

“FOOTBALL FAITH (#4): ENDZONE CELEBRATION”

(Numbers 10:10)

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[PROPS NEEDED: Video Clip of Endzone Dancing]

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 11-15-09]

–I–

1. **[Traditional Service ONLY:]** Read Text: Numbers 10:10 and Pray.

2. **[WATCH VIDEO CLIP** – Football Players dancing in Endzone following touchdown (0:30)]

A–So, what is it that *you* experience when your football team scores a touchdown or a goal?

B–For the past 3 weeks we’ve been sharing in a series called Football Faith, connecting the biblical practices of Stewardship with metaphors from the game of Football.

C–And as we conclude this series today, I think it’s appropriate that we end by focusing on those feelings that we experience when our team scores – ...

1–...Namely, we feel excitement; an adrenaline rush; an energy that surges through us, causing our bodies to erupt in celebration, whether it’s clapping, or jumping up and down in the stands, or giving our friends a “hi-five.”

2–It’s *OUR* way of having an “*Endzone Celebration*” just like the players often do.

3. Well, did you know that that *same* feeling – that same sense of joy and elation – is precisely what God *designed* each of us to feel when we *give generously* to the work of His kingdom?

A–Ok, now I just lost some of you right there, because you’re saying to yourself, “*Whoa, Preacher, there’s no way that I could be as excited about giving as I am about my football team scoring! That’s crazy!*”

B–But let me just ask (without judging, mind you!): Could it be that the reason we don’t really understand the Stewardship concept of the joy of generosity is because we’ve never really been generous?

1–After all, it’s easy to criticize something we don’t understand, and to say that something’s impossible if we’ve never experienced it firsthand.

2–You see, I challenge anyone in this room to find a generous person who *doesn’t* feel a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment through their giving.

3–For example, take any one of the people we’ve shown on the “Will You Grow?” videos over the last three weeks and ask them how they feel about giving,...

4—...And I may be wrong, but chances are they'll *all* say that when they were generous, God somehow always brought blessing and contentment no matter what they were facing.

(a) You say, “*But maybe they would have been blessed anyway, whether they were generous givers or not.*” Well, maybe.

(b) But in my experience, generous Christians always seem to *BE* more content than ones that aren't – and that's a “coincidence” that's rather suspicious, if you asked me!

4. You see, it may seem *counterintuitive* to think that when we *give up* something (e.g., money), the act of giving can actually can bring great satisfaction, fulfillment, and (yes) even joy!

A—But don't just believe me, because the scriptures are very clear on this point, as well. ¹

B—Probably the most familiar is one we read just several weeks ago (2 Corinthians 9:7) where the apostle Paul ends some advice about generosity by saying that “*Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver*” – there it is: generous giving can bring “*cheer*” (e.g., Joy)!

C—And yet, I didn't want to just repeat that one story, and so for today's scripture I chose a single verse from the Old Testament: Numbers 10:10 – it's not as well-known as Paul's more famous words from 2 Corinthians, but it does convey this same sense of joy and celebration as a result of generous giving.

[Contemp. Service ONLY: Listen to what it says... (Read Numbers 10:10, THE MSG)]

–II–

5. Now, since it's set in Old Testament times, let me share some background to help us understand it a little better.

A—In that time, there were a number of festivals and special events every year that God's people were supposed to celebrate.

B—And according to this verse, whenever certain types of offerings were made, one of the ways they were to celebrate is by blowing special trumpet/bugle called a “*Shofar.*”

C—Now, there were at least four major types of offerings in ancient Judaism, and each had a different purpose. Two types are mentioned in this one verse:

1—First, there were the “**Whole/Burnt Offerings**”(Hebrew “*Olah*”), in which an entire sacrifice (like a lamb) is burned on the altar, symbolizing one's “*whole/complete*” *surrender* and submission to the will of God.

2—The second type are the “**Sacrifices of Well-Being / Peace Offerings**” (Hebrew “*Zebach Sh'lamim*”), in which only a *part* of the animal is burned on the altar, and the rest is cooked and shared among the priest, the person offering it, and their family, symbolizing *thanksgiving* to God for one's blessings. ²

D–So, think about this, then: according to this practice, when believers recognize *God’s* generosity (e.g., through the “Peace” Offering), and decide to be generous *in return* (e.g., through the “Whole/Burnt” Offering), then appropriate response is *rejoicing and celebration* (e.g., through the sounding of the bugle/trumpet).³

E–In other words, *thanksgiving* that leads to *generosity* is cause for *joy* & should be *celebrated*.

6. You see, to the ancient Israelites (and need I add, also the early Christians), *giving* should be celebrated because it represents a type of “victory,” much in the same way as happens at football games today.

A–Think about it: when a High School or College football team scores a touchdown (or even a field goal), what does the band usually do? ...they play the school’s “victory” song.

1–You know, when I was in High School, I played trumpet in our marching band,...

2–...And since our team was the Tigers, every time the team would score, we’d play the song “*Hold That Tiger*.”

B–And even though the “Shofars” of ancient Israel could only make *noises* and not real musical *pitches*, they nevertheless served the same purpose: to celebrate the “victory” of generosity – the victory of God and of God’s people in our world over the diseases of selfishness, self-centeredness, and stinginess through the “antidote” of *generous giving*.

C–In a sense, the sounding of these bugles/trumpets during the two offerings mentioned here were a way of celebrating the fact that God’s people finally “got it” – that they finally understood that **generosity involves not only what God does for US, but also what we can do for GOD.**

–III–

7. So let me conclude simply by asking: Do YOU – do we ALL – “get that” today?

A–Do we understand (like the ancient Hebrews did)...

...that the generous blessings each of us have come *from* God?

...that He asks us to be generous *back* to Him so that He can carry out His plan/purpose for the world through His church?

...and that when we “get this,” there’s joy in heaven and joy on earth.

B–Do we understand that when you and I are generous in our giving to God, there’s literally an “*Endzone Celebration*” like none other, because *God Himself* is dancing around in heaven, celebrating *OUR* generosity!⁴

C–Now, I don’t know about you, but *that* kind of “*Endzone Celebration*” is one I don’t want to miss out on! And my prayer is that you won’t want miss out on it, either.

8. [PRAYER]

9. [Distribute Commitment Sunday Response Cards. Finance Chairperson gives instructions, inviting congregants to complete them and bring them forward as an act of celebration and commitment to God...]
10. [Invite congregation to “Tailgate Party” after worship today to celebrate generosity]

ENDNOTES:

1. Read also Psalm 37:21-26, Mark 8:35-36, Luke 17:33, and James 1:17.
2. From the internet article “*Judaism 101 – Qorbanot: Sacrifices and Offerings*” found at www.jewfaq.org/qorbanot.htm#Types.
3. This is precisely where African and African-American Christians get their practice of singing and playing upbeat music and praise as people joyously bring their offerings forward during worship services. The offering-time is supposed to be a joyous celebration!
4. NOT celebrating the amount we give, mind you, but celebrating the heart of love and devotion our gifts to Him represent.