

And just like that it was over. In a little over two hours for each, both home state teams are now out of the tournament. We barely had time to get excited. But that's what it's like at tournament time. One game and if you don't win you're out. If your team is not winning it's hard to stand up and clap for the opposing team. They're beating up your team. Honoring them for playing a good game isn't on your mind. Sportsmanship says you play hard and win or lose you do it honoring the opposing team. But if your team is getting beat deep down you just want to be mad at them.

The world has been locked up in a game with much bigger implications than moving on in a tournament. The world goes against God. Seems like a mismatch, but that doesn't keep the world from trying. Winning would mean getting rid of God altogether, getting rid of his commands, his expectations, and his control. Winning seems like it would feel good. That's why the world keeps going. And when God wins, the world doesn't even show good sportsmanship, it just gets mad.

Long before Jesus arrived in Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, Isaiah was writing about him. The first lesson helps us not to miss what happened in the gospel. That might be easy if not for the words of Isaiah. He makes it clear that...

**All the earth will honor Christ
For being faithful to his Word
For his righteous works**

"Let's go!" I've watched many a young person lean on parents saying that. If they could they would push them out the door to go home. I suppose there were times I was like that too. They promised we were leaving but I was left sitting in the car waiting. It seemed not cool to have them go back on their word like that.

God however is always faithful to his Word. Isaiah warned the people of coming exile. This wasn't a parent's promise to leave only to get caught by another person wanting to talk. This would happen although not for a hundred years or so. God was telling them ahead of time. They'd go into exile and stay for a while. Then the big promise, a new ruler would signal God was sending them home. They could take comfort and not worry. God would demonstrate his complete power over a ruler who wasn't even born yet. Only God could do that with any sort of confidence. Because God is true God he can make these promises and then offer an invitation. **"Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other."** Because God is the true God it would be wise for the whole world to turn to him.

It seems unlikely that God could be very serious about wanting the entire world to turn to him today. Turning means at some point we were facing the wrong direction. Sadly that's exactly where we used to be. We were facing the wrong direction opposed to God. We were born that way, so some might use that as an excuse to say we can't help it. We learned to trust things you can see and touch. God you can't, so naturally we wanted something other than God. Our fascination started with anything and everything that led us away from God. He seemed unreal, untouchable. It was hard and still can be hard to see how he will be faithful to any of his words or promises. He's so far away. It's difficult for us to believe in him or take him seriously.

The only way the court takes people at their word is if they swear an oath that they're telling the truth. God doesn't need to. His words and promises are the truth. But he takes an oath anyway. **"By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked..."** God swears by himself because there's nothing higher. The foundation of this oath is God's own Word. He speaks with integrity. God's being truthful. We can't turn to God ourselves. So God invites us to turn. In turning to God we're being converted by the Holy Spirit. We come to believe in Jesus. No other religion or god announces and completes forgiveness of sins. God is faithful to his Word through Christ. We turn from sin and death and find a life with Christ of free and faithful love from God. This invitation to believe is based on promises God makes in his Word. All the earth honors Christ for being faithful to his Word.

As faithful as he is, the world bows before him. Not all now, but someday. In recognition of his power and goodness, his faithfulness to his Word, we do nothing but get down on our knees and praise him for his invitation and grace. **"Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear."** When God is faithful to his Word bowing down before him comes naturally. We're confessing and worshipping Christ Jesus. Paul in his letter to the Philippians, the second lesson, draws attention to the humble Jesus who laid down his life and the exalted Jesus who is worthy of our praise and honor. **"Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."** We praise God and worship and honor Christ for his faithfulness to his Word.

One thing you don't usually want to be is wishy-washy. You don't want opinions from all over to just keep you swaying back and forth. That's not sticking up for principles and defending them. That's just giving in to everybody and letting them push you the way they want you. You definitely can't say that about God. He isn't wishy-washy. He isn't swayed by public opinion. God swears an oath and it's done. He says something in his Word and it happens. He brings out his righteous works and no one can argue with them. Christ is honored for his righteous works.

Did you ever meet someone who for some reason you just couldn't stand? There wasn't a reason necessarily; they just got under your skin. When they spoke it was like nails on the chalkboard. When they smiled you figured they were lying. Everyone else you like, but this person you just can't take. Some recognize and take in stride God's bold statement, **"They will say of me, In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength."** Others might admit this is true but they just can't stand it. It's impossible for them to accept.

You're not one of those people. But maybe without realizing it in certain things you have reached that point. At least you show that you have. You might be angry at God or enraged by his actions. Where does God get the nerve to tell you who you can live with even if you're not married? Where does God get the ability to tell you who you should say you're sorry to or who you should forgive when they've done something terrible? God wants to hold you accountable? How can he do that when he's mostly responsible for the bad things that happen in this world to the innocent? Anger and rage toward God can lead to rejection and rejection leads to hell.

God's works are righteous. That means he's perfect and we're not. He holds people accountable because he's just and has to punish sins. But his mercy stuns us. God declares us righteous for the sake of his Son Jesus. Anyone mad at God for claiming righteousness alone, they're put to shame. Every human being has had his or her sins removed in Christ. We're free from the consequences of those sins. This grand gift is given freely for the whole world. Why would anyone be angry at God? He has in his righteous actions forgiven them in Christ. Those who believe it, take God at his Word, forgiveness becomes a personal possession. You have this grand gift in the Lord, in his Son, that same King marching into Jerusalem we honor this Palm Sunday.

The works of God call you to faith. He works in you by the Holy Spirit. **"In the Lord all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult."** God makes you part of the real true Israel, all true believers. Believers who give glory to God, exult his name, and honor Christ for his righteous works. Those brought to faith will repent of wrong doing and will bow the knee before the Lord. We turn from those things that separate us from God, the idols of our lives, and we worship him alone. We're part of the earth that honors Christ for his righteous works.

In the tournament there will always be major mismatches. No one really expects the lesser ranked teams to win. We're a major mismatch in our worldly fight against God. But in our sinfulness we get into it with him anyway. In a stunner God flips the mismatch and makes us the favorite. He does this through a glorious invitation from a glorious Savior. Be part of the earth honoring Christ Jesus, both for his faithfulness to his Word as well as for his righteous works.