

Part 5: Sport

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Date: 08 June 2025

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[0 : 0 0] Well, this morning we are going to turn to Genesis chapter 1, but we will be coming back to 1 Corinthians 15 as well. God created man in his own image. Verses of Genesis 1, 27 and 28.

So God created man in his own image. In the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. And God blessed them and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.

And have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on earth. Today we're continuing our series called Good Dreams, Better Certainties.

And in this series we're capturing the two great truths that everybody has dreams and the dreams that we have are good dreams. The things that we aim for in life, the goals that we set, the things that we long for, we all have them.

And these things are good. But the big truth that we want to emphasize is that the gospel gives you better certainties. And what we want to say is that it's not saying that, you know, all your dreams are kind of a bad thing over here.

[1 : 1 6] And you need to abandon them all and follow the gospel instead. Actually, all our dreams are good. And in so many ways they're pointing us towards what the gospel gives us.

But the dreams that we have will fall short. And all the time the gospel promises us more. And what the gospel promises is certain.

And so dreams are good, but they're maybes, they're possibilities, they're hopefulies. And sometimes they come through, sometimes they don't, and sometimes they do, but they're not quite as satisfying as they thought, as we thought they would be.

But the gospel gives us promises that are certain and are guaranteed and are unlosable. And what we've been saying each week is that the dreams that we have actually find their origin and their explanation in the Bible's teaching about creation in Genesis 1 and 2.

And so every week we're coming back to Genesis 1 and 2 and connecting with both our dreams and with other parts of the Bible. And the big point I wanted to emphasize in doing that is to say that actually what the Bible teaches makes sense of your dreams.

[2 : 3 2] And the truth is, without the Bible, without the gospel, our dreams don't make sense. We might be chasing them, we might be looking for them, but actually the foundation of what makes them good and true and worthwhile disappears unless we have the Bible's doctrine of creation.

In other words, one of the things we wanted to see again and again here is that maybe you're here today and you have questions as to whether or not the Bible really has anything to offer you and whether or not the gospel is true and whether or not Jesus is worth following.

And as you think about that or question that, you don't actually need to think about your religious convictions or your philosophical principles. You need to think about your dreams. You need to think about your dreams.

And that's what we're doing. We're working through eight different dreams that people have. We've looked at the dream of a home, of a career, of a relationship, of a family. And today we are going to look at the dream of sport.

And for all of these dreams, our headings are the same. We're saying that these dreams are good dreams. These dreams are broken dreams. And the gospel replaces these dreams with better certainties.

[3 : 54] So first of all, I want us to see that the dream of sport is a good dream. Now, of our list there that I put up there, sport might seem, you know, actually like maybe the least significant on the list because probably none of us would put sport in the same category as family or home or health.

And some of you in here might not even like sport. And you're like, Thomas, this is not my dream at all. But it's a very important topic to include in our list for two reasons.

One is because whether you like sport or not, there's no denying that sport has a massive influence on our society today. And for many, many people, it holds a huge place in our lives.

So if I ask the question, for those of you, our sports fans, if you're football fans, what would you say is ultimately more important, your health or your football team? And now let me ask, but which one do you actually think about more?

And I would definitely say my health is more important. I think about football way, way more. So sport is a big part in our society. But the second big reason why it's important to include sport on our list of dreams is because the dream of sport is actually part of a bigger dream.

[5 : 22] It's part of the dream of victory. And that dream, the dream of sport and the bigger dream of victory, is a good dream in lots of ways.

So success in sport can bring a very great reward. So it's obvious. You win, you get the prize. And that's true if you're participating or if you are supporting.

And winning is a brilliant feeling. You get the trophy, you get the medal, you get the recognition, you get the glory. Success in sport brings great reward. It also brings great relief.

And so you have this massive sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. So French Open final is on today between the two best men's tennis players in the world.

And it'll probably be a very long game. It'll probably be exhausting. And what you very often see at the end of a tennis match in a final is that the player will just sink down onto the ground with a massive sense of relief.

[6 : 26] The battle's over. They've won. And there's a great sense of pride for everyone connected with a victory. There's that sense of relief when you reach the finish line, when you make the target, when you push yourself, and then you're able to rest.

And actually, that's one of the most satisfying feelings of rest. Even if you're not necessarily winning, even if you just go for a 10K run or more or whatever it might be, there's that sense of relief when you do it.

And so many people here will know that as you approach sport, whether that's as a participant or as a supporter, often there can be a sense of nervousness, anxiety, kind of hope, fear.

And anybody who watches Scotland play football or rugby knows exactly how that feels. It can be agony. And when victory comes, there's such a sense of relief.

Success in sport brings great relief. So it brings great reward, great relief. And all of that's because success in sport brings great rejoicing.

- [7 : 34] When Carlyway win, it feels fantastic. It's such a good feeling. There's joy. There's celebration. There's delight. And for many people, that's the dream.
- The dream of celebrating victory, whether that's Olympic athletes, football players, loyal supporters, to finally win is a huge source of joy.
- And that celebration is shared. And that's one of the wonderful things about sport. An individual can win a gold medal at the Olympics. A whole nation rejoices. 11 players in the local football team can win a match or a trophy.
- The whole community celebrates. And so that dream of success in sport is so powerful in our society.
- And so many of us know how that feels. And so you can think back just now to a moment of sporting success in your life. Whether that was for you individually, as a player, or for you as a supporter, or a parent, or even a friend.
- [8 : 39] And when that success comes, it feels so good. A few weeks ago, I'm sure many of you, many people in our community, were in Stornoway for the Jockstein Cup final.
- Carlyway against Point. Carlyway were winning 1-0. Hamish got the ball in midfield. Ran forward a few paces. And leathered the ball into the top corner from miles out.
- Fantastic feeling. And Carlyway went on to win the match. And so many of us rejoiced. Sport is a dream. It's a good dream.
- Now, one of the things that we've been saying is that all of these dreams find their origin in the Bible's teaching about creation. Does that apply to sport?
- Is there any mention of sport in Genesis 1 and 2? Well, those of you who've read Genesis 1 and 2 recently will say, Well, no. There was no mention of football, or tennis, or cycling, or golf, or anything like that in the Garden of Eden.
- [9 : 44] However, although there's no direct mention of sport in the opening chapters of the Bible, there is a key word in the creation narrative that I think is very important for us to think about.
- And that key word, I want to argue, is teaching us where the dream of sport comes from. And it's in these verses. In the middle there, God says, Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it.
- And what I want to focus on is that word there. The word subdue. Now, that's a really interesting word because later on in the Old Testament, that word comes up again.
- It comes up a few times, and it comes up frequently in the context of victory in battle. So, Numbers 32 is an example of that.
- Moses speaking to them, talking about them preparing for war, and talking about how when they drive out their enemies, the land will be subdued before the Lord.
- [10 : 49] And then that was what happened later on when Joshua went into the promised land, drove out the enemies, and the land was subdued before them.
- Same word. And it's actually Hebrew, which is what the Old Testament was in, Hebrew has kind of word families. So, you've got lots of words that are connected as part of one word family group.
- And the word family for subdued is interesting because there's another word that is part of the same family. That's the word for footstool. And you see that used in association with like a royal throne.
- And so, a king on his throne, feet on his footstool. And it's conveying the idea of authority, of ruling, of overcoming. And so, that language of subdue is mentioned in Genesis 1.
- Now, in Genesis 1, there was no war. Sins not entered into the creation. And so, there's no physical war for Adam and Eve to fight.

[11 : 56] But, nevertheless, God is saying, I want you to fill the earth and subdue it. And I think that that word is telling us that humanity has been given a specific instruction by God.

It's often, this instruction is often called by theologians, it's called the cultural mandate. And what we mean by that is that humanity is made to go and to cultivate the resources that God has provided in the world.

So, that's why it's cultural mandate, the cultivation of life. And so, it's speaking of the fact that we are made to go out and seize opportunities, to overcome challenges, to aim for targets, to discover new things, to push ourselves further and further.

In other words, when you think of humanity made in the Garden of Eden, humanity is not made just to sort of float around as though we're kind of just on this perpetual holiday, just drifting. No, God made us to push ourselves, to succeed, to climb mountains, to explore rivers, to dig up minerals, to walk further, to run faster, to get stronger.

To push ourselves, to triumph over big challenges. And I think this is the reason, I think this is explaining, it's definitely explaining why so many of us dream of success in sport.

[13 : 29] It's the outworking of our God-given ability to subdue and succeed. The dream of sport is a good dream. It's also a broken dream.

And one of the big things we're emphasizing here is that sin has affected every area of creation. It's affected every area of our lives. And that's definitely true of sport.

And so, I'm sure you can all think of thousands of examples of how the joy and beauty of sport is intermingled with awful behavior. Just a couple of weeks ago, just a week ago yesterday, Paris Saint-Germain, PSG, football team from Paris, won the Champions League.

And so, they've spent millions over the past 10, 15 years trying to win this league. They've never won it before. Trying to win the Champions League. They've never won it before. Finally, they won.

And so, it's the greatest moment in the history of that football club. The moment their supporters have been longing for. And yet, you turn on the news the following morning, what do you see?

[14 : 42] You see two things. You see PSG won the Champions League. And you see that hundreds of people got arrested in Paris because the celebrations got out of hand.

And there was even a couple of people killed. And so, sport, although it's such a source of joy, it can also be a massively fertile ground for sin to just spiral out of control.

And there's loads we could say about that. Again, I just want to highlight three things. Number one is that sport can bring bitter rivalry. And we see it all the time.

It can happen between competitors, you know, as they face off against each other. But maybe even more so, it can happen between supporters. And sometimes that can bring tension and resentment.

But sometimes it can escalate into hatred and violence. And there are times when it does even lead to death.

[15 : 42] And this is where the connection between sport and conflict is seen again and again. Where in sport, it becomes so easy to actually view opponents, not just as opponents, but as enemies.

And that can have a massive influence on how we view people. And we judge people accordingly. So, on the one hand, if people are supporting the same team that we're supporting, if they're on the same side as us, then, you know, we like them, no matter how bad they might be.

And on the other side, if people are of a different sporting allegiance to us, then we don't like them. No matter how nice they might be, everything is shaped by this rivalry.

And in all of that, sins like jealousy and resentment and suspicion and cynicism and aggression and hatred and violence can all flourish. Sport can bring out the worst in people.

And I think we've all seen it, that a football pitch can change a lot of personalities dramatically.

[16 : 49] So, sport brings bitter rivalry. Sport also brings bitter disappointment. And so, winning's great, losing's hard. And sometimes that can bring blame onto somebody who's made a mistake.

Sometimes they can bring a huge sense of failure in the person who feels like they've messed up. And sometimes you can try and try and try your hardest.

But you never reach the goal that you've been aiming for. There are people who will have poured their whole lives into coming seventh in the semifinals of the 400 meters in the Olympics.

They've given everything. But actually, they're nowhere near where they wanted to be. And that fear of disappointment can fuel other sins.

That's why, when you look at sport, what do you see? You see cheating. You see doping. You see match-fixing. And very often, people can harbor a deep sense of revenge towards their rivals.

[18 : 05] So, sport can bring bitter rivalry. It can bring bitter disappointment. But the thing I maybe want to highlight most of all is that sport is a broken dream because of the fact that even when you do win, the joy and the satisfaction does not last the way you thought it would.

So, in my lifetime, one of my favorite sportsmen has been Andy Murray. Andy Murray is just the epitome of Scottish sports because he has absolutely agony to watch.

And yet, he gives you enough to make you feel so hopeful. And yet, so often, he doesn't quite make it. And so, supporting Andy Murray, he kind of connects with the Scottish psyche, I think, so much.

And so, one of my biggest sporting dreams was to see Andy Murray win Wimbledon. You used to think, if he could just win Wimbledon. When I was young, I used to watch Wimbledon quite a lot.

And there was always this thought, no British person has ever won it. Well, they have won it, but they haven't won it for donkey's years. And they say, oh, will a British guy win? And even better, if it's a Scottish guy.

[19 : 23] And finally, in 2013, it happened. Finally, Andy Murray won. And it was amazing. But one year later, in 2014, did I sit there and think, oh, well, Andy Murray won last year, I'm not bothered.

No. You're like, I want him to win again. And he didn't in 2014, but he did in 2016. But the next year after that, I was still desperate for him to win again.

And I was longing for him to win it a third time. And he never did. And you feel a sense of, oh, I wish he had won it three times, rather than just twice. And that's true in every sport.

Rangers have got 55 titles. Is that enough? No. Celtic have won the title 13 times in the last 14 years.

Give the next few to Rangers. Or maybe one to Aberdeen, will you? No chance. No chance. And for Carloway, we're doing really well this year.

[20 : 29] We won the league in 2013. We won it in 2017. But, boy, we want to win it again this year if we can. And the fascinating thing is that victory in sport, it feels so satisfying, it just makes you hungrier.

And the key point is this. It's that if you are pouring your hopes for joy into a sporting dream, then you're chasing something that's not going to ultimately satisfy you.

You're chasing something that's going to feel brilliant for a while. But it will not ultimately satisfy you.

The dream of sporting victory only ever has two results. It either doesn't come or it doesn't last.

And, you know, you see that with sporting people. This week, some of you will have seen in the news, Bradley Wiggins has been in the news the last week.

[21 : 39] Bradley Wiggins won Olympic gold, a few golds, I think. He won the Tour de France. Massively successful cyclist. And since he retired, his life's fallen apart. He became a drug addict.

He was bankrupted. He's massively struggling. And all that success still left him feeling broken.

And there's loads more examples like that. So sport's a good dream. It's a broken dream. The key point is that the gospel replaces these dreams with better certainties.

Now, what I want to say here is that the gospel connects with everything that we feel about sport. So everything that we feel about sport, the gospel connects to those feelings.

But the gospel applies those experiences to something much, much more important. So the gospel connects with what we feel about sport, but applies what we feel and what we experience to something much, much more important.

[22 : 47] So what do I mean? Well, as we were saying, the sporting dream is part of a bigger dream. It's part of the bigger dream of victory. The gospel, if it is about anything, it's about victory.

But that victory is not over a sporting rival. It is a victory over our biggest enemy. And that's what takes us back to 1 Corinthians 15.

I tell you a mystery, Paul writes, which is not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin. The power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[23 : 59] What does the gospel give us victory over? It gives us victory over death. And death is our bitterest opponent. It's our most fearsome enemy.

And although we were created to subdue the world around us, the reality facing all of us is that death has actually subdued us. And the fascinating thing is that sport actually proves this.

Because sport exposes inescapable inability. Because that's the reality for all of us.

Because maybe you were capable for a while. Maybe you were actually at the very top of your game, in whatever sport it was.

And maybe you're still able to push yourself a wee bit further, and a wee bit further, and a wee bit further. But for everyone, our sporting ability fades. Some of us never had it in the first place.

[25 : 00] But for those of you who did have it, it fades. Every champion gets weak. For every one of us, inability is inescapable.

And what's true in sport is a shadow of what is definitely true in the face of death. Ultimately, we are helpless before that opponent.

And the whole of the gospel, the whole of redemptive history, the great story of God's salvation, across the Bible and across the ages of history, it's in the context of a battle, a conflict and rivalry between the kingdom of God and the power of sin and death.

And the reason that we crave victory in sport is echoing a much, it's because it echoes a much, much deeper and much more serious craving that we all have.

A craving for hope in the face of death. And the utterly amazing thing about the gospel is that that is exactly what Jesus has come to give us.

[26 : 11] The whole gospel is centered on victory over death. That's why it's all about the resurrection of Jesus. That's why we meet on the first day of the week, because Jesus rose from the dead.

Death has subdued us, and eventually inability will expose us, and our enemy is going to consume us unless a Savior comes to win us back.

And that is exactly what Jesus has come to do. And the result is a magnificent, spectacular, eternal victory.

And that victory is achieved and proved in the death and resurrection of Jesus. And that's the great point that Paul is making in 1 Corinthians 15. He's telling us in this chapter that the resurrection is utterly central to the Christian faith.

If Jesus didn't rise again, Christianity is a waste of time. But Jesus did rise. And that resurrection is an utterly magnificent victory. Jesus has conquered death.

[27 : 13] And it's a fascinating little, I think, possible hint at everything that we've been saying in an earlier couple of verses that we read in verse...

I don't actually know if we read these verses. Maybe I forgot to put them in the reading. But it's in the chapter. And let me read them here. Do you remember... Before I read it, do you remember when I said the word subdued is connected to another word by the same word family?

Remember that I said that? So let me read this. In each and its own order, Christ the firstfruits, then it is coming, those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and every power.

For he must reign until he's put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. The word subdued is in the same word family as the word footstool. And here we have been told that Jesus has put all his enemies, including death, under his feet.

Our greatest opponent has finally been subdued. And that makes Jesus' victory over death an irrevocable certainty.

[28 : 22] And the amazing, amazing thing is that we get to share in that victory. And the New Testament speaks about that in lots of places. It talks about us receiving a prize.

There's the language of a wreath here in 1 Corinthians 9. There's pressing on towards the prize in Philipians 3. There's the beautiful language of finishing the race.

Jesus endured that race. And so we're running that race. 2 Corinthians talks about finishing the race. Same language. It all has echoes of sport.

And it all culminates in spending an eternity rejoicing. Because Jesus has won a stunning victory.

And this is part of the reason why we sing at church. Because we're celebrating. So, apart from pop concerts, where are the two places in Britain today where adults sing?

[29 : 28] They sing at sports stadiums and they sing at church. And they're doing the same thing in both.

They are celebrating the prospect of victory. That's why they're singing. celebrating the prospect of victory. The difference is that for one, the joy lasts for a few days.

For the other, the joy lasts forever. And this is where we actually see, and I hope it's okay for me to say this, a football stadium in a certain way is a glimpse of heaven.

There's lots of things about football stadiums that are not heavenly at all. But there is a certain way in which a football stadium is a glimpse of heaven. Let me read Revelation 7, 9-10.

A vision of the new creation given to John the Apostle. After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, crying out with a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, that Lamb's a reference to Jesus.

[30 : 50] And so, if any of you have been in a football stadium or a rugby stadium, Murrayfield or anything like that, and you've heard that spine-tingling roar of the stadium as everybody lifts up their voice to celebrate, as a tiny shadow of the roar of joy that will echo through heaven as a multitude that no one can number celebrates the victory that Jesus has won.

Jesus has come to conquer death. And the key point, the key thing that I want all of you to see is this, that if you are a Christian or if you become one, victory is not at the football pitch.

It's at Dalmore. It's at the graveyard. That's where Jesus has won the victory.

So, do you love sport? Many of you do. I do. Do you dream of victory? Many of you do. I do. I guess the big question is this.

Do you dream of victory over Rangers or over Celtic or over Westside or over whoever it might be? Are you dreaming of that victory more than you dream of victory over death?

[32 : 22] And I want you to think about that because yes, the dream of sport is a good dream, but in so many ways it's a broken dream and all the time the gospel is replacing these dreams with far, far better certainties.

So, if you love sport, I want you to carry on loving sport. And if Carla, we do win the league this year, I'll be celebrating as much as anybody. but all the time, please, please, please, can you see where this is pointing you?

It's pointing you to the greatest victory that we can ever know and the greatest joy that we can ever experience. And the amazing thing about the gospel is that that gospel can be shared with everyone and Jesus is inviting us all to come to him to trust him.

So, if that's you today, if you feel Jesus' voice calling you, just say, Lord, please save me. Please help me. I want to follow you and by your grace, I'll trust in you forever.

Amen. Let's pray.