

You Belong Here!
Pastor Joe Oakley
9-16-18 GFC

Today is Back to Church Sunday and I'd glad you are here with us today. Because you belong here! That's why I'm preaching a message entitled You Belong Here! When I say that, I am not saying that you belong at Grace Fellowship Church - Although many of you do!

I'm not saying you belong in a building. The church is much more than a building. In fact, the building is not the church – it is the place the church meets!

Technically, Church is not a place you go to. Church is a family you belong to. There's a big difference. The Christian life is not just a matter of believing. It is matter of belonging, and you and I must choose to belong.

People are looking for a place where they belong.
 A place where others are glad to see them.
 A place where other notice if they're not there, and they miss them, and they call them to see if they're OK.
 That's what church is about.

It's not just about attending, it's about belonging. When I say you belong here I'm saying that you belong in Jesus Christ. You belong in the church! You belong in the family of God.

First and foremost, the church is a family. Ephesians 3:14-15 says:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

The church is a family. We are not perfect because we are people and there are no perfect people - But we do our best to build relationships with each other.

We are a family, so we help each other in times of need. Galatians 6:10 says:

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

The church is not perfect, but we do our best to meet people's needs. We visit them in the hospital. We help them with financial needs. We provide food for the hungry. We have support groups for people who are addicted or hurting. The church is a place to belong.

Whether I know you personally or not, I know four things about you. I know this about you because it's true of everyone everywhere.

It's true because that's how God created us.

You see, I know you need to know your identity. Identity answers the question, "Who am I?" Most of us try to answer that question by saying what we do rather than knowing who we are!

You see, first and foremost, you are a child of the Father. Being a child of God is your primary identity. I know some people think we are all children of God, but they are wrong.

God wants children. He wants a family. This is seen all through Scripture. God told Adam and Eve – Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth. Jesus taught us to pray – Our Father who art in heaven.

God loved His Son so much that He wanted a vast family who would share His life, nature, vision, purpose. God's eternal purpose is to have a vast family of children conformed to the image of His only begotten Son, united in His Son, who will bring Him glory and honor in all things. Hebrews 2:10 (NCV) says:

God is the One who made all things, and all things are for His glory. He wanted to have many children share His glory...

This is God's will – having a big family. But, not everyone is part of God's family – only those who have been born again. The first prophecy in the Bible is found in Gen. 3:15 where God said to Satan:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will bruise His heel.

This shows God has offspring or children and so does Satan.

There is a big lie that people buy into that we are all God's children, one great big happy family. This is not what the Bible teaches! Yes, in the sense that He created everything, God is the father of everything. But the Bible plainly teaches that not everyone is a child of God.

In John 8:31-47 Jesus had a conversation with some people who did not believe He was the son of God. He told them in verses 42-44

If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on My own; but He sent Me. Why is My language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire.

Everyone is part of one of two families: God's or Satan's. All it requires to be part of Satan's family is to be born. But to be a part of God's family you must be born again! You must change kingdoms, change families, change fathers!

Every human being was created by God but not everyone is a child of God. You became part of the human family by your first birth, but you become a member of God's family by your second birth. Colossians 1:13-14 says:

He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

God wants a family, and He wants you to be a part of it. How do we become a member of God's family? 1 Peter 1:3-4 TLB says:

It is His boundless mercy that has given us the privilege of being born again so that we are now members of God's own family. Now we live in the hope of eternal life because Christ rose again from the dead. And God has reserved for His children the priceless gift of eternal life.

The invitation to be part of God's family is universal, but there is one condition: profession of faith in Jesus. Galatians 3:26 TLB says:

For now we are all children of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

When we place our faith in Christ, God becomes our Father, we become his children, other believers become our brothers and sisters, and the church becomes our spiritual family. John 1:12-13 says:

To all who did accept Him and believe in Him He gave the right to become children of God. They did not become His children in any human way - by any human parents or human desire. They were born of God.

When you become a believer in Jesus Christ – your primary identity is child of the Father.

The second thing I know that you need to know is your purpose. To know why you exist. Identity answers the question "Who am I?" but purpose answers the question, "Why am I?"

Your ultimate purpose is to glorify your Father in everything you do! Each of us have individual purpose and calling, but we all have the same purpose of bringing glory to God through what we do. How do we do that? We do it like Jesus said in John 17:4

I have glorified You on the earth by completing the work You gave Me to do.

We bring glory to Father God by knowing and doing His will for our lives! That's our purpose!

The third thing I know that you need to know your destiny. Destiny answers the question, "Where am I going?"

When you become a child of God, your ultimate destination is heaven. But your destiny is found in Romans 8:28-29-

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His design and purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also destined from the beginning to be molded into the image of His Son, that He might become the firstborn among many brethren.

Your destiny is to become like Christ! Everything that God allows to happen in your life is permitted for one great, eternal purpose: to conform your character to the image of Christ. This is what discipleship is about – becoming like Christ. Luke 6:40 says:

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.

God has us in a training program to become like Christ.

The fourth thing I know that you need is a family, or a community. You need a place to belong.

God has so designed you that you find your identity in Christ.

You find your purpose and reason for being in Christ.

You find your destiny in Christ.

And you find your place to belong in the church that Jesus is building.

Satan wants to steal all of this from you! He wants to steal your identity by giving you an orphan spirit that keeps you from knowing God as Father. The result of that is a self-centered and independent life where you live for yourself, but without any real identity, purpose or destiny. That kind of life is way beneath what Jesus died for! 2 Corinthians 5:15 says:

He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.

There are other people who do find their identity as a son or daughter of the Father, but they think they're an only child! Everything is about them.

They don't initiate relationships with other people.

They make church all about themselves and their needs.

They don't give anything, but they expect everyone to give to them.

They expect others to pray for them, but they don't pray for others.

They expect the worship leaders to sing only the songs they like and worship in the way they want and they put no thought into the needs of other people.

They want to do what pleases themselves without thinking of others.

But this is not what Jesus died for! Remember Romans 8:29 –

...that He might become the firstborn among many brethren.

The path to spiritual maturity goes from orphanhood to child of the Father to mature sonship that is a vital part of God's family. That family is the church.

I know it's popular these days to put the church down. Many people think that they don't need church. But they just don't know what they're missing.

Now – I'm not talking about just attending church. I'm talking about becoming part of a family of believers who live life together.

Who laugh together and cry together.

Who pray for each other when we have needs.

Who encourage each other when we are discouraged.

Who lift each other up when we are down.

Who give to each other when there is financial crisis.

Who share each other's deepest secrets and pain and hopes and dreams.

We all belong in a place like that.

And that place is the church!

Some people think the world would be better off without Jesus, without church, without any religion. That shows that they do not realize the huge impact that Jesus Christ and the Christian church have made in the world.

If you are like me and want to make a difference in this world – there's no better place to do that than in the church!

The truth is that the church impacts the life of everyone – not just those in the church, but even those who don't attend church – even those who are anti-church! The Church impacts the lives of everyone every day. That's because of the great things that have been accomplished by those who are followers of Christ and members of the church!

You might not know it – but the church has been responsible for many advances in science, government, business, education, medicine and the arts. In fact, the Christian church has made more changes on earth for good than any other movement or people group in history! And all people – even unbelievers and atheists – enjoy the blessing of those advancements. And the church has impacted you! How?

If you've ever received treatment in a hospital, you can thank the church because churches started the first hospitals in the world. Today the church is the largest provider of medical care in the world! In fact, most of hospitals have names like Baptist or Methodist or Presbyterian.

If you've received an education, you can thank the church because education in America was started by churches. Most major universities were started by churches to train ministers – including Harvard, Yale, Oxford and Princeton.

You can thank the church for advancement in the arts.

Some of the greatest writers in history were Christians, including C.S. Lewis who wrote the Chronicles of Narnia and J.R.R. Tolkien who wrote the Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit.

You can thank the church for advancement of civil liberties. The civil rights movement of the 1960's was mainly led by churches and ministers like Dr. Martin Luther King. The abolition of slavery in the Western world happened after a long fight by Christians like William Wilberforce.

People who are in churches are giving people. Most charitable organizations were started by Christians including the Salvation Army, The YMCA the Red Cross, World Vision, Compassion International, Food for the Hungry and Samaritan's Purse.

In short, the church has impacted every area of life. The modern missions' movement has gone to the four corners of the earth with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And everywhere the church has gone:

The Word of God has been translated and people have been regenerated
 Morality and justice have been upgraded and crime has abated
 The status of women has been elevated and slaves have been liberated
 Regard for human life has been cultivated and suffering has alleviated
 People have been educated and ethnicities have been integrated

And everywhere the church has gone, countless lives have been transformed by the power of the gospel. Nothing has changed the world like the power of God's word.

Atheism does not change people's life – but Jesus does! You can look all you want, but you will be hard pressed to find hospitals or orphanages started by atheists. That's because the power of unbelief changes no one! But the power of faith in Christ has changed billions of people throughout history!

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 says:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

Those of us who are followers of Christ are not here because we think we are so good or holy. We know what our lives were like before Christ and we know what we are like now! We know that Jesus has changed our lives and we give Him the credit!

The reason the church has made such an impact on the world is because Jesus has made such an impact on us!

The reason Christians make a difference is because Christ made us different.

Without Jesus Christ, there would be no salvation.

Without Jesus Christ, there would be no forgiveness.

Without Jesus Christ, there would be no church.

For us the church is a place to belong and a place to become. People gather here on Sundays and throughout the week to learn the word of God.

We don't do that so that we can become Bible scholars.

We do that because the Word of God changes our lives.

It makes us better people so that we can help other people.

The church also helps us grow by giving us opportunities to use our gifts and talents to serve God and others.

Listen – I know the church is not perfect.

But the truth of the Christian message does not stand or fall on the way

Christians have acted throughout history or are acting today.

The truths of Christianity must be distinguished from the people who say they follow them.

The real focus of questions about the truth of Christian faith is Jesus Christ Himself. No matter what imperfections you may find in the church – Jesus Himself is perfect!

No matter what failures we may find in Christians, Jesus Himself never failed.

No matter how Christians may have hurt you, Jesus will never hurt you.

I'm not asking you to accept Christians; I'm asking you to accept Jesus.

It is to Him you will ultimately answer; not to Christians.

Virtually everyone agrees that no one impacted history like Jesus Christ.

And no group of people has impacted the world like the church.

Emperors have tried to silence the church.

Governments have tried to destroy the church.

People are still trying today.

But it has never worked and will never work because Jesus said in Matthew 16:18

I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Jesus has changed the history of the world and He continues to do so!

He has changed the lives of many people here today.

And He can change your life and your history right now!

That's why you belong here!