

Get In The Game – Bench Warmers vs players

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Last month I started a brand new sermon series titled, “Get in the Game”, and we talked about how each of us are uniquely designed to fulfill a purpose while we are here on earth. Tonight I want to talk about “Benchwarmers vs. Players” and how we can move from just warming the bench to participating as players, in the work of the Kingdom.

One of the verses I shared last time is found in Matthew 9. Here’s the context of the story – Jesus was going from village to village and town to town, teaching, preaching, and healing the sick. Vs. 36 says that when he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them! And he said to his disciples” The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few...ask the Lord of the Harvest to send out workers into His harvest field.”

I firmly believe that God is asking each one of us to be a laborer for him in his harvest field. God wants us to be players, not benchwarmers! Getting in the Game, becoming a player, and serving in ministry is an essential part of what God has called us to do. Mark 10:45 - *“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve...”* God wants us to get out there and serve!!!

Let me share with you tonight 4 reasons why we should get off the bench and get in the game.

1. We were created to serve God – Ephesians 2:10 –“ We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” When it comes to serving, we have to understand that service is not optional. Rick Warren says in his book, The purpose driven life, “You are here to make a difference by serving God and others. When you serve others, in any way, you are actually serving God, and fulfilling one of his purposes for creating you. We weren’t placed on earth just to breathe, eat, take up space, and have fun. God fashioned each of us to make a unique contribution with our lives.”

Last month I talked about Living a life of purpose and in that message I talked about the idea that each of us were given a specific purpose to fulfill in our lifetime. And that purpose can be fulfilled by how God created us.

God created us with a unique set of abilities, experiences, and personality traits. The abilities are the natural talents that we are born with. God has blessed your congregation with so many people who have natural talents and he wants each of you to use those natural talents in ministry. God also has allowed our unique life experiences to be a part of how He is shaping us and molding us. You and I can use our life experiences, no matter how good or how bad, for ministry. And then he also created us with our core personality –

We were created to serve God using our abilities, experiences, and personalities.

The 2nd reason why we should get off the bench and into the game is because

2. We were saved to serve God – Now, it's important to note here that the primary reason why God sent his son to die on a cross is to save us from our sins, to save us from eternity in hell, and so that we could have the opportunity to be reconciled to him. This thought of being saved to serve God is a secondary thought and it comes out of 2 Timothy 1:9 where it says, "It is he who saved us and chose us for His holy work not because we deserved it but because that was his plan".

I was struck this week with this thought. When we come into a saving knowledge of Christ, Christ becomes our Savior and Lord. What this means is this....A Savior is someone who does something for us. "Christ died on the cross for us....." He is our Savior. Let me give you another example.....I'm not sure if you're a football fan or not, but I think the JETS believe that their new quarterback, Brett Favre will be their savior this year! Brett Favre can come in, do his thing, maybe lead them to a championship, and more than likely, some of the sports headlines will read something along the lines of, "BRETT FAVRE: JETS SAVIOR" He did something for them!

But a Lord is different – a Lord is someone who has power and authority over others. A lord is someone who expects something from us. We're familiar with the word "landlord"....as a landlord, they have power and authority over their tenants and they expect a rent payment.

When you and I were saved.....Christ became both Savior and Lord in our lives. He does something for us by giving us an opportunity to be spared from eternity in hell, and at the same time, he expects something from us.

God redeemed us for the purpose of doing his work. Again, Rick Warren says, "You're not saved by service, but you are *saved for service*"

We can find a number of examples in scripture and let's take a look at just a few.

- **Jonah** – We've just come through a summer series looking at the life of Jonah and in that story we discovered that God asked Jonah to go to the Ninevites and preach against them. Jonah didn't want to do that and so he ran away, jumped on a ship to get as far away from God as possible, and a big storm came up. The men of the ship threw Jonah overboard, and he was swallowed by a whale. While in that whale, Jonah had some serious prayer time with God. And after 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of whale, The Lord commanded that Jonah be spit out. From there Jonah went to Nineveh, as God had originally intended and preached against the Ninevites. God spared Jonah's life so that he could do the work of God in the city of Nineveh.
- **Paul** – we can find a similar story in the life of Paul in Acts 9. Paul was walking along the Damascus road, and God called out to him! For 3 days he was blind and he ate nothing. Ananias came to him and told him of what God wanted him to do and immediately he was healed of his blindness. Over the course of the 3 days and in that moment that Paul regained his sight, he knew that his life had been spared for a purpose of doing the work of God.
- Peter's our last example – Peter was a disciple of Christ, he had walked with him and he was close to him, and in Matthew 16

we find Jesus telling Peter that He will use Peter to build the Church and nothing can come against it! - We know that later on in the story of Jesus and Peter that Peter denied knowing Christ 3 times, and then in John 21, we find that Jesus reinstated Peter into the ministry – He gave him a 2nd chance – he redeemed him – So that he could do the work of God!

Here's what we need to take away from these examples..

- IF you've been running away from God like Jonah did, it's time to stop running. He has ministry that only you can do!
- If you've been spiritually blind like Paul was, let me be your Ananias today to tell you that God wants to use you in a great, great way!
- If you're more like Peter and at times you've turned your back on God. Know this.....God is a God of 2nd chances and He still wants to use you for ministry.

The 3rd reason why we should get off the bench and get into the game is because

3. We are called to serve God

To help us understand our call to serve, we have to look at our call not just as an individual call to serve, but also as a call to serve as part of the body, as a part of the community of faith, as the entire church. Last week we took a brief look at 1 Corinthians 12 and how we are all a **part of the body!** But we need to go a little deeper into understanding that our call to serve God is also **as the full Body!**

Matthew 16:18-19 is extremely significant for us. Here's what it says, Jesus is talking to the disciples and specifically to Peter. "And I tell you that you are Peter,^[a] and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades^[b] will not overcome it.^[c] **19!** will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be^[d] bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be^[e] loosed in heaven."

The word "church" in this passage is from the Greek word ekklesia. Ekklesia is a compound word. "Ek" means out of and "Kaleo" means

It seemed to be a job that ANYBODY could have done, If ANYBODY thought he was supposed to be the one.

But since EVERYBODY recognized that ANYBODY could, EVERYBODY took for granted that SOMEBODY would.

But NOBODY told ANYBODY that we are aware of, That he would be in charge of seeing it was taken care of.

And NOBODY took it on himself to follow through and DO, What EVERYBODY thought that SOMEBODY would do.

When what EVERYBODY needs did not get done at all, EVERYBODY was complaining that SOMEBODY dropped the ball.

ANYBODY then could see it was an awful crying shame, And EVERYBODY looked around for SOMEBODY to blame.

SOMEBODY should have done the job and EVERYBODY would have, But in the end NOBODY did what ANYBOY could have.

God's calling you and I to serve.

The 4th reason why we should get off the bench and into the game is because

4. We are commanded to serve God - The calling of the disciples is a perfect example for us here. Listen to the language in Jesus's voice and the response of the disciples

Matthew 4:18-22 - **18**As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. **19**"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." **20**At once they left their nets and followed him. **21**Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, **22**and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Matthew 9:9 - As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. **"Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.**

Here's what we need to take away from this point.

- Like the disciples, Jesus is commanding each one of us to follow him. "Come, follow me"
- In that following, he tells us how we will be serving – "I will make you fishers of men"
- Our response should be immediate – "Immediately they put down what they were doing and followed him" When God is calling us and commanding us to serve him, we need to do it immediately.
 - It's interesting because in the middle of this story line, we have Matthew 8:18-22 and here's the story of someone who didn't know what immediately meant. **18**When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. **19**Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." **20**Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." **21**Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." **22**But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead." We can assume that the person desiring to follow Jesus never did follow Jesus because he was unwilling to follow immediately.

In Matthew 16, after Jesus told Peter that He will use him to build the church, we also find Jesus saying that even "the gates of hell will not be able to prevail against the church..."

- The people and culture understood the importance of "Gates" when Jesus talked about the gates of hell – they were familiar with the gates Jericho, and the gates of Jerusalem – and the gates of other places
- The gates were the place where some serious business would take place – the nobles of the city gathered there and held

court cases, they sold items, and they did much of their other business at the gates. The gates represented power and authority for the people of Jesus' time.

- And so when Jesus says that the gates of hell will not prevail what he was saying is that The gates of hell will be shut closed because the church has invaded the territory – the church is too powerful for satan!!!! When we work together, we have the might, power, authority, and everything that we need to advance the gospel.
- Jesus didn't come so that he would do everything. Jesus came to equip us to do the work of the kingdom.
- Our job, as Jesus has commanded us, is to be an assembled, called out people...from the darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9) for the purpose of advancing the kingdom of God and to kick down the gates of hell.
- When we are commanded to serve Christ, it is a summons for every person to come together because God has called us to a great work that will end in victory!

Friends! We can talk about revival, we can pray for it, and we can hope for it, but it will not happen until we raise our hands and say, "Sign me up! I want a part of this deal.....I don't want to just be a benchwarmer..I want to be a player. I want to participate with what God is doing.

My prayer for us today is this..... that each person will find a place of ministry where you can connect with what God is doing in the life of the church. I really believe that God will speak to you about an area of ministry that is especially designed for you.

Pray