

Here/There—Church

I grew up in the church. My dad was a preacher. My grandfathers had been preachers who became seminary professors. I had uncles who were preachers. I had aunts and uncles on the mission field. Church was indelibly engrained on my childhood.

As a baby I was passed around like a football from church lady to church lady. My childhood was filled with youth groups, church camps, and VBS's. We were there whenever the church doors were open, and even when they were closed, I was often there with my father. The church was my playground.

Most importantly, it where I first fell in love with Jesus. It's where I first loved songs of praise. It's where I was baptized into Christ, or as I said it as an 8 year old— I was bapitized. That relationship has been tested and tried over the years, but it has carried me through everything.

I loved the church. I love the church. I love this church.

I'm so tired of people saying, "I love Jesus, but I can't stand the church." Jesus loves the church. He gave his life for the church. He's coming back for the church. He sees her as his beautiful bride. How it must break his heart when we say she is ugly. He wants us to love his church too.

We're in a series from 1 Peter called *Here / There*. It's all about how as Christians we are a part of two different worlds. We are a part of this world HERE and we are a part of another reality THERE. We're exploring this question of how do we live two places at once? And this question of how do we live HERE and THERE cannot be answered without the church. Because, it is the church that connects us simultaneously to HERE and THERE.

Show Picture of Blind Men and Elephant

What is the church? There's a well-known fable about some blind men and an elephant. Each blind man describes the Elephant based on his individual experience with the Elephant.

One touches the side of the Elephant and declares that the Elephant is like a wall!

One touches the tusks and declares that the elephant is like a spear.

One touches the trunk and declares that the elephant is like a snake.

One touches the elephant's leg and declares that the elephant is like a tree.

One touches one of the elephant's ears and declares that the elephant is like a fan.

The sixth one touches the elephant's tail and declares that the elephant is like a rope.

Like these men we define the Church based on our individual experience with the Church.

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To some people the Church is a place. It's a building at a certain address.

To some the church is an event. It's a scheduled activity that takes place every week. Church starts at 10 am on Sunday and stops about 11:15.

To some people the Church is a club. Church is all about membership. It exists for the benefit of its members. If it doesn't give its members what they want, then it isn't doing its job.

To some people the Church is a business. It's run like a business. The pastor is more of a CEO, and success is determined by the bottom line.

To some people the Church is a Health Club. The church provides a series of services and programs to enhance one's life. It's all about personal improvement.

To some people the Church is a drive-in theater. Show Picture.

A Florida church meets in a former drive-in theater. Ever since 1958 congregants at Daytona Beach Drive-In Christian Church may wear swimsuits as they listen to services amplified through theater speakers attached to car windows. About 800 people attend services each Sunday, 1,500 during peak tourist seasons. Robert Kemp-Baird, the minister of Drive-In Christian Church, delivers the sermons from a balcony. Ushers move among the cars to take up the collection, and worshipers who particularly enjoy a solo or choir song toot their horns instead of clapping.

Honk if you love Jesus! Hit the car wash for a quick baptism! This is a church that literally sits in idle.

But how does God see the church? In 1 Peter 2 we learn that to God the church is a special people being built into something special.

1 Peter 2:9 says,

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Did you hear that? We are chosen. We are special. What does it mean to be God's special possession? It begins back up in the beginning of chapter 2. A special people is a different people.

I. A Different People.

Being with Christians, around Christians, among Christians should be different than being with anyone else, and in a good way. Listen to what Peter says in 1 Peter 2:1-3

So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.

If you are a Christian, you are to be different, because you are God's special possession. You talk differently. You have a different attitude. You have different ambitions and longings.

Last week we celebrated our mothers, and a good mom has a way of making their kids feel special. My mom would remind me that wherever I go I carry two names. My mom would say, "Remember, you're a Raymond." She was telling me that my name was my reputation. My name has value. All the good and bad I've done is bound to my name when it is spoken.

In Kissimmee, FL, there is an Insurance Agent by the name of William Pancake. I wonder if his mom ever told him, "Remember, William, you're a pancake. Never waffle on the truth."?

My mom would also remind me that I carry another name. I'm a Christian and I carry the name of my Lord and Savior. She would say no only remember who you are, but also remember whose you are.

Peter here identifies some of the things that make us different as God's special possession. The church is a different people whose lives are to be free of certain things:

A. Malice

-Wanting bad things to happen to people. Wishing ill on someone else. We are to be defined by love and grace.

B. Deceit

-Lying. Spinning things in such a way that causes people to believe something that's not true. We are people of truth because we belong to a God of truth.

C. Hypocrisy

-It literally means to wear a mask. Pretending to be something you're not. We are to be real, authentic, genuine.

D. Envy

-We understand this one, don't we? You got it. I want it. But envy isn't just wanting what you got. It poisons my attitude toward you because you have it and I don't. I harbor a bitterness and resentment toward you because you have something I want.

E. Slander

-This is saying things about someone that are not true to make them look bad and make you look good.

We are to be a different people. Our lives can't be driven by the same things that drive everyone else. When it comes to all these old attitudes we need to put them away. There's going to be times where we think these things. There's going to be times where we'll feel this way, but we need to put it away.

The term Peter uses here was often used of clothing. This was clothing that you would take off and put away. You don't wear it anymore. It gets shoved to the back of the drawer. It gets lost in the dark reaches of the closet. It's tossed in the Goodwill box. You put it away because you don't wear that old thing anymore. That's what we are to do with these old attitudes that aren't to define us anymore. We take them off and put them away.

II. A Different Longing

Peter switches from the negative to the positive. Instead of defining us by what we don't have, he defines us by what we long for. He tells us in verses 2 and 3:

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

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What is this pure spiritual milk Peter's talking about? You can't go down to Price Cutter and buy a carton of spiritual milk. It's this (Hold up your Bible). You have it on your shelf. It sits on your night stand. You carry it in your pocket. It's an app on your phone. In the Bible, milk is the simple, basic truths of Scripture. The meat of the word represents the deeper truths of Scripture, those things that are harder to understand and require some maturity to grasp.

Peter says that the way we grow up as Christians is by feeding on the pure, spiritual milk of God's word. In fact, he says we need to crave it like babies. People have all sorts of cravings. Some of us crave coffee. Some of us crave chocolate. Some of us crave ice cream. Some of us crave spicy food? Some of us crave all of the above. But do you crave God's word?

Do you crave truth of Scripture? If you said "yes," how much Scripture did you read last week? We need to crave God's word like a little baby craves milk. Rebecca, what does Gracie do when she's hungry?

Think about how different your life would be if you craved God's word like you crave caffeine in the morning. The truth is we need God's word more than we need chocolate, more than we need salt, definitely more than we need sugar, but we don't desire it the same. As Christians we cannot grow without God's word. We are as dependent on Scripture as Gracie is on her bottle. Our spiritual maturity depends on it.

Let me give you some quick signs of spiritual maturity.

A. Sin less

No one is perfect, but—growing Christians—don't sin as much as they used to.

A baby with spaghetti all over his face is cute. A 40-year-old man with spaghetti all over his face is an embarrassment.

B. Self less

Babies are by necessity selfish. They don't know better. It's all about them and it has to be all about them, or they don't survive.

The more we mature in Christ, the less it is about us and the more it's about others.

C. Stress less

Babies are so dramatic! Crying all the time. They are always 2 hours from starvation or from needing a clean diaper. They are always needing something, and when they don't get it when they want it, it's the end of the world.

It's to be expected when you're a baby, but do you know any teenagers like that? Do you know any adults like that? When you're older, it's just plain ugly.

The more a person grows in Christ, the less they worry about stuff? Things that less mature Christians get bent all out of shape about, more mature believers, shrug their shoulders and say, "Oh, well. God's got this."

Why? It's an indicator of spiritual growth. It's someone who understands their place and position in Christ. As a church we are a different people who have different longings, and finally we have. . .

III. A Different Purpose

Another thing that makes us God's special possession is that he has a special purpose for us. Last week we talked about holiness and how holy means to be set apart. We have been set apart for a special purpose, and that purpose is that God is building us into a spiritual house. Listen to 1 Peter 2:4-8.

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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.

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Peter says that we are living stones. In those days buildings were built out of rocks. Peter is saying every one of them has a place and a purpose in this house God is building into something. Growing up a lot of us were taught that the church building is God's house. No, it isn't. It's just a building. It's just a tool. You are God's house. All the believers together are a temple for God.

God is putting us together like living Lego blocks to build something special. Church is so much more than just showing up. It's about so much more than membership or attendance or how much you put in the plate.

Peter teaches that we are being "built up." Each one of us is under construction. The church is one massive building project. It's not always easy when something is under construction. Road construction makes you late to your destination. When they are doing remodeling at your work it can be annoying and noisy. When something is under construction, it is messy.

Church can be like that, can't it? Sometimes people at church get in your way. They can certainly be annoying and noisy. And sometimes church gets a little messy. Instead of getting mad and lashing out. Instead of taking our ball and going home. Instead of calling it quits, we should imagine that every time we gather as body that there's this sign that says, "Excuse our mess. Under construction."

So, please whenever church gets a little noisy, a little annoying, a little messy, remember this—grace is in progress. God is still building us. Our focus needs to be not on the mess now, but God's final design.

Let God work in you and on you so He can work through you! And have the grace to recognize that God is still working on others too.

You are essential to this church! This church is missing something vital without you! God has you here for a reason.

Next Peter calls us a holy priesthood. How can we be both a building and a priesthood? This tells us what kind of building God is making us into. He's not just making us into any old house. We're not a ranch or a colonial, or a tri-level split.

We are being made into a temple. We are a house for God. Did you know that in the book of Revelation in the New Jerusalem there is no temple, because the people of God are the house for God. The bride of Christ is the temple. God is making us into a very special house. He's making us into his dream house.

The temple is where priests served. This is where the priesthood comes in. Priests were set apart for a special purpose, just like us. They served at the temple to represent the people before God and to represent God before the people. They offered sacrifices for the people and represented God's law before them.

That's what the church is to be for the world. We are to be the middle man between a lost world and the God who loves them, who longs to have a relationship with them, and who sent his only Son to save them.

If you're a Christian, you're in the priesthood. One of the important teachings of the New Testament is the priesthood of all believers. We all represent Jesus. We all have a place and a purpose.

Our sacrifices aren't animal sacrifices of goats, doves, or bulls. Peter says we make spiritual sacrifices acceptable to Christ. We are all gifted for something. We offer sacrifices of prayer, encouragement, serving, teaching, leading, helping, and giving. No matter who you are. No matter how long you've been a Christian. No matter how long you've been a part of the church, you have something to offer. Everyone has a place and a purpose in the church. What is your place? What is your purpose?

Jesus himself is the most important part of the building. He's the cornerstone. The cornerstone was always the first stone that was set, because every other stone in the building was squared off that one stone. If the cornerstone wasn't right, the rest of the building would be off.

Even to this day a cornerstone has that symbolic value. We inscribe cornerstones with important information. Sometimes, we even store significant things inside cornerstones. Back in 2015 the city of Baltimore found a cornerstone for the Washington Monument that had been built there back in 1815. This stone was almost 1,500 pounds. It turned out to be a giant granite box, and inside was a time capsule filled with things from 200 years ago.

Jesus is our cornerstone. That's why Jesus must always be central to everything we do as a church. Every program, every ministry must be squared off of him. He holds it all together. Anything we build without him, will be off. It won't work. It won't matter. It won't last.

This Church is not being built on people—it's built on Jesus.

This Church is not being built on our plans— it's built on Jesus.

This Church is not being built on a preacher— it's built on Jesus.

This Church is not being built on dreams— it's built on Jesus.

And each one of you is a living stone in that building. Or to use a modern analogy, a living brick. Now I didn't want to carry 150 bricks in here this morning, so I've brought some Lego Bricks. I want each of you to have a brick and take home a brick. I'm also going to pass around some Sharpies, and I want you to write something on your brick. Write down 1 or 2 words about how God might use you to build his house. A word about your place and purpose in the church. A word about where you belong. Then take your brick home and put it where it can be a reminder this week. Just don't put it on the floor where you'll step on it at 4 am on the way to the bathroom. That might not be the kind of reminder you want.