

Football And Facebook

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[0 : 0 0] I would like us to turn back to Hebrews chapter 4. Let me read again verses 14 and 15 and 16. Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God. Let us hold fast our confession, for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin. Let us therefore with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Last week we were looking at this passage and we did so in order to highlight two great truths about Jesus. We said that in him we see incomparable greatness and in him we see inexhaustible kindness. So Jesus is the fulfilment of everything that the Old Testament was pointing towards. He's the one who reigns over all and in him we have astonishing access to God. Jesus is incomparably great, but at the same time in Jesus we find the one who is able to sympathise with all of our weaknesses and temptations. When we find ourselves in need we can run straight to him and there's never a moment when he's unable to help us. And it's all summed up beautifully in the phrase throne of grace that you can see in verse 16. It's a throne where God reigns an incompatible glory, majesty and greatness, but it's a throne of grace where the weakest, frailest and most needy people can find mercy and grace to help in time of need. And I hope I would love it if there was times in the past week when these two truths were a help to you. This week I want us to just follow on a little bit from what we were looking at last week, but I want to look at things a little bit more widely and the reason I want to do that is because the two passages that we read in Psalm 95 and this passage in Hebrews 4 they are pointing us towards two questions that are absolutely fascinating. Two questions that are immensely relevant to life in Scotland in 2021 and two questions that you have probably never heard being asked in church before. The two questions are why does humanity love football and why does humanity love Facebook? That's our two questions today and we're going to think about them together, but before we do I want to just note two introductory points. One, I acknowledge straight away that not everybody loves football and not everybody loves Facebook, so even speaking personally I love football, I have very little interest in Facebook myself and not on it, but as

I'm sure you've guessed I'm using these two things, football and Facebook, as specific examples of something bigger and so even though not all of us love football or Facebook, there's no denying that across the globe an astonishing number of people do. So that's the first thing to remember. Second introductory comment is just that this sermon is not having a go at these things. Our questions are not saying why are football and Facebook bad because they're not necessarily bad at all. The questions are neither condemning nor endorsing. The questions are asking why. Why is it that so many people love these things? And if Hebrew is correct when it says that the word of God is living an active shepherd than any two-edged sword, if that's correct then that means that the Bible should absolutely be able to give us the answer to these two questions. So Facebook, football and Facebook, why do so many people love them? Well let's think about each of them. First of all football, over the past month we've had the European Championships, two or three football matches a day, wonderful. It's been excellent. And even though Scotland didn't get as far as they wanted, as we wanted them to, it was brilliant for us as a nation to be part of it. And in a month's time the domestic season will begin again. And if you're anything like me, every Saturday you'll be checking the BBC Sport website to see what the scores are. And there's lots of reasons why people love football. So I'm not giving you an exhaustive analysis today, but I want to just pick one thing which I think is fair to say is one of the main reasons why people love football. And it's this it's because we long to have something great to aim for. We long to have something great to aim for. So with Scotland we longed to get to the Euros when we finally did, it was amazing. And if it was Scotland playing in the final today then the whole nation would be buzzing with excitement. So

whether with football, whether it's Scotland qualifying, whether it's Rangers finally beating Celtic, whether it's Carlouey getting back to the glory days of the Highland Amateur Cup final, we long for something great to happen. And we want to be part of that. And of course that longing, football is just an example of the fact that that longing can apply to many different parts of life. So it's the desire that leads some people to become really avid supporters of a particular political party. They support the party, they long for them to win because they long for something great to happen and they want to be part of it. It's the same in our careers, or our hobbies, it's the same desire that inspires us to build the house of our dreams.

Humanity longs to be part of something great. And central to that is the fact that no matter how many great memories we have from the past, they are never enough to stop us from longing for more in the future. And football is a great example of that. So Rangers, you finally won the league this year. You've won 55 titles, you have an incredible history for every Rangers fan in here. Does that mean that you don't care what happens next season? Not at all. You still want to be part of something great next year. Just try being an Aberdeen fan, that's all I can say to that. We've had a long time to wait. It's not just football. Every year I long for Andy Murray to win Wimbledon again. I don't think he's ever going to, but I wish it would happen. I long for

[7:17] Scotland to do better in next year's six nations. And even though there's been so many already, we all want Britain to win more gold medals at the Olympics. These victories, whether it's in sport or politics or even our own personal targets and exercise or work or whatever it may be, these victories taste so good. But they never last long enough. Now, none of this is necessarily bad. In fact, a lot of it is good. That longing to be part of something great shows that as humans we're not made to be static. We're not made to be happy with just no sense of achievement in our lives. God has made us to be creative. He's made us to have responsibilities that we can fulfill.

He's made us to achieve success in our endeavors. And that joy of achievement is something that humanity is made to enjoy together. So it should not surprise us from a biblical worldview that we long to be part of a great success. And that it's something that we as humans can enjoy together. In fact, we as humans enjoy that in a way that no other part of creation can. So there's lots that's good. But like everything in a fallen universe, the potential for good is accompanied by the potential for great harm. So that desire for victory or success, whether in football or politics or even having a nicer house than our neighbors, all of that can lead to unhealthy competitiveness. It can lead to jealous materialism. It can even lead to extreme ideologies. And the danger is that our desire to be part of something great can lead us to make an idol out of something that never, ever deserves to be one. All too often, the thing that we long for becomes the thing that we live for. And when it does, we've made the wrong choice. Sam 95 speaks of that in verses 7 to 11. Here you have a description of when the Israelites left Egypt, they'd been freed from slavery. And so you'd think, wow, this is so good. But they've gone into the wilderness. And when hunger and thirst set in, they began to resent God. They began to think that all we need is just food and something to drink. And even back in Egypt, the food and water we had was actually better. And so we should just go back. We just want food and water and we'll chase it, even if it comes at the cost of a return to slavery. And what nearly happened to the Israelites has repeatedly happened to people right up to today. We choose the wrong ultimate. If food and water are important for the Israelites, it wasn't bad that they wanted them, but they were basically like, is it God or is it food and water? They're like food and water, even if it means slavery. That was the wrong choice.

And they chose the wrong ultimate to aim for. So many people do the same. We choose the wrong ultimate. We become slaves to the success that it promises. But which never lasts long. So one of the big reasons why humanity loves football and why I love football is because we long to be, we long to have something to aim for. We long to be part of something great. What about Facebook? Well, like football, there's lots of reasons why people love Facebook. Just in case there's anybody watching or listening who maybe doesn't even really know what Facebook is, it's just a massive website where people can put up photos and comments about what they're doing in their lives. And if you put up a photo, somebody else can write a comment underneath it. And it's a little bit like, it's a kind of chatting bit on the internet and showing photos of what you're doing and telling people what you love to that kind of thing. It's hugely popular. And there's lots of reasons why people love it. It's a great way to communicate. It's wonderful for keeping in touch with friends and family across the world. You can use it for charity work. And there are many wonderful stories of how people have had lost items returned to them through a Facebook post. That actually happened to us in

Edinburgh. We found a Bible on the street and in the front cover it had a message from someone's parents to their child. I can't remember exactly what it said, but there was just like best wishes from mum and dad. And then there was a joke in it, something like make sure you don't lose this one or make sure you don't leave this one on the train or something like that. And of course, the person had lost it. I took a photo of that page and it was posted on the social media account for the church and we found the owner, which was amazing. So there's lots of really cool things that can happen. So there's lots of reasons why people love Facebook. But I think again that one of the biggest reasons why it's so popular is because it's a way of connecting us with people who think the way that we think and who sympathise with the way that we feel. So if someone puts up a photo of a happy memory or a happy moment, it's great when people comment to share in that joy. But equally, when people put a post up where they show their frustration, say with the government, whether in London or in Edinburgh, or whether it's about the ferry or whatever it may be, one of the reasons they do so is that other people will show their sympathy and say, yeah, isn't that awful? And you get comments where people are feeling the same way. And so just as we long to be part of something great, so too, we long for sympathy and attention when things are not going the way we want them to. And again,

[13:40] Facebook is just a specific example of something wider that we can see in lots of different places. So this can be part of the appeal of going for a drink at the pub. It's a place where we can find people who share our frustrations, maybe about work, maybe colleagues can go and just talk about how things are frustrating. We can get the same from TV shows. So you might watch a TV show or a film, you might see a character to whom you relate. And even though it's fiction, their situation seems so similar to ours, there's a kind of sympathy there. And we can even find it in a church setting. We can easily be drawn to people who share the same complaint or sense of grievance that we have. And again, that's not necessarily bad. Because when things go wrong, we do need the comfort of friends who understand why we're hurting. We are made made by God to support each other. We're not made to keep everything bottled up inside and pretend that everything is fine.

And that's why Facebook or an evening out with friends or a long chat in front of the fire can be such a good thing. But at the same time, all of this carries great danger. So our sense of disappointment about something can turn into a sense of victimhood. A victimhood can turn into a sense of resentment against people who we feel have caused it. That resentment can lead to hate it. And it can be a really damaging downward spiral. If you look at the people who post extreme comments on Facebook, it can seem outrageous to us. But I doubt that any of them believe that they're the ones who are in the wrong. And again, this could be seen in the history of Israel. Sam 95 is giving us another example of this. The people were grumbling at Moses. There was a sense of frustration, victimhood and complaint. One of the reasons why people love Facebook is because it's a place where we can find others who will have sympathy towards the way we feel. So that's our two answers. And people love football because we long to have something great to aim for, that we can be part of. People love Facebook because we long for sympathy from people who feel the way we feel when things go wrong. And we can summarize it like this. We all crave passion. We long to be part of something great, a passion that we can have. And we all crave compassion, sympathy when things are rubbish. These are two of our greatest needs as humans. But what I want us all to recognize is that the whole point of Christianity is that it meets our deepest needs.

So that means that if you want to be part of something amazing to give you hope and joy for the future, and if you want someone to sympathize and help you in all your needs and disappointments and frustrations now, then there is nothing, absolutely nothing that can satisfy these needs in the way that Jesus can. Jesus is calling us to be part of something amazing. He's establishing a new humanity. He's restoring the creation back to what it was meant to be. He will call every injustice in history to account. And he's promising us a place in his eternal kingdom where death is defeated, where pain and suffering and tears will be no more, and where everyone who trusts in him can enjoy being with him and with each other and enjoying the beauty and wonder of his creation. And that's exactly what God has created us to do. Psalm 95, these verses, verses 1 to 6 rather, that speaks of it. It speaks so beautifully about God, our great God, our Creator. The heights and depths are in his hands. And he is the one for whom we are made.

He's the one who's worthy of our worship. He is our God. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture. And that's why one of the key teachings of Christianity is that God has got utterly amazing

plans for the future. Please don't ever think that Christianity is this old historical thing from way back then. So much of what Christianity is about is for tomorrow and for the future and for eternity. There, God is promising a new creation where the universe will be restored. He's creating a new humanity where all the brokenness of sin will be healed, a new life where death is never part of your future again. It's only ever a memory from a never returning past. No wonder Paul speaks in Corinthians, 1 Corinthians chapter 2, of what no eye has seen, no ear has heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him. And the amazing thing is that God has started to reveal all that to us now.

In Jesus, we see a wonderful future, but the most amazing thing of it all is that God wants you to be part of that. So, if you want victory, Jesus gives you the greatest of all, victory over death, our worst opponent, our biggest enemy. If you want a triumph, Jesus gives you the greatest of all, he has conquered the kingdom of darkness. If you want to protest against wrong doing, Jesus gives you the greatest of all, he left heaven to go to the cross because he would not stand for all the hurt, evil and suffering in the world. If you want a campaign for justice, Jesus gives you the greatest of all, he will put right every wrong, he will call every abuser and deceiver to account, and he will always stand up for the rights of the oppressed.

[20 : 35] If you want a result to celebrate, Jesus gives you the greatest of all, he's risen from the dead, he's alive and he offers eternal life to all who come to him. If you want a march to join, Jesus gives you the greatest of all, he's calling people from all nations to follow him, to walk, counter to the culture of today and to be ready to be different. And if you want a festival where you can celebrate, Jesus gives you the greatest of all. And if you think that the roar of the crowd at Hamden or Murrayfield is impressive, then just you wait until you hear the roar of heaven in praise of Jesus. The gospel of Jesus Christ is giving you something amazing to be part of. In other words, if you want a passion to live for, then nothing, nothing beats this. And if you're not yet a Christian or not you when you stand before God, he's calling you today to be part of that too.

And the amazing thing is that it's so simple, all he asks you to do is to put your trust in Jesus. And at that moment your mind can be filled with buds, but this, but that, but the next thing. But what about my mistakes? But what if I don't manage this? But what if I'm able to not do that? But what about the fact that I'm not like this person? What about this? What about that? But what about all the ways in which I'm just not really able to do it? Well, if your mind is full of all those thoughts, the amazing thing is that as we come to Jesus, we come just as we are. Because Jesus is also the friend who can understand and sympathize with all of our weaknesses, our disappointments and our struggles. But unlike Facebook, Jesus won't fuel our resentments and he won't indulge our bitterness. Instead, he shows us a better way. He shows us a way of healing, a way of forgiveness, a way of refusing to judge others and of recognizing that people will have all sorts of things going on in their lives that nobody else knows anything about. He shows us a way where love covers a multitude of sins, where the fact that Jesus laid down his life for his enemies shows that we must be ready to see something valuable in the people we struggle with and a way where his commandment is to love one another, to bear each other's burdens and to see the best in one another. And if and when we make mistakes or if we are hurt by the mistakes of others, we're always ready to choose grace instead of revenge. In other words, if you want compassion, then nothing compares to the compassion that Jesus will give you. And that's what Hebrews 4 has been telling us this week and last week that Jesus is able to sympathize with every temptation we face and we can draw near to his throne of grace and find grace and help in time of need. Sometimes things like Facebook can leave us feeling horrendous about ourselves. Everyone else is better looking. Everyone else has a tidier house. Everyone else has more friends. Everyone else had a better laugh last weekend and all of that can leave us feeling so insecure. Like everyone else is striving and we are just one big failure. Jesus is saying, forget all that nonsense. Come to me because I love you so much. And I will give you an amazing passion to live for and I will give you all the compassion that you ever need.

All of this is reminding us that Jesus is the greatest of all and the kindest, kindest of all. And so there's loads that's good about football. There's lots that's good about Facebook, but none of these come close to comparing with knowing and following Jesus and being part of his family together. As we conclude I want to leave you with two questions to think about.

So first of all, every human without exception needs a passion to aim for and they need compassion when things are tough. The question is, in your search for these things, where are you looking?

[25 : 58] What is your biggest passion? And does it deserve to be your biggest passion? Now I'm not telling you to give it up because that's not what I'm saying. I just want you to think about the order in which you prioritize these things. All of us, whether Christians or maybe not yet Christians, we need to think to look at ourselves. We need to think about where we are looking for the passion that we long for and for the compassion that we desperately need. Now every one of us, whether we've been a Christian for many years or just starting out or not yet, we can slip into this mistake at any point where we can start chasing the wrong passion or we can start looking for compassion in the wrong place. We need to think about where we are looking and if it's not in Jesus then you need to have a very good list of reasons why the thing that you've chosen in his place is better. So that's the first question to think about. Where are we looking for these things? The second question is, as the people around us in Carlway, in our workplaces, in our communities, as they search for a passion and for compassion, when they approach us as Christians and us as a church, what will they find?

Will they find something great that they want to be part of, a glimpse of the amazing future in the here and now? And perhaps most importantly of all, will they find grace and mercy to help in time of need? Will the person who knows nothing about Christianity find patient helpers?

Will the person with an addiction find people who will actually see the precious person behind the addiction and who give them the warmest welcome they've ever received? Will the person who stopped going to church be greeted with a flood of kindness and a famine of judgment? Will the confused, the tired, the lonely, the broken, the fed up, the bruised, the battered all find that here they can be part of a family that will stick together and will stick with them no matter what?

When people come to us, what will they find? May it never ever be the case that people find more passion and more compassion in football and Facebook than they find in church.

So in the week ahead, may all of us remember that in Jesus we're part of something amazing and may that truth be the passion that drives us and may we also remember that all around us are people who are caught up in all sorts of things that are awful and may that truth stir up compassion that pours out of us. The more we are like that, the more we'll be like Jesus.

[29 : 46] Amen. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you give us something amazing to be part of and we pray, oh God, that we would have the order right in our lives, that you would be first in everything and that because of that we would then be able to enjoy, think all the good in football and Facebook and politics and hobbies and all the other things that are part of human culture, help us to see and recognize what's good and to pursue that well, but all with you first and all to your glory. May we be driven by a passion for you, for your kingdom, for your glory.

But we thank you also that you give us compassion and we only need to think of the cross to see how great that compassion is and we thank you so so much for that, for your kindness and mercy and compassion towards us. We pray, oh God, that in everything that we do this week and work at home in our community, whatever it is, we pray that that we would come to you for compassion when we are struggling and that your compassion would overflow out of us into others who are in need around us. We pray, oh God, that in all these ways you'd make us more and more like Jesus. Amen. Our closing item of place is from the Sing Sam's version of Psalm 130,

Lord from the depths I call to you, Lord hear me from on high. That's an again just an amazing example of the compassion of Jesus that from the very depths he hears us. So we can stand and sing these wonderful words together in conclusion.