

Me vs We

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[0 : 00] Having recited God's truth, I pray that only the truth would be spoken and only the truth would be heard. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. I invite you to be seated.

It's funny when you've been doing things the same way for 40 years, trying to remember that now the creed goes just after the sermon is a little bit difficult.

So we've been kind of following the evangelical practice for the last, well, at least we understand. Amy and I have been doing ministry elsewhere for about the last month and a half. But we've been going, taking a verse or two verses and expositing those particular verses.

There's a number of ways that we can go when we preach in the evangelical mode, the reform mode, expository preaching. You can go through entire books of the Bible, which I think is probably one of the most valuable ways to do it.

[0 : 58] But also one of the ways we can do it, which is also very valuable to kind of switch to, we want to switch stuff every now and then, is just to focus on one scripture. And really dig down deep, drill down deep and say, okay, what is the Holy Spirit saying through these passages that we all kind of know, they all kind of sit in our hearts, but maybe we can see them in a new way.

And so the passage that I'm going to be focusing on, if you want to turn to it in your Bibles, is 1 Peter 2, 9 and 10. I keep on saying 2 Peter, but 1 Peter 2, 9 and 10.

So it's a section, just two verses out of the epistle that we had read this morning. Now, recently I read about a phenomenon that I was not aware of, which is kind of funny because I grew up in the bush, as I like to mention.

And this phenomenon has to do with tree roots. I was not aware that when trees come together and their roots actually touch, there's a kind of fungus, in most cases, that grows on the tree roots that actually limits the amount of competition between those two trees.

And not only does it limit competition, but it actually binds the trees together and links them together so they'll share resources back and forth.

[2 : 15] And you can, they physically link together. This actually happens even with trees of different species. So you can have an evergreen and a maple tree, and they'll come together and they'll actually link their roots together.

And this substance, this fungus that grows there, what happens is, in many cases, when one tree has access to light, and another tree has access to water, perhaps just a little bit over there, and another has access to some sort of the nutrients that are in the ground, a special kind of nutrients, the trees will actually share, underneath the earth where you can't see, share these things back and forth.

And you'll have entire forests, entire forests, that are linked together and are sharing these resources. So I always wondered, how can a short little tree last in these big, huge forests?

It's because these big trees are actually sharing the sunlight, what they get from the sunlight. Now, I'm not a scientist, so someone here could probably tell you what that is. But they're sharing, they're sharing sunlight, let's just say, underneath in their roots.

And I like this image, because to me, it's a good image for how the New Testament speaks about the church. Now, we all see, you know, the surface here.

[3 : 30] But the way the New Testament talks about, and when Peter talks about this, this new vision of God's people, somehow, underneath, where it's really important in our lives as a church and as individuals, we are linked together and sharing resources back and forth that we're not even aware of.

That's how God in the New Testament wants us to see the church. Biblically, we're a network linked together, and under the surface, we're sharing back and forth. Christians need one another. Now, I don't usually like the term need. Okay, when you preach and you use the term need all the time, the term need all the time, it can become very legalistic. But I think the Bible makes it very clear.

Jesus himself walked in community. Okay, Christians need one another. I want to talk about that this morning. Our catechism, to be a Christian, and I speak about this quite a bit because I was actually very moved by the catechism, the network catechism.

One of the reasons I made the jump over to this denomination was I prayed my way through the catechism. If you haven't read it or prayed your way through it, I strongly recommend it.

[4 : 37] And when the catechism, our catechism, talks about the church, it says this, to be a Christian, says, the New Testament teaches me to view the church as God's covenant people and a family, as the body and bride of Christ, and as the temple where God in Christ dwells by his spirit.

It's a little bit different than the bad press that you'll read about the church. God's covenant people and family, the very body and bride of Christ, and the temple where God in Christ dwells by his spirit.

And when to be a Christian says that, it actually highlights 1 Peter 2, 9 and 10 as key passage that helps us understand what the church is.

And so I'm going to ask, if you haven't already, that's where we're going to turn to. And as was read this morning, I just want to reiterate it, but you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, 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. So, it's very, we're as a church used to reading from Paul.

[5 : 54] And reading from Peter, we have to get ourselves in a different mindset when we're reading anything from Peter than if we're reading from Paul. Paul does things what we would say properly. He starts with an idea, and he's very linear.

He'll start with that idea, then he'll just flush that idea out. Anybody who's read Romans, like he takes an idea, and then he just beats that horse till it's dead, then he moves on to the next idea, and he does it again.

And that's how Paul does it. But when we read Peter, completely different. He's not this highly educated guy like Paul was. For Peter, he exhorts, and in the middle of that exhortation, he'll stop, and he'll start talking about something else, then he'll kind of come back to that exhortation, and he's just back and forth, and he's all over the place.

What you catch in Peter is the spirit, and the excitement with which he's talking about, and the urgency of the message that he's trying to get to his people. And so, he's a lot of exhortation.

Now, that's a big Bible word. That's kind of a big theology term that we use. When he's exhorting, it's kind of like, it's like a mother at a football game, or Amy at a soccer game with the kids, urging their kids on, exhorting their child to do well in what they're doing.

[7 : 03] And so, what we get is Peter is actually exhorting his children in our passage. Our passage is interesting. It's actually, our passage is an exhortation, which is a departure from another exhortation that Peter's having.

So, that's why we stop and we focus on just 2, 9, and 10, because there's a whole lot of other stuff going on, but he says something really important within this kind of departure that it is that he's taken.

Now, outside sources confirm that Peter wrote this in Rome. Oh, my arrow did show up. Look at that. Do I have a thing? There we go. Up in Rome there. Okay? And it's probably two to three years before he's martyred is when Peter wrote this.

We know Paul saw the end coming. Right? And they were martyred around this. They were killed around the same time by the Emperor Nero. So, I'm pretty sure, we can be pretty sure, Peter saw the end coming too.

And so, when Peter's writing his letter as he is here to a people who are themselves oppressed, you've got a guy who knows the end's probably coming, and he's writing how to be a Christian when you're under persecution.

[8 : 11] That's what he's writing to. It gives weight to us when he speaks about faithfulness in tough times. And as it's highlighted here, he's writing the letter to what's called Asia Minor, which is right

across here.

This is modern-day Turkey. That's the Black Sea right there. And he calls this a dispersion. Okay? And the reason that is what they find in 62-63 AD when Peter writes this, I'm probably going to do that about four or five times, when Peter writes this, he's actually writing to Jewish and Gentile Christians who are spread right across that region.

Now, the reason that there's so many Jewish and Gentile Christians there is because they have fled other areas to get there. They have been persecuted in other areas, and this mixed bag of people is coming together in Asia Minor, right across into Asia, and they've come together, and they're trying to be the church, all these different people, in the midst of oppression they've had, oppression that's having, and oppression they can see coming, because Nero is nuts.

That's the context within which Peter is actually writing to them. The letter's destined for there. And he's speaking directly into their situation of suffering.

And what 1 and 2 Peter are is they're basically just stripped down, super practical letters on what it means to be a Christian. Because when you're writing to people who are in persecution, they don't want fluff.

[9 : 42] When I'm talking with my soldiers, and they've just come out of a foxhole, when they've just come out of Afghanistan, and they've seen the reality of the situation of war, they don't want fluff from me. They want the real deal.

And so that's what it is that Peter is speaking to these people, to his churches that are there. And he gives stripped down practical advice. This entire chapter, chapter 2, if you read the entire chapter, this part is about what it means to be a Christian.

What is the Christian life? In our passage, for our purposes this morning, we want to note that even though he's talking to a mixed bag of people along here, he's using, in particular, very Jewish terms for the church throughout the chapter 2.

He talks about Rome as the new Babylon. He talks about the church as God's new covenant people.

When he does this throughout the second chapter, I'm not going to bore you with it, but he uses direct quotes from Exodus. He uses quotes from Hosea within there that are kind of hidden in there. And what he does when he talks about the church as the new Jerusalem and Rome as the new Babylon, which is exactly where he is, he's using terms from Isaiah.

[10 : 55] He's using terms from Isaiah and he's trying to get them into the mindset of Isaiah itself. And in particular, we need to highlight the fact that he calls the church the new Jerusalem.

In verses 2, 9, and 10, that we are in, what I just read to you, are kind of that central passage, that central moment when he's talking about church as this new Israel, as this new people.

And what he's saying to this super diverse group along here, what he says is that the more we become rooted in our identity as that royal priesthood, the more we become rooted as God's chosen race, a holy nation, the more we glorify God.

The more we become rooted in our identity together as a people, the more we glorify God and that fulfills our very purpose for living. That's kind of the center of what Peter's message is.

Now, this matters. I think I've missed a whole bunch of slides. Nope. I get rolling and I forget to switch the slides when I go.

[12 : 04] This matters because we have trouble in our individualistic context understanding what it is that Peter's saying. Oftentimes, when I hear, and I know I've done this too, when I read this passage or when I hear people read this passage, they'll read it like this.

They'll look at it and go, you know, isn't this great? I am chosen. I am royal. I am holy. And Peter's kind of saying, well, yeah, I guess, but no, it's more that we are chosen.

We are holy. We are a royal priesthood. When he says that, there's a cultural dissonance, I want to say, with this verse for us.

When the ancients read the verse, when these folks read this verse, they saw everything in life, not just the Bible or not just these letters from the apostles.

In the ancient world, they saw everything through the lens of community. They saw everything through the lens of their family or through the lens of their community at large.

[13 : 20] whereas, what do we see everything through? What's in it for me? We're all about I, whereas they were more about community.

And so that's the lens through which this letter was meant to be written. God's chosen race, when Peter says, you are a chosen race, they saw right away their community. Because the last time I checked, there's no such thing as a one-person race. There's no such thing as a one-person people.

It's pretty obvious when you read it, but for some reason, we just focus on the big eye when we read this passage. Romans said that we're grafted together into the vine.

Now, I think it's pretty obvious that race is somehow innately important to us as people, as human beings.

[14 : 20] That, you know, we've always been in our history aware of race, oftentimes with pretty awful results. We've been like, okay, race is important.

It's a spiritual need we have to be grafted into this race. But if we don't know Jesus, then we start focusing on race like my race is better than your race. Or my nation is better than your nation. We end up with wars over races.

We end up with segregation. We end up with things like slavery around the world. We know that race is very important. And in this blind, leading the blind world now, I really don't think things are getting better.

We see people on all ends of the political spectrum leveraging race for their own ends. And it's just, it's disintegrating. It feels like, maybe not so much here in Canada, but around the world.

I think it's disintegrating even more. Because the world knows that there's this spiritual need to be a part of the race. But of course, without Jesus, you just try to fill it in whatever way that you can.

Race is important.

[15 : 20] It's an important need in our hearts, but not in the way that the world sees it. Part of the depth of our spirituality is realizing that we have been grafted together, the Bible says this in a number of places, into a new race.

Both Peter and Paul hammer away at that point. We're grafted together into a new race. And this has consequences for our spiritual formation.

I'm from a place called Halliburton. Anybody know where Halliburton is? Well, you do now because I just put a map up there. So if you go where Muskoka, everybody knows Muskoka for some reason, and you go kind of a Bancroft area or the valley, there's this void in between that no one really knows about called Halliburton.

I grew up right about there in the middle of that void. Now, we're a special country bumpkin kind of people. I was going to say we're not a race. Amy said, you are a race.

You're family. My family all lives within about 15 minutes of each other. I'm the only one that kind of moved out and got away from there. It's a very special kind of person. I'll put quotes around that.

[16 : 26] That comes from Halliburton. Okay? Now, I haven't lived there for 20 years. I joined the Army. I've been in the Army for 12 years now. You know, being from Halliburton is not so much a part of my identity anymore.

It's just kind of one thing that makes up who I am. And the reason I mention this is I think that's really how the world wants us to see our faith.

You know, kind of like we're free runners here and then there's all these different things that kind of make up who we are. Our ideas, our work, you know, our friendship, obviously social media. And being a Christian is kind of over here somewhere.

Right? It's just one little small thing. Just keep it over there, not up front, right out of the scene and don't make it too important. You're going to become one of those crazies. Right? That's how the world wants us to see our faith.

Kind of like me being from Halliburton or you being from wherever you're from. Just kind of one of those things that make up who we are. But the New Testament shows us and talks about the fact that the New Testament faith is that faith becomes the integrating factor.

[17 : 35] The ultimate integrating factor in our lives. Faith, when you come to faith in Jesus, if you don't know Jesus and you're feeling really kind of messed up right now, there's a reason for that. Faith is that ultimate integrating factor that sifts and sorts all of these things here.

Prioritizes them according to God's design for us. That's how God wants us to see faith. And that sorting and sifting is something, friends, that happens together.

That's what 1 Peter is talking about to us. Now, Peter uses terms a royal priesthood in a holy nation. Again, plural. He's actually returning to an idea.

If you look in your Bible there, you can see it here. 2 Peter 2.5. So he's just, he's made a point here where he said, let me read it from here. I'm going to hurt my neck if I keep doing that. You yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood. So he said that, then he kind of goes, he's come back to this idea again. He's, oh, wait a minute, I have to flush out that idea a little bit.

[18:43] Now, this is from the ESV, which is a translation we use here at the Messiah. When it comes to this verse, I actually prefer what the NEB says, and it says that we are being built into a spiritual temple.

This term, spiritual house, oikos, when you read it within the popular context of the ancient world, it just means house.

Within the Bible context, it almost always has to do with God's house. It almost always has to do with the temple. And so, Peter is saying there that you and I are being built together into a spiritual temple, and into God's new temple, which was the focus of worship at that time.

And the, it's not built out of stones and beautiful jewels and all kinds of gold. It's built out of the beauty of Christians' lives.

faith-filled, spirit-fueled lives. That is what God's new temple is built out of. God glorifies, and that, just like the temple itself, when we are built together, that glorifies God.

[19:55] And so, why is that important? Well, our verse, 2b, goes on, 2, 9b, goes on, says that we are built together for this reason, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

This term, proclaim, that he uses for proclaim here, doesn't happen again in the New Testament, but in the Psalms, this same term is talked about to be glorifying God.

It talks about worshiping. It's not so much evangelism here, that's part of it, but really, it has to do with worship and glorifying God. And the old English reformers said that this, said that the main purpose of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

So, when we are built together into a spiritual house, we glorify God, which helps us fulfill our chief end. I want you to recite this with me.

I'm going to ask, what is the chief end of man? And you're going to say, man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

[21:07] Man's chief end is to what? Glorify God. And? To enjoy him forever. Wow, look at that. I checked off on good preaching to get you involved with what's going on.

You know, according, this is super important. According to Peter, again, when we give up of ourselves and we join the church, we glorify God, which ends up fulfilling our chief end as individuals and as a community.

So we're not just giving up ourselves for some weird sort of reason. It's to fulfill what God has created us to do. The community of faith, the community of faith is a spiritual vehicle that allows us to meet our purpose.

I'm going to say that again. The church is the chief vehicle when it's spirit-powered that allows us to meet our chief end in God's purpose of glorifying God.

I just like this quote. The catechism says that man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever, but we shall then know that these are the same thing.

[22:18] Fully to enjoy is to glorify. C.S. Lewis. The more rooted, then, friends, that we become together in these identities that he talks about, priesthood, chosen race, a holy nation, the more we glorify God and fulfill our purpose.

And so this leaves us with something to do. I have a spiritual practice, a couple of spiritual practices for us to practice this week, okay, while you're enjoying the beach or whatever you do during the summer. Richard Foster said something I thought was really amazing.

He said, you know, the biggest need in the world and the biggest need in the church right now is not for more talented people. God doesn't need more, more, you know, amazing people with jazz hands up front.

What God needs is deeper people. God, friends, is calling us deeper as individuals and as a community to invest more and to become more, more engaged with our spiritual purpose.

So our to-do, that deepness happens within community, the Bible teaches us that, our to-do is, I really want you to ask yourself a question this week.

[23 : 29] What are the ways that my individualism, that's the water we live, we swim within, is our individualism. What is the way that my individualism is keeping me from fully engaging with Jesus?

What are the ways that my individualism are keeping me from fully engaging with the body of Jesus, which is his church? That's your spiritual question for meditation this week.

We're living stones and our beauty comes when we're together. So I'm going to leave you with that item for prayer and meditation. Just with a couple of examples of this. When Amy and I moved to Petawawa, as I mentioned, my military chaplain, we get posted all over the place.

It becomes difficult sometimes, you know, moving from church to church. And one of the things that when I was a new chaplain and we were posted at Petawawa that I really started to enjoy a little too much was church shopping.

Because you can go in, you can enjoy the worship and all that. But you know, when people started to kind of get on your nerves, you just moved on to the next one. But then I found out, he says, as a chaplain, wherever you go, you always run into people.

[24 : 38] And after a while, we spent years church shopping when we were up there. You'd be amazed at how many churches you can find when you really look hard. And we never really invested. Now, if I want you to think about, that's 2008, 2009.

Afghanistan's going on. I'm a chaplain in Petawawa. Do you think maybe a few important things were going on? Maybe some stressful stuff was happening as an army chaplain in Petawawa? I really think during that time, I suffered, my family suffered, we suffered spiritually because we weren't plugged in to a church.

It wasn't until we became plugged in to a church and were welcomed, Archdeacon Tim's church, St. Luke's, that we really started to remember how important it is to be actually plugged into a church. So when Amy and I came here to Ottawa and the bishop said, okay, which church are you going to choose? We come here, heard George preach, met all of you, and said, we're going to invest in this church. And we've been amazed that the, just the big ways and the small ways that the Lord has opened up ministry opportunities for us, community opportunities for us, just being plugged in right away, just diving in.

Because no church is perfect, friends, because we're in it. And we need to learn to dive in where we are and where God has placed us.

[25 : 56] That's the lesson that both Amy and I learned. God blessed that opportunity to serve. So that's a way that my own individualism, my desire to shop and find the church that I wanted, was getting in the way of my relationship with Jesus.

More in general, something that happens within our lives, you know, in this me first world that we live within, is our constant need to be first.

Like we live in a world, I mean I drove here, there's hardly anybody on the highway, but people are still just all over each other. In the cars, on the highway, in there, I'm not going to say I wasn't one of them, but we're just all over the place.

We live in a world where we hate to line up. It's a very me first. And one of the spiritual practices that was recommended to me was actually fasting from the need to be first.

A spiritual practice we can do is actually fast from the need to be first. You know, Jesus commented in our gospel in the context of me focus that the first and the last, the last are going to be first.

[27 : 02] Those who put themselves forward are going to end up at the end of the line. And so a spiritual practice is actually putting those words of Jesus into action. You know, I've tried this in my own feeble way and I'm going to admit a very feeble way.

I remember being on the road to work one day and, oh, I missed that one. That's a nice picture of the church. There we are. And OC Transpo one day did what OC Transpo does best.

The bus broke down. Right about carling and I was on my way into the downtown core here. So we got off to the side and I remembered for some reason it was by the grace of God because usually when I remember I'm fasting about something it's halfway through the chocolate bar and it's Lent. Like, oh yeah, I'm fasting from chocolate. I never know. Should I finish the chocolate bar and just go whole hog? Or anyways. But I remembered this time. I was at the back of the bus. Like I usually, everybody fights for those back seats.

I was at the back of the bus and I remembered, hold on, you're fasting from being first. So, and I'm a chaplain so I can explain that to my boss when I'm late. So, I'm just going to sit here and I'm going to observe.

[28 : 06] And there was this other guy that was kind of sitting beside me. I think we just kind of gave, he gave up and was just going to wait. But I observed when the bus pulled over and limped itself into the next stop, everybody got up and started jostling for position.

Like, and I mean jostling. And you could see some people who were a little further back and they were just, they were just on the edge. They were just about ready to lose their minds. And when those doors opened it was like the cattle, like who let the dogs out?

Everybody went out and people were jostling one another and I'm like, I just realized that would have been me. I'm not saying I'm any better because it was by the grace of God that that wasn't me.

And then I watched, I kind of came on after and I watched as, you know, the bus that was waiting for us was already like 90% full because in the morning there's never a bus that's not 90% full. People were just cramming themselves, yelling at each other to get on like, like loudly talking to each other to try to get on this bus.

Literally bodies up against the window like that. The doors closed and I, but for me, this is the point. I saw myself.

[29 : 09] I saw my love for my neighbor and I saw my Christian witness get on that bus because the me first attitude pervades my life just like it pervades yours.

It's the water within which we swim. And this is how fasting and spiritual practices can work. Jesus meets us and shows us and walks beside and I can just say, man, Lord, I'm sorry.

I'm sorry that that's, I'm not judging anybody like the Pharisee there. I'm saying, Lord, have mercy. By your grace, that's not me doing that to my neighbor. Now, the interesting end of the story is just as those doors closed, another bus rolled up which miraculously was only about like half full.

And the five of us that were left kind of sauntered onto the bus and sat down. I'm like, okay, thanks, Lord. That's a good lesson. Sometimes, sometimes God does that for us. You know, put yourself first.

What is it that, what is it that you're reaping when we sow that? What is it that I'm reaping when I sow that? Simple little practices like that, offering little things to God, help us walk with him and see throughout our day and then to allow Jesus' forgiveness to overwhelm us and to empower us.

[30 : 23] So, I'm going to ask you again, what are the ways that individualism is keeping you from fully engaging with your faith and will you walk with Jesus this week to allow him to show you and to make you into that beautiful creature that he wants us to be together?

Especially, friends, as pertains to this church. Emails are going out with opportunities to engage in this church every week. I see them as well as you do and I've been convicted this week.

I need to dive in. I need to be more involved and to struggle with Jesus. The more rooted we become together in our identity as a royal priesthood, as a chosen race, as God's people, a holy nation, the more we glorify God, friends, and we fulfill our purposes together.

Big finish. Okay? This is the end of the sermon. In World War II, the enemy conducted experiments on POWs, prisoners of war, to find out what is the best way to get someone to talk.

They found that the best way to get a soldier to talk or get anybody to talk was solitary confinement. You put someone alone for three to five days, they lose their community, they lose their sense of identity with others, and they spew like you wouldn't believe.

[31 : 47] all because they've been removed from their community. Any soldier will pretty much tell anything. Most men will tell anything. We need fellowship and we need community at a spiritual level.

That's why we need the body of Christ. We need our fellow believers because without it, when we become very easy prey for temptation, which is everywhere, around every corner, in the abandonment of our values.

Together, and then we become formed into the image of the world and the powers of the world. Whereas what Christ wants for you, what Jesus wants for me, is to become formed into his likeness together.

Let's pray. Loving God, you call us to be a royal priesthood. you call us to be a chosen race and a holy nation.

Help us, Lord God, to fully engage with one another. Help us to engage in our community and in worship and in praise and acts of service together so we can glorify you, enjoy you forever, together as a people.

[32 : 56] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.