

July 18, 2010 Hebrews 11:3-39

GOD'S TEAM

This morning many of you are wearing a shirt showing one of your favorite teams. Many years ago someone invented shirts with logos on them and ever since we have seen all kinds of shirts advertising lots of things, some good, some not so good. Then people began to have shirts with their favorite team and players on it, especially when they went to games. Look around at Wriggley or Busch or any other stadium these days and you see many people with logo shirts and players names on them. They, as well as we this morning, are proud of those teams, win or lose. We are fans of these teams and we support and cheer them on.

Since I announced today was sport shirt day someone asked if I was going to preach on sports and I said I didn't think so. Couldn't figure how I could tie it together, you know sports and God. However, I forgot that the Holy Spirit can do anything and I thought God is a sports fan, especially baseball because I see that in the first verse of the Bible. That verse says, "In the beginning" or a loosely Little Fish translation would be "In the big inning God." But then I thought hey, God does have his team, so in many ways today I will be talking about God's Saints who are All Stars found in Hebrews 11:3-29. In this section we generally call them God's Faith Walkers, but for today let's refer to them as God's All Star Saints.

Hear now their stories **READ**

God's Team, Let's call them the "Saints" versus the other guy's team, the "Devil Dogs." There always has been a battle between God's Team, the Saints, and Satan's Team the Devil Dogs ever since the beginning of time. God has recruited many people, have put them through training, watched how they grew and how well they played the game. The Devil has done his recruiting as well. But because of time 3 examples of God's All Stars will suffice.

First the game between the **Devil Dogs (Boo and hiss) and the Hebrew Children (Yeah...)** many of you know the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. It's a great story of faith in practice. The Devil Dogs roused up the King to proclaim a day when all the people would gather and worship his newly created statue. It was of gold, 90 feet high, you could not miss it. It stood as high, if not higher than the cross in Effingham along route 70. When it was unveiled thousands stood in awe. When the trumpets, flutes, and pipes and harps began to play the people were to bow down to worship the statue of the king. When this happened the Devil Dog team fell on their knees to worship the statue of the king. The coaches of the Devil Dogs stood to check who or who did not bow. They were like the chapel checkers at Asbury College when I went there. For 4 years we had assigned seats in chapel. The checkers would take your attendance. If you missed more than 3, you would be called into the office to see why, and it could happen they would lower one of your grades. That's how important chapel was at Asbury.

Don't know if they still do that, but I would assume they do. However, back to our story. The coaches of the Devil Dog team watched who did or did not kneel. When the music sounded it was as if a hush came over the crowd as the people, almost in unison, fell to their knees. But then, as the coaches began to check, way up front, almost in the first row, 3 men were still standing. It was, of course, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Quickly the Devil Dog coaches wrote their names on their slates and when worship was over all stood together they rushed to the king and told them about the 3 Hebrew children not bowing down. The king was horrified because he had said any who would not bow would end up in the fiery furnace. So he had the 3 Hebrew men brought to him and they already had the fiery furnace getting up to its full output. He gave them another chance to bow to him, but God's Saints stood their ground. They told the king he could do whatever he wanted with them, but they would not bow to him. They worshiped the one true God of Israel and would not worship him or any idol of him. He could toss them in the furnace and they were not afraid because they had enough faith in their God to know he would watch over them. Or as the Apostle Paul would have said if it had been him, he was a winner either way, for if he died he would see Jesus, if he lived Jesus would be by his side. So the angry king had them thrown in the fiery furnace and he waited to see if their God would help them. He paced back and forth and he noticed through a peep hole from time to time that they were standing

talking with a fourth person. He yelled to one of the men to turn that baby as high as it would go. In fact it got so hot, one of the guards standing near the furnace felt the intense heat and keeled over and died. The king was furious. He looked once more through the peep hole and saw the 3 Hebrew men still talking, laughing with the fourth man. Who was that? He had the furnace shut down. They opened the door and out came 3 men and as they checked them over there were no burns, no smell of smoke, and as we might say, not one hair of their chinny, chins was scorched. Their God had saved them and the king was utterly amazed. Score one for God's Saints.

The second game between the two teams pits **The Devil Dog's All Star player Goliath (Boo and hiss) and The Saints rookie, David (Yeah, go get em David)** Once again this is a story we all know. It's pretty simple. The giant Goliath is taunting the Hebrew army for weeks to send their best to confront the Philistines best. Day after day with the Hebrew army on one hill and the Philistine on the other, Goliath would stroll down to the middle of the playing field in all his armor and yell out "Hey, you guys, have anyone who is willing to come and fight, or are they all chicken?" King Saul would sit there and not respond. How could he? After all when you look at this 9 foot giant and his muscles and all that armor you know he is a mighty man. Then you remember how his dad was a fighter and never lost a bout. You heard stories how Goliath won one match after the other against great

men of various armies and you think, 'who do we have that can match him?' The answer is easy. No one! The Devil Dog's army sits on the hill and laughs. They are well rested because the giant does all their fighting. Not once have they lost since Goliath has taken his dad's place. But God's Saints are the underdogs. Who can step to the plate? Who can drive one out of the park? Who can strike down the big bambino? Who can defend their God? One day a young boy comes to bring a home cooked meal from to his brothers. As he enters the camp he sees and hears the taunts of the giant. He hears the laughing and how they belittle not only the Hebrew army, but their God as well. This young boy delivers his home cooked friend chicken to his brothers and asks why someone doesn't go up against this guy and shut his mouth. How can they let him speak damaging words against the king of Israel and their God? The brothers chow down on their meal and say there wasn't anyone good enough. "Brother," they said. "Have you gotten a good look at this guy? I heard he works out 3 times a day, can bench press 1,000 lbs, and has muscles on top of those muscles, and muscles on top of those muscles." Their younger brother said he believed he could do it, if given a chance. His brothers laughed because he was so small, had no experience and they told him to go back and care for the sheep. But David said he had killed many an animal attacking his flocks. He would handle this guy with one hand tied behind his back. They laughed, however David was serious and he went to King Saul and told him he

would go against the giant. He would represent God's Saints against the Devil Dog's Goliath. Looking at his figure, being so young and all that and no experience at all in fighting, Saul was skeptical. But David pushed on. He knew that it was winner take all. He knew if he lost the whole Hebrew army would be enslaved by the Philistines. But he insisted he could do it. How? Because it would be he and God who would take this guy down. So Saul relented and gave him his mantle and shield which he cast aside, too big, too awkward, and while David went out to meet the enemy one-on-one, his own brother's and the rest of the army yelled out, "Saul are you nuts? Our future, our lives are in his hands? He's going up against one of the Devil Dog's best ever all stars. He is undefeated." David hearing the taunts from Goliath for them to send someone, and hearing the taunts from his own team, yells back to his own team, "Hey guys, it's bottom of the ninth and I can win this game. Have a little confidence. After all, our God is on my side." So while Goliath does his taunting to send someone he sees little David the shepherd boy coming, he laughs so hard he almost falls over. He can't believe King Saul was counting on this kid to defeat the most fierce fighter of the Philistines ever. He set records that would not be broken. David steps forward, no armor, no weapon like the giant had, only a pouch with three smooth stones that he had picked up at home he used to keep the wolves away from his sheep, and his secret weapon, God in his heart. The giant taunts, calls him to come on. David tells

him to lay down his weapon and surrender before he gets hurt. Goliath lets out a roar that could be heard for miles and starts walking to meet David. That doesn't even phase David as he says, "Okay, you big buffoon. I gave you a chance, but if it must be I want to let you know you are toast. Me and God will take you out."

David marches closer and the giant with all his armor gets ready to let one of his spears go, and by the way, he always won the spear throwing event at their county fair. He was very accurate. When someone hit the bull's eye, Goliath's spear would split that one in half. Goliath cocks his spear lining up David and David reaches into his bag and pulls out a smooth stone and he whips his slingshot around like he had done many a time to keep wild animals from his flock. Oh by the way I forgot to tell you he had won gold medals at the games when the 12 tribes came together for their summer games. He won his first at age 9 and hasn't lost an event since. So the Devil Dog's all star gets set to toss his spear against the rookie of God's Saints team, and David whips his slingshot around one more time and lets it go and before Goliath could let go of the spear that one smooth stone caught Goliath in the only place where there was no protection, right between the eyes and down he went falling to the ground with so much force it was as if a giant building came crashing to the ground following dynamiting, making a noise that rattled the hillsides of both teams. Shocked faces were seen on both sides as David walks over and stands over him and says, "Our God has delivered you and your

people into my hand. Praise the name of our God” and with that he cuts off the head of the not so tough giant. God’s Saints 2...Devil Dogs 0.

The last match pitches another one- on- one contest. This time Satan himself will represent his team and God’s Saints is represented by none other than God’s Son, Jesus. **This is the final battle.** The Devil Dogs team’s coach prepares his team for the great battle with God’s Saints coaches son. The Devil heard that the son was coming and he did all he could in 33 years to stop God’s work and discredit the Son. Things were pretty quiet in those early years but these last 3 years God’s Sons popularity came to be front page stuff in Jerusalem and all around Galilee and elsewhere. They say he healed people. That was okay others did that too. But he healed the lame and lepers and blind and people with diseases that others could not. He drove out wild spirits and was accused of doing stuff that might be attributed to Satan himself, but he gave praise to his Father in heaven. People began to follow him. He had 12 wonderful guys he called to come and learn so that when the time was right they could carry on his ministry. The Devil Dog team tried all they could to discredit Jesus, from having people lie about him, to question what he was doing and by whose authority. When God’s son told them it all came from his Father in heaven, they were in awe, for they said he was committing a sin saying such a thing. And when he forgave sins, why they said only God could do that and Jesus said they were right for he was God’s son come

to earth to forgive the sins of the whole world and give his life so others may live. For 3 years this battle went on between the Devil Dog Team and God's Saints. Now came the final inning. The Devil Dogs seemed to get a few runs in the top half of the inning as they worked on one of Jesus' disciples to betray him for a measly 30 pieces of silver. Let's say Judas' error opened the door. They had Jesus arrested, there was a mock trial, and they brought him to Pilate, the Roman governor at that time for trial but he found nothing wrong. However the Devil Dogs coach got his team to yell out for Jesus to be crucified, and finally Pilate, against his will said, "Go ahead. Since you are so sure this man must die, take him away and crucify him." And so they did that Friday. They nailed him and 2 thieves on crosses and they all waited for that final moment when he would take his last breath. We all know the story so let's just say, Jesus finally gave up his spirit and died, and was taken down and placed in a tomb, sealed by a huge rock, guarded by soldiers of Rome and soldiers of the high priest. That was some top half of the last inning. The Devil Dogs coach sat on the stone with his team looking toward the heavens and lit his victory cigar and said to God, "Well, my friend, it's all over but the shouting."

But that was Friday and Sunday was coming! God's Saints had their final time at bat. Things looked bleak for the Saints. With Jesus now in the tomb dead and buried some women went to the tomb to do the final preparation. The coach of

the Devil Dogs went home to gloat knowing that his victory was assured. When he saw those women coming he just kind of chuckled. They were too late. There were two outs and the count was full. The game was over. But when they got close to the grave there was an earthquake and the stone rolled away and the women were able to see that the tomb was empty. Then one of the Heavenly Saints of teams gone by said to them, "Why are you looking for the living among the dead? Jesus has risen." Jesus had hit one out of the park onto Waveland Avenue in downtown Chicago. The games are over...Devil Dogs 0....God's Saints 3...

I wish that was the end of the games between the Devil Dogs and God's Saints, but it's not. You see it goes on and on and will until that final battle of Armageddon where God's All Star Saints will gather to go against all those who represent the Devil Dogs team. But I want to let you in on a secret. I know the outcome. I've read the results many times. The Devil Dogs loose the final most important game of all. God's Saints win again for God is on our side. We have a great coach, Jesus.

Aren't you glad you're part of God's team? While God's Saints will enjoy heaven, I'm afraid the Devil Dog team will not enjoy the heat of their eternal home. You thought it's been hot here lately? Wait until the Devil Dogs get to their final destination....it will be hot as.... Well, hell.... And no fans or air conditioning! If there is.... There is no electricity!