

LAST IS FIRST John 13:12-17

Show Video ... Helping Others ... 1:00

So let me ask you ... which is greater ... being 1st or helping someone else make it to the finish line? The way you answer that tells you whether you have a world's view of life or God's view of life! Our culture ... which is driven by competition ... would say that it is most important to be first ... no matter what it takes. But that is not the way God sees it.

Listen to **MARK 10:31** ... ³¹ **But many who are first will be last, and the last first.** Wow! You talk about God flipping the world's view on its head!

For several years ... while in youth ministry ... I was the dean of the Junior High week of Church Camp. Several of you were on staff for those years. When it was time for the meal, we would have the kids line up in their camp families to file in. family by family. The kids would be bumping into each other trying to get to the front of the line. And then they would try to be in the straightest line so their family could go in before the others. We would wait until they were all settled and then sometimes have them enter from the back of the line first. It is amazing how often we heard the kids complain and say something like ... "That's not fair!"

This morning is the last of the sermons in the "Against the Grain" series. We have been looking at how God has flipped on its head the way the world looks at life. Today we want to see how God sees that being first in his eyes is being last in the world's eyes. And vice-versa ... being first in the world's eyes is being last in God's eyes.

In God's eyes ... being a servant of other people is First Place. You win the race when you serve others.

Now I know that none of you parents ever said ... "I hope my kid grows up to be a servant." But that is exactly what God wants for them ... and for us! That is not coming in last for Him. It is coming in first.

So why should I want to be a servant to other people? Why should I sacrifice my position in the race to help someone else make it to the finish line?

Well, that is the first question we want to answer this morning ...

WHY CHOOSE TO BE LAST BY SERVING OTHERS?

There are three good reasons to choose to be a servant ...

1 ... We are created serve others.

I started a new philosophy class at IWU a few weeks ago. I always start the class by asking each student a question prompted by Socrates' statement ... "An unexamined life is not worth living." When I got to the second student in class, she gave the typical answer ... she gave me her name. I responded ... no I don't want to know what your name is ... I want to know who you are. We went through that battering back and forth for a while and then she said ... "I don't have a clue who I am."

EPHESIANS 2:10 is clear on who we are and what we are created to do. Listen ... **For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**

What does that verse tell us we are created to do? It says we are created to lead everyone and be the top dog ... right? No! It does not say that at all does it? Part of the confusion for Christians as to what we are created to do is because of the plethora of books on Christian leadership and the limited number of books on servanthood! Does that mean there is no place in God's kingdom for leaders? Of course, not! But leading in God's eyes is serving.

Friends ... we are designed to do good works ... and those good works are to be directed toward people on behalf of God. And we fulfill those good works through servanthood! Not putting ourselves before them ... but by serving them!

2 ... We are called to serve others

There was an unusual thing that happened in the Upper Room the night of the Last Supper. They had eaten the Supper and Christ had introduced what we now know as the Eucharist ... Lord's Supper ... or communion. He then gets up from the

table ... gets a bowl of water and a towel and begins washing the feet of the apostles. After Peter first begins to refuse to let Jesus do so ... Jesus explains the whole reason that he washed their feet.

Listen to **JOHN 13:12-17** ... ¹² When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. ¹³ “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

When you become a Christian ... you are immediately called service ... no exceptions! It is not just ministers that are called to service ... It is not just missionaries that are called ... we all are! We are all called to be last ... not first ... to be a servant not a master.

3 ... We are commanded to serve others

Parents ... do you ever remember ending a face-off with your children with the words “Because I said so!” ... “Go clean your room.” “Why?” “Because I said so!” You ever do that? Did you expect the child to go clean his or her room after you told them that? Of course you did! But WHY? Why did you think they should obey you? Because you are the Mom ... or you are the Dad ... and they are supposed to obey your authority ... Right?

Let me ask you this then ... Who is the Heavenly Father? God is right? And if He is the Father ...and we are the children ... and HE tells us to do something ... should we have to do it? Look at **MATTHEW 20:25-28** ... ²⁵ Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Human nature wants to be served ... to me the Master! It always focuses on who is going to meet MY needs. Who is going to serve me? Who is going to help me? When am I going to have My way? That is exactly the opposite from what God commands the Christian is to be saying and thinking! That is thinking like the world ... not like God.

The Christian is to be saying “Who can I serve?” “Who can I help?” “Whose needs can I fulfill?” “What can I do to help other people?” That is what the Christian is created for ... called to ... and commanded to do! **It is not about serving me ... it is about serving others!** And any time that we get that turned around ... we are seeing life the way the world does!

If we choose to be last instead of first ... when we choose to serve rather than be served ... there are benefits ...

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS WHEN I CHOOSE TO SERVE OTHERS?

There are four benefits that take place when we decide to serve others.

1 ... Serving others indicates we belong to God

Romans 7:4 ... So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

When a person becomes a new Christian ... when they join the Body of Christ ... they have a specific job or ministry to do that God has already determined for them. AS they begin to function in that job or ministry in the name of Christ ... then we can begin to see the results of their work. And those results show that they belong to the Body of Christ.

Now here is the key point that I want you to catch: It is not attendance in Church services that shows that you belong to Christ.

Churches used to give out perfect attendance pins to people who went to Sunday School for a year without missing. I was just talking to a gentleman at the pancake breakfast a couple of weeks ago. He was telling me about his pin that he had at home that had 10 bars hanging from it ... one for each year he had perfect attendance in Sunday School. But those pins are not the evidence that he belonged to the Body of Christ. His service does!

Service in the name of Christ ... is the evidence that you belong to the Body of Christ! When you serve other people in the name of Jesus ... it is a witness to the fact that you belong to the Body of Christ.

2 ... Serving others is the way we serve God.

Listen to this because I don't want you to miss it ... it is very important:

- 3 Worshipping God in this morning's worship time is not serving God ... it is worshipping God ... there is a difference
- 4 Praying to God this morning ... or any time ... is not serving God ... it is talking to God
- 5 Reading the Bible is not serving God ... it is reading about and listening to God
- 6 Taking the Lord's Supper this morning is not serving God ... it is remembering how Christ served you in the ultimate way!
- 7 Being Baptized is not serving God ... it is obeying God!

We mess up everyone's mind when we call this a worship service! We get this whacked-out idea that coming this morning and doing these things is some kind of a service for God. It is not at all! Serving God is done by serving people! That is what service is ... when you serve other people ... you are serving God.

Jesus is very specific about this in **MATTHEW 25:35-40** ... ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' ³⁷"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?' ³⁸When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?' ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' ⁴⁰"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

God is leaving no doubt in His Word here ... service to God is serving other people.

3 ... Serving others gives life meaning

MARK 8:35 ... ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.

The only thing that gives value to life is living it in service for Christ. You can chase after anything and everything that you wish ... but in the end ... it is not going to bring you fulfillment. You were created ... called ... and commanded to serve others. That may mean we chose being last instead of first ... but that is the way God works!

8 ... Serving others results in eternal rewards

In **Mark 9:41** Jesus says I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.

Do you get the point? God created you ... He called you ... and He commanded you to serve other people in the name of Jesus. If you do that ... He is going to reward you! And the reward is not going to be some kind of trophy that will rust ... or break ... or corrode! It is a reward that lasts for eternity. Serving others results in eternal rewards.

CONCLUSION:

SHOW CLIP AGAIN ... FIRST IS LAST

Show which do you want to be ... the two girls that served ... or those that ran by? God has created you ... called you ... and commanded that you be last, not first ... to serve ... not be served. Will you live out the way that God sees life ... or the way the world sees it?