



Pastor's Page

"Faith in Football"

Well by the time you read this it may be all over! If so I only hope that the outcome is the same as it was when the two sides met back in '66 and the BBC commentator coined the immortal phrase "they think it's all over – it is now" I refer of course to the World Cup match between England and Germany in Bloemfontein this afternoon. As the World Cup has now entered the knock-out phase England have to overcome Germany if they are to progress further in the competition. However 1966 was the last time that England fared better than Germany in the competition so history is not on our side. (Apologies if you're not English.) But whether or not this historical fact troubles you or whether or not this football festival interests you there's no denying that it is both a global and historical event. Teams from all 6 continents on the planet have taken part and it is the first time this World Cup tournament has been held in Africa. But what does God think about it all? Well, allow me to give three reasons why I believe the World Cup may make God smile;

> It celebrates human skill and the joy of achievement. When God made man at the climax of his creative work the bible says "God saw all that he had made and it was very good" (Gen 1:31) God takes pleasure in his creation - footballers are part of it. The bible talks a lot about using to the full gifts (talents) that God has given us. And the Apostle Paul writing to Timothy says that "God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment – surely this includes football!!

> One of the greatest players on the planet is a Christian. Kaka who plays for Brazil describes the birth of his first child - and his "victories and conquests" in football - as gifts from God. A secular newspaper writing about him reported that "Kaká does not drink or chase women. He says that he was a virgin until he married his childhood sweetheart Caroline Celico four years ago. When Kaká scores a goal - something he has done nearly 90 times in his five-and-a-half seasons in Italy - he thrusts his arms heavenwards in gratitude. When Brazil won the World Cup in 2002, and again when Milan triumphed in the Champions League final of 2007, he tore off his team strip to reveal a T-shirt emblazoned with the words: "I belong to Jesus." Surely this makes God smile!

> Mass Evangelism is happening at The World Cup. IDEA Magazine reports that "The Alliance member Ambassadors in Sport has been helping to restore vulnerable broken lives through the Gospel and football while building a legacy beyond the event. To do this – they have trained hundreds of Christian coaches to reach out to soccer-mad – and often desperately poor – young people with the Gospel while addressing issues such as HIV/Aids and human trafficking. As the World Cup builds to the final on 11 July Christian organisations will work with hundreds of South African churches and individuals to make the most of opportunities to share Christ both within communities and with visiting fans from around the world" Many churches in this country too are seizing the evangelistic opportunity that the world cup is presenting (let's not miss out!)

So, God may well be smiling at this Football festival, but if Rooney, Gerrard and company don't defy history by defeating our German brothers this afternoon you won't see a smile on my face for quite some time!

27th June 2010