

START

“I love Jesus, but do I need the church?”

I Peter 2:4-10

October 18-19, 2014

Introduction:

I want to welcome all our campuses worshipping across the Triangle this weekend. My name is Will Toburen and I work with the discipleship ministries of the church.

I know you, like me, are very grateful for the way that Pastor JD leads our church. He’s an incredibly gifted preacher and beyond that he’s incredibly wise. Some of the things I appreciate about him most is his humility, approachability, and sense of humor. I remember the first time I preached at the Summit...as I shared with him what I was about to preach he just gave me one piece of advice: “Sounds good...just don’t screw up!”

So, I figure the best way to ensure that doesn’t happen this weekend is to start the message with a quote from what may or may not be one of his favorite musical artists...Justin Bieber.

In an article written several months ago, Bieber was asked some questions about his faith and being a part of a church. *“A lot of people who are religious, I think they get lost. They go to church just to go to church. I’m not trying to disrespect them...but for me, I focus more on praying and talking to Him. I don’t have to go to church.”*

Many people think and believe just like Justin Bieber (whether they want to admit it or not) when it comes to their view of the church. They’ve wrestled with the question, “I love Jesus, but do I really need the church?” and come to the conclusion that they don’t.

Tod Bolsinger in his book “It Takes a Church to Raise A Christian” wrote: *“More than any before us, an American today believes “I must write the script of my own life: the thought that such a script must be subordinated to the grand narrative of the Bible is a foreign one. Still more alarming is the idea that this surrender of our personal story to God’s story must be mediated by a community of fallen people who we frankly don’t want getting in our way and meddling with our own hopes and dreams.”* (p.22-23)

So, as we continue our START series, I want to spend some time answering the question, “Does the church really matter?” So, if you have your bibles turn with me to I Peter 2 and follow with me as I read vs. 4-12.

Scripture Reading:

"As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture:

"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word as they were destined to do."

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy."

"Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."

This is the word of the Lord.

Prayer of Illumination:

The question, "Does the church really matter?" is a critical one. And if you talk to people you are going to find people all over the spectrum.

- You'll find some who say that your relationship with Christ is private and therefore you don't really need the church and the community it provides. There are any number of reasons people give for this, including:
 1. Christians are a bunch of hypocrites
 2. I've been hurt by leaders / others in the church
 3. Church doesn't care about the things I care about
 4. Too political / judgmental
- Others will say the church is valuable *if* there is some intrinsic value that is found or some personal felt need that is met.
- Still others will say church is vital for growth as a disciple and for reaching those who are far from God.

So, which one is it, and why? To find the answer I believe it's incumbent upon us to start by looking at the very nature of God. So, before we dive into I Peter 2, let's consider Genesis 1:26-27.

When we go back to the creation account in Genesis 1 God says, *“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness”*.

- There is so much that can expounded upon regarding the profound ways that we bear the image of God.
- But what I don’t want you to miss from this passage is that there has never been a time when God did not exist as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...from eternity past existing in perfect relationship with one another.
- So, to be created in the image of God is to be created for community. **In other words we can’t truly bear the image of God apart from community!** *“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; **male and female he created them.**”*

As Genesis 2 comes to a close we see a glimpse of what this is supposed to look like. Here we see Adam and Eve coming together as husband and wife, with the scripture recording, *“And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”* Man and woman are living here in perfect community with God and with one another.

But when Adam and Eve sin in Genesis 3 it not only fractures their relationship with God, but with one another. They immediately cover themselves, hide from God, and blame each other. They begin to love themselves more than anything else, which is exactly what each of us are hardwired to do.

But the beauty of the gospel is that God sent his own Son not only to reconcile us back to him, but to create a new community...a new family that reflects his glory, majesty, and worth. That’s what Peter is talking about here!

Look again with me at vs. 9, *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*

Look with me at the three ways Peter describes who the church is:

- **We are a ‘chosen race’**
 - By using the word ‘chosen’ Peter is reminding us that God is the one who has initiated this relationship with us and it’s not based at all on merit.
 - In fact one author said, “What makes you a member of this new race is not your blood lines and not your pedigree and not your family and not your racial stock...God’s people, a people are being formed now...based on God’s choice, his unmerited favor, his unmerited love.”

- But he goes further saying we are a chosen 'race' (add commentary here). D.A. Carson in his book, *Love in Hard Places*, wrote:
 - *"The church is...made up of natural enemies. What binds us together is not common education, common race, common income levels, common politics, common nationality, common accents, common jobs, or anything else of that sort. Christians come together...because they have all been saved by Jesus Christ and owe him a common allegiance...They are a band of natural enemies who love one another for the sake of Christ."* (p.61)
- When I see that there is nothing in and of myself that warrants the grace and mercy of God, I come to the realization that there is no basis for me to have any prejudice or sense of entitlement.
- This is one of the things I love about our church. Although we have room to grow in this area, by God's grace we are seeing people from different races, ethnicities, educational and socio-economic backgrounds sharing life together under the banner of Christ.
- But it's more than just people from different backgrounds gathering together for an event. It's people opening up their lives together, and living out the 'one another' commands of Scripture.
- The New Testament alone has 47 specific 'one another' commands. Here are just a few:
 - Be at peace with one another
 - Be of the same mind with one another
 - Bear with and forgive one another
 - Confess sins to one another
 - Through love, serve one another
 - Greet one another with a kiss (hopefully that won't become a church growth strategy for our student ministry)
 - Regard one another as more important than yourselves.
 - Pray for one another
 - Be hospitable to one another
- What's really beautiful is when these characteristics become the practice among people who normally wouldn't share life together.
- We are a 'chosen race'
- **We are a 'royal priesthood'**
 - Now for some of us this might seem a little strange, but all Christians according to the bible are considered 'priests'.
 - There are two things that are absolutely beautiful about this:
 - **First**, is to see that through Christ we have immediate access to God. We no longer need a human priest to mediate on our behalf. Christ has satisfied the wrath of God by laying down His life as the perfect sacrifice.

- Because we are clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ we can come boldly into the presence of God.
- Hebrews 4 (?)
- **Second**, is to understand that the role of the priest was to minister in the presence of God on behalf of the people. His role was not to bring God to the people, but to bring the people to God.
 - This is exactly what we are called to do as a 'royal priesthood'. We are called to pour out our lives as sacrifices for the glory of God and the flourishing of others.
 - This is what Paul meant in Romans 12:1 when he said, *"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."*
- Illustration: DDC school project
 - During ServeRDU worked with a local school to do much needed landscaping, paint picnic tables, fix sinks, fixed up the playground.
 - Here's the response for the school leadership: *"I would have replied sooner – but I've been busy helping pick up people's jaws from off the floor over here after seeing the amazing work...We are so humbled by the gracious, enthusiastic and skillful ways in which your community came together on our behalf and worked side-by-side with us for an entire day. In particular, we truly enjoyed everyone's company and spirit. We were so tired, yet so energized by the end of the day, that we decided we'd do it all again next week as long as we could work with all of those super fun people."*
- So the essence of a 'royal priesthood' is to be deeply involved in the world seeking to care for and minister both to other believers and those who are far from God.
- Let's contrast that with what Peter says next...

- **We are a 'holy nation'**

- The word 'holy' means to be 'set apart' or 'distinct'
- So, simultaneously we are called to 'deeply involved' (royal priesthood) yet 'distinct' and 'set apart' (holy nation)
- 'set apart' and 'distinct' means forming a new culture that has Christ as it's focus and allows the gospel to shape everything:
 - From money to sexual ethics
 - From Business to art
 - From politics to family

- This is what Peter is getting at in vs. 11-12, “*Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*”
- In my study this week I was reminded of a few ways in which the early church was ‘set apart’ and ‘distinct’ from their culture:
 - They didn’t go to bloodthirsty entertainment
 - They didn’t support abortion or infanticide
 - They empowered women in ways that were different from Greco-Roman society
 - They held to a biblical sexual ethic (meaning they viewed sex as intended for one man and one woman in the covenant of marriage)
 - They were radically for the poor
 - They mixed race and classes together
 - They believed Christ was the only way
- Tim Keller points out that when you look at this list you notice that some of the ways make them look incredibly liberal (empowering women, care for the poor, mixing races and classes) and some made them look radically conservative (views on abortion, sex, marriage, and view that Christ is the only way).
- So, being ‘set apart’ and ‘distinct’ is not about being ‘conservative’ or ‘liberal’ it’s about a community of believers displaying the power of the gospel in everyday life.
- By simultaneously being deeply involved in our culture while remaining set apart and distinct means that we will suffer. Peter was writing to ‘exiles’! We will be misunderstood. But as I read this week – we can lose the culture but we must never lose the gospel.

We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation!

Don’t miss this: When this is who the church is...this is what the church will do. We “*proclaim the excellencies of him who has brought us out of darkness into his marvelous light.*”

Key Point: We can only and truly display the excellencies of Christ in the context of community.

We proclaim the excellencies of Christ when through community we:

- Allow others to speak into our lives helping us to mature as believers (Discipleship happens in relationships)

- Displaying a 'new community' through living out the 'one another's' of Scripture
- Through our community bringing others into a deep and personal relationship with Christ.

None of which we can do apart from community!

Does the church really matter? I can't say it any better than Tim Keller: *"You can't know God, change deeply, or change the world apart from community."*

Being part of a community is hard and it often get's really messy. People let you down and disappoint, leaders sometimes fail and miss the mark, and at times misunderstood. But if it's in community that we bear the image of God, if it's in community that we proclaim the excellencies of God, then ultimately it's worth it.

Let me close with this:

1. For those of us who have repented of our sin and placed our faith in Christ, I want to ask, "Are you deeply committed to the church and opening your life to others?"
 - a. I'm talking about more than just coming to church and attending small group...I'm talking about letting people in.
 - b. Here's a few questions to ask yourself:
 - How many people know the specific places where you are susceptible to temptation?
 - How many people know the responsibilities that tend to overwhelm you?
 - How many people know the idols that most entice you?
 - How many people know the secrets of your past that still haunt you?
 - How many people know the reasons why you might doubt the goodness and power of God?
 - c. Another consideration is, how many of these questions could you answer of your closest friends.
 - d. Starting Point and SMALL GROUPS at Next Steps area.
2. For those of you who are skeptical: The good news of the gospel is because of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ we can now experience perfect community with our God. Perfect love, complete forgiveness, and joy everlasting.
 - a. And once we have experienced this we are now free to give ourselves to others without any expectation in return.

Does the church matter? It matters so much that Christ laid down his life for it. Through it we know God more deeply, grow as a disciple, and reach the world!

