June 13, 2021

Sermon 4

1 Peter 2:1-12

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Alright, open to 1 Peter 2:1-12. 1 Peter 2 and we’re going to be in the first 12 verses of this chapter. While you turn there, one of my favorite memories is when Sarah and I were in San Diego. That’s where we took our honeymoon. And to this day, if you were to ask me what one of my favorite meals is I would say fish tacos. Not just fish tacos in general, that’s a good meal, but I have more favorites above that. But, specifically, there’s a place in Del Mar, which is about ten miles north of San Diego, where Sarah and I had lunch one day on our honeymoon. It was a rooftop restaurant overlooking the ocean and I remember I got blackened mahi-mahi fish tacos. To me, they were amazing. I think we only got two and paid about fifty bucks a pop but it was worth it because it was somebody else’s money. That was the best part of the honeymoon--we had gift cards to everywhere. But, for me, in my mind those fish tacos were amazing. They tasted so good. But you know, you probably have something like that in your mind that you’d like to go back to, that you’re drawn to that experience—the taste, the goodness of that meal again. I would love to do it. But I know it’s not about the fish taco. If I went by myself, and sat on that same rooftop, and had that same place make blackened mahi-mahi fish tacos, I probably would be like, “Meh, it’s not quite how I remember it.” It’s more about the whole experience. It’s about being there with my new wife. We were newly married—not that I had an old wife. It was about being on our honeymoon and we were just enjoying that time together. Throughout that whole experience, we kept saying, “It feels like we’re living somebody else’s life.” We did—we were spending money left and right and we were going to fancy places. I was like, “Yeah, this is how other people live,” then we moved back to Andrews. It was awesome. But it was an experience and so often in my mind I think how one day it would be great to go back to San Diego with Sarah and basically relive that week.

In our text, Peter is going to pose a question and he’s doing it for emphasis but he’s going to say, “If indeed you’ve tasted that the Lord is good,” and then there’s all this fallout from that. Really, what he’s saying is, “since.” He’s using “if” to be emphatic. Of course, if you’re a believer, if you’re a child of God, if you’ve experienced what he laid out in chapter 1—if you’ve experienced that, then yeah, absolutely, you’ve tasted the goodness of God. He’s using taste because that’s visceral for us. We get that. He’s saying it’s the experience of knowing God. It’s the experience of having your soul purified, of being redeemed by the blood of Jesus. If you’ve experienced that then you know, yeah, God is good. How can I say God is good? Can I say it theologically, just based on facts? Absolutely. But more so, when we, the people of God, say that God is good it’s because we’ve tasted the goodness of the Lord. It’s because we’ve experienced it, initially at the beginning of our salvation and then all the way through. We know the Lord is good and it’s a goodness that keeps drawing us back for more, for more, never enough. I want to experience that goodness again, and again, and again. Hopefully, y’all feel the same way about the Lord and Sarah feels the same way about that week.

So, let’s dive in. I’m going to read the first 12 verses and then we’ll break it down. He says,

So…

Therefore…

…put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. 2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 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. 6 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.”

7 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,”

8 and

“A stone of stumbling,

and a rock of offense.”

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

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. 10 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.

11 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 12 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.

He starts with ‘therefore’ and he’s referring back to all the goodness that’s laid out in chapter 1, the goodness that the Lord has given us through salvation, primarily through the hearing of His Word, and that Word taking root in us and bringing us to salvation. I’m going to read from chapter 1 verse 22. He says,

Having purified your souls by your obedience…

Over, and over, and over again in the New Testament, especially in the New Testament but not limited to the New Testament, we see that faith is best demonstrated by obedience. Faith is best demonstrated by obedience; and unbelief and rejection of the Gospel is always displayed by disobedience. So, when he says, that you obey the truth he’s saying that you believed in it and it’s real because it produced the fruit of obedience.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love,…

A sincere brotherly love.

…love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; 24 for

“All flesh is like grass

and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers,

and the flower falls,

25 but the word of the Lord remains forever.”

And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

He says because of that…because of that…remove, put away, take off, and he’s using a term here like taking off dirty clothes. Paul uses the same thing in Colossians 3 when he says,

Take off, therefore…

…and he talks about all these works of the flesh. Here, Peter is doing the same thing but this isn’t some random list of sins. He’s very specific in what he says to take off, which should no longer have a part of our life, and that we need to be intentional, as believers, to be intentional that they no longer have a place in our life. Take these things off—and they’re this: malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander. He chooses those things because he just got done talking about the unity that we’re to have through brotherly love; that in the Church, as believers, we’re to love each other with a sincere love, from a pure heart, a heart that’s been redeemed by the blood of Jesus. The natural outflowing of that should be a sincere, real, pure love for one another. A love for one another that mirrors the love that Jesus has shown us; a selfless, sacrificial kind of love. That’s what we should have for one another. And he’s saying to take these thing off, why? Because they’re the opposite. They’re the opposite of that. In fact, if we allow these things to be in our life, all they will do is attack the unity that we’re to have. These things—malice, envy, slander, deceit—they attack relationships and destroy community. False teaching is definitely a danger in the Church—absolutely—but in all reality it’s nowhere near as dangerous as how we think and speak of one another. It’s a sobering thought to think that the most threatening thing to Red Oak is us. The thing that threatens our unity, and our witness, and our worship the most is what we think of one another, how we treat one another, and what we say of one another. So, he says put these things away.

Deceit. Doriani says,

This is inconsistency between belief and practice, between one’s inner life and outer life. It includes self-deception as well as deceiving others.

On one hand, it’s as simple as don’t lie to one another. That breaks down trust. But beyond that, he’s saying that what’s included in this kind of deceit is a self-deception that then bleeds over into then deceiving other people. It’s the idea of when we’re not really honest with ourselves in our pursuit of holiness. What we will see later in the passage is the passions of the flesh that we’re supposed to abstain from, be honest with yourself in your struggle against those things so that you can be honest with your brothers.

Hypocrisy—the opposite of sincerity. Envy. Sam Storms says,

This points to a desire…

This one’s going to hurt. Are you ready? It’s going to hurt.

Envy is a desire for some privilege or benefit that belongs to another together with resentment that another has it and you don't.

We know that. Listen to what he says.

Envy is the fruit of dissatisfaction with God.

Envy is the fruit of dissatisfaction with God.

If God were truly enough for you, you wouldn’t feel the need to have what others enjoy.

It goes beyond physical possessions. It includes physical possessions—it’s not less than that—it’s just more than that. Typically, it has to do with how other people view. Maybe it’s your brother in Christ and you’re jealous of the way that people respect that person, or listen to that person, or esteem that person, and you’re envious of that. What you’re communicating is that God isn’t enough, that you’re dissatisfied.

Slander is most often motivated by the desire for revenge and self-enhancement, often driven by a longing to deflect attention from our own failings by shining light on someone else through slander. We may be able to deflect attention from our own darkness. That’s slander. Gossip is when you spread things about people and maybe they’re true. They’re probably true but you’re not doing it in a way for their edification or the good of the Church. You’re exposing their sin in a way to condemn then in somebody else’s eyes. That’s gossip. Slander is when you’re just speaking evil against somebody and it’s not even true. You’re looking for things to say negative about somebody to somebody else so that they think the same way about them. And do you know who’s really bad at this? Listen… Just kidding. Some of you scooted forward on your seat. “Oh, yeah, tell me.” No, that’s the point. Don’t do that. That’s slander and it’s bad.

We all have these things and in our flesh we will be guilty of all these things. That’s why Peter goes out of his way to say, “Take these off.” He’s painting this beautiful picture of how the Word of God has taken root in our souls and it’s purified us. All of us have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus so that unites us more than any other thing in this world that would give us identity or that we would associate with anybody else over. We have the blood of Christ so we should love one another. He knows that the greatest threat to that is malice, envy, slander, hypocrisy, deceit, so take those things off. We have to be intentional and what is the remedy? Thanks for asking. He says it right here,

2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.

Most translations here will just go ahead and say, “…the pure spiritual milk *of the Word,…”* because that is absolutely what he’s talking about in context that flows from chapter 1 through right here. He’s talking about desiring in the way that a baby desires milk; that we would desire the Word of God in that way. Now, if you’re familiar with what the writer of Hebrews says at the end of chapter 5, this is different from the admonition that he’s giving. The writer of Hebrews is really rebuking the Church and saying, “Man, y’all need milk, not solid food.” He’s rebuking them because they’ve been believers for a while and he’s saying, “Y’all are acting like a bunch of babies.” The rebuke is, “You need to go back and learn the ABC’s of the Gospel again,” because what they haven’t been doing is they know the Gospel but they haven’t been applying it to their life and he’s calling them out on that. He’s saying, “I want to go into deeper truth but you’re not ready to hear that because you’re not obeying the truth that you know.” That’s not what Peter is saying here. What Peter is saying here and what he’s drawing our attention to is the longing. This is for all believers of all time of any spiritual maturity. None of us mature past this. Past what? We should desire and long for the Word of God the way that an infant longs for its mother’s milk. We should never get over that. We need it. This is the remedy. How do we take off all these ugly things that would cause disunity and destroy our witness? Long for the Word of God. Long for it, be nourished by it. That is your strength. That’s the sustenance that keeps you alive, keeps you growing. He says that,

… that by it you may grow up into salvation.

So, the way that Peter primarily talks about salvation so far in 1 Peter, when he’s using that term ‘salvation’ he’s not talking solely about the initial stage of salvation, which is typically what we do. When we say, “When did you get saved?” we’re talking about when did you become a Christian and when did you start following Jesus. But a lot of times, New Testament writers, when they’re talking about salvation, they can be talking about the whole trajectory of salvation that, yes, has a definitive starting point, and then it progresses and you’re to progress in that salvation, and it has a consummation that we call glorification. So, redemption, then sanctification is you’re being made more like Jesus, and this terminology, as you’re growing up in salvation, to an appointed end where you are one day glorified in Heaven with Jesus where you will be like Him because you will see Him as He is. You’ll no longer have the potential to slander, to be hypocritical, to envy. That will be removed because you will once and for all be made like Jesus. So, here he’s using it in a sense of what happens, as in you need to grow up into your salvation. You need to continue to grow and how you’re going to do that is by longing for and not being satisfied with anything other than the pure milk of the Word of God.

I would say, for the original audience, this primarily would have meant during their corporate meeting. So, we need to pause and think, and we should go immediately to personal Bible study, memorizing Scripture, meditating on Scripture individually; we should go there and we’re going to, but we don’t need to skip over this step. We need to think about who originally received this admonition from Peter. I have I don’t know how many copies of the Word of God at my house, let alone on my phone. I am not hurting for access to the Word of God. But think about this church and they probably had Old Testament scrolls that were available because there was, no doubt, a synagogue somewhere nearby and some of the believers in that church were probably Jews who had access to that, and they may have had some letters of the New Testament before they received this one, so they were probably very limited and there were probably not enough copies to go around to have what we’re blessed to have—the finished, full revelation of God that we call the Bible. So, what I want to emphasize is what would have been most prevalent in their minds when they’re thinking, “Oh, I need to desire the Word of God?” The first place their minds would have gone was the corporate assembling together of the body of believers, when they’re meeting together with the people they’re supposed to love sincerely, and together hearing the Word of God, as then preached by the men that God had called to rightly handle the Word of God in their local body. I bring that up because I think we’re so quick to see it in our context and we’re very individualistic in our thinking and we’re quick to go, “Yeah, this is good. You need to do this but you need to be studying your Bible.” Yes, that’s part of this but let’s not overlook the importance that the New Testament, and specifically this passage, is putting on us coming together to come under the authority of the Scriptures, to come under the authority of hearing the Word of God read, and preached, and applied.

God caused us to be born again by His Word and now Peter tells us that this Word through which we receive new life is the same Word that will sustain us through the time of our exile and cause us to grow into the salvation we are looking for at the revelation of Jesus Christ at the end of time. Notice that the God who initiated our salvation also initiates our growth. This so mirrors what God has done in creation. God spoke the universe into existence, right? He created everything by His word and then the Bible tells us that He sustains everything by the word of His power, not just that He keeps it afloat and He’s juggling it, like keeping it going, but it’s that He’s orchestrating all of space and time, all of human history. He is moving everything to its appointed end and He’s doing that in creation, and what we are learning about the Word of God is its role in our salvation as well. The Word of God was instrumental in the beginning of your salvation, when God rescued you and He brought you out of darkness into light, and it is just as instrumental now, as God is making you from one degree of glory to another, more, and more, and more like Jesus, until the day of Jesus when you will be made like Him.

So, he says again, “If you’ve tasted that the Lord is good,” and we said that is to emphasize the point that we know, we know He is good. From Psalm 34:8, which we read together at the beginning of the worship service, Peter borrows this from David, as David is talking about the goodness of the Lord because the Lord delivered him from a physical threat. So, Peter is using it in a “how much more?” If David was saying, “I’ve tasted the goodness of the Lord” because he was saved from an enemy here on Earth, how much more for us who have experienced eternal deliverance?

Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!

Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!

We know the goodness of the Lord through His Word, through the salvation that it has brought to us, and the ongoing sanctification that He’s doing in us by His Word.

So, Peter transitions now into another metaphor and he says this.

4 As you come to him, a living stone…

So, as you come to Jesus, and this carries the idea of a continuous coming to Jesus. This is that in our relationship to Jesus this should be our normal way of life, in corporate meeting, personal Bible study, meditating on, memorizing the Word of God, spending time with Jesus.

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 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.

He’s reminding us of the Temple in Israel. In the Old Testament, where God gave instruction to Moses and then to the Jews that followed him, to one day, in Jerusalem, build a temple in a specific location where God would meet with His people. We know that in the Temple was ultimately the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was and that’s where God was to dwell. Then, He provided for the people priests from one tribe that would serve before God in the Temple. The priests’ role was to represent the people before God and to be able to go before God on behalf of the people and offer certain prayers and blessings, to ask for forgiveness, and to make sacrifice, and to offer the blood of bulls, and lambs, and goats for the atonement of sin, for the covering of their sin, so that God could remain in covenant fellowship with the people, and so that God could draw near to the people.

As they would do this, year in and year out, we ultimately know that was all a picture, it was a shadow, of the reality that Jesus would fulfill. So, what he’s saying is that he wants us to picture that in our mind and go, “Just like that Temple had to be constructed and built, and then God dwelt in that Temple and blessed the people through that, and through the people the nations, that ultimately the real Temple, the new Temple, is built on Christ. With the original Temple and all ancient construction the foundation was set based on the cornerstone. That was the most important part of the building process, it was having a right, and good, and perfect cornerstone to build upon, right? We just sang about this. We sang an awesome song and sang that Christ was the cornerstone. That’s everything, because if the cornerstone is off, or isn’t perfect, or is flawed, cracked, or can’t sustain, it doesn’t matter how precious are the materials that you use to build on it, it doesn’t matter how beautiful it looks in a moment, it’s not going to stand. It won’t withstand a storm and it won’t withstand time. It’ll crumble and it’ll fall. So, what he’s saying is that Jesus is our cornerstone; He’s this living stone. The foundation of the new Temple where God dwells is the reality that Jesus is a living stone. He is resurrected from the dead never to die again and by His resurrection we have this foundation that we then are all being built on. We’re the Temple of God.

Pause, this is important. We have to be so mindful of not vertically transferring our presupp….. That’s nerdy, let me start over. We don’t need to see Scripture through our own preconceived ideas. We need to understand that if we are not careful we will impose our individualistic mindsets on Scripture. We’re not supposed to just see me or you when we read this. We’re supposed to see us—us like big “C” Church, universal Church. That’s the main picture but then the application is for us, the local Church. We are the dwelling place of God. Now, is it true that as an individual believer that the Holy Spirit dwells in me? Yes, and in that sense then I’m like the Temple of the Lord. The Holy Spirit dwells in me because I’ve come to Him in repentance and faith. But what Peter is pointing to in the weight of this passage is that when we come together we are being built up as a spiritual house where the Lord dwells. There’s a unique and special thing that happens when we gather together, when we’re together. We come underneath the Word of God and the Spirit of God is with us and He is meeting with us—listen to me—in a more intimate way than He did in the stone Temple in Jerusalem on the Day of Atonement when the high priest would enter in before the Holy of Holies, before the Ark of the Covenant. There’s something more special happening here because of the perfect work of Jesus being complete. Jesus ultimately is the High Priest who went into the real Holy of Holies in the heavenly places before the throne of God and shed His blood and put His blood on the real altar so that not just a picture of atonement happened but real satisfaction of God’s wrath happened toward us because Jesus’ blood was the perfect sacrifice. And because of that, when we’re together we are the Temple of the Lord. The Lord is meeting with us. Amen. Amen, right? It’s good news. This building is living because its constantly growing with each and every conversion, with each and every salvation, as each and every eternal soul is redeemed, and the new and true Temple of God grows.

We are to offer spiritual sacrifices. He says we’re a holy priesthood. In a minute, he’s going to say that we’re a royal priesthood, that we’re priests of the King of kings. We’re a holy priesthood but we don’t come here to offer the blood of anything; Jesus has done that. The once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus was perfected but what that’s done is it’s freed us all to be priests. That means we all get to go before God consistently and offer sacrifices, offer prayers, and pray on behalf of one another, to pray on behalf of the lost world around us. Just like those priests were to represent the people before God, we still go—as priests, you and I should still go before God on behalf of other people, on behalf of our brothers and sisters, on behalf of those who are lost and without hope.

He says, chosen and precious by God in His sight but rejected by men. This was true of Jesus in His day, right? Jesus was rejected. By and large Jesus was rejected by those who should have recognized Him, submitted to Him, and worshipped Him. But He was rejected and the same is true now. Listen to what Peter goes on to say. Verse 6,

6 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.”

7 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,”

8 and

“A stone of stumbling,

and a rock of offense.”

He’s saying that nothing has changed. By and large, people are going to reject Jesus. The Jews of His day, following with the metaphor, they said, “I’m not going to build my house on that cornerstone. We’re not going to build our place of worship on Jesus. We reject Him. He’s not perfect. He’s not sufficient. He won’t hold it up.” That’s what they said to Him then and that’s how people view Jesus now. They reject Him. So, now, those of us who are being built into this house, those of us who are children of God, we share in that rejection. The world is going to reject us. If we say, “Yes, Jesus is my cornerstone,” if we actually take what we just sang outside of these walls to the world around us, yes, they’re going to reject us for that. There’s going to be shame involved. And what he’s saying is, “No, no, no. That’s all going to get turned around. Yes, the world rejected Jesus but in God the Father’s eyes He is chosen. He is precious.”

So, let me ask you, Red Oak. Which is more important to you? It’s clear what was more important to Jesus. Despised, rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. We esteemed Him not. He embraced that, why? Because in God’s eyes He was chosen, He was precious. It was God’s plan. What Peter is saying is that we share in that, so right now, right now, we may share in that rejection. But what’s more important to you? The approval and the acceptance of men who don’t love Jesus, who reject Jesus, or to be seen as chosen and precious in and through Jesus Christ? Yeah, it’s a no-brainer in here. That’s why it’s so important that we come here and we do this together, so that when we’re out there and we feel the weight of that rejection we don’t buckle. Because this life is but a vapor. It’s but a vapor. It’s short. He’s saying that on the day of visitation, those same people who will shame you now, speak evil of you now—on the day that Jesus returns you’ll be the one with honor and they’ll be the one in shame. And you know what they’re going to do? They’re going to glorify God because of your good deeds. That’s how he ends this section of Scripture. Do you see it?

12 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…

When?

… on the day of visitation.

The day of visitation. The day of judgment. Lord willing, they’ll do it before then. That’s our hope. That’s why we do good deeds. That’s why we declare the excellencies of our God and Savior. So they can see Jesus now and come to Him now. But whether on that day or the day of visitation, they will glorify God.

He says,

They stumble because they disobey the word…

Their unbelief is being manifested by their disobedience.

…as they were destined to do.

Just like earlier, we rejoiced in the reality that God has elected and chosen us, and by His sovereign hand He saved us from sin and death. We recognize that even those who reject the Gospel, they don’t reject the Gospel and somehow forfeit God’s plan for their life, they don’t somehow throw God’s plan aside, they don’t frustrate God. But we see that God is sovereign and supreme in all things even when men reject Him.

Verse 9,

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession,…

Here, Peter is borrowing from Exodus 19:5-6, that says—this is God speaking to the Jews as they become a nation – ,

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

So, before we are the new Temple, here we are the new people of God. Listen to what he is saying. This is from Juan Sanchez’s commentary.

Peter described the Church as the new Temple of God built on the foundation of Jesus. Now, he identifies the Church as nothing less than the new Israel, restored and renewed on the basis of the new covenant and called to be a display community that points the world to the glory of God and the joy of His kingdom, with both our lives and our lips. In other words, the Church is not incidental to God’s plans. It’s essential to them. He has not given you the Church to fit your plans and priorities. Listen, He has given you to the Church to serve His plans and priorities.

He’s saying we’re now like Israel. Over, and over, and over again, especially in the Psalms, God says, “I’m putting you on display as my people so that the nations will be drawn to me,” for the hope of the nations of this world. That is now the Church. We should declare the excellencies of God with our lips and live out the Gospel in such a way that people are drawn to the glory of God now. What Peter is tying this all to—let’s not forget that how we best do that is the way that we love one another in the Church. We don’t slander, we’re not hypocritical, we don’t lie to one another, we’re not malicious in our attitudes and actions toward one another, but from a sincere heart we love one another and build each other up.

I talk to a lot of pastors, a lot of youth pastors. That’s primarily what I do at camp. So much of the baggage, and the hurt, and the dysfunction comes right here. This is real; this isn’t theoretical. God has been so gracious to Red Oak. We’ve had very little issues. Things have been handled and it’s been painful at times but God has been overwhelmingly kind to us. But we can’t coast here. We’ve got to be vigilant. Because what we see over, and over, and over again with churches that come and that are hurting is that this takes place. Here’s primarily my takeaway—this is my observation—that oftentimes those who complain, those who gossip, those who slander, those who are malicious, those who cause divisions, are people who are not serving. They’re just consuming and they become dissatisfied and they become envious and that manifests itself in the way that they talk about other people in the Church and, at some point, leadership. I think the remedy for that is to desire the Word of God. Desire the Word of God, intensely desire it, and love your brothers in Christ. How? Get busy serving. Serve. People who are busy serving the Church seldom have the time to criticize it. People who are serving alongside their brothers and sisters rarely fall into the trap of slandering them. God has given each of us a gift and a measure of faith to serve this body. We should each pray for clarity as to what that gift is and how we can use it to serve. This is our commitment to each other because this is God’s plan for us. Isn’t that encouraging? Let me encourage you. God has uniquely given each one of us—He’s given you—a specific gift and a measure of faith to serve this body, to serve Red Oak, in a way that really no one else is gifted to do. That should encourage and motivate you. You have a role to play in my sanctification that really no one else can fill. I have a role to play in your sanctification that no one else is going to fill, and the Holy Spirit empowers us to do that. It’s not all about having some role on a Sunday night, onstage. This happens in the nitty-gritty, relationship level, hands getting dirty when we are involved in each other’s lives. The spiritual gifts that the Lord has given you are then activated by the Holy Spirit as a need in somebody else’s life is made known through the relationship and you meet that need. If we’re doing that, if we’re preoccupied with that, if we’re praying for how God can use us in somebody else’s life—how do you do that?—How do you love somebody that intensely, that deeply, and then turn around and slander them to somebody else? That’s a lot harder to do. You are a lot more aware of, “Why did I say that about him? I love him. That’s my brother. That frees you. If you’re serving somebody in that way, it frees you to see the grace of God in their life instead of their sin and shortcomings. So, let’s be vigilant here. I’m thankful for Red Oak. Hear me, I’m thankful for this church. Either I’m right or I’m living in blissful ignorance but I don’t think this is a cancer in our church, but let’s stay healthy. Let’s keep growing here. Let’s keep praying and seeking the Lord in how we might love each other more and serve each other better.

There is so much still to go. Listen to this really fast. He says you’re a chosen race. This is so good—I’ve got to read this from Sam Storms.

This kind of “race” has nothing to do with ethnicity precisely because this race is comprised of every ethnicity![[1]](#footnote-1)

It is a spiritual race. This is our identity. Our identity together, big “C” Church and little “c,” our local body. This is our identity. We are a chosen race. It has nothing to do with ethnicity precisely because this race is comprised of every ethnicity. It is a spiritual race, a chosen race, defined not by color or culture but by creed. This race is defined by the One in whom we believe, Jesus. The Church in America needs to hear this.

Listen to me. We need to identify with each other based on our identity in Christ, not our ethnicity, our ancestry, our political alignment, or social agendas. We need to unite in our common salvation and calling to serve God through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our past sins do not define us. The sins of our fathers do not define us. The experiences of this life do not define us. What has been done to us does not define us. Our identity in Christ is the only thing that defines us. Everything else is temporary. Everything else fades away. Who we are together in Christ is forever. We have every reason to be united. We have every reason to love one another well and do it for all of eternity. That is who we are. We’re a royal priesthood, a holy nation. We’re distinct from the world, set apart to serve God, so that the world might see God through us. We are God’s possession. It’s not so much about who we are but whose we are. That seems really wise, doesn’t it? Somebody else said it and I stole it. Listen again. It’s not so much about who we are but whose we are. We belong to Jesus. We are blood-bought and we belong to God. We are His possession. That is our identity. Who are we? We are Christians. We are those who were lost but have been found. We are those who were blind but now see. We are those who were dead but now are alive. We are those who were sinners but now are saints. We were slaves of sin but now we are slaves of righteousness in Christ. We were in darkness but now we are in the light. We belong to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. That’s who we are. So, he says, you’re sojourners, you’re exiles, you’re pilgrims here. This isn’t your home; you don’t belong here.

Look,

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

We don’t belong here. We’re exiles. He quotes Hosea right before this and he alludes to Hosea where God was telling His people, because they were unfaithful and they were demonstrating their unbelief, He was saying, “You’re not going to be my people. You’re not going to experience my mercy. But the day will come when I’ll restore you and you will be called my people and you will know my mercy.” And Peter is saying, “Surprise, that’s you! It’s not about ethnic Israel but it’s about all those who come through Jesus Christ. You are God’s people. You have experienced His mercy. So, live like pilgrims, live like exiles. Don’t succumb to the passions of the flesh but recognize them for what they are and take them off. How are you going to do that? Desire the Word of God, look forward to this meeting, and come expecting to meet with God, to meet with His people, to learn His Word, and grow. Grow up in your salvation as we love one another and represent Jesus to a lost and dying world.

So, here’s the application. I encourage you to examine yourself to see if you have any of these attitudes, thoughts, or actions that would cause division in this body. That’s healthy. We should all do that. Examine yourself to see if you identify more with this world than Christ and His Church. Do you identify more with a group of people based on something other than the blood of Jesus, whether that’s as superficial as skin color or political agenda or alignment? It’s false, and it’s temporary, and it’s hollow. It’s a false salvation. How can we individually—and we should ask this question—how can we individually and corporately better proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light?

Pray with me.

1. <https://www.samstorms.org/enjoying-god-blog/post/my-post-4th-of-july-reflections> (June 20, 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)