and suffering and death. *That's the ultimate prize, that's the new goal our lives are oriented to!*
- **Get Your Head In The Game**
 - But how easily do we lose focus? Sometimes, we just need someone to come alongside us and say, *get your head in the game!* The winners of championships, the winners of Survivor, will all tell you, so much of it is about *mentality and mindset*. We can take the gift of Jesus for granted and start to set our sights on *lesser things, former things*. **Paul is saying, eyes on the prize, head in the game!** Christ has already won it for us! He gives us His righteousness, He gives us His new life, He gives us His Spirit—now we just have to press on toward the finish line where He's waiting to welcome us Home!
 - Becoming mature in Christ means recognizing the new goal of your life now that you're in Christ, and aligning all of your purpose toward the Prize of His calling. And it means learning to repent, and realign when you start to get distracted or off course. I've known Jesus since I was a kid. He's rescued me from so much and

taken me so far—but I still get distracted. The Enemy knows how to subtly get me off track. I can drift and veer off course ever so slightly. I can start to get anxious and distracted by things that don't matter. I can start to live off my own effort and put too much weight on lesser things. And I can get weary and lose heart, get complacent or fearful. And then instead of putting all my energy to lean forward to take hold of the prize, I'm divided, self-conscious, afraid, shut down. And He waits on me to repent and look up again and hear Him say, *"son, get your head in the game—remember I am your victory, I am your prize, heaven is your home, keep running to me!"*

- Here's what you need to reconcile today: *Have you received His gift to make you debt-free? Is He the ultimate goal and prize of your life? Are you running to Him, or something else?* No matter who you are, or where you are in this crazy "game" of life, the answer is just as beautiful now as it was in the beginning: *repent and believe the Gospel of Jesus*. Whether you need a total reset, or just to recalibrate: *repent and believe the Gospel of Jesus*. Get your head in the game: *repent and believe the Gospel of Jesus*. *Game Time, folks, let's go!*