

Text: Matthew 18:18-22

Theme: Keeping Score

September 17, 2017

How many of you have been scorekeeper for a sporting event, a board game, or a card game? Most of us, regardless of age, have kept score for some type of game. And if we have been the scorekeeper, we also knew how to play the game. In today's text, outspoken Peter, the one who always had all the questions, asks Jesus about keeping score. Much to his surprise, Peter learns the same lesson we need to learn, that in some situations, keeping score isn't the proper thing to do.

I. In the arena of forgiving, Jesus encourages us not to keep score. A. However, we like to keep score. 1. We keep score because they haven't earned our forgiveness. We know how the game works. Someone offends us and our minds say, "You're gonna pay for that!" What we're saying is that they owe us, that they need to do something, whatever our minds dream up to pay for their words or their actions. And until they make sufficient payment, we're going to withhold our forgiveness. We're going to keep them in our self-created prison. Yet if everyone plays the game and keeps score, everyone will owe someone and the cycle will never end.

2. We keep score because we want payback. Look at Joseph in our Old Testament lesson. Because of their father's treatment toward him, his brothers became jealous and their jealousy led them to sell their brother. Now, the event has gone full circle and the brothers find themselves standing before Joseph fearing payback. When someone does something far less damaging to us, we, too, keep score and want payback. It's an instant, built-in response as we say, "That wasn't fair; that wasn't right. They deserve to suffer." But our desire for payback serves no good purpose and, most of all, it doesn't fit with Jesus' instruction to stop keeping score.

3. We like to keep score because they don't deserve to be forgiven. How many times have you heard, "I'm not going to forgive them because they don't deserve it?" How many of us sitting here this morning deserve to be forgiven by anyone, especially by God? If we're going to play the deserving game, we're going to find ourselves on both sides of that fence. Maybe you feel like they don't deserve to be forgiven for x, y, or z. But, if it hasn't already occurred, you'll soon find yourself on the other side where the other person is saying the same thing about you. None of us deserve to be forgiven by God. As we recall that truth, keeping score takes on new meaning.

B. Although we prefer to keep score, how do we follow Jesus' instruction? How do we stop keeping score? 1. We stop by not playing the game. How many scorekeepers would you need for a card game or board game if no one played the game? As we choose to forgive, we choose to stop playing the game and if we're not playing, no one needs to keep score. As Peter asks what seemed to be a logical question, he very quickly realized that forgiving isn't a game for score keepers. When we forgive, it's game over. When we continue to forgive regardless of the circumstances, no one can keep score and when no one is keeping score, everyone wins.

2. We stop keeping score by mentally comparing score cards. If Joseph's brothers had compared their mental score cards many years earlier, would they have sold their brother and found themselves in this awkward situation? Suppose

you could exchange mental score cards with the person you think you have a right not to forgive. What would you realize? All the scorecards would look very similar because we're all in the same predicament. As we realize that it's no different from the other side, we quickly draw the conclusion that keeping score doesn't work, that it serves no good purpose, that our best next move is to mentally shred our scorecards and move on.

3. We stop keeping score by following the example of Jesus. How many people could Jesus have added to His scorecard? Regardless of what someone else may have done, His words remain the same, "Forgive as I have forgiven you." He doesn't say that you need to approve, or that their actions were right. He says, "Forgive because that's what you need to do for you!" Is it simple? Not at all. Does it appear that they are getting off too easy? Perhaps, but appearances are deceiving. Is it always what's best for you? Jesus whispers to your heart, "Yes. Do it because I have more important things for you to do in your life!"

4. We stop keeping score by mentally throwing away the scorecard. In our Old Testament lesson, we see Joseph doing just that. We're not told when he did it, but Joseph threw away the scorecard and allowed God to use him. How many of us are holding back on God's next great plan because we're still holding the scorecard? How many great things does God have planned that haven't occurred yet because we haven't let go? If Jesus can discard the scorecard He could have on us, we can follow His example and the example of Joseph and get rid of our scorecards. As you bury the scorecard, you prepare yourself for the next installment of God's great plan for you.

5. We stop keeping score by noticing what they do right. When we're in scorekeeping mode, how often do we see what someone does that's good? Because we want to prove that we still have a right to keep score, we stop looking for what's good and when we stop looking, we think they have stopped doing anything good. Joseph looked for the good as he reminds us that what others intend for evil, God can still use for good. As we intentionally look for what's good, we realize that there's more good out there than we previously noticed. And as we realize the good, it becomes easier for us to set down the scorecard and allow everyone to move on.

6. We stop keeping score by choosing to forgive. It may not seem fair. It may not feel fair. It may not even be fair from our estimation. But, at the end of the day, all that doesn't matter. What ultimately matters is eternity. God will deal with all those other things in His good time. Our place, our next move, our best move every day is to choose forgiveness. It may not make us feel great at the moment. It might even seem like the wrong thing. But when we remember that forgiving is always the right thing because Jesus has given us the perfect example, our heart will tell us that we did what was right and when our heart knows we've done the right thing, that same heart will move us forward to God's next plan. As we focus on His next plan, we'll realize that keeping score is only for sporting events and board games. Most importantly, we'll know in our hearts that we've done the right thing when we choose not to keep score. Amen.