

Black Sunday
“It’s Only a Game”
February 3, 2019

Congregational Songs – From the Day / New Wine

Video – “Black Sunday (Chiefs Pats)”
“The NFL Follies”– Shannon & Contestants
Video – “State of Mind” series promo
Announcements – Shannon

Feature Song – Eye of the Tiger (with Chiefs 2018 highlight video)

Good morning everyone.

As Shannon said, today is *Black Sunday* because our Chiefs aren’t in the Super Bowl.

And, in our attempt, to make lemonade out of lemons, I want to talk to you about, why, *if it’s only a game*, their loss to the Patriots two weeks ago had such an emotional, psychological and even physical impact on us both individually and

collectively, as a city.

For me personally, when the Patriots scored in overtime I was totally deflated (no pun intended). I tossed and turned all night as I thought about all the ways we could have and should have won.

And Monday was no better. The clouds and the cold of the day matched my mood. I was totally depressed.

- The Chiefs' incredible season really was over.
- There would be no Super Bowl rematch against the Rams
- Nor would we see Patrick Mahomes against Drew Brees (the two top candidates for MVP which, as I'm sure you know, Mahomes won).

And it just felt really empty ... a sensation that I

tried to make up for, literally, by eating way too much ...

... which, by the way, seems to be a normal reaction. According to researchers, football fans on average eat 16 percent *more saturated fat* the day after a loss. We're also less productive at work.^{i ii}

So, show of hands please. Who else ...

- Was sad
- Ate too much
- And acted like a slug all day?

I hope it wasn't just me!

Fan Reactions

Of course, some of the fan reaction went beyond the simple emotional funk. Some fans were actually quite angry and some even went far

beyond civility.

For instance, one thing that I heard a lot of was that ...

1. “Patriots are cheaters! The game was rigged!”

The borderline calls that didn’t go our way and those that were completely missed led some fans to accuse the refs and the league of showing preferential treatment to “the quarterback who shall not be named.”

One twitter user even posted video of a ref speaking to said quarterback right before the key play of the game. According to the commentary of the poster, the ref said, “I’ve got your back.”

In reality, the ref said, “you’ve got your timeout back” because of what had happened on the previous play.

But people were mad at the Patriots and refs.

Another reaction I heard a lot of was something to the effect of – and I’m greatly cleaning this up:

2. “Fire Bob Sutton and <bleep> Dee Ford”!

For those who don’t know, Bob Sutton was the Chiefs defensive coordinator and it was his defense that couldn’t stop the Patriots in overtime.

Fans got their wish two days later when he was released.

As for Dee Ford, it was *his* penalty for lining up in the neutral zone on the key play of the game – an interception by the Chiefs’ Chavarious Ward that would have sealed the victory – that led to him being skewered in the media and also by fans.

In fact, the shaming he received on Twitter was so bad that ... well, just watch.

Video Clip – The Wrong Dee Ford (1.9 mins)

(Begin) Anchor: “That Chiefs loss was painful for all of Kansas City.”

(End) Reporter: “Betsy Webster KCTV5 News.”

One more reaction I heard a lot of ... a lot of fans – including me – decided that they are going to ...

3. “Boycott the Super Bowl.”

I can’t remember ever missing a Super Bowl – maybe when my kids were little – but I’m not going to watch today.

I’m curious – anyone else decide not to watch?

I’m not going to watch, but I don’t think the Patriots cheated and I don’t think the game was rigged.

And I’m not mad at Bob Sutton or Dee Ford because there were a lot of other opportunities to win. Mahomes overthrew a wide open receiver in the first half that would have been an easy

touchdown. Make that play and Ford's penalty doesn't matter.

I'm not going to watch because I just don't have the heart for it.

Plus, I can't bear to see the Patriots in this game *one more time* ... because they're probably going to win ... and that quarterback is probably going to be the hero.

Again.

By the way, we Chiefs fans are not alone in being sick of the Patriots winning.

Prior to the game against the Chiefs, they did a survey ...



... and found that almost every state in the union was rooting for the Chiefs. *Everyone* is sick of the Patriots winning!

Anyway, those are just a few of the reactions that I heard of to this heartbreaking loss.

And if you stand back from it a bit, the whole thing really doesn't make a much sense. After all, *there's a lot of losing in sports*. It's part of the game. Only one team can win a championship. Only one team along with its fans escape the season without tears.

It's almost guaranteed *not* to be yours.

With those odds, it almost seems a little foolish to care.

Why We Cared

So why do we?

Why do Americans collectively spend nearly \$56 billion a year on tickets to sporting events plus many billions more on team jerseys, cable packages, and buffalo wings?ⁱⁱⁱ

More specifically, why were so many of us so amped up by losing to the Patriots? We did we care what happened to a bunch of guys none of us even know?

One possible answer that I heard from people who are not big sports fans – is that we have ...

1. Misplaced priorities.

“After all,” they would say, “it is only a game!”

“In the broader context of life on this planet, many things happened on Sunday January 20th that were far worse than a privileged group of young millionaires losing and missing out on the Super Bowl.”

As one person told me “it’s hard to get too worked up about losing to the Patriots when people you know and love are dying.”

The fact that people cared so much about the Chiefs is just a sign that their priorities are out of whack.

And there’s probably some truth to that.

Another answer I heard ... another reason why we cared and why it hurt so much to lose – is that ...

2. “We were so close to victory.”

If Dee Ford hadn't lined up offside, we would be playing today. It was *that* close.

Plus, most preseason projections had the Chiefs finishing at 8-8 which meant we weren't even supposed to be *in* that game. We weren't supposed to be playing for the Super Bowl.

So *to be* in that game with victory *literally* in our hands – actually, in the hands of Chavarious Ward ... and then *to lose* made it even worse. It was the proverbial “snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.”

One person told me that it reminded them of the biblical proverb that says:

Hope deferred makes the heart sick.
Proverbs 13:12 (NLT)

Even though it was “only a game,” hope literally was deferred that night which is why, for those who were fans, our hearts were sick.

One more reason we cared so much is that ...

3. We were drawn in by Patrick Mahomes.

Not only is he one of the most incredible talents ever seen in the NFL, he seems to be a really great guy as well.

Unlike a lot of professional athletes, he lives here in the offseason. And he seems to care about Kansas City as a community.

In one interview, Mahomes said, “The fans come out every single week and show passion and love for us and our team and what we’re doing here. So for me, I want to be in the community, giving back. And just be a part of it, to show the same love and passion to them.”^{iv}

So, for example ...

- Last winter, he showed up wearing his

Chiefs jersey to read “Oh the Places You Will Go” to a group of children at the Truman Library.

- Then he hung out with fans at a Jason Aldean concert at the Sprint Center.
- Then he wore a cutoff jersey from the T-Bones and a pair of jorts while attending the NASCAR race at Kansas Speedway.
- And he threw out the first pitch when the Royals played the Yankees at “the K.”

Then, right before Christmas, this happened at a local Dick’s Sporting Goods store. As we watch pay attention to what the kids say about him.

Video Clip – Mahomes & Youth (2.1 mins)

(Begin) Reporter: “Local football players got a huge surprise ...”

(End) Reporter: “Emily Rittman, KCTV5 News.”

We cared about the Chiefs this year because we were drawn in by Patrick Mahomes. Even people who weren't big football fans *became* fans because of what he did on the field and off.

And we wanted him to win. We felt like he *should* win, especially against “the quarterback who shall not be named.”

Urge to BIRGe

Now, those are some of the things I heard and experienced myself and I think they *partly* explain why 60% of all households in the KC area were tuned in to the game (which was the highest percentage of any metropolitan area in the country^v) and why so many were disappointed, depressed and even despondent over the loss.

But I think there's another reason that goes even deeper and to understand it we need to talk about something first noted by social scientists back in

the 1970s called ...

“The BIRGe effect” ... where B-I-R-G stands for “Basking in Reflected Glory.”

... which means enjoying the shine or the radiance that comes from the greatness of someone else.

Two things, specifically, are important for our discussion today.

1. The BIRGe effect says that whenever humans see the manifestation of greatness (which what “glory” is) we want to be identified with it.

We’re suckers for glory. We want to bask in it. We want it to reflect on us and make us look good.

- This is why we brag about a famous relative if we have one – and make one up if we don’t. “My great, great, great uncle was Abe Lincoln!”
- It’s why we put a bumper sticker on our car

that says, “Proud parent of an honor roll student.”

- It’s why a lot of cities have signs listing the names of famous entertainers, politicians and war heroes who were born there.
- It’s why one-and-a-quarter million people can proudly tell a story about going to the parade or watching it on TV when the Royals won the World Series in 2015.

And because we desire to be identified with glory and to bask in it for the benefits it brings to us ...

The BIRGe effect means that victories and losses of sports teams really are *personal* to their fans.

Dr. Robert Cialdini, one of the original researchers on this subject, says “The self is centrally involved in the outcome of the event. Whoever you root for represents you.”^{vi}

This is why when their team wins, fans will not say “*they* won” but “*we* won” – even though *we* had nothing to do with the team’s success.^{vii}

This also why, when our team loses – especially if they (meaning *we*) were on the cusp of greatness like the Chiefs were – it hurts.

In fact, the BIRGe effect helps to explain why there are “sports riots” in Europe, or murders in South America of soccer players and referees whose actions cause the home team to lose. The personal images of fans are at stake when their teams take the field.^{viii}

Now, I know at this point that some of you are thinking, “well, Rick, this is all interesting stuff but what does it have to do with anything?”

“I mean, the Chiefs lose and pretty much the whole town is sad and upset that we don’t get to

play in the Super Bowl today because of the BIRGe effect – we all wanted to ‘bask in their reflected glory’ and now we can’t.”

“But so what? Why does this matter?”

It matters because it reveals an awful lot about who we are as humans, what’s gone wrong with us and how to fix it.

A Story of Glory

If you’re a Christian or if you have some familiarity with the Bible, you’re probably aware that the word “glory” is a pretty big deal. It’s everywhere all over the place.

In fact, you can pretty much summarize the whole story of the Bible with it; the whole story of the human race.

Here’s how it goes:

In the beginning, a glorious God creates a glorious world and glorious creatures – men and women – who are glorious specifically because they are designed to bask in His glory and to reflect His glory in who they are and how they live.^{ix}

Though the earth is filled with God’s glory, and the heavens – the stars and the sky – declare God’s glory, the Bible says that no other creatures are as glorious as these. For no other creatures can perceive and then reflect the divine glory as they can.

Plants cannot. Animals cannot. But humans can. It’s in our spiritual DNA (so to speak).

But something terrible happens along the way.

The Apostle Paul explains it like this.

Since the creation of the world [God’s] invisible attributes—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, because they

are understood through what has been made. So people are without excuse. Romans 1:20 (NIV)

In other words, by studying creation, human beings can see the manifestation – the radiance – of God’s greatness. We can see God’s glory.

And that’s true. Whether you believe that the creation story in Genesis is meant to be understood as six literal days or you believe in theistic evolution – that God used that process in creating everything – the point is the same:

All of this didn’t just happen. Someone who is far above us, far greater than us designed it.

- That’s why there’s order instead of chaos.
- That’s why there are laws of physics and thermodynamics that allow us to be co-creators with God. We can create bridges and space shuttles and chocolate chip

cookies because this place was designed to *allow us* to do so.

- That's why there are mathematical constants that reflect the stability of our universe. We know that the earth isn't going to spin out of control and fly off into space somewhere.

This place – this earth, this world, these heavens and these creatures are incredible.

And because it's incredible, the One who designed it must also be incredible, too. This place manifests and radiates the Designer's greatness. God's glory is obvious to anyone who wants to see it.

But that's where the problem comes in. We don't want to see it.

Paul writes ...

Although [people] knew God, they did not glorify him as God or give him thanks, but they became futile in their thoughts and their senseless hearts were darkened.

Romans 1:21-23 (NLT)

And because their thoughts and hearts were futile and dark, Paul continues ...

Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for an image resembling mortal human beings or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. Romans 1:21-23 (NLT)

The story of the human race from the very beginning, from the first man and woman right up to today, is that we have made and continue to make a terrible, terrible trade.

- Instead of basking in the glory that comes from the Creator, we have chosen to bask in the glory that comes from the created.

- Instead of bowing the knee to the Almighty, we have suppressed knowledge of Him and create all sorts of lesser gods for ourselves.

Sometimes, we've done it literally, as Paul explains here. We've created idols of stone and wood that look like men and women and animals and we've bowed down and worshipped them instead of God.

But we've also done it figuratively. One biblical commentator explains it like this:

In ways most of us probably don't even realize, we have again and again asked *creation* to give us what only the *Creator* can provide. We have looked *horizontally* for what can only be found *vertically*. We have asked people, situations, locations, and experiences to be the one thing they will never be: *our savior*.

We have looked to these things to give us life, security, identity, and hope. We have asked these things to heal our broken hearts. We have hoped that these things would make us better people.

A war is raging. *It is a glory war: a battle for what glory will rule our hearts, and in so doing, control our choices, words, and behavior.*^x

And the Apostle Paul would agree with that, for he goes on to describe what happens when humans lose the glory war; when we trade basking in the glory of the Creator for lessor glories.

He continues:

Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done. Their lives became full of every

kind of wickedness, sexual sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. Romans 1:28-29 (NLT)

They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents.

They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy.

They know God's justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too.

Romans 1:30-32 (NLT)

Wow! If you were looking for a description of what's gone wrong with the human race, that one is pretty hard to beat. It about covers everything we see when we turn on the TV or surf the internet.

And it all starts with basking in a lesser glory than the glory of the One who created us.

The Point

Now, at this point, some of you are thinking, “I’m trying to connect the dots here, Rick, on everything you’re saying. Is your point that it’s wrong to be a sports fan? That it’s somehow bad that the Chiefs loss stung so much?”

Not, that’s not what I’m saying at all.

What I’m saying is that how we felt about what happened to the Chiefs is Exhibit A. It’s evidence that *exactly what the Bible says about us is true*: that we’re suckers for glory – the radiance and manifestation of greatness.

We were created for it. And so we’re drawn to seek it and identify with it wherever we can find it.

And that's not a bad thing unless ...

- If all you have is the Chiefs and their glory – and for some people, that's all there is.
- If all you have is your career and whatever glory it has – and for some people, that's all there is.
- If all you have is your money and possessions and whatever their glory – and for some people, that's all there is.
- If all you have is your family and its glory – and for some people, that's all there is.

Or if you give any of those things the place in your heart and mind and life where only God should be (which is idolatry) – and many people do ...

If you trust these things for life, security, identity, and hope more than God ...

Not only will you be constantly disappointed, you yourself will fall short of the glory – the manifestation and radiance of greatness – for which God intended you.

You will never be who you were meant to be until you put God back into his rightful place in your life.

So how do we do that? How do we put God back in His rightful place? How do we begin to fix things?

Obviously, we need to become more conscious of the things we're turning to and trusting in other than God; the things we praise and honor; the people and things we submit to.

But it goes deeper than that.

Earlier we saw that one of the things about our

inborn urge to “Bask in Reflected Glory” is that, in our minds, whoever we root for represents *us*. Their victories vicariously become our victories.

But they really *aren't* our victories. We don't get the paycheck or the ring for winning the big game. As great as Patrick Mahomes is and as much as he wants to give back to the community, he's not giving you the MVP award he won last night. It's his and his alone.

And, even if he wanted to, he can't do anything about your biggest problem and mine – that we have fallen from the glory God intended for us – because he himself has the same problem. He, too, is a sinner.

That's what makes Jesus of Nazareth so amazing. *His MVP award (so to speak) really can be yours and really can be mine.*

Here's why I say that.

Actually, Paul says it.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV)

What that means is this:

- Jesus lived the perfectly righteous life that you and I should have lived. There were no idols in his life, literally or figuratively.

He had no sin.

- Then He died the death on the cross that we deserve to die as those ...
 - who have turned away from acknowledging and glorifying God completely;
 - who have bowed down to other things and other people instead of Him.

He became sin for us.

- And He did that *so that* (Paul says) we might become – in reality – *the perfect righteousness of God*; so that we can have the ring; so that we can be labeled MVP.

And this is God's plan for fixing what has gone wrong in us and in our world. *Jesus has already done it all.* He has already won the big game. He has already won the victory over evil and death and Hell and Satan.

All we need to do to receive the award – to be forgiven and set free – is to trust in Him. To believe that ...

- He is who he said he is – God in the flesh.
- And that He died on a cross for us and rose again on the third day and then ascended into Heaven.

That's where the journey back to glory begins.

And some of us, today, need to trust and believe for the very first time. To simply say, "Jesus, I do believe in you. And I receive what you have done for me."

But that's just the beginning. The journey continues as we integrate more and more of what He taught and how He lived into our lives. That's why we're here as a church – to help people do that.

And if you don't have a church – even if you don't believe what we believe about Jesus at this point, you are welcome here. You're welcome to investigate our faith and make up your own mind.

The series we're beginning next Sunday – *State of Mind* – would be a great place to start and I hope you'll come back for that.

Conclusion

But for today, the thought I want to leave you with is that you were made for glory. Something deep in your soul longs to bask in the glory of God and to become a glorious, God-reflecting person.^{xi}

And in keeping with that thought, I'm going to invite you to do something a little different in the next few moments.

At the end of most of the messages we give here at North Heartland, we typically turn it over to our band and they restate musically what we've talked about in the message. And we typically sit and listen and then we're dismissed to go out those doors and attempt to live out (with God's help) what we've discovered.

But today, instead of sitting and listening, I'm going to ask you to stand as you listen; to stand as a way to bask in God's glory.

And then, maybe join in giving glory to God by singing along or even – dare I say it – by raising your hands. A lot of us don't do that easily in worship though we *will* do it when the Chiefs score a touchdown. So, today, if you're a believer in Jesus I invite you to glorify God in that way.

If you don't feel comfortable doing that or even singing, it's OK. But please don't take this as a cue to leave early so you don't disturb the people around you who want to do this.

Ok, let's stand together and bask in God's glory for just a few minutes.

Congregational Song – Holy is the Lord (4)

Endnotes

ⁱ <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/news/releases/for-disappointed-sports-fans-defeats-increase-consumption-of-fat-and-sugar-2.html>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/04/be-a-fan/554081>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/04/be-a-fan/554081/>

^{iv} <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2018/06/13/chiefs-patrick-mahomes-ii-embracing-life-in-kansas-city/35993629/>

^v <https://www.kansascity.com/sports/nfl/kansas-city-chiefs/article224860785.html>

vi

<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/sports/other/081100fans.htm>

1

vii

<http://www.people.vcu.edu/~jldavis/readings/Cialdini%20et%20al%201976%20birg.pdf>

viii

<http://www.people.vcu.edu/~jldavis/readings/Cialdini%20et%20al%201976%20birg.pdf>

ix

http://www.reformed.org/documents/wsc/index.html?_top=http://www.reformed.org/documents/WSC.html

^x www.christianpost.com/news/pastors-ambassadors-of-glory-for-a-beaten-down-church-98605/

^{xi} See <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/to-him-be-glory-forevermore>