

THE BIG IDEA: We're FREE to serve, not FORCED to serve.

The Take-Off

[VIDEO / 01 / Church Hunters]

If you have ever been in a church around Easter, then you've probably heard of Palm Sunday.

You may not know why it's called that, but you've at least heard of it.

Palm Sunday is the Sunday before Easter, and it celebrates the day that Jesus entered Jerusalem and people put palm branches on the ground in front of Him and cheered.

Within a week, He was dead.

Today's message will help us begin to understand how things could change so drastically in just a few short days.

Here's a hint: it has EVERYTHING to do with why Jesus came, and why He didn't.

And before we accuse the Jews in Jerusalem of being fickle, let me suggest to you that all of us - no matter if you've been following Jesus forever or for never - struggle with the very same thing that they did.

Want to know what it is?

Jesus said it Himself in **Mark 10:45** / He didn't come to be served, but to serve, and to give Himself away

That became the rub that caused a crowd to go from cheering to killing within a week.

It still causes a rub today, and yet this one characteristic of believers has the potential to change the world.

How do I know? Because it already did once.

When Emperor Julian ("the Apostate") wanted to revive pagan religion in the mid-300s, he gave a most helpful insight into how the church spread. This opponent of the faith said that Christianity "has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers and through their care of the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar and that the [Christians] care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help we should render them."

It's important to note that - of all the things a pagan could have noticed about Christians - the one thing that he mentioned specifically was how they served each other and others.

This morning, we're turning our attention to what can happen when the church stands DOWN in service, when we humbly love and serve those around us.

I believe that true Christian service can change the world again.

Let's take a closer look at serving...

1. Jesus chose to serve

- a. In case this is your first week here ever or in awhile, let me give you a quick recap of our series "Stand"
- b. Paul said in **Ephesians 6:13** that, after we've done everything, we should stand
- c. We're not teaching about whether or not we should stand, but about how we stand
- d. We stand IN obedience, we stand UP through prayer, we stand WITH one another through unity, and we learned last week that we stand OUT because we're holy.
- e. We learned last week that **IDENTITY FUELS ACTIVITY**; in other words, **knowing WHO WE ARE will influence HOW WE ACT**
- f. I told you last week that understanding our identity is foundational for our Christian faith, and we're going to build on that this morning.
- g. Service is an action, and it is fueled by our identity. Jesus modeled that in **Philippians 2:5-11**.
 - Jesus knew WHO HE WAS / equal with God
 - Jesus made the choice to become nothing
 - Jesus made the choice to be obedient
 - Obedient to what? **Mark 10:45** / serving instead of being served / He was a servant King
- h. Jesus stepped down; He wasn't pushed.
- i. **[VIDEO / 02 / Funniest Break Up Ever]**
- j. **John 10:18** / Jesus willingly laid His life down

2. Now, we can choose to serve, too

- a. **Romans 6:5-7** / What happened at the cross? Slaves were set free!

- b. Now, just as Jesus choose willingly to serve us, we can willingly choose to serve others.
- c. **Galatians 5:13**
- d. The Big Idea says it like this: **We're FREE to serve WITH Jesus, not FORCED to serve BY Jesus.**
- e. This is huge, and if we don't see the freedom, we'll never understand the power of serving as Jesus did.
- f. When we're SLAVES, serving is a CHORE. When we're FREE, serving is a CHOICE.
- g. It's a choice that we can make now because we have a new identity, one that can choose to do what pleases God and brings Him glory.
- h. Remember **1 Peter 2:9** from last week? We're the CALLED OUT ones, right? New identity!
- i. Did you catch that same phrase in **Galatians 5:13**? We are CALLED OUT to be free, and to use that freedom to stand DOWN in service to those around us.
- j. But the distinction now is that we don't HAVE to; we GET to.
- k. That's why the early church serving the poor was such a powerful testimony to the emperor. His people looked for what the could get, but the believers looked for what they could give.
- l. It is our WILLING service that makes the difference, and it is something we would never have done apart from the cross.

The Landing

Here's the thing that you won't hear many leaders say: if you can choose to serve, you can also choose not to serve, and there are seasons when we may not be able to serve in the same capacity as other times. But 1 Peter 4:10 is clear that we should serve, and verse 11 says that God will give us the strength to serve. Sometimes we can serve a lot, other times a little, but saved people serve people, and so the challenge to us today is to simply start somewhere.

[Video/ 03 / Evan Almighty]

Do for one what you wish you could do for everyone.

Serve someone at church, at work, at school, at home.

As we pray, ask God to show you who you can serve this week, and allow His grace to lead you as you do.

Let's pray.