

Week of March 11-17

SAME LEAGUE, DIFFERENT TEAM

Scripture Reading: Read Luke chapter 9

Many people who love sports have a favorite team they follow. They usually know the names of the players as well as the coaches/managers for that team. They will probably know the team/player statistics, etc. It's all part of being a fan. Folks in our congregation know that I am a Syracuse Orangemen basketball fan. As I write this devotional, March Madness (the NCAA Division I Basketball tournament) is about a week away. Syracuse is ranked #2 in the nation right now and I'm hoping to see them win it all. Team loyalty and fan support are important to the players and is part of the game.

In today's chapter reading, we read an account where team loyalty went awry. The story has nothing to do with sports, obviously. Rather, it has to do with the disciples and their perspective on the "Jesus team." They seemed to have developed the idea that they were the only team playing. *"Master," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us"* (9:49). Notice John's words, *"He is not one of us."* Perhaps John felt this guy was muscling in on their operation. Maybe he felt that only he and his fellow disciples were qualified to cast out demons with Jesus' authority (an interesting thought since only a few verses earlier they were unable to cast the demon out of a young boy, but here this man was successfully casting out demons!) We don't know for sure why John had a problem but he obviously did.

Jesus, however, didn't have a problem with the guy driving out demons. He had a problem with John's narrow-minded vision and attitude. Jesus corrected him, *"Do not stop him," Jesus said, "for whoever is not against you is for you."* Jesus recognized that this guy was doing the work in His name. He was legitimately doing the works of Christ even though John had trouble with it.

There are times in my years of pastoring where I have seen John's attitude resurface among believers. It's a condescending and exclusive attitude where we see our church or our denomination as the only one doing things for God, that our church is truly alive but others are just dead. Such an attitude is ungodly and is contrary to the teaching in this passage. We are not in competition with each other as believers or as churches. Now, it's true that we have different ways of doing ministry and different styles of worship, but as long as Jesus is the Lord we worship and serve by faith, then we're in the same league...just on different teams.

So, let's rejoice when God uses believers in other churches to do his work and rejoice in what God allows us to do for Him as well. The kingdom is growing and that's worth celebrating.

Action Step: Check your heart to see if you have a kingdom mindset that welcomes all true believers or an empire mindset that excludes others because they're not like us.

Prayer Focus: Ask the Lord to give you a kingdom mentality

Take-a-way: *Same league, different teams...but one Lord Jesus Christ we serve.*