

## Sermon 1/21/18

Run the video of 61 yard touchdown – Case Keenum to Stefon Diggs.

Stefon Diggs' stunning 61-yard touchdown catch and run on the final play of the game gave the Vikings a 29-24 victory against New Orleans, giving birth to the nicknames "**Minneapolis Miracle**" and the



the team is selling a T-shirt with a picture of Stefon Diggs and the slogan, "**Minneapolis Miracle 1-14-18**" and they've already sold over 1,000 t-shirts.

After this incredible touchdown pass and win there was all sorts of talk as whether this play finally broke the **curse** that's hung over the Minnesota Vikings all of these years that they can win and be successful during the regular season but can never quite win the crucial game that would make them Super Bowl Champions.

I don't know about breaking this supposed, "**curse**" but we'll certainly find out much more of the validity of that claim later today when they take on the Philadelphia Eagles.

But in reflecting on this event throughout the week, there is a far more important curse that had a connection to the number 61 that I'd like to spend some time focusing on this morning. Please turn in your Bibles this morning to Isaiah 61. It's an amazing passage of Scripture that talks about God's plans for His people.

Read **Isaiah 61:1-11**

What an amazing passage of Scripture. It's describing God's plans for His people. He wants to take **broken hearted** people and **imprisoned** people and people **living in darkness** and give them instead **healed hearts** and **freedom from captivity** and enable them to walk in His light. Some of those descriptions might very well describe many of you. Your hearts have been broken by things people have done or said to you and you feel imprisoned by unforgiveness or the haunting recollection of those words or maybe you've been imprisoned by some form of addiction and it feels like there's a heavy darkness over your life. God is proclaiming that He wants to change that for you. That He will step into our lives and into history and give freedom and light and a healing of our hearts. And the great exchanges continue to be described in verse 3 where

- **Comfort** is exchanged for those who **mourn**
- A **crown of beauty** is given in exchange for **ashes**
- A **garment of praise** instead of a **spirit of despair**

*"They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of His splendor."*

This promised reward is far greater than winning any Super Bowl.

And notice in **verses 10 & 11** the response of Isaiah the Prophet to this incredible promise:

This is the description of a person who is living in awe of what God has done for him and the result is living a life of praise to God. His focus is on God and His goodness and greatness.

**Case Keenum** last week was interviewed after the game of what this moment meant to him. And his response was that this was likely the 3<sup>rd</sup> most important moment of his life.

1. First would be the day he committed his life to following Jesus Christ
2. The second would be when he married his wife,
3. This winning touchdown throw would be the third greatest moment.

Friday night I had a Pine Have Camp board meeting that I'm privileged to serve on. And at the meeting we took the following picture. Anyone looking at that picture would quickly be able to determine what football team we all root for. Can people look at your life and easily identify that Jesus is Lord of your life? This transformation isn't as easy as putting on a purple shirt. Rather our identification with Jesus

show itself in the way we respond to life in general but shows up even brighter in how we respond to life's challenges and difficulties.

Did you notice one of the identifying characteristics of the people of God. Earlier in this passage it says that we will be oaks of righteousness for the display of His glory. An oak is an impressive large majestic tree that people can admire. It would be quite difficult to hide a majestic oak tree. It stands tall and proud for everyone to see. Similarly, the people who have been transformed dramatically by God don't hide it well. They stand out from the crowd because they've been changed and they make a difference in the society in which they live and their lives are lives of rejoicing in the Lord.

Look again at that last verse of this passage.

**Isaiah 61:11 (NIV)** *For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.*

What's the soil of your heart like? Is it heavy with sorrow, or burdened with disappointment or unforgiveness or heartache. God wants to transform your heart and promises to do that if you let Him. One day, early on in Jesus' ministry, he was in his hometown synagogue and on that particular day he was given the honor of standing up in front of his hometown people and reading the scripture for that day. And as he stood up to read he read out of this passage of Scripture. And then it says that he rolled up the scroll, and declared to the people: *"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."* (Lk 4:21).

And if Jesus were here physically with us today he would say the same thing. Wherever Jesus is, his mission is to restore His people back to what God always intended them to be. To be people who are living in a close connection with Him, who's sins have been forgiven, and the result is that they live lives of praise and thankfulness to God. They are people who aren't rattled by the outside events that happen in their lives because on the inside they are living lives of rejoicing and focusing on God. They've trained themselves to live lives focused on God and His goodness and greatness. And having that focus powerfully prepares them to face anything that life throws at us.

Last week I mentioned the difference this approach to life made in the life of David when he came up against Goliath. All the other men in Israel's army were cowering in their tents because they allowed the external daily threats of Goliath to drive them into fear. But then David came along and he had spent the majority of his time with the sheep praising and thanking God and allowing God to empower him to fight off lions and bears and anything else that threatened his life and the life of his sheep. So, David came into this fight with Goliath with his heart and mind overflowing with confidence in God. Everyone else had allowed the external threats of Goliath to consume their minds and fill their hearts with fear. And from that we learn a very important principle. **That if we focus our attention on the challenges of life we will often be offended depressed and anxious by life's circumstances. But when we're daily choosing to focus on God and allow Him to continually fill our hearts and minds with His love and empowering grace, then we come against life fully prepared and equipped to be a change maker rather than being changed by the world.**

The apostle struck at this in **Romans 12:2** *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Do you want to know how to know what God's will is for your life? Then follow this principle by renewing your mind daily by focusing on the goodness and greatness of God. And as you do that you will be drawn deeper and deeper in your relationship with God and equipped to face the challenges or distractions the world throws our way.

Paul gives us similar instructions in a wonderful passage in Philippians 4:4-7

**Philippians 4:4-7 (NIV)** *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Is anyone in this room ever anxious about anything? Here's a prescription given by God in how to deal with your anxiousness. He presents us with a **God sandwich**. On the inside of the sandwich is anxiousness but surrounding that is an ongoing focus on God. Whether it's through rejoicing always or recognizing that Jesus is right with you in every situation you may encounter or through constant communication with the Lord, which is filled with not just requests but with thanksgiving. And the end result of such a disciplined life like that is God's peace will set up a guard over your heart and mind. What Paul is calling us to is more than just attending church weekly and singing songs to God and then leaving these doors and going back to a life of worry and concern. What Paul is commanding us to do is live every moment of every day rejoicing in God and spending time with Him. And I guarantee that as you do this you'll be able to live in peace. Peace isn't something we're told to pursue – it's a byproduct of a life lived rejoicing in God. And as you do that – the worries of this world will have to get through your peace before it can find a place to reside in your heart or mind and begin to affect you.

We see this same principle at work in instructions given through the prophet Isaiah as well.

**Isaiah 26:3 (NIV)** *You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.*

I love the approach I once heard from a preacher who shared how he handled the problems and worries and temptations that often came knocking on his life. He says he would spend the day rejoicing in the Lord and fellowshiping with Him throughout every day. And he pictured himself strolling around the inside of my house with Jesus. Then when Satan came knocking on the door of his house with a temptation or an accusation or hurt and any potential attack against his peace in God – he would just ask Jesus if he'd answer the door for him and when Jesus answered the door and Satan saw Jesus standing there he'd turn and run every time – because he knew that he can't win that fight.

If you spend each day focusing your heart and mind on Jesus then Satan's got to first get by Jesus before He can get to you and he knows that's a mismatch.

So, regardless of the outcome of today's Vikings football game, use any mention of the Vikings to remind you of God's design for your life expressed in Isaiah 61 and that He wants you to live a victorious confident life in Him for the whole world to see. See yourself as an oak of righteousness for the display of His glory. And remember that wherever you go throughout that day, God has given you the resources to live the life of an overcomer, not through your strength but through Christ's strength flowing through you. And the fuel that keeps you living victoriously in Jesus is a life of rejoicing in Him.