

444 The Solid Rock

In the last couple of weeks, we have seen how sporting occasions, with real crowds present once more, have played their part in lifting the overall mood within our nation. In a small way this change of mood brings to mind those beautiful words in Isaiah 61, (which of course have far greater spiritual significance than merely cheering some people up at Wimbledon or Wembley!) – the Lord’s giving of “beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness ...” all given “that he (the Lord) might be glorified” (from Isaiah 61.1-3, KJV).

So Wimbledon is back: the crowds, the courts, the matches, the players, the tennis itself. Then there is the football too! – “the beautiful game”. Football, such a simple, natural game and accessible for all, has become truly global, a universal “language” which really does bring peoples and nations together, usually, and thankfully, for good.

Do we not see that all football crowds, irrespective of club or country, are much the same? – transfixed by watching a ball being kicked about, by the skills, the beauty, the tension, the tactics, the decisions, the mistakes, the hopes and fears, the joys and tears, and then best, or worst, of all - the sight of that net bulging when a goal is scored. Now England have reached dizzy heights unclimbed since 1966 – the nation holds its breath ...

So we see before us in these two current sporting occasions of tennis and football, and in all others too, the ability of sport to unite us in our common humanity, in fellowship and emotions. As the Covid restrictions are eased it has become so clear as to just how important is the presence of the crowds on great sporting occasions. For we really are one human family in need of each other, one human race, albeit nowadays with the ethnic and cultural differences which have developed under God’s allowance since the Flood and Babel (egs., Genesis 1.26-28; Chapters 5-11 / Acts 17. 22-31).

Now this one-ness, this same-ness, across the crowds of humanity also means that we are all in the same spiritual situation – namely a state of separation from Almighty God our holy Creator, caused by our sin and sinfulness, this separation being unbridge-able from our side by any human effort. Put simply, divine holiness and human sinfulness can never peacefully co-exist, so humans with sins undealt-with have a real problem for both now and in the hereafter.

Most of the world Faiths of human origin which have come into being since the Flood state that this holiness-sinfulness gulf can be bridged by self-achieved human goodness. But such “goodness” is unachievable, as is graciously shown in the one, true, Bible-revealed Faith, by God’s giving of “the Law” to the seed of Abraham and Sarah His covenant people. One purpose of this Law is to show us all that no-one can or does keep this Law (egs., Romans 3.9-20,23; 7.12-13 / Galatians 2.16end). So the solution to the universal presence of sin is clear: to be rescued from the consequences of our sins, humanity is indeed one in that we all depend entirely upon God’s help.

This brings us of course to the biblical Gospel of salvation, promised in Christ and pointing towards Him in the Old Testament, and duly achieved in Christ in the New Testament under the Fatherhood of Almighty God. Our restoration into a state of peace with God, for both now and after physical death, is brought about by our simple belief that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God and is indeed our crucified and risen Lord and Saviour (egs., Romans 3.24-25; 5.1-2, 8-10 / Ephesians 1.7 / Colossians 1.14, 20 / Hebrews 9.14-15 / I Peter 1.18-21 / I John 1.7 / ...).

It is over the Person and Work of Jesus Christ that the human one-ness so well expressed in sport is quickly broken. Only a comparative few of us accept Jesus Christ as Lord, while all too many reject Him, as was shown in the Nazareth synagogue that day (Luke 4.22-30 / also Matthew 7.13-14; 10.34-36 / Romans 9.33 / yet Acts 2.41 & 4.4!).

So while we cheer together a wonderful sliced backhand on Centre Court or Harry Kane’s five goals against Italy this Sunday (?!?!), we thank the Lord for the blessings of human oneness as far as these blessings go, while we long for the day when these blessings are complete in Christ.

Meanwhile, as Edward Mote’s old hymn puts it, “My hope is built on nothing less / than Jesus’ blood and righteousness; no merit of my own I claim, but wholly trust in Jesus’ Name / On Christ, the solid rock, I stand, all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand”.

There is still ample room on the Solid Rock for all who, in response to God’s call, clamber up on to it, leaving the sinking sand behind.

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