

LINKS PLAYERS

DAILY DEVOTIONAL FRIDAY BIBLE STUDY FOR AUGUST 23, 2013

'PLAYOFFS?! PLAYOFFS?!'

As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." (Romans 9:33, NIV)

IF YOU LIVE OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES, you may not recognize the now immortal words of American football coach Jim Mora, who was once asked in a press conference about his hapless team's chances in the postseason. He replied incredulously, "Playoffs?!... Are you kidding me? Playoffs?!"

Ben Crane lampooned his own narrow inclusion into the FedEx Cup playoffs this week, posting another goofy YouTube video, this time about his role as "Bubble Boy," taking the 125th (and last) position into the opening tournament.

Still, as sports fans we can't help but be fascinated with the idea of playoffs that continually narrow the field. The FedEx Cup playoffs aren't your traditional bracket, but they do a fine job of paring down the lessers in favor of the greater, until one stands.

Yes, we're OK with this in athletics, but when it comes to death and judgment, there's a collective gulp of hesitation going on in our day. Honestly, God can't be exclusionary, can he? Doesn't he love everyone?

In response, I am intrigued with John Piper's words in a sermon considering God's sovereignty in Romans 9:

Ever since the day of Jesus Christ, when he did the great atoning work for sin in his death and resurrection, and purchased the promise of salvation for all who believe, the narrowing down has resulted in a broadening out. Not Ishmael but Isaac; not Esau but Jacob; not the nations but the Jews; not the Jews but the one Jew, the one offspring, the anointed one, the one God-man. And what did he do? "You were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). So, "Go," he says, "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). All of them! Tell them all to come. The door is open.

You see, God did narrow the field—to one. But in the narrowing, he made salvation available to all who give their lives to that one.

Opening questions: Narrowing

What do you most like about match play golf events or similar athletic tournaments? How does the phrase "one way to heaven through Jesus Christ" rest with you?

The stumbling block and cornerstone

Romans 9:33 is a mash-up of two passages in Isaiah. Read Isaiah 8:13-15 and 28:16. As prophecies, these words apply to Jesus. How is Jesus a "stumbling stone" for some but a "cornerstone" for others?

Read John 11:45-52. Note the different responses of the people to the raising of Lazarus from the dead (vv. 45-46) and the discussion of the religious leaders. What motive did the leaders have for plotting to kill Jesus? What motive do people have today for dismissing him as their way to salvation?

Living stones

Read 1 Peter 2:4-10. What is a believer's relationship to the living Stone?

What great callings are identified in this passage with those who have such a relationship?