

Playing Monopoly With God by Jeff Strite

Matthew 6:19-6:21

Lead-in with the following video:

<http://discoverychurch.com/messages/actually-win-losing/> (first 24 seconds)

How many of you have ever played Monopoly? (ask for a show of hands).

Me too.

I hate the game. I never win.

However, Monopoly is one of the THE most popular games in the world.

As I did research for this sermon I found there are at least 900 different game variations centered around things like:

- TV shows (I Love Lucy)
- Movies (007/ Pirates of the Caribbean)
- Sports teams (NFL/NHL/NBA, and numerous college teams)
- Every branch of the Military.
- Various cities and nations throughout the world.
- Cartoons (Garfield/Fantastic Four)
- Singing groups (Beatles)
- And animals.

They have Monopoly games that feature horses, dogs, cats... and my personal favorite: "Hello Kitty".

More than 275 million games have been sold worldwide and it's available in 111 countries, in 43 languages.

The longest MONOPOLY game in history lasted for 70 straight days.

In 1978, the Neiman Marcus offered a chocolate version of the game priced at \$600.

And the most expensive version of the game is valued at \$2 million. The set features a 23-carat gold board and diamond-studded dice.

However, there's something worth noting here. Monopoly totally runs against the teachings of Jesus.

Jesus said: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

I'm pretty sure Monopoly is ALL about storing up treasures on earth. Buying houses & hotels and accumulating money is the main thing in this game. The name of the game is to establish a MONOPOLY – to monopolize and control everything on the board.

Now, why does Monopoly set those goals?

Well, because in every game we play we have to have a way of measuring success. In the board game Monopoly the way you measure success is by winning all the money; build

houses and hotels on your properties, and pretty much beat the tar out of all the other players.

And in many ways, Monopoly reflects the mindset of this world

- Is my paycheck bigger than yours? I deserve more than him because I work harder, longer, etc.
- Is my job more important? He gets more but he couldn't do my job.
- Is my house bigger and grander than my neighbors?
- Is my car/my boat/my motorcycle – more powerful/more classy/more expensive?
- Etc. etc. etc.

Why do folks do that?

Because in the game of our lives we feel we have to have a way to measure success. How else will we know whether our lives have had meaning? How else will we know whether we've done things worthwhile?

Well Jesus said we need to measure our success this way:

"...store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Or – another way of saying it:

"...seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Matthew 6:33

Jesus isn't saying you can't have a nice house or good car, or a great pay check. What He's saying is: these are NOT how His people should measure success. Success for God's people should NEVER be about comparing ourselves with others.

In fact Paul wrote: "...When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise." 2 Corinthians 10:12b

When we end up trying to compare our lives with the lives of others, we show we're not too smart.

So, how should I measure MY success in life? How can I know that my life has had meaning and purpose? How can I know that I have sought His kingdom and His righteousness?

Well, before I get to my answer this morning, I need to point out two ways you should not seek 1st His Kingdom and Righteousness. One of those ways was something the Pharisee were good at. The Pharisees were VERY religious people and they measured their success by their religiosity.

The following video humorously shows how Christians sometimes fall into that trap.
<http://discoverychurch.com/messages/monopoly-wins-loses/> (first 1.06 minutes)

Notice what that preacher in the video did. He used his position in Christ to dominate the other players. A few of his statements:

- "Jesus would let me roll again"
- "Instead of paying rent... I'm going to pray for you. Because really, it's just as good"
- "I'm the lead pastor and I get to say when I take another turn."

Now, of course, he's just making all that up. It's all in fun. But there ARE people who do that. They use their religion to dominate others. For many "Church" people, the name of the game is power.

And just like the Pharisees of old, their measure of success is not what is best for God's Kingdom. It's all about getting what they want for their own kingdom. I've seen Preachers do it, Elders do it, and Deacons do it. People in the church that have no official position at all do it.

ILLUS: It's sooooo easy to fall into this trap of using your position in Christ to try to get an advantage. Some time back a friend and I were driving down the road and I stopped at a stop sign. The police officer didn't agree (he was wrong) and he was in the process of writing out a ticket back at his police car when my friend said: "Why don't you just tell him that you're a preacher?"

You know what my friend was saying don't you? My friend was saying I should use my position as a preacher to beat the ticket. I didn't do it... but I can understand the temptation.

Every kind of Christian is tempted by this type of thing.

Using religiosity to gain an edge. To get their way. To succeed in what they feel is important.

And you can usually tell when people are doing this.

Do you know what people do when they can't get their way?

That's right – they get angry. If they're mad enough they take their ball and go home. It's so easy to build "your kingdom" rather than God's.

Now, that said... there's another trap Christians can fall into.

I call it the trap of Churchiopoly.

As I was making my way through the various 900 versions of Monopoly I came across this unusual Monopoly game called Episcopopoly (a game developed for the Episcopal church)

Instead of choosing a top hat, or a race car to move around the board, they have tokens like a lamb, a dove or the bell tower modeled after a famous tower at an Episcopal college in Tennessee.

Instead of cards that say "Chance" and "Community Chest," players can draw cards entitled either "Time, Talent And Treasure" or "Operating Budget."

The Game includes offering plates, steeples, cornerstones and bricks.

The Goal of the game: Teach the realities of building and maintaining an Episcopal church.

Now I'm sure it's a real barn-burner of a game.
And it had better be for the price of \$65 a pop (I personally don't pay that much for any game).

But notice the way they measure religion: in buildings and in operating budgets.
And that reflects the trap of Churchiopoly: measuring spiritual success by how pretty and well maintained your building is.

Now there's nothing wrong with having a pretty and well maintained building.
And there's nothing wrong with knowing how to balance a church budget.
The problem is, if that's how you measure success in seeking 1st the Kingdom of God then something's out of whack.

You see, a church building is just a tool.

ILLUS: Out in my garage, I have a whole bunch of tools. Saws, Hammers, Drills, Chisels.
But if I never use those tools for their intended purposes they can end up being just bunch of pretty pieces of wood and metal. They have no value because they don't do what they were designed to do.

And that's what can happen when a congregation gets all tied up in how pretty their building is. They can forget WHY the church building is there. All of their resources and ministry efforts center on maintaining and improving the building.

ILLUS: When I was younger, my folks told me of a sister church where one of my relatives was an Elder. That congregation had a building fund that was funded to the tune of \$40,000. If they ever used that money for improvements on the building they scurried about and worried about how they were going to rebuild that nest egg of \$40,000. Their faith was in that \$40,000... not in God. They measured their success for Christ by the fact that they had \$40,000 in the bank.

ILLUS: Now, by contrast, we had an annual meeting here about 6 or 7 years ago. There was money in the bank... we were growing. And we just knew this was the moment to build a new building.

But at the annual meeting the leadership addressed the congregation and explained that, because of recession and people being out of work they were going to suggest that we keep the money rather than spend it so that we could help people who were struggling to meet their bills.

And you know what happened?

Everybody broke out in applause.

Everybody agreed and it was unanimously approved that we would NOT build because everybody wanted to have that money available for those who needed it.

I've never been so proud of this church as I was at that moment.

It proved to me that we hadn't gotten bit by the bug of churchiopoly.

So, if we don't measure our spirituality by how we dominate others with our righteousness, and if we don't measure our spirituality by how nice and well maintained our building is...

just HOW can we measure whether we've sought first God's Kingdom and His Righteousness?

ILLUS: Well, it just so happens I had a dream about that this last week. I'm not kidding you, I actually had the dream I'm going to tell you about. As you know, in dreams we're mostly just bystanders, observers who have no control of the outcome of dream. This was the dream: I dreamed that I'd come to church to preach like every other weekend, but when I got up to preach... there was no one here!

Well, you were HERE, but you weren't here (in this part of the building).

Where were you?

You all were in other parts of the building doing ministry for kids and homeless and people who were hurting. But, in the dream, I got the impression you still wanted me to preach to you while you were doing all that other stuff.

I had to get down off the stage and position myself so that I could shout my sermon and you could hear me. But then, as I started to shout out my sermon... I realized I hadn't finished it. The sermon was only half done.

I hadn't done my job!

But you were doing yours!

Now, I'm going to qualify what I say next.

I've heard of churches where folks complain that only 20% of the people do 80% of the work. That's not true here. Here it's more like 50 or 60 % of the people doing the bulk of the work. I brag about you all the time.

So understand that I'm not saying this next part for any other reason than that I believe it to be true.

The problem for many churches is that a lot of folks feel their whole purpose as a Christian is to show up and sit down, shut up... and listen. And we kind of condition ourselves to that mindset by how churches are set up.

For example... where are all the chairs in the auditorium facing?

Towards me, right?

It gives you the impression that church is all about coming and listening to me.

Now I have to admit – I like that! It gives me someone to talk to.

But if you do come, sit down and listen, I have a question for you this morning.

Is that all you do?

Now some folks are physically unable to do a lot of things and I understand that.

But what's YOUR excuse?

Just like in every church some of you come and just sit and get entertained. But is there something else you could do and you don't because that's not YOUR job?

Let's just start with the simple stuff.

- Do you make it a point to meet people at the door take an umbrella out to folks walking in the rain?
- Have you volunteered to make coffee or refreshments between church and Sunday

School?

- Do you volunteer to help in the nursery/junior church (not teach... just be there)?
- Do you volunteer to help with communion/and offering. Not just the serving, but the preparing of the plates for worship time?

Or how about the more intense things:

- How many of you can drive? We have several people doing the bus ministry, but maybe you could make yourself available to help out at times they can't be here.
- Would you be willing to give an occasional Communion meditation?
- Would you be willing to teach Sunday School part time (just to spell the other teachers)?
- How about working in the Sound Booth? I'm sure they'd be happy to train you to do that.
- Have you thought of giving a Special on Sunday morning?

I could go on and on and on...but the point is we all have something we can do.

Are you doing it?

Are you being a servant, or you just here to be served?

Now we are entering a New Year.

What do people always seem to do every New Year's Eve?

That's right, they make resolutions.

So, I'm not trying to harangue anyone here, I'm just saying – why don't we make a resolution to do more for Jesus this year? It's a great time for us to make that kind of New Year's Resolutions. To challenge ourselves to do more for Jesus.

Now, granted I've just been talking about things you can do here on Sunday mornings. But I have noticed that people who DO THINGS for Jesus on Sunday morning are more likely to DO THINGS for Jesus all the rest of the way through the week. (Now I'm sure that not always true, but it's true often enough).

And do you know why it's so often true?

Because where your treasure is... that's where your heart is as well.

If you're already investing your time, talents on treasures on Sunday morning then your heart is already there with Jesus. It's easier to serve Jesus all the rest of the week because you've put your faith into practice on Sunday morning.

CLOSE: I want to close with the thoughts from the following poem:

"Where shall I work today, dear Lord."

And my love flowed warm and free.

He answered and said "See that little place? Tend that place for me."

I answered and said, "Oh no, not there! No one would ever see!

It wouldn't matter how well my work was done. Not that little place for me."

His voice, when he spoke, was soft and kind. He spoke so tenderly.

"Little one, search that heart of thine — Are you working for them, or me?

Nazareth was a little place. So was Galilee."