3 years ago, *SB Nation,* an online sports magazine, published a 25-part serial short story called *17776*.

* Its an article about the future of football…but its really about the meaning of life.
* Here’s the way the story goes.
* In the early 21st century, people stopped dying. No one really knew why.
* They also stopped having children.

Then, humans developed technology that prevented people from serious injury, eliminated the need for humans to work, and produced all the food we needed.

The chains of work and death now gone from humanity, humans had the universe to explore…but- in the year 17776, all they were doing was playing football.

The story is told through the point of view of 3 space probes that have become conscious who enjoy watching football games where the field is the state of Nebraska and the endzones are Wyoming and Iowa.

In a very poignant and revealing part of the story, one of the space probes explains to the other why with all their technological progress, humans never tried anything greater than just playing more elaborate, complicated versions of football.

Here is the answer:

**“Humanity tried and tried to send themselves to other solar systems. In 3143, they succeeded, and found…nothing. No life. Nothing interesting. A bunch of planets full of rocks and gas. They then deployed probes to visit other stars in the Milky Way galaxy... They found nothing even the slightest bit interesting. …. “It was the grandest anticlimax imaginable. It shattered what people thought of themselves and their destinies. The letdown was, in itself, sort of a brilliant wonder of its own…People had a choice. They could continue wandering through the endless darkness, an absences of everything they loved, and endless void of disappointment and loneliness…or they could look down, and embrace what they always had and loved.”- *17776, Jon Bois***

Do you know what the author is saying?

He’s saying that inside of humanity is the desire for there to be something bigger than us. Each of us has this longing for there to be a god…a being who is higher than us….better than us…

And, it seems that death and the trivialities of life, like working to put food on the table- always get in the way of finding this god.

So in Jon Bois’ story- the limitations of man… have been conquered and removed…and we are ‘free’…unfettered…loosed to go and locate this god…the deep meaning of the universe.

But all humans found was darkness. Disappointment. No god. No higher being. No deeper meaning.

And that left us with a choice- keep looking…or finally just enjoy football….for eternity.

It reminds me of the ad that was placed on buses in London a few years ago by a group of atheists. **“There is probably no god. So stop worrying and enjoy your life.”**

In other words, its an eternity exactly like many Xians envision. No death. No sickness. No work. Just playing A LOT of your favorite sport.

In fact, in the early 90s the Xian band Audio Adrenaline released a very popular song about “Heaven” where they described “My Father’s House” as having a BIG BIG YARD- where we could play football.

I don’t know if Jon Bois ever heard that song- but it is curious to me that both a Xian and Non-Xian- have a similar vision of eternity. Never dying…just playing the sport you enjoy…forever.

Its interesting to me- that a person who believes there is no god- and a person that believes that God is their Father- both imagine eternity the same. A football field as big as Wyoming.

What’s the point?

**Title Slide “The Future is More Than Football:Why Holiness is the Meaning You Are Looking For”- 1 Cor 6:1-11**

The point is that if its true that God is real. And he loves us…and that he has given eternity as a gift and he’s making all things new- that our vision of eternity should probably include HIM- and should probably fundamentally change the way we understand the meaning and purpose of our lives now.

It should change from trying to just “enjoy ourselves” and somehow be attached to that deeper cosmic meaning. That we are loved by someone better than us…and he has made a way for us to know him…and experience that love.

...and that’s why the Apostle Paul told the Christians at Corinth to stop taking each other to court.

**1 Cor 6:1-11**

* **If any of you has a dispute against another, how dare you take it to court before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?**
* **2 Or don’t you know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the trivial cases? 3 Don’t you know that we will judge angels ​— ​how much more matters of this life? 4 So if you have such matters, do you appoint as your judges those who have no standing in the church? 5 I say this to your shame! Can it be that there is not one wise person among you who is able to arbitrate between fellow believers? 6 Instead, brother goes to court against brother, and that before unbelievers!**

**7 As it is, to have legal disputes against one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? 8 Instead, you yourselves do wrong and cheat ​— ​and you do this to brothers and sisters! 9 Don’t you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God’s kingdom? Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or males who have sex with males, 10 no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God’s kingdom. 11 And some of you used to be like this. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.**

**Transition:** In case you are wondering if I’m skipping the elephant in the room about sex- don’t worry- that will be the next couple of weeks.

For today- A couple of other questions come to mind from this text. What does judging angels have to do with taking people to court? And why would Paul encourage people to be wronged or cheated? Shouldn’t they care about justice- about setting the record straight?

Surely none of that has anything to do with playing an eternal football game on a field the size of Wyoming?

**1) Life without holiness is life without meaning.**

* + Even though the word “Holy” doesn’t appear in the text we read today, this passage is in a section of this letter where for at least 3 chapters Paul’s message to the Corinthians is about holiness.
  + I think for most people- when you think about Holiness- you think about morality. Or purity.
  + You think about a person who adheres to strict set of religious laws.
  + For a lot of us, Holiness is a word that represents mainly things you “can’t do”.
  + You know, don’t sleep around, don’t cuss, don’t drink too much, don’t party too hard….don’t …don't… don’t.
  + But those ideas are not holiness- they are kind of by-product of holiness.
  + Rather than give you a definition- I’m going to give you 2 metaphors for Holiness.
  + On many occasions throughout the Bible where humans encounter God- there is smoke or fire happening.
  + Think about the Hebrews arriving at Mt. Sinai after their Exodus from Egypt.
  + Where God says they can’t come near the Mountain.
  + Then, they get the law, the 10 Commandments.
  + And Moses comes down the mountain and finds that they are worshipping a Golden Calf that they made by melting down their jewelry…in the shadow of this Mountain that’s on fire surrounding by smoke and lightening.
  + Or Isaiah’s vision of God in Isaiah chapter 6.
  + Where Isaiah sees God on a throne in the temple, surrounded by smoke…and his robe fills the whole temple.
  + And God is surrounded by these angels saying.
  + HOLY HOLY HOLY is the LORD
  + By “Holy Holy Holy” they don’t mean “morally pure”
  + No…they mean- Look at this BIG GOD- who is bigger and better than you and is absolutely untouchable- at the same time he is remarkably beautiful.
  + Isaiah’s response is “I am ruined. I’m a man of unclean lips.”
  + At that point- one of the angels comes to Isaiah in this vision and touches his lips with a glowing coal- a bit of fire that purifies Isaiah and then God asks for a volunteer to carry his message- at this point Isaiah says- Here am I. Send Me.
  + That’s why God is so associated and represented by fire in the Scripture.
  + Because fire has this combination of beauty and danger.
  + Its beautiful. It draws you in.
  + But- even in its smallest form, a small flame like a candle- if it gets out of containment- it can get out of hand. Burn down your house or an entire forest.
  + Fire is something that draws us in…but at the same time…we know its too dangerous to get close to.
  + Its HOLY.
  + Its SET APART.
  + Its beautiful but dangerous.
  + Or think about the Grand Canyon.
  + You are absolutely drawn to its beauty- its grandeur- its bigness and different-ness.
  + Yet, at the same time- you know you can only get so close to the edge. Which is scary…and frustrating.
  + As humans we have this innate desire to become a part of something beautiful…but the most beautiful things are also the scariest.
  + Like Fire- and the Grand Canyon.
  + And- to tame them…to make less dangerous…also, somehow detracts from their beauty.
  + Fire is not fire if it doesn’t burn.
  + And the Grand Canyon is no longer Grand if you somehow could make it smaller and safer.
  + So what does this have to do this passage and the meaning of life.
  + Well- when you lose the sense- or the belief- that there is no God. Or there is not a meaning of life bigger than you… that life is just your evolutionary survival and passing on of your gene pool…
  + When you come to realize like the Preacher in the book of Ecclesiastes that everything you do is “Meaningless. All is meaningless”…
  + Or like MacBeth in the Shakespeare play that, “Life is a tale   
    told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing.”
  + Because you are a human being created in the image of God. When you lose a sense of Holiness. You lose a sense of meaning. And so…you have to create it.
  + And how do we do that- Well, Think of the Golden Calf…and everything that Paul is addressing chapter 5, 6, and 7 of 1 Corinthians.
  + We turn to whatever seems to give us that transcendent sense of power and beauty….but feels a little less dangerous and demanding than God.
  + Namely- Sex and Money.
  + We try to create meaning from Sex and Money.
  + The problem on the surface in this passage is Christians taking other Christians to court. To have a judge say which one gets to keep the property, the livestock, or the money that its in dispute.
  + Its people who claim to have had an encounter with this untouchable FIRE OF A GOD, trying to grasp for money.
  + See money and possesions make us feel HOLY- because with them we can aggrandize ourselves. We can make ourselves bigger. More powerful. Think of how much larger and beautiful a person feels when they live in a mansion and drive sports cars than if that same person lives on the street and gets around on a bicycle.
  + Try it.
  + Next time somebody has a nice cocktail party that you are invited to, ride a bicycle and don’t shower for a week before you show up. Like don't use any of your money or possessions to make yourself seem more beautiful or important.
  + Money and Possessions are a way we try to achieve holiness.
  + Or sex.
  + Sex makes us feel holy because it provides a kin of transcendent experience of pleasure. It is the fusing of 2 people that seem like they should be apart, uniting together…and in so doing there is a kind of “whooshing up”. This moment where you almost lose yourself in someone else.
  + It's a Grand Canyon experience.
  + Its different than ordinary life. It almost feels divine…or immortal.
  + Drugs can do a similar thing. I’ve notice in recent years how in the absence of a transcendent, Beautiful and Dangerous God in some people’s lives, they’ve turned to using ‘Shrooms. These folks report having a transcendent…almost divine experience.
  + Think about the children of Israel at the bottom of Mt. Sinai.
  + They created this Golden Calf- from their expensive possessions…and around it…they engaged in sex.
  + **V 9 & 10**
  + Did you notice the list that Paul gives the Corinthians here about people that won’t “inherit” the Kingdom of God- almost every single one has to do with Sex or Money. Thieves, and greedy swindlers- adulterers and sexually immoral. And right there listed along with them are “idolaters”. People who replace God with lesser things.
  + There is also Drunkards- which is kind of the ‘Shrooms effect.
  + The other thing on this list is verbally abusive people.
  + Why are people verbally abusive- they get a sense of power over another person. When they make someone else to be small and insignificant with their words- it makes them feel more powerful…different, set apart, and better than others.
  + HOLY
  + See, when the holiness is drained out of life- we cheat. We hurt our brothers and sisters. As we grope for something to bring that holiness- that beauty and bigness and danger back to our lives.
* **Back to 1)**
  + Because we were made to be like Isaiah. Called close to this Holy God…and then given a purpose- a task. A mission. Meaning.
  + But in the universe where man becomes all powerful and we lose a BIG HOLY GOD- well- we’ll just settle in on Football games the size of Wyoming to give us purpose.
  + Guys- I think some of you can relate. Ever make football more important than it actually is?
  + On one hand you know that the results of that game don’t change a thing about your life…yet you will yell, scream, get defensive if somebody says something bad about your team.
  + You will put your whole life on hold- all your relationships for a football game. People have ended marriages…damaged their children…for this form of entertainment.
  + You know why- because in associating with that football team- you feel a part of something bigger than you. That's beautiful and dangerous- and even as a fan- you feel like you are invited into a mission- to make known the Glory of your team. (Even if they’ve never actually won a championship during your lifetime. Like objectively- they are not #1- even though you keep holding up that finger to the camera when it pans by you in the stands.
  + Only one thing explains the insane things we do when we make our football, or our sex, or our money what we live for.
  + - We are deeply longing for meaning- for holiness…something bigger than us to make us beautiful and tell us who we are- and WHY WE ARE.
* **2) Holiness isn’t about being more moral than others. Its about being caught up in bigger story.** 
  + Look at the way Paul argues with Corinthian Xians here.
  + Note- he doesn’t say “Stop taking each other to court because God has this list of what is moral and ethical- and taking each other to court is on the list.”
  + No- he doesn’t argue from sheer morality or ethics.
  + Instead- he argues from the story of God’s holiness…and their part in it.
  + **V 2-3**
  + He says “How in the world can you on one hand believe that you are going to judge angels…that God has set you apart to be a part of his Kingdom Come…at the same time you bicker and argue in court asking some pagan Corinthian judge to figure out which of you should have the money you are bickering about.”
  + Something that you should understand about these Roman courts is that in them, the aim was typically to humiliate your opponent to win. And- the system favored the rich and powerful.
  + Its not completely unfamiliar to our courtroom settings sometimes. Where often the aim is to humiliate or embarrass or expose the sins of another person- and the ones who win are often those who have the most financial resources.
  + So Paul is saying to them- This transcendent Fire of a God has invited you LIKE ISAIAH, into a HOLY RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM…and SET YOU APART FOR A HOLY MISSION FOR HIM…and here you are worshipping at the feet of a Golden Calf.
  + You are going to JUDGE THE WORLD with GOD- and yet there isn’t a single person among you walking so closely with this beautiful God that you can’t ask them to help settle disputes.
  + See he is not appealing to morality- he is brining up the point that they have lost their identity of holiness.
  + They have forgotten the bigger story they are a part of- and they have simply risen up to play around a Golden Calf.
  + **V 8**
  + And when they lose the holiness story- their morality follows soon with it.
  + Now, they hurt and cheat each other…whatever they can do to scrape up a tiny bit of money- to give their lives meaning and beauty.
  + **V 6-7**
  + Notice one of the point Paul makes again that is consistent with the point he made in Chapter 5 when they were tolerating sexual immorality in the church…is “you are doing this all in front of unbelievers”
  + In other words- the world is watching you. You have made this claim to be connected to me…to be a people who are going to be resurrected with Christ…who will judge angels…in Kingdom Come!
  + …and yet- you have stooped to lie and cheat in court to get money and property.
  + Don’t you remember your mission? Don’t you remember the coal I put on your lips to purify you and unite you to me and my mission to make the unclean- clean…to make the ordinary- holy. To make FIRE WALKERS and GRAND CANYON DIVERS.
  + God called you into his beauty- his holiness, his fire- to carry that beauty and holiness to the world- and invite others in…
  + And you are just settling for tearing each other down over money.
  + I’ve shown you the galaxies I’ve created- and all you see is a meaningless universe that you can turn into a giant football field.
  + Paul’s point here is “You have a bigger and better story. Don’t get caught up in all these law suits…you’re gonna have galaxies for hair!”
  + Instead, you’re acting just like the Pagan Gentiles who say “eternity is football.”
  + That's why Paul’s word of correction to them here is about sacrifice.
  + Its about love.
  + Its about making yourself smaller so the BIGNESS of God’s love can flow through you to others.
  + He asks this rhetorical question that only makes sense if you believe the BIG HOLY BEAUTIFUL story about God.
  + He says, “when you go court- everybody loses. Sure. You might win the case- get the money- but you’ve had to deface and dehumanize your brother or sister- while you make yourself bigger than you are.
  + Then he asks- “Why not be cheated? Why not allow yourself to be wronged?”
* **Back to 2)**
  + His point is- let them take your money- find yourself cheated out of your property- if by it- you can display to a watching world- that you have a bigger, better, more HOLY POSSESSION
  + Namely- you have God himself.
  + By being cheated- by refusing to hurt and fight with your brother- you can display that Jesus is better that riches, than sex,…than football games the size of Wyoming.
* TRANSITION: Let me show you how a life that doesn’t seek revenge…or power over others lives out and displays the Story of a Holy God.
* **3) ONCE/NOW and ALREADY/NOT YET- set you apart as portable fire- a vessel for the holiness of God.**
  + There are 2 stories that set you apart in holiness as a Christian.
* The first story is your ONCE/NOW story.
  + That’s what Paul points out in this last verse
  + **V 10-11**
  + Right after he lists all of the lack of these unholy identities…
  + He says “And that is what you used to be”
  + You ONCE WERE idolaters and adulterers and greedy swindlers..
  + But NOW- you are Washed, Sanctified, Justified.
  + And, notice that he mentions “the Kingdom of God”.
  + He says all of what you used to be will not inherit the Kingdom of God.
  + BUT NOW- that you have been washed, sanctified, and justified- you WILL inherit God’s Kingdom.
  + Remember when we went through the gospel of Mark. Mark wrote that Jesus came preaching the good news- the gospel of the Kingdom of God. And he Jesus would say, “REPENT” the Kingdom of God is at hand.
  + Remember in John, when John talked about ETERNAL LIFE…that he wasn’t talking mainly about life after death, but starting to live the GOOD LIFE with GOD NOW.
  + He was talking quality more than quanity.
  + It's a mistake to believe that HEAVEN is only way out there after you die.
  + Yes- there is much about the Kingdom of God that is NOT YET…after all, we live in an age of pandemic and racism, and greed, and sexual abuse, and sexual immorality and swindling…so clearly the Kingdom is NOT YET.
  + But- when you are attached to a Holy GOD- when you are invited to step up to the foot of Mt Sinai or walk in the temple where the Lord sits and receive the coal to your lips- the Kingdom of GOD- the GOOD LIFE- the transcendent ETERNAL MEANING and Beauty and BIGNESS START ALREADY.
  + It is those 2 stories- I once was, but now am ( a new identity)
  + And the Kingdom of God is NOT YET (I’m still waiting for something better) but its also ALREADY- I have God now…those stories are what shape the way we live and allow us to make the decision to be cheated or wronged without stooping down out of our transcendent calling and into human courts where we call each other names.
  + And it all has to do with these 3 verbs. All passed tense.
  + Washed- Forgiven- guilt and shame gone.
  + Sanctified- set apart for purpose
  + Justified- Ongoing Right relationship with God and others

Paul says that this happened in the name of Jesus.

* + It is because Jesus died in our place…became our sin on a cross…that we get his identity.
  + We are washed and forgiven our guilt.
  + We are given a mission- Sanctified. Set apart for a purpose. To represent Jesus- to go out to the world and a represent him. In his way…and character. Which is most chiefly represented in sacrifice. Humility. Descent. That's why a willingness to be cheated or wronged- is so tied in with God’s holiness here. Its because Jesus took our evil so we could be forgiven…and now SANCTIFIES and sends us out to make small sacrifices that point others to his BIG SACRIFICE.
  + And we are justified. This means that God doesn’t just forgive us. He welcomes us home as family. He doesn’t just say, OK, I won’t kill you…but keep away from me- you’ve hurt me to deeply. I’m triggered by your face. No- We have a new identity- we are family, brothers and sisters together with Jesus and each other, sons and daughters of the Living God.
  + He throws a party for us and kills the fattened calf when we cozy up to his Holiness through Jesus. We get a hug from a flaming inferno.
  + We score a Touchdown in the endzone of Wyoming.
  + We leap into the grand canyon and don't die.
* **Back to 3)**
  + And now, God sends us out to represent that. Like little flames of his holiness.
  + This passage ends the Spirit of our God.
  + Also known as the “HOLY SPIRIT”

The book of Acts (a picture of the starting of the church) begins with a rushing wind coming on the apostles…and then little flames of fire over their head…that go out and preach to the nations that they can be washed, sanctified, and justified.

We are called to be the galaxy where people find God- and cannot return to trivial matters like taking one another to court- or playing huge football games- because they are so taken by God’s beauty in the flames of our generous and sacrificial lives- lives of HOLINESS>

* And don't forget- you don’t earn the Kingdom of God. You don’t get this holiness- by BEING HOLY.
* You inherit it. Think about inheritance.
* It is passed on to you not because of anything you did, but because of something your Father did.
* JESUS. Laid down his life. His blood washes you clean. His spirit sanctifies you to be a holy flame yourself…and in his name- you receive a new identity- YOU ARE A CHILD OF THE ONE TRUE GOD.
* You can’t earn it. You can only inherit it..by believing it.