

A church that engages in evangelism

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[0 : 0 0] So the reading is from 1 Peter chapter 2, verses 4 to 12. And it says this, As you come to him, the living stone, rejected by humans, but chosen by God and precious to him, you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For in the scripture it says, See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious, but to those who do not believe, the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and a stone that causes people to stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.

They'll stumble because they disobey message, which is also what they were destined for. 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.

Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from the sinful desires which wage war against your soul.

[2 : 0 4] Live such good lives among the pagans, that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Amen. Thanks, Yvonne. Over the last few weeks, I don't know whether you've been with us, but over the last six weeks, I've been trying to build really a sort of a foundation for our church family.

The sort of theological foundations for us as a church. What is it that's going to be important to us as we move forwards? So you might remember at the beginning of July, we started with this idea that our church is to be centered on the cross of Jesus Christ.

That the message of the cross of Christ, which is the message of the whole Bible, it's right at the center of the scriptures, is to be at the center of our church life. It's the message of the cross which makes the church.

It's the preaching of the message of Jesus Christ in God's word that makes us the people of God. That's where we started. We then went on to say that as a church, we rely absolutely on the Spirit.

[3 : 1 7] We know that we are absolutely powerless in ourselves to convert anybody, to change people, or to equip one another for the Christian life. There is nothing that we can do on our own to open blind eyes to the truth of the gospel.

If our church is going to be revitalized, if our church is going to grow by people coming to know and love and trust the Lord Jesus, it's going to be because God does it by his Spirit, not because we do it in our strength.

Following on from that, then you might remember that we said that we were going to be a local church that are committed to corporate prayer. We were startled by the book of Acts just how many times the local church gathers together to pray.

It's like breathing for them. They can't live without it. We know that in a way that we don't really fully understand, God, in his sovereign power, chooses to work through the prayers of his people.

Then we thought next about diversity, didn't we? The fact that God is bringing us together. He hasn't made us all the same. In fact, God is glorified by stitching together a group of people who are very different to one another, both in the gifts that they have, but also that the cultures that they're from, the languages that they speak.

[4 : 36] And so we found that God is stitching together something that is beautiful and glorious because of our difference. Our fifth foundation, which we were looking at last week, was then discipleship.

And you might remember this. It's only last week, so I'm hoping that you might. That our single biggest contribution to the life of the church is what? To grow as a Christian. That's the biggest contribution that we make.

It doesn't matter whether we give thousands of pounds or hundreds of volunteer hours. If we are not growing as Christians, if we're not growing in our love of the Lord and our Christ-likeness and our eagerness to live for him, we will fundamentally be damaging the church, not blessing the church, because the greatest contribution we can make is to grow in Christ-likeness.

And now that brings us to this week, and that is this one, engaged in evangelism. And that means we've got one more to go, which I'm going to do when we get back from holiday. And you might know what that is, but if you don't, I'm going to leave it as a surprise for you for when I come back from holiday.

So this week, we're thinking about evangelism, telling others about Jesus. This is the idea that our church exists not just for itself, but to be a witness to the world about the gospel.

[5 : 50] We want to grow, don't we, as a church, numerically, not from stealing people from other churches, but from people coming from our friends and our families, our community, to know Jesus for themselves.

So we're a church that engages in evangelism, telling people about Jesus. Now, to tackle that subject, I want, if I can, to draw your attention to just a single phrase in the reading that we've just had.

If I were an old-fashioned preacher, I would say this is my text for this morning. Do you remember when you used to go to church and they used to announce the text for the morning? Well, that's what we're doing this morning.

We're just looking at a single phrase. It's there in the second half of verse nine that we read with the children earlier. It's this, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Now, before we get to all of the detail of this, I want you to notice that that phrase is essentially a purpose statement. It's a purpose statement. It starts, isn't it, with that you may.

[6 : 54] In other words, that statement is the outworking of something that's gone before. The declaration of the praises of God is the purpose of what precedes it.

So like a delivery driver is given a van full of parcels that she might deliver them or a student is given an exam paper that they might answer the questions or at least try to answer the questions.

So here we see that the declaration of the praises of God is the result of something that has been given or done. So the declaration of the praises of God in our passage are what comes from what comes before it, which is being a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession.

Now Peter's point is that the church is like the new Israel and I would love to, we don't have time to do it, but to go into all the ways that this reflects Old Testament passages. But Peter's point essentially is that when you read Israel in the Old Testament, now you're looking at church in the New Testament, the chosen people of God, people selected by him to be his servants, a royal priesthood, people who have access to God's presence, a holy nation, people with special status, before God, his special possession, people who are cared for and protected by God.

They are all of those things, says Peter, that they may declare my praises, praises of God in the world. Now that means, and again, listen, this is just, I'm just showing you obvious stuff here, but it's worth stating this clearly.

[8 : 28] It means that the church is the church not because they declare the praises of God. You get that? It's not the church becomes the church as it declares the praises of God.

It's the other way around, isn't it? They declare the praises of God because they have been made the church by God. God makes the church, not us.

You don't become the church by coming and declaring the praises of God. You become the church by God being at work in us. And then he gives us a purpose. A purpose which, if you notice, the purpose of the church then is not really so much about me or you.

The purpose of the church is not that we make cups of tea for one another, that we might feel nice about life. The church's purpose isn't even about self-help or self-improvement. God hasn't made us a chosen people and a holy nation so that we might get better versions of ourselves.

It's not that, is it? It's not even that we might look down our noses at everybody else. Oh, I'm God's chosen and special people, not like you. It's not that either, is it? It's not so that we might have a nice club where everyone is like us and we feel normal.

[9 : 38] No, the that of church life, the so that of church life is so that you might declare the praises of him, of God. That's why we're here. That's why God has saved us.

It's about him and his glory and not us. Let me try and say this carefully, but I want to kind of land this practically for us if I can. I want to suggest that one of the reasons that you and I struggle so much with church life, one of the reasons why we get so easily upset and diverted into conflict with one another is because we have missed the point of church life.

Church exists not so much for the comfort of the people who come or belong. it's not existing to give them an opportunity to express themselves.

The church exists for the glory of God. Now that's not to mean that comfort or opportunity to contribute are not important. I'm not saying that, but rather that they flow from the glory of God.

The point is, if you come to church thinking mostly about your own feelings or mostly about what you need and not about the glory of God, you will leave disappointed because the gatherings of the church are about the glory of God.

[10 : 57] Church exists for the glory of God so that we might declare his praises. Now, there's one other thing to notice as well here before we move on, and that is that this is circular. So, let me try and explain this if I can.

So, God here makes the church to new Israel that she might declare the praises of God. But think about it. What are God's praises? What does it mean to declare his praises?

It's a very Christian phrase, isn't it? We might think we know what it means, but what does it actually mean? Well, Peter again is borrowing a phrase from the Old Testament, and the idea is that this is declaring what God has already done.

When we praise God, we are not adding to God something that's lacking from him. Do you understand that? It's not the idea that we are adding something to God who would be less if we weren't doing it.

Rather, we are articulating something in our praises that's already true. God is not like that year seven child who just needs lots of encouragement to get on with their work.

[12 : 01] Maybe you were like that year seven child. I think I probably was a bit. Oh, you're doing a great job. Carry on, won't you? Oh, look at that. You've done some great work, haven't you? Keep going.

That's not how we're to talk to God. That's not what praising God means. Rather, here, the sense is that the praises of God are something that already belong to him because of who he is.

So declaring his praises isn't making up for something lacking in God so much as it is saying aloud who God is and what he's done. Listen, this is what God is like. He is praiseworthy in his being.

Look at what he's done. Which, if you notice this, this is then a giant circle because if you look down at our little phrase, how is it that the church become the church to declare the praises of God?

How is it that they become the church? How do we become a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation? Well, God did it through choosing. And how did he choose? Well, he called, notice, he called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.

[13 : 06] In other words, God speaks and calls out his people. So he speaks the gospel and calls his people out of the world, out of darkness and into light.

People who are living in the darkness of their own sin and lostness, people who are ignorant of God, the God who made them, estranged from the purpose of our existence. God calls those people through what he says in verse 8 is a message.

What is the message? Well, the message is the praiseworthy deeds of God. You get it? God calls his people into existence as they hear the declaration of his praiseworthy deeds.

So, let me try and put it on the slide. The deeds of the praiseworthy God are declared. You hear them and it calls out God's people. Oh, God is the God who saves his people.

He's saving me. And as he calls you, you then become somebody who declares the praises of God, which does what? It calls out the other people of God. So in this giant circle, generation upon generation, declaring the praiseworthy deeds of God, calling out the people of God who will declare the praises of God, which will call out the people of God, which will declare the praises of God, which will call out the people of God, which will declare, and it goes on from generation to generation, from city to city, from nation to nation.

[14 : 32] The message has been heard and God's people have been called out. Here's the thing. Jesus says that that circle is so solid and unbreakable that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. No one will be able to stop it from generation to generation.

Now, put all of that together for a moment, and I think the point of our text is this, that hearing the message of Christ creates a church who exists to declare the message of Christ. I'll say that again.

Hearing the message of Christ creates a church who exists to declare the message of Christ. That's how God gets glory in the world. Now, there are literally thousands and thousands of implications of that for us this morning, but I'm going to be kind to you.

I'm going on holiday tomorrow, and so I don't still want to be here on Monday morning, and so I'm going to give you three rather than a thousand. Let me show you three ways this particularly relates to evangelism, particularly relates to our evangelism.

First one is this. Evangelism is leaky worship. Evangelism is leaky worship. In other words, evangelism, this idea of telling other people about Jesus, is what happens because we are unable to keep the gospel to ourselves.

[15 : 48] Churches quite often, I think, will nag their church members into doing evangelism, won't they? Say, listen, if you're not going to share the gospel, then you're not really a proper Christian. If you're not going to tell other people about Jesus, you're not a proper Christian.

You need to sign up to be involved in this evangelistic crusade. You need to give out leaflets with me on this street corner. But our text this morning shows us that that approach is not quite right, not because evangelism and telling others about Jesus is not important, or because handing out leaflets is wrong.

Of course it's not, but rather because it's putting things the wrong way around, isn't it? The cart before the horse. Our text this morning reminds us that the purpose of the Christian life is not evangelism so much as it is praising God for who he really is.

And Peter's point here is that praising God for who he really is leaks into evangelism. It pours out of us in lots of different ways. It spills over. Look down at verse 11.

What does he say? Dear friends, I urge you as foreigners and exiles to abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify you on the day when God visits us.

[17 : 05] You see, the idea is that they are spilling over into the world. Read across in chapter 3, verse 15. He says it again there, doesn't he? But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have. How do you prepare to give an answer for the hope that you have? Not simply by swatting up, but by what?

Revering Christ as Lord in your heart. Christ will spill out. This is what I was trying to illustrate with the kids this morning. As our Christian lives are full to the brim with the glory of God and the goodness of the Lord Jesus, we are spilling it all over the place.

You know, declaring the praises of God, you'll spill it out at work, in your family, you'll spill it out with the people who live in your block, on your social media posts, at your mates at uni or at school.

Because this worship of God, this amazement at the greatness of God and his works in Christ, he doesn't switch off when you walk out those doors at the back. He's there all the time.

[18 : 13] Now, let me try and suggest this means there's a principle at work. It's at work in us corporately, but it's at work in us individually as well. So this is at work in you and me this morning, if we're a Christian this morning. And that is our evangelistic usefulness, our effectiveness at telling other people about Jesus is a direct function of how excited I am by what the Lord Jesus has done for me.

Do you get that? My effectiveness in evangelism, sharing the gospel with my friends, my family who don't know Christ, is directly related to how encouraged I am or how enthusiastic I am or how excited I am about what Jesus has done for me.

And that means that for us as a church, we don't encourage evangelism so much by starting new activities as we do by reminding one another of the greatness of the Lord Jesus and making sure that we are all excited by what Christ has done for us.

Because if we are excited by Christ, it will spill out all over the place and you won't be able to stop it. Let me try, if I can this morning, to try and motivate us for evangelism in the way that Peter's trying to get it to happen.

Look down at verse 9 and let's just have a think about it with me. Let me ask you, if you're a Christian this morning, have you really reckoned with this idea that together we are God's chosen people?

[19 : 40] Just ponder on that for a moment. God has chosen us. Not because there's something worthy in us, not because he saw that we were good people. That's the great stumbling block of the previous verses that Yvonne read to us.

That's why hell will be full of religious people who relied on their own efforts and thought they were better than other people. That is not the gospel, is it? The gospel is that God has chosen us because God in himself loves.

He loves us because of his own loveliness, not ours. And he has chosen us out of the world to belong to him as his people for a reason that we cannot explain.

A people who then get described as a royal priesthood. People who have access to God's very presence through the work of Christ's cross. So much so that if you're a Christian this morning, at any time, any of us in any place can call out to God, the God who made us, the God who rules and governs the world, and know that that God hears us.

We have access to him like a child has access to a parent. And then we find, what does he say next? That we're a holy nation. That means that we are outside of the condemnation that our world faces for its sinful rebellion against the God who made us.

[21 : 02] We are free from the fear of hell. Death has no claim on us because through the action of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, God has made us despite our sin holy, perfect, justified, and sanctified.

But I wonder if maybe best of all is the next phrase, isn't it? What does he say? You are God's special possession. His treasure. I don't know, if you're a young Christian or maybe you're a new Christian, it's easy to think that maybe the blessings of being a Christian are the stuff that God gives you.

Maybe you think the blessings of the Christian life are mostly things that God might give you. Maybe he might give you good health or a nice family or a nice job or whatever it is.

Actually, the blessing of the gospel is that God gives you himself and calls you his treasured possession. You're mine. You belong to me.

Of all the things that I have, says God, and God owns everything, right? Of all the things that God has, you are my treasured possession, he says. Can you imagine that?

[22 : 09] I'm not going to let you go. I'm not going to let anything snatch you out of my hand. I want you to know, says God, that there's nothing that can separate you from my love.

There's no height, nor depth, no trouble, no hardship, no persecution, no poverty, no danger, no sword, nothing in all creation, even angels or demons that can separate you from my love in Christ Jesus.

And listen, if you're a Christian this morning, that's true for you, right? That's true of you. And I defy you to keep it to yourself if you understand it.

You just won't be able to. I bet you. If you really get this, you won't be able to stop talking about it. You'll be like a new parent who just can't shut up about their child or the colleague who's returned from that fantastic holiday of a lifetime and is just constantly showing you photos on their phone of, oh, did I show you this one?

Oh, what about this one? What about that one? Or the guy on the bus who's just won 100 pounds on a scratch card and is going around high-fiving everyone on the bus? You'll be like that guy.

[23 : 13] Let me tell you, I'm God's special possession. He loves me. He gave his son for me. I'm holy. I'm free from the condemnation that the world faces. God loves me.

It will leak out of you all over the place. Right, second implication. We need to move a little bit faster. Evangelism requires the church. Evangelism requires the church. Now, I think this could be misunderstood here, so I want to be very careful and you need to listen carefully.

I'm not saying that individuals cannot engage in evangelism, nor am I saying that all you need to do is drag your non-Christian friends to church and I will do the rest.

That's not right. If you're a non-Christian friend this morning, you've been dragged here, I'm very sorry. That is not our intention. I can only apologize. The truth is, as individuals, we do need to make the most of the opportunities that God gives us to share the gospel.

You know, whether that's over the dinner table with an unbelieving spouse or walking to school with a child or on the bus with a stranger. But I think the point of our text this morning is that there is a sense in which the most evangelistically effective thing that we have, or, if you like, our sharpest tool for gospel declaration, if you like, is our life together.

[24 : 30] Yeah? The church itself, the church corporate, is evangelistic in its leaky worship. In other words, the evangelistic strategy of our church can't just be, hey, listen, go and tell as many people as you can about Jesus.

Take the gospel out there, convert the nations, and when they're converted, bring them here. Rather, we must go out and tell, mustn't we? That's really clear in the Bible. But also, as we go out and tell, we are also saying, come and see.

Come and see. Come and see what God is doing. He's choosing a people for himself. Let me introduce you to them. He's got a royal priesthood. Let me show you where they are so that you can engage with them.

He's got a group of people whose very purpose is to declare the praiseworthy deeds of God. Come and listen to what they're saying. So this is for you if you're here this morning and not a Christian.

It's brilliant that you're here this morning. So glad you've come this morning if you're not a Christian. Because I think, not only do we want to welcome you, but also I think this is the best place for you to understand what being a Christian is about.

[25 : 33] Being a Christian is not just a private belief in a set of historical facts about a man called Jesus. It does involve that. But being a Christian is about more than that.

Being a Christian is about coming to realize and love and give yourself to the God who made you and who is now making a new humanity. A people who love their maker, who know him personally, who worship him in all of life and who praise him together.

A new humanity who are forgiven of their sins, cleared of future judgment by the atoning work of Christ on the cross. A group of people who are now gathered into local churches before one day being gathered all together with all of God's people from all history and all geography.

Now it might be this morning, if you're not a Christian, that you've got loads of questions about that and I'd love to speak to you about them. Please come and find me at the end. But there is a sense in which right now, in this moment, in this place, you are getting the clearest glimpse of who God is and what he's doing.

And if you are a Christian this morning, if you're a member of the church here, then let me say to you that your personal evangelism, your own sharing of the gospel, must at some stage include an invitation to church and exposure to the family of the church.

[26 : 50] If you look over at verse 12 again, you can see that Peter's assumption is that the corporate life of the church is seen and witnessed. Yeah? When he says, live such good lives among the pagans, his assumption is that the pagans, i.e. people in the world who don't believe in Jesus, they will see your life.

How are they going to see your life if you are hiding it or you're only living it among Christians? You see, there are two mistakes, aren't there, what you can make here.

One is to think, oh, all I have to do is just drag people to church and Steve will do the evangelism for me. Or the other mistake to make is to think that the most evangelistically effective thing that we do is outside of church, you know, talking to people at Hyde Park or in the open air, when the truth is that it's the corporate life of the church, seen in the gatherings of the church, experienced in the relationships of the church, which is the witness to the truth of the gospel.

If you like, evangelism, a team sport, something we're doing together. Oh, you've got lots of questions about that, have you? I've got a friend at church who's really good at answering those questions, why don't you come and meet them?

Actually, we're really good friends, we're totally different, but we're really good friends. Actually, we call each other brother and sister. So here's the two-pronged evangelistic strategy for us as a church.

[28 : 10] One, if you're a member of the church here, you go and build friendships and talk to as many people as the Lord gives you opportunity to speak to about Jesus. Don't spend all your time in a Christian bubble.

Go make friends with people. Tell them about Jesus. And secondly, we're going to organise our church life, our friendships, our socialising, our formal gatherings in such a way as their accessible, clear witness to the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so that you can bring your friends to any of them. That's what we're going to do. And if we do that, and if the Lord blesses us, then the normal testimony of someone coming to faith and getting baptised in our church will be something like this.

Oh, I met Clifford. I met David. I met Jeff. I met Joe. And they were chatting to me. And they talked to me about Jesus.

And they brought me around for a meal. And there were other people from the church there. And I got to meet them. And there was something about the way that they related and spoke to one another and loved one another. I'd never seen that before.

[29 : 15] And then I came to church and week in, week out, I heard the message of Jesus who died for me to forgive me of my sins, that I might belong to him. And I found that actually my heart was moving to trust in Jesus for myself.

That's the testimony that we long for, isn't it? Let's pray that God does that for his glory. Finally, evangelism is about God's glory. I think essentially what the text is telling us here is that evangelism in the life of the church, if you like, is a subset of something over the top of it.

In other words, our great passion in taking the Gospels to the nations, to the lost members of our family, is not so much a passion for evangelism as it is a passion for God's glory.

You see, the tragedy in unbelief is not so much that people are missing out on the blessings of the Gospel for themselves, but that they're missing out on the glory of God. John Piper has a brilliant, brilliant book on mission.

It's called Let the Nations Be Glad, and he puts it this way in the very first paragraph of his book. It's this. He says, missions, or evangelism, telling other people about Jesus, is not the ultimate goal of the church.

[30 : 31] Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more.

It's a temporary necessity, but worship abides forever. Now, I know, because we've said this over and over in these Sundays together, that we are absolutely reliant on the work of God to open people's hearts to the Gospel.

But I want to suggest to you that he does that as we make the Gospel clear. And I can't help but wonder if at times we share the Gospel in a really unclear way, because we are unclear about this primacy of the glory of God.

I don't know about you, but I think often I can tend to share the Gospel something like this. Do you know what? You and I, we're sinners. We've done stuff wrong. And because of that, we're going to hell to be judged by God for eternity.

But Jesus came to die on the cross to forgive us of our sins so that we can get eternal life when we die. And that's how we share the Gospel, isn't it? Something like that. And that's true. None of that's wrong.

[31 : 47] But it's wrong in its emphasis because it's very human-centered. It makes the Gospel as being the means that God achieves something for us that we really want, rather than the Gospel being something about who God is and what God really wants in the world.

Actually, the Gospel is about the glory of God first and foremost, before it's about anything else. And when most of our friends hear the Gospel as we present it about them, quite often they say, well, I don't really feel sinful.

I don't really feel as if my life is missing something. I'm not that bothered about God and His glory. I don't see the importance of what you're talking about. But Peter's point is that the Gospel isn't really about us like that.

It's about God and His glory. We're better off sharing the Gospel or something like this, saying, listen, have you thought about this? Do you realize that you exist, you live on a ball that is spinning at thousands of miles an hour around another ball of fire?

Actually, your existence itself is a miracle. And you are being sustained in every moment by the God who made you. Have you thought about that? That even the breath that we have that we use to deny God is the breath that He has given us in that moment.

[33 : 08] Have you thought about that? Can you imagine that God as the sustaining creator of all things is just offended by the fact that you use the life that He's given you on this amazing spinning ball around a ball of fire, the breath that He's given you, you use that to deny Him, to live as if you've worked it out yourself, as if this life is all about you?

Well, let me tell you what I've discovered about God through His Word, the Bible. I've discovered that God is not just the creator, but He's also the loving Savior. And He's come into this world in the person of the Son to defeat our ignorance and unbelief, but not with a sword or a gun, but by dying in our place and bearing our judgment and rising to new resurrection life.

So that now, through the Son, you and I get to live life for God's glory. The glory not only of a creator, but of a lover. So that God gets glory and we get joy.

A joy that stretches through the ups and downs of life and into resurrection, eternal life that the Son of God has started already. Doesn't that sound pretty good? That's the glory of God.

That's what calls people to Himself, to be a chosen people, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, His special possession, who live their lives to declare His praises.

[34 : 35] Let me close in prayer. Let's just take a moment. You can think through and ponder on the wonder of what God has done for us that we might declare His praises together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that you are passionately committed to your own glory and that that's the right thing for you to be.

It's the right way for you to be. It's the right thing for us to acknowledge that you are glorious and wonderful. And we pray, please, that as a church family we might be leaky in our worship of you, that it might spill out of us into the people around us wherever you put us tomorrow, that people might hear from us the good news of the Lord Jesus because it's just spilling out from us at every turn.

So you pray, please, Lord, that you would do this work in our hearts for the sake of your name and for the good of the lost around us that they might hear of Jesus and come and trust in Him for themselves.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.