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Forerunner Church  
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Living Stones, Part 2

I am just so grateful to be a part of this spiritual community and honored to be here with you this morning. We're gonna pick up where we left off last week. We're in 1st Peter 2, so you can go ahead and turn there in your Bible. We're in 1st Peter 2. We're also gonna touch on just a couple things over in Ephesians 2 as well, if you want to kind of mark that or be ready for that. I'm gonna go ahead and pray if that's alright with you.

Father, we thank You for Your Word. And we thank You for this community and the church, the body of Christ throughout the nations of the earth. Father, we ask that You would come this morning, that You would meet with us through Your Word. We ask, Lord, for more than information. We ask for a divine exchange. We ask You, Lord, that Your Words would touch our hearts, Your truth would impact us. Father, I ask that You would help me to speak well of You and to speak well of Your Son. This choice and precious Cornerstone. Father, we draw near to You, Lord, as a covenant community before You. We ask that You would come and meet with us this morning. In Jesus' name we pray, amen. Amen.

Well, just a quick review. I'm just gonna take a moment on this, but I just wanted to touch on just a couple of things from last week because we're building upon this theme. We're gonna begin this week in verse 9 of 1st Peter 2. Last week, we began back in 1st Peter 2:4, in verse 4. And essentially, the idea is this, that we need, as the people of God, we need faith to believe who it is that God has actually called us to be as a church and as a community. We actually need faith to do that. Our natural state is one of unbelief. Our natural state is one of criticism and cynicism. That's our natural state. And we need faith to actually believe that what God says about His people, what God says about community, and even more specifically, what He intends to do through His church. Is true, and it's real.

And I think that we're in a challenge right now, as the body of Christ and as a generation. We're in a challenge, and the Lord is, I think, inviting us into something. He's saying, "Will you see My people the way that I see them or will you just see them as, kind of, the conglomeration of your experiences and their failures and their weakness and their brokenness? Will you see them in the way that I see them?" And I've just been so provoked in my spirit recently on this issue related to the church. Who is the church? Who is she? Who does God say that she is? And where are the two lining up and where are they not lining up? And I want help from the Lord.

The first thing that we must do to understand who we are as a covenant people of God is to come to Christ, actually come to Him. And we derive our sense of identity. We derive our sense of community from Him rather than kind of, constructing it from the inside out. What are my felt needs? What do I want in a church? What do I long for? What makes me feel excited and alive on the inside? And they're constructing something. Rather coming to Him, which is what Peter says here in verse 4. We must come to Him, the Cornerstone, and we must be cut and laid next to Him in accordance with His values and who He is. We're living stones. We're being joined together, and we're being built up into a spiritual house.

And the Lord touched my heart with this reality last fall, just meditating on these verses. And the Lord said, "Isaac, the reason that you struggle with community is because you think that it ultimately exists because of you." He goes, "You're trying to build community ultimately for you." And He goes, "Look at what I'm doing here," in verse 5, He goes, "Living stones are being brought together and built up. Why? Because it's My house that's being built. It's about Me." As the house of God is built, as spiritual stones come together in life, in community, in worship, we're built up into this spiritual house, and the presence of God floods in, and then the peoples look on and say, "There's something different about them. There's something different about them. What it is that's different about the people of God?" But it only happens in the context of community, and it only happens as we're built up as these living stones.

I say it like this, the greater the glory, the more intrigued those are on the outside, looking at the temple, going, "What kind of God is in there? What kind of deity is in there?"

You know, the nations of the earth, they would come to Jerusalem, and the Gentiles, they would marvel at the glory and the beauty of the temple. They would look at it and say, "Oh, my goodness, what is this?" And then right there, that's where the people of God, the Jewish people, the priesthood, they would meet the nations of the earth right there in that context. They would be shocked at the glory of the temple. And then they would meet them right there with the true and living Way.

And in a similar fashion, the people of God, in covenant, must be a statement to the world about who Christ really is. The nations would look at the church and say, "You're different. There's something different about you. And in that context, that's where the Word would go forth, and there would be this collision between the agenda of men and the purposes of God. It's around this covenant people.

Let's look at this, verse 9, now here in chapter 2, 1st Peter. And there's so much here. We're gonna just touch on a few things, these four verses. I mean, there's just so much here. We might just get lost in the first couple words. But I just want to say that. I don't feel like we can give enough time to give this justice because this is so loaded. This verse, this segment, even this chapter is so loaded with vital information about understanding who we are and how we interface with the Lord, how we interface with one another and how we're to interact with the world. We're only gonna be able to touch on a few of these themes.

Verse 9. He says this. "You are a chosen race." I'm reading out of the NASB. "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession." Notice that ownership there. Why is it happening? It's happening because it's a people that God possesses, that God wants. That's us. He wants something. He's after something. We're His possession.

The second part here, "So that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light." Verse 10. "For you once were not a people, but you are the people of God. You had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles so that in the thing in which they slander you as

evildoers, they may, because of your good deeds, as they observe them, they may glorify God in the day of His visitation." See, there it is. The gentiles observe the covenant community of God, and they begin to glorify God, and the slander that is being brought against the covenant people of God ends up turning out to where the excellency of Christ is proclaimed.

See, the issue with the church is that we're trying to sell people on our church rather than selling people on Jesus. I'm not that interesting. I can't convince people to come to the cross, be washed in the blood of Jesus and enter into a new covenant because of me. They have to see Him. We must be Him. We must be the conduits into the glory of God and into the person of God. We bring them to God rather than bringing them to us. If we bring them to us, they aren't gonna stay for very long.

I don't know what it was the last time you hung out with yourself. I'm just not that interesting. If I'm alone, just there with my thoughts, that's a dangerous place. It's a horrible place.

We must live in community with one another. So, let's look at this. When we are saved, when we are bought in by the blood of Jesus, we're saved into a family, into a covenant community. And this cuts against the grain of our western individualism. Where everything is just about me. And it's about my life and making my life more comfortable, making my life more convenient, making my life this, making my life that. And Peter in this chapter is just, I mean, completely blowing this idea out of the water. He doesn't even have to on purpose because He's a Hebrew. He's Jewish. And the Jewish people were a people that understood the corporate reality of who they are. And we've been brought as gentiles, most of us. We've been brought into a corporate reality, into a corporate. And we need to understand that.

We need to understand that we're a part of a family. Why is that important? Because when you're dealing with family, you can't just quit and give up. When it's family, it's personal. When it's family, you can't run from it. You can't run from the issues. You can't escape them. You can move to the other side of the world. You can leave your family. You can say, "Up shelve all the issues. I'm out." But at the end of the day, you're still connected spiritually. You still carry those same gene pools. You're of the same branch as family. You can't escape it.

See, family forces us to confront the issues. Friendship can often, more often than not, just meet a need. See, family, it's for better or for worse. When you're in family, whatever Uncle Joe is doing at Thanksgiving, we have to deal with it. We can't uninvite him next year. We'd like to. Hopefully he moves and we don't have his address, you know? But when he's there, and he's doing whatever he's doing, there's just no other option. You can't just kind of, "Wow, thank you for coming," you know? "Never come back..."

When it's family, it's personal. See? And the way that we often relate in our western individualism is that we relate on the basis of friendship, but it's mostly what can you give to me? We're all little mini sociopaths, I mean honestly. We are. We want to be friends with people that encourage us and make us feel better and give us some sort of advantage or you know, it just increases the experience of our life. They make us laugh. They don't make us cry. And we just kind of... And the problem is, we take that same approach, and we apply that to the body of Christ and the church. We're going, "Well, what is it you're gonna do to make me feel better?"

The Lord's going, "I didn't just bring you into a community of friendship. I brought you into a family. There is no plan B."

And that's one of the main sticking points I think, for me, is that God set it up this way. He set it up this way. In all the mess, in all the craziness, in all the dysfunction, in all of the pain, in all of it. And we know that's what we're confronted with day to day. And yet, here we are, and God's going, "Will you believe My promises as it relates to My people? Can you look across the aisle and see the brother or sister and see them in the way that I see them? Can you see them as family? Irreplaceable?"

See, our friendships, friendships will come and go over the years. You know that. You've probably been through 2, 3, 4, you know, 38 cycles of friendships. Friendships come and they go. People move, they get married, the circumstances change, you know, all these things. You know, I think back to my time in my early 20s, late teen years. I'm not friends with any of those people except my wife, thank God. Plucked her out, and then here we are years later.

Friendships come and go, but family is different. Family is here to stay. And the Lord is just pushing this onto my heart going, "Isaac, will you see My people in the way that I see them? Will you relate to them on the basis I relate to them? Or will your pain, and your struggle, and the strife, will it override what I say? And will you relate to people on the basis of their brokenness and their weakness rather than their identity before Me as the covenant people of God?"

You know, I find it ironic that everybody knows all the problems with the church, but here's the other problem, we are the church. I mean, I've heard people just rant about it. I've ranted about that. "The problem with the church, da da da... And they're just so da da da." And the Lord's going, "Hey church," and He's talking to me, you know. "Hey church," I'm like, "Me? That's not me. No, no, no, no, no. I need to separate all that. Those are the issues of everyone." What we're saying is, "Those are the issues of everyone else. Those aren't my issues, and if we all did it my way, it would all work right and we'd have revival." Guess what? It's not true. It's just not. We imagine that our way really is the right way. There's no one sitting in this room going, "I'm intentionally living the wrong way." Everyone thinks their way is right, right? And so, what narrative are we going to buy into? Will we just buy into our own narrative of our own experiences and our own view or will we go to a higher narrative, a more potent narrative, an eternal narrative, a covenantal narrative, and say, "God, I want to see what You see as it relates to my people, Your people."

We must meditate on these things in order to stir up faith and our hearts. Because as faith is built in our hearts, we're compelled to love and good deeds, as faith rises. Now, you don't need faith where things are just easy. You don't need faith. You don't need to be spurred on where things are just kind of, just moving along. You just kinda jump in the lazy river. I love lazy rivers. You just get in those things. Why? Why? Because you're moving, but you're not doing anything. It's the only context in the world where you're moving but you're not doing anything. It's glorious. I don't know who invented those. They're a genius. They deserve a diet coke.

Okay. If it all made sense, if the body of Christ made sense and the church, if it all made sense, guess what it wouldn't require? Faith. And if it doesn't require faith. If it doesn't require us reaching for something beyond our circumstances and our experiences, then guess what? God doesn't get the glory.

See, faith is the way that God goes, "Cross over from your experiences into what I can do." When we cross over in faith, we leave behind our ideas, our strategies, and we go, "You know what? You're really gonna be glorified in this." God is glorified in faith. If it doesn't require faith, God won't be glorified. And I'm talking about believing and seeing and interacting and engaging as the body of Christ in the way that the Bible describes, in the way that God actually intends. Okay, let's look at this. Verse 9. The Lord says through Peter, "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people." I mean, all of these little phrases are so charged and energized with a practical expression.

I know there are so many of us out there that we just want the practical. Tell me exactly what to do. And often, we're not left with the nuts and bolts of it. See, the reason that we want that so much is that we want religion. Just tell me exactly what to do, and then I'll do it, and then I'll get the A on the paper. Just tell me exactly what to say. Tell me exactly what to do. How should I relate to my spouse? Just tell me exactly what to say. How many of you husbands out there have made that mistake? Asking her what it is she wants you to say. Not good. Good intentions! Great intentions! Horrible application. Just absolutely horrible. Just, I don't know what you want. What is it? Just tell me what to say, you know? Not good.

That means that we haven't gone after the heart. That means that we don't know them, and we're just... we want religion. Tell me the rules. We don't want relationship. We just want religion. I do A, A equals B, B equals C, and that's just happiness. And often, we come to the Lord with the same type of thing. So, He gives us these values and vision to our life because He goes, "I want you to engage with Me in the struggle of it." He goes, "I'm not gonna tell you exactly what to do. Sometimes I will. Sometimes it's real clear, but other times you have to apply values and you have to engage in the relationship." And then He goes, "You'll engage in the relationship with each other and with Me, you'll have no idea what you're doing, and then you'll cry out to Me." He goes, "That's exactly what I want. I want you to cry out to me. I want you to need me." That's faith, when we need God. That's faith because we're leaving what is familiar and our own strategy. We're taking a leap going, "Okay, God, what is your plan and what is Your way? I want to engage in that."

These glorious terms describing the body of Christ, chosen, royal priesthood, a holy nation, a special people. There's so much within these phrases that give us insight into the plan of God, but we're just gonna focus on two just briefly, and I hope that this makes sense what I'm about to say. Help me, Lord. Mom, pray. Okay.

Royal priesthood. The word that the Lord spoke to the children of Israel when they were called out of Egypt was that they would be a kingdom of priests to God. They were saved out of bondage and slavery for a purpose, for a reason. There was a reorienting of their life. Their life in Egypt could only be oriented around their work. But God goes, "I want a people whose life is oriented around their worship. That's why I bring them out of slavery and into the promise land."

And that's the exact reason why God saves us and plucks us from the slavery of sin. Because in the slavery of sin, at the center is us and our way. It's when I do this, this is enlarged in my life, and everything that we do is about us. And God plucks us out of that Egypt and brings us into the wilderness. Often like, we're still on the journey of like, getting out of Egypt, and we forget what the purpose is. What have we been saved into? We've been saved into something. Our life has been reoriented. You don't get a new spirit, you're not born again just to avoid the fire of hell. He brings us into something. He goes, "I'm reorienting your life. Your life will not be centralized around work and money and sexuality and pleasure and gain and comfort." He goes, "Basically, you. You're living for you, but I've saved you from that, and I've brought you over here to this covenant people, this kingdom of priests."

This is how I would summarize the priesthood, Christ at the center. I think, in the most boiled down form. I mean, we have whole classes and courses and teaching on the priesthood. And there's so much understanding to mine from that, but here's really what the priesthood means, boiled down. It means Christ at the center. Christ at the center. See, Israel oriented everything they did around the presence of God at the very center. When Christ becomes the center, everything else that we do moves out from the place of worship and prayer and adoration and intercession. It moves out from that, and that's the way God established the nation of Israel. He goes, "You'll be a whole kingdom of priests. Me at the center."

In the new covenant, when we're brought into that glorious plan of God, the Lord goes, "I want Me to be the center. I want Myself, My presence, My glory. I want that to be the center so that everything you do comes out of the place of worship and adoration and prayer. That's how your meant to function."

I think one of the reasons that so many Christians are just bored with God, bored with the Bible, bored with whatever is because they're living a life that's not out of the place of intercession, but they're out here trying to get into the place of worship. That's where we're at. Mostly, as gentile Christians, as believers, we're out here. We're so bogged down with the cares and the concerns and the labor, the family, the bills, and the da da da da da da da, and then where's the vacation? And is there money for this and can we do this? And we're trying to convince the body of Christ in the west, "Hey, let's go back to Christ at the center. Let's go back to worship. Let's make it the priority because in the priesthood, worship of God and looking at Him and just glorying in who He is, that is the center." And then they turn, and they go out from there. They go out to their spouses. They go out to their jobs. They go out to their communities. They go out to their children, from the place of intercession. It's reorienting. See?

And the Lord goes, "You are a royal priesthood. I've set you apart for a purpose. I brought you out of Egypt, out of self-consumption. I've brought you out of that into a purpose." He goes, "It's Me." He goes, "You're gonna fill up with me. You're gonna revel and glory in Me as your primary love, and then you're gonna do everything else from that place." The Christian life is a reoriented life. The secular life is the life that we're at the center and everything else that we're reaching for outside of that center is to enrich our experience. The job, the marriage, the relationship, the kids, the vacation, everything. We're reaching out and then trying to pull in to enrich our experience. The Christian life is this. Christ goes, "I've reoriented everything that you are. Whether you realize it or not. I've reoriented" And He goes, "I'm putting Myself at the

center," And He goes, "I want you to live and revel in Me, and then I want you to reach out from that place." It's the reoriented life.

The second thing that he talks about here is being a holy nation. And Israel, like we mentioned, is this nation that was called out, separate. That's what that word 'holy' really means. It means separated. It means other than. It means consecrated. Because the nation of Israel, they didn't understand their identity as priests to the Lord, and they couldn't in the place of captivity, in slavery. It wasn't just about being in a foreign nation. It wasn't just about being in Egypt or living in another land as we'll see here in just a moment. It was because they did not understand who they were. So, the Lord goes, "I'm gonna pull you into the wilderness. I'm gonna tell you who you are. I'm gonna reorient your life, and then I'm gonna send you back. I'm gonna send you back." The Lord reorients us and He sends us back as His witnesses to the very ends of the earth.

That's the way that He set up the program. That's the way that He set it up. He goes, "Everything that I want to be declared to the nations about who I am and what I'm like, I'm going to do through My people, through the church." He's like, "You'll be witnesses to me. To the ends of the earth, you will be witnesses. You, you, you, you." That's scary stuff. That's why we need to really take a leap of faith and begin to engage with what God has really said about us. Because He's talking about us. He's not talking about this group or that group or whatever. God has given you a commission. He's pulled you out of your former life. He's given you a new name. He's cleansed you of your sin. He's made you holy. He's made you righteous. He's called you to be a priest, but you're not just gonna hang out within the confines of the temple walls. He goes, "I want you to go proclaim My excellencies in all the earth. I want you to be a voice. I want your works and your deeds. I want your love. I want your service. I want all of that to confront your neighbors, to confront your coworkers, to confront your unsaved family members, that they would see a priest and that they would glorify God because of it."

Now, He says that we've been called to be a holy nation, and this word 'nation' that Peter uses here is the word 'ethnos', ethnicity, people groups, race, all the people, the tribes, the tongues, the nations of the earth. And what Peter is saying here as a Jewish man who had been raised conformed to the law, observing the ordinances, this is a striking revelation. It doesn't strike us in the same way that it should, and that's okay. It doesn't, I think, fully have to. But what he's saying here, I just want us to understand is so profound because to be a priest in Israel meant that you had to be of Jewish decent. You had to be.

And secondly, you had to be of the tribe of Levi within that. Long story short, we can't be priests... Let me say it stronger. We can be the church and the body of Christ without addressing the racial issues in our nation and in our generation. They're not going away. They're not going to change. We can't ignore them and expect them to be different. And if you're like me and you're sitting there, often thinking, "Well, racism isn't an issue to me," that is indicative that it actually is. And here's why. In Ephesians 2, Paul says that the blood of Christ comes and breaks down the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile and between men and woman, Galatians 3:28. It's been broken down. The blood of Jesus, itself, drives right to the core. He goes, "I want you to be a people to Me. I want you to be set apart to Me. I want to reorient your life, and in that, we need to break down these walls of division between race and gender. He goes, there's no other way around it. How do we do it? We have to by the blood of Jesus, enter in to a new way and a real

way. We need to open our ears. We need to reach out and understand and hear and empathize and put ourselves in those positions. We need our eyes to be opened.

If Jesus is saying, "My blood came down to break down walls of division, specifically racial division," that should matter to us. And we should not assume that that's not an issue in our own heart. We actually should assume the opposite. It is an issue, but I don't know it's an issue. Therefore, it's actually a greater issue.

I went to some of my friends. I said, "I've got to learn about this. Teach me about racism. Teach me about systemic racism. Teach me about division and segregation. I don't understand because I feel nothing about it." That's how I knew. I feel nothing; therefore I assume everything is good. And I'm just in this place, this is a couple years ago, I'm in this place of, "I think everything is good. Like, why is this such an issue? Why is this such a hot topic within our culture in our nation?" And the ultimate reason is because Christ's blood is warring against the natural heart. What does Paul say here? Let's look at it. He says He's broken down the middle wall of separation, verse 15. He's abolished in His flesh the enmity. He uses that word twice, enmity, which is hatred - hatred, racial divisional, tribal hatred. There's automatic, built into our fallen nature, our, let me say it like this, our natural state is one of hatred and animosity towards various races. It just is. And Jesus is going, "My blood came not to just cleanse you of your sin." He goes, "My blood came. I'm breaking down this wall."

Now, what is that wall in context to? That wall was an actual wall, and Paul's using a metaphor here, but he's referencing there's an actual wall in the temple that kept the gentiles out. The nations couldn't enter in. And there was a sign, and I think they actually recovered it. There's a sign on it, and it said basically if you trespass, if you're a gentile and you walk in, if you walk beyond this wall that's right here, your blood is on your own head. It's your own fault. We're gonna kill you.

And Jesus' blood comes and the new covenant is brought in. And He takes a priestly people that were just Jewish, and He breaks down the wall and He enlarges it to the whole earth, and He goes, "The earth is a priesthood, and the earth is My family. And across races and gender and all of these different areas," He goes, "I'm bringing unity, and it's not for your sake, primarily. That's good." He goes, "It's ultimately for My sake. I will be glorified in the earth through My people. Every tribe, every tongue, every language." And He cuts right to the core. He goes, "The issue is your natural state is enmity. It's enmity against Me. It's enmity against your brother, and it's enmity against those of the opposite gender. That is the enmity. It exists. It's real, and it's present." And beloved, we can't act like it's not. Because of Him, because of His heart, because of His blood, His precious blood. If it came and it broke down these walls, how much more should we who delight and revel and enjoy and appreciate and glory in the new covenant and being washed in the blood of Jesus? How much more should we be adamant about these things and be a voice in the midst of these issues?

We need a voice. We need a prophetic voice in the church and in the earth right now. We need a people who believe the word of God and then act upon it. We cannot speak of the church and living stones and priesthood without talking race and gender and the division and the barriers between them. We must open the conversation because Jesus' blood has, and we're merely

entering in to what He, as the Forerunner, and the great High Priest, has already done. He's already paved a way. He wants a people for Himself. He wants a people.

Our calling in relation to the world, now, we just talked about our calling in relation to God as priests. Our calling in relation to the world, Peter opens up his whole letter in 1st Peter 1:1, and he addresses it to those who are aliens that have been scattered across the earth. Those that are aliens. He mentions it again down in verse 11 that we're looking at. "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts so that the gentiles..." And the purpose is so that the nations around you, the people, don't think nations like big continents, nations out there, think about your neighbors. Think about your neighbors. It's so that you, as an alien, with that mindset, we'll talk about what that means, would interact with them, they would see your good works, and then they would glorify God. That's the point.

Now, there's this increasing debate in the church about how the church should engage in culture, how the church should engage in political issues, how the church should engage in communities. And there's two primary approaches. There's one that says we should just be separate from everything that's in the world because it's unholy, and we're holy. So, we're gonna build up walls. And we're gonna sing our own songs. And we're gonna dance our own dance. And if you don't follow our way, you're not in. Those are the separatists. They go, "We're just gonna create our own thing. We're gonna do our own way." And Peter goes, "I want you to see yourself as a stranger and as an alien," and that term that he's using there means a resident alien. It's a person from another country, an immigrant, who moves into a country, and they engage in the culture, they learn the ways, but they still maintain their distinctives and their values. That's how he says, "I want you to interact."

And he goes, "The whole way that you're doing this is through the lens of the priesthood, Christ at the center. Be different. Be like me." Jesus offended. I mean, He was so offensive. He was offensive to the religious leaders, but He's also offensive to the idea that, you know, the Samaritans are looking at Him like, "Why are You talking to me?" He's offensive to the separatists. He's offensive to the mainstream guys. Nobody could figure out what Jesus was and why He was doing the things He was doing. I love it.

I don't like that people are offended, but I like that I don't have to be a republican or a democrat. Shots fired. We should be equally offensive to both parties, in my opinion. That doesn't make us all libertarians. That makes us Christians. If we're not offensive, if we're not a voice of both standards and holiness on one side, and yet, an open hand of compassion and love and generosity on the other side, we are not Christians. We have become political affiliates. I don't want to stand before Jesus and just give my political affiliation account. I want to stand before Him as a Christian, as a follower of Him and His ways and His values.

If you look at the early church, they were neither conservative or liberal. They were neither. They offended both parties. Nobody could figure them out. On one hand, they're out giving to the poor so radically that everybody's going, "Who are these guys?" They're caring for the widows. They're like democrats. And on the other side, they're standing for the sanctity of marriage. They're against abortion. They're against, you know, sexual behavior outside of the context of marriage. They're like republican. It's like, what is going on? Are you conservative?

Are you liberal? They're going, "No, no. I'm a stranger. I'm an alien. I'm a resident of another age, another timeframe, another Kingdom. I'm part of another Kingdom, but right here, right now, I live in Grandview, and I engage with the people of Grandview, but I love Jesus and His ways. I engage with culture, but I'm not conformed to it. I reach out. I'm known. I don't build up walls and close all my blinds and hide everything." When trick or treaters knock on your door, give them tons of candy.

See, those separatists, those who want to just put up walls. And then there's the relativists. They go, "We just want Jesus to be known everywhere," but then what happens is, they end up compromising on their moral values. They go so mainstream that they just become watered down. They lose their salt. They lose their light. But their motive is good. They go, "We want to reach out. We want to speak out. We want to be engaged in our community and our culture and in the music world and da da da da, all these other worlds. And they reach out, but then they become watered down. What happens is, the values of those around them become their values.

And then over here, what happens is, we become so isolated and so boxed in that we go, "It's my way or the highway. You can't hang out with me unless you're da da da da da." We become separatists. Both groups want power. This group wants the power of the world. This group wants the power of religion. Both groups want power. They're motivated by the same thing. And Jesus is standing at the center going, "Guys, look at My life."

See, all the legalists guys, the separatists guys, know the arguments and the Bible for when Jesus is like, "No, no, no. You've got to be holy as your Father is holy." See, all the mainstream, relativists guys over here are going, "No, no, no, no. Jesus was a friend of sinners and ate dinner with sinners and prostitutes." And there's this constant pulling back and forth. "We're right," "No, we're right," Back and forth, back and forth, and back... And Jesus is right in the center. He's going, "My Kingdom, My values, they're of another age. He's going, "I'm a priest. You're a priest. Don't go build a monastery out in the desert somewhere and don't let anyone in." He goes, "Put it right in your neighborhood. Put it right in your home. Put it right in your backyard. Worship Me. Talk about Me. Glorify Me. Take care of your lawn. Pay your taxes. Talk to your neighbors. Find out their stories. Pray for them. Let them see your good works and glorify your Father that is in heaven."

Notice the words that He uses right here in verse 12, "Keep your behavior excellent among the gentiles." So, even Peter understood. Now, Jesus was forming in Christianity and pulling these aliens out of their old way and into a new Kingdom. He goes, "You'll still be among, among, among, not fifty miles away, up on a mountain cliff, top, somewhere that's inaccessible." He goes, "Be among them, but don't be of them. Love Me. Love My value. Fight for that. Build community around that. Fight for one another. Encourage one another. Be among them, among them. Because if you're not among them," He says it right here, "They should be slandering you as evildoers." They should be. But your neighbors don't even know you well enough to slander you as evildoers. They're just slandering you because you raked your leaves into their yard. They're slandering you because your dog is going to the bathroom on their property. They're slandering you because you're blowing shofars at 2 in the morning. They're slandering you because your friendship group is parking in their driveway and blocking it in. That's why they're slandering you, us. Those are all, of course, hypothetical stories. No real life here. No real things

that I've done recently. They're slandering you because you have a large firepit and you're burning Christmas trees within city limits. Again, hypothetical, entirely made up. They're calling the fire department and police on you. Again, hypothetical here. We're all just in the same world.

See, the gentiles, they have to be close to you to observe your good deeds. They have to be around you. How close does someone have to be to observe your good deeds, to observe your tone and your demeanor and your generosity and your labor of love and the way that you serve when others aren't around and the way that you work and da da da da? How close do they have to be? You can't do that if there's walls built. It's impossible. The walls have to come down. We have to reach out. We don't have to compromise on the Bible. We don't have to get all mainstream and, you know, water down the worship and not sing about Jesus. We don't have to do that. Praise God. We can engage. We can learn. We can reach out in relationship so that we're among those that do not know the name of Jesus. Peter is saying this, "Be separate but don't be a sell-out. Don't sell out, but don't put up walls so much that no one knows you." He goes, "Reach out." He goes, "Live as Christ did."

The mainstream guys were going, "We don't know what to do with You?" The religious guys were going, "We don't know what to do with You. We want to kill You." No one knew what to do with Him. Are we a people that no one knows what to do with? Are we a peculiar people? Are we a special people? I say that we are.

I invite the worship team out. I know one thing. We need Jesus' help in a major way. I mean, we really need His help, not in like a sovereign way in like, "Jesus, take the wheel. I'm going to sleep." I mean in like a real way because we need the help of the Lord. We can't. See, the problem is, we can't do this without Him. We can't just go out and create another program and create another strategy that doesn't involve Him and faith and pain and pressure and challenge and rigor and years of "Uhh, this is hard!" We can't do it without Him because He wants to be glorified in the end. And in this city, in this region, in this neighborhood, in this community, Jesus is going to be glorified. Nobodies gonna go and look and say, "Wow, that church, wow, that ministry, wow, that program, that really did it! That really pushed it over the top," because if they do, they probably haven't come to Jesus. They've just come to another open door and another potluck and another whatever it is. We want people to know Christ, to see Him, to savor Him, to delight in Him, to glory in Him, to be priests before Him, a worshipping people would emerge out of this city. Amen? It's not just this church, it's the thousand churches, all the congregations in this city.