

THE ONLY MEMBERSHIP THAT MATTERS

I PETER 2:4-10

INTRODUCTION

TRANSITION

Explain what the next three Sundays are going to look like and then the series in Matthew.

The need to belong to a group is among the most basic of human needs. There are few things that can cheer us up more than a familiar, smiling face, warmly greeting us as we come home from work or show up for a night of bowling or arrive at the bar or run onto the field for practice. There are few things that will create a greater sense of hopelessness and despair than not having any group that cares whether you come or go. One of the greatest sources of depression is that sense that nobody, no group of people needs or values me.

Right now, everyone sitting in this room, has a sense of contentment with life or a sense of unhappiness in life that is directly related to whether you belong to someone else. My goal this morning is to help each of us understand that regardless of how “connected” we feel to our families or some other significant group, if we are not “connected” to God’s family it doesn’t matter. If your family is like the Walton’s, warm and intimate and mutually supportive and if you are involved in the broader community with friends and associations that are a joy and delight to you but you are not connected to God’s family, it doesn’t matter. If you feel isolated and alone and are on the edge of despair because you don’t feel connected to your family or any other group you must realize that if you belong to God’s family, while there may be temporary pain here, you have the greatest membership in the world. You see, membership in God’s family is the only membership that matters.

When the Bible tells us that membership in God’s family is the only membership that matters it is not thinking first of all about being members of a church. There are many millions of people who are members of churches who are not members of God’s family. However, let me hasten to add that if you are a member of God’s family you will be connected to a local church family. As we will see in the passage this morning, the person who says they can be a Christian and worship God fine without being connected to a local church is most likely not a Christian. So this morning, whether you are feeling connected or disconnected to people I want you to consider with me God’s word in I Peter 2: 4-10 and see that ...

MAIN POINT

Membership in God’s family is the only membership that matters because

I. The benefits far outweigh the costs (vv. 4-6)

Any group which we belong to, whether it is our family or the local union, has membership requirements. In order to be a part of any group you must agree to live with certain expectations of what it means to be a part of the group. It is these criteria that distinguish a person who is a part of the group from those who are not a part of the group. We generally describe these as the responsibilities you have as a result of being a part of the group. In addition, every group has certain benefits or privileges that go along with being a part of the group. It is these that motivate us to be a part of the group.

When I was a freshman in high school one of the coaches in the school told me I ought to go out for wrestling. I couldn’t think of any good reason not to and so I spent that winter working out every night after school with the wrestling team. To be a part of the team I had to show up every night and do all the running and practicing that the coach told us to do. The benefits of being a part of the team were, by the end of the season, a mystery to me. I knew something about the sport of wrestling and was in better shape than I had ever been in my life. But the cost of membership, working out every night to the point of complete exhaustion and getting beat every time I got into

a match whether at practice or in an actual meet, convinced me that this was not a group that I wanted to belong to. The next year when wrestling season rolled around and the coach came and asked me why I wasn't at the organizational meeting I gave him some excuse for not wanting to wrestle. The real reason was that the membership requirements for being a part of the team were not matched in my mind with the benefits of being a part of the team. It seemed a way more profitable use of my time to go home after school and watch reruns of Star Trek than to get beat up every night.

First, I want you to see the costs of belonging to God's family. What are the membership requirements for being a part of his family? How do you become a part of it? To get the full picture we have to look back at chapter 1 to get the development of Peter's argument.

How many people here decided to be born into their family? Your birth into the family you are a part of was not something you decided. In the same way, if you look at chapter 1, vs. 3 you'll see that all who are a part of God's family didn't decide to be a part of it. (read it) God out of his mercy causes us to be born into his family. How does a person know if they have been born into God's family? What are the signs of divine life? Look in v. 5 (through faith) and v. 7 (so that your faith) and v. 8 (read the whole thing). The evidences that you belong to the family of God is that you have faith in Jesus or that you love Jesus. God gives you spiritual life, he decides that you will be a part of his family, in response you believe in Jesus and love him. Now, if you'll look at 2:3 & 4 Peter uses different language that says the same thing. This is one of the things that makes the Bible beautiful and attractive. It uses a variety of language and illustrations to help us to understand what it's trying to communicate.

In 2:3, Peter says that everyone who belongs to God has "tasted that the Lord is good". There was a point in time that everyone who belongs to God's family had no taste for Jesus, he was not a part of their diet. We're like little children who have to be coaxed to try a new food. We live our life eating all kinds of things but Jesus sits on the shelf like a jar of unfamiliar food until someone begins to tell us that we ought to try him. Eventually, just like that little child, we give in and take a taste of him and we discover, by an act of God's mercy, he is delightful. We discover that this one who was completely irrelevant to our happiness and our spiritual health is now the central part of our diet. We discover that he is very good. How do you respond when you try a new food and find it to be delightful? Women, what do you do when you have dinner at someone else's home and eat a dish you've never eaten before and it's absolutely marvelous? You get the recipe and you make it at your house. You make it a part of your diet. When we discover a food that is good, we eat it again and again.

That's what v. 4 says. Look at the difference in the tenses of the verbs between vv. 3 & 4. "Tasted" is past tense and "come" is present tense. If you are a part of God's family, at a point in time you tasted the Lord and found him to be good. Now, you keep coming to him because you delight to do so. The way you know you are a Christian is not by looking back in your life and pointing to an experience you had in the past but by looking at your life now. Are you each day coming to Christ? Is he the central part of your diet? Is it the chief happiness of your life to know and trust and love him? Faith in Christ is not a duty, it is a delight. Desiring God, page 53-54

The metaphor has changed between vv. 3 & 4. In v. 3 Jesus is a food we discover is good, in v. 4 he is a living stone that we come to. We are told two things about Jesus in this verse. First, mankind in general rejects Jesus as central to life. Most human beings when they are looking for stones to build their life with do not find Jesus to be the necessary cornerstone, the main building block of life. The word for reject that is used here and in v. 7 means that something is examined and found to be lacking and so tossed aside. Like when you go to the lumberyard to buy wood for a project and you search through the stack of 2 x 4's, tossing aside the ones that are crooked and keeping the ones that are straight. Most humans find Jesus to be irrelevant to life. He's like one of the crooked 2x4's that you toss aside. But God sees Jesus as the choice and precious stone in the building. Look at v. 6. God is building his family, he is building his church and when he begins the project and looks around for the best stone to use as the cornerstone he picks Jesus. The cornerstone in a building is the most important stone. If you start a building wrong, even a little bit, by the time you get finished, nothing fits together, the whole thing is wrong.

What does this tell us about the requirements of membership in God's family? If you belong to God's family you have the same opinion of Jesus that God does. He is to you the most necessary part of life. Christianity is not just

an add-on. If you belong to God's family, Jesus isn't just a person of passing interest to you. He is the most fascinating, most desirable, most necessary person in your life. He is your life. You feel about him the same way that God the Father feels about him. Those who have been born into God's family have examined all the potential things to build life upon and have discovered that the only thing that is trustworthy is Jesus. Christians have discarded everything else in life as the foundation and have chosen Christ alone to build their life upon. If you can have anything in the world or you can have Jesus, what will you choose? All those who belong to God, choose Jesus.

The other cost that is implicit here and made explicit in the rest of Peter's letter is that if you find Jesus to be the choice and precious cornerstone, like God does, you will also discover that most humans will reject you just like they reject Jesus. The cost of finding Jesus to be the most necessary part of life is that life in a world that rejects Jesus will often not be pleasant.

The benefit of belonging to God's family is described in vv. 5 & 6.

- "like a living stone" God finds precious those who find his Son to be precious. Zephaniah 3:18. What matters more to you, that some human being delights in your company or that God delights in your company?
- "you are being built into a spiritual house" God's chief work is to build his church, to gather together his family from all the peoples of the world. You are a part of what God is doing in the world.
- "to be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God" you enter into his presence and into his service. Your actions now have eternal consequences. Spiritual sacrifices are our worship and praise when we gather together as his people and our acts of service to one another prompted by our love for Christ (Heb 13: 15 & 16)
- You will never be put to shame, you'll never be disappointed
 - Ever signed up for something, expecting it to be really fun or fulfilling in some way and discovered it to be a complete waste of time? Gone to a movie expecting to be entertained and left halfway through because it was so useless? Ever gone into something expecting it to make you happy and it only made you miserable? Every earthly pleasure you say no to because you have greater pleasure in Jesus will be seen to be worth it in heaven. Every suffering you go through will be as though it were nothing when you get to heaven.

Membership in God's family is the only membership that matters because...

- *The benefits far outweigh the costs*
- *And because...*

II. To live outside his family is eternal suffering (vv. 7-8)

V. 7 makes plain that there are only two kinds of people in the world, those who believe in Jesus and those who don't. Those who have tasted and found Jesus to be the most delightful and satisfying of foods and those who find him tasteless. Those who find Jesus to be the foundation of life and those who find something else to be the foundation of life. Every other distinction you make between humans is meaningless. What these verses tell us is that you cannot avoid Jesus. He stands in the path of every human being. When you encounter him you will either join yourself to him as the cornerstone of life and of God's work in the world or you will reject him. If you reject him you will discover him to be a rock that makes you stumble over the edge of the cliff to your destruction. There is no getting around Jesus. He is the most important person in the whole universe. What you decide about him and how you relate to him is the most important issue in your life. He matters more than what job you have, more than who you are married to, more than what kind of house you live in, more than whether you are healthy or not, more than anything.

To reject Christ is to reject God. To reject Christ is to decide that you want to live apart from God and outside of his family. When you reject Christ you are saying that belonging to God's family is not important. To reject Jesus as the foundation of your life is to make yourself God's enemy.

In v. 8 it says that they, the ones who do not believe, stumble because they disobey the message. What is the message that is disobeyed? It is the gospel of Jesus. God sent his son into the world to die for the sins of all who would believe in him. He raised him from the dead and Jesus is now seated at God's right hand waiting until all his people are saved and then he will come back and destroy all who have refused to trust in him. He now commands all people to turn from their sins and to trust in him alone for salvation. Everyone who disobeys that message is going to stumble. I want you to see that stumbling is equivalent to being destroyed by God. God says in...

- John 3:36 "Everyone who believes in the son has eternal life, but whoever disobeys the son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him"
- Romans 2:8 "But for those who are self-seeking and disobey the truth and follow evil their will be wrath and anger"
- Hebrews 11:31 "By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient." Describe what happened to Jericho and how Rahab escaped. You will be annihilated as God's enemy, just like all the people of Jericho, if you do not obey Christ's gospel. If you do not turn away from your sins and flee to Christ as the only source of salvation, this is what will happen to you. Rahab was not saved because she was a good person, she was saved because she knew that she deserved to die along with all the people of Jericho but she believed the promise of the spies that if she remained in her house she would be spared. You are not saved because you are a good person but because you believe in Jesus, love Jesus, and find Jesus to be precious.

All of us have been shocked this past week with the horror of what happened in Columbine High School in Colorado. The question that is being asked over and over again is, "Why did this happen?" Many are asking, "why did God allow this to happen?" Jesus was asked this exact question in regard to an equally horrifying incident that happened in his country, Israel. I want all of us to turn to Luke 13:1-9, page 738. I want you to see that this is the answer Jesus gave to people who were not present at the experience, these are not the relatives of the slain people. These are people like us. People who have been shocked by the tragedy but have no personal involvement in it. Here is what he would say to us.

- God has given you life and every good thing you've ever experienced he has done
- God decides when life will end. There are no accidents. God has an appointed time for you to die.
- There is a day of judgement coming for you. One day God will examine your life and see if you've fulfilled the purpose for which he created you.
- All humans are sinful and deserve death. No matter how a person dies, it is ultimately not unjust. God can never be accused of acting unjustly in his universe on the basis of how people die because we are all under condemnation, we all deserve to die. If God were going to treat us fairly, to give all of us what we deserve, he would cut us all down right now and send us to hell.
- The main thing to learn when we observe the deaths of others, especially when they are brutal, is that we deserve the same treatment and if we don't flee from our sins and pursue Christ we will perish forever. When you consider the death of these students you should think, "Have I repented of my sins and believed in Christ so that I will escape God's judgement?" The question not to ask is, "Why did it happen to them?" but rather, "Why doesn't something like this happen to me?"

Membership in God's family is the only membership that matters because...

- *The benefits far outweigh the costs*
- *To live outside God's family is to perish forever*
- *And because...*

III. It's the only place where you can fulfill God's purpose for your life (vv. 9-10)

The most basic question that you have to answer as a human being is, "Why am I taking up space on planet earth?" Or to put it another way, "What is the purpose of my life?" In vv. 9 & 10 Peter makes plain both God's answer to that question and shows that it is only by being a member of God's family that you can fulfill that purpose.

In v. 9, Peter first wants us to recognize what a privileged thing it is to be God's people. He intentionally uses language that is taken directly from the Old Testament. In essence what he is saying that all that God said about

his unique relationship to Israel now applies to you. Listen to these two statements: Exodus 19:5-6, “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a royal priesthood and a holy nation.” Listen to Deuteronomy 7:6, “For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. For the Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.”

Once all who belong to God were nobodies, according to v. 10. None of us belonged to the most significant family in the universe, the only group that matters. Everyone who belongs to God at one time was under God’s wrath, not his mercy. But now, in Christ, because of mercy we are:

- Chosen people. Describe feeling of being chosen for Sophomore of the year at UWSP. But note: God does not choose us for any reason besides his own purpose. Titus 3:5, “He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.” Romans 9:10-12
- A royal priesthood. Belong to King Jesus’ court and draw near to God
- A holy nation. Not a rich nation or a powerful nation or kind nation but a holy nation. We have, as God’s people the characteristic that matters most in the universe, holiness because we share in God’s nature. Is 6:3.
- A people who belong to God (his treasured possession). How do you treat your treasured possessions?
- Called out of darkness into his marvelous light. Story of Lazarus

The last phrase of v. 9 is the purpose for all this. Why did God bother to take us nobodies and give us such an exalted status? He did it so that we might declare his praises. He did it so that he might be glorified. He did it so that the whole universe would see how great and powerful and merciful God is. He didn’t do it for our sake, he did it for his own sake because God is primary, not man. God is at the center of the universe, not man. Everything, including the church exists to show off how great God is.

Tell about the jubilation and declaration of the greatness of the Packers following the Super Bowl. This is what the Christian life is like. It is not duty. It is not primarily about moral reformation. It is about being so happy in this great salvation that God has provided that we are full of joy that bubbles over into praise and proclamation and love.

Membership in God’s family is the only membership that matters because...

- *The benefits far outweigh the costs*
- *To be outside of God’s family is to eternally suffer*
- *It’s the only place you can fulfill God’s purpose for your life*

SONG

BENEDICTION

I Peter 5:10-11

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