

the RORY STORY

a parable and its glorious explanation

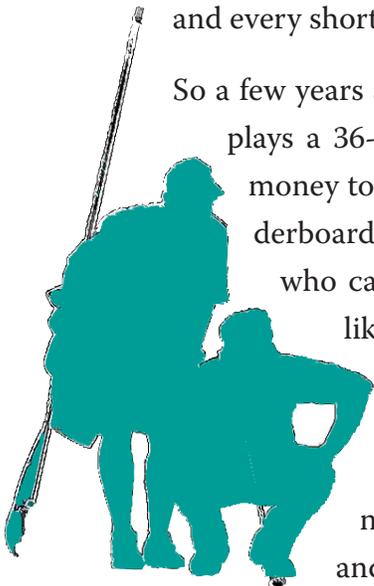
Consider yourself part of this story, because we're going to put you right in the middle of it. It goes like this...

Every year, you anticipate one tournament more than any other. Oh sure, you play your company scramble and you team up with some buddies for a charity event or two. But to you, that's not golf. A competitive player of reasonable ability in high school, you still like golf played the hard way—with all the rules intact and every short putt holed.

So a few years ago you hooked up with a regional tournament that plays a 36-hole challenge like it's a tour event. You pay good money to play and it's worth every penny. They set up big leaderboards all over the course, supply caddies for every player who can't bring their own, and feed you in the clubhouse like this is the last meal you'll ever eat.

It's fair and it's fun. At least it was. Until this year.

This year you drew a first-day tee time in the afternoon wave. They let 144 players in, just like the tour, and you play one day in the a.m. and one day in the p.m.



With your afternoon time, you arrive with a plan to grab an early lunch before you head to the range for your warm-up. When you get to the clubhouse, though, the murmur is unmistakable. Something is not normal, and you can feel it among the players eating their meals. So you find an empty seat next to another player you know well enough, and you say, “What’s going on?”

“Rory McIlroy is what’s going on,” he replies.

“Rory McIlroy?”

“You haven’t seen the leaderboards, obviously.” You look back at him and slightly shake your head. He continues. “McIlroy is here. He went out in the morning. He’s eight under through fifteen.”

This all sounds crazy. You’re playing an enjoyable regional tournament where the competition is just right for all who enter. Why would McIlroy come here? Who gave him the go-ahead to crash your party? Actually, it bothers you that this bothers you. Plenty of the players are excited that McIlroy would lend his fame to this goofy little event. And you’ve never come close to winning here. So what if the world’s top player is “below his station”?

You eat your meal with not much conversation, though you do get the word about a few of the flags. Then you head to the range. On your way, you stop at the big board and get a good look. McIlroy has finished. 62. You simmer. You’re a decent enough player, but you break 70 maybe twice a year. So much for dreaming.

Your routine on the range is typical. You open with some wedges, move up through the bag, let go on a few drivers, then ease back down before heading to the putting green. As you are about to finish, you remember this is the time when the caddies start to arrive. Many of them run two loops, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Right about then, you turn around to see a familiar figure walking toward your bag.

Rory McIlroy.

After all your earlier ill feeling toward the guy—or at least his appearance in this event—you don’t know what to say. “Mr. McIlroy,” spills out of your mouth, though he is more than a dozen years younger than you. “What are you doing here?”

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“I’ll be your caddie today. So, let’s turn off the ‘Mr. McIlroy’ stuff right away.” He holds out his hand to shake yours. “Rory,” he says with his beloved smile.

“Well, I don’t know what to say.” You’re still fumbling for words.

“It usually goes like this,” he says with all measure of lightheartedness, and then he begins to tell *you* what to tell *him* to do.

Before you know it, the two of you are standing on the first tee, where Rory has set your bag down and is introducing himself to your fellow competitors and their caddies, who are all as dumbfounded as you first were.

For all your nerves, your tee ball is fine, coming to rest just inside the fairway off the righthand rough. Your playing companions aren't so fortunate. With less time to acclimate to the fact that they are being watched so closely by the best player on the planet, one sends it into the fairway bunker, the other deep into the rough.

It doesn't take long, however, for you to offer several keen examples of how this is not your day. A three-putt, a ball left in the bunker, an ugly snappie into the woods on the fifth hole. You're counting bogeys rather than pars and you're not sure whether you should ask Rory for advice. One awful shot later, he gives it all the same, though he's deferential about it.

“Mind if I give you a word of help?” he asks.

“Absolutely! What you got?”

What he says is more about perspective than process, but you see how it applies. Within two swings, you're back on track. Still, this comes two swings too late and the bad numbers have a healthy lead by now.

All in all, you can't imagine a nicer guy to hang out with than Rory. Nobody's perfect, but this guy seems pretty darn close. Except for one nagging thing. Your score doesn't add up to anything better than it normally does. In fact, you know you've turned in a better card plenty of times. And turning in your card is what you're about to do.

Rory stops you. “Listen,” he says. “When you go in there, tell them you can have my score.”

“What?”

“Just tell them you would like to have Rory's score.”

“I don't get it.”

“Just tell them—but you have to tell them—‘I would like to have Rory's score.’”

“You mean I can have 62?”

“Right. You can have 62.”

It’s all you can do to make sense of this. “What about you?” you ask. “Are you going to have to take my score?”

“No, no, I get to keep my 62. But you can post my score, too. You just have to go in there and tell them that’s what you want and sign the card.”

You say, “Wait a minute. While we were out there, you gave me all kinds of help and advice. How about if I just try to do what you told me to do?”

“OK, but you can’t have my score that way. You have to tell them you want my score.”

People resistant to the message can present any number of reasons to dismiss the Good News of Jesus Christ, commonly called the Gospel. At Links Players, a ministry of sharing this message among golfers, we hope one of those reasons is not a simple lack of understanding. So allow me to take a few minutes to show you how this Rory story helps us understand so well what the Bible says about who Jesus is and what he came to do.

In the letter of the apostle Paul to the Philippian assembly of Christian disciples, we find a short section known as the *kenosis* passage. The Greek word *kenosis* means “pouring out” or “emptying,” and this passage is given that name because Jesus is depicted as emptying out who he is as God for the sake of humanity. Look at the first part of this passage:

Christ Jesus,
Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!¹

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The wording is clear. Jesus Christ was God. But because his mission was an earthly one, he had lowered himself to a rank far beneath him: a servant.

You might recognize from the Rory story that the world's best player stepped down from his hard-earned place of preeminence and became your caddie. You might have considered this a step down even if he had made the same offer to another great, say Jordan Spieth or Lydia Ko. But Rory was offering this to *you*, an average player from Anytown. That's quite a comedown.

Where the Rory story breaks down, however, is at the point of death. Jesus humbled himself on behalf of humanity so far that he was willing to die a wicked death for their sake. Such a reality begs a crucial question: *Why would he do this?*

The answer is again recognizable from our story. Golfers are sinners. Regularly. How can we say that? Because in its literal origin, *sin* means “missing the mark.” All day long, golfers miss the mark. They're off the fairway, off the green, and outside the cup. People, too, miss the mark with regularity. We speak and think and act outside the parameters of God's sovereign design. Paul wrote to the Romans, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”² Think about this for a minute, because glory is where Jesus came from to serve us all the way unto his death. He came to be an atoning sacrifice, making amends before God not for his sin but for ours.

Therefore, the work of salvation has been done. The matter is before us.

When this becomes clear to us and our hearts are stirred, we have three choices:

- Say, “No, thanks. I have other ideas about how life is to be lived and death is to be faced.”
- Ask, as the golfer in the Rory story did, whether there is another way, perhaps even trying to attain salvation by our own religious effort (following the teaching of Jesus, for instance, without accepting the work he has done on our behalf).
- Rely fully on the righteous work of Jesus, allowing his saving work to count on our behalf, even though we have done nothing to deserve it.

Paul explained this to the Romans by hearkening back to the example of Abraham, who believed God so faithfully that he was willing to deliver up his own son to God. But in that case, just as in ours, God intervened and provided the way of salvation. Paul wrote:

Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will

credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.³

There is then only one righteousness that accesses eternity with God: the righteousness of Christ. No other righteousness can measure up, because no other righteousness meets God's perfect standard. We can resist, we can strive, or we can receive what is being given to us.

This was the case of the golfer (you) in the Rory story. Confused, the golfer wondered whether it was really possible to receive Rory's score. And what did Rory say? "You have to tell them you want it."

The activating mechanism for receiving salvation and eternal life through the righteousness of Jesus Christ is to tell him you want it. Jesus did not give up his nature as God to come and die, any more than Rory McIlroy would give up his nature as the world's best golfer by showing up to caddie for you tomorrow. Jesus is there on the throne of heaven, waiting to hear your response. Do you want what only he can give?

When we looked at it earlier, we left the *kenosis* passage incomplete. Its remarkable ending is this:

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.⁴

It is hard to be unimpressed by such a picture of glory. Those of us who love sports are used to "sharing" in the victories of our favorite champions, relishing the payoffs for their excellence. Here is Jesus, the champion over sin and death, exalted at God's throne.

At the end of time, all people, whether or not they have said they want to spend eternity with him, will fall to their knees and acknowledge Jesus as Lord. Some will do this defiantly, still wanting their own way; God will honor their decision, sending them to an eternity apart from him. But those who say, "Yes, I want what Jesus has, his righteousness and salvation," will celebrate with him for eternity. 

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