

# I Have A Dream - Community

REVIEW: We have been studying through the dream of what the church, not could be, but should be. We have looked at what church membership is, and how important it really is. We have looked at how all of life is about glorifying God, and that includes glorifying Him with our schedules. Last week we took a look at a classic piece of literature that has become popular via the recent movie it was made into, and lessons that apply to us out of the story.

INTRO: This morning, before we get real specific on how we want to build the community in our church, I want to lay some groundwork on the purpose of community. Where does the idea of community come from? What are we really trying to accomplish with building community?

I. Usually when you talk about building community in a church setting you are referring to small groups.

A. And that makes sense, because everyone craves community - even if they do not realize it

1. People are desperate to belong and be connected to others
2. Think about the ways people try to do this
  - a) Social action
  - b) Campaigns
  - c) Planning and revitalizing neighborhoods
  - d) Feeding the homeless
  - e) Joining a gang
  - f) Getting lost in online communities
  - g) Or hanging out at coffee shops
3. All of these things are an attempt to satisfy the need for community - but they do not address the root cause of a breakdown of community
  - a) The root cause is not the internet, a fragmented society, or a lack of friendly people
  - b) The root cause is sin
    - (1) It wears down community
    - (2) It alienates us from others - leading to isolation
      - (a) Remember Adam and Eve
      - (b) The first thing they did was hide in response to their sin
      - (c) We generally do no less - we hide from the very people we should be building life with

B. So it makes sense that churches seek to break the church down into smaller and smaller groups

1. We do it by human nature because we crave community

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2. It's just we are aiming at the wrong goal when we think it is to make the church feel smaller, or give people a way to belong, or "close the back door of the church"
3. In fact, if a community is marked more by sin than by grace, it is a poor reflection of God
  - a) The community of God's people should reflect the very nature of God
  - b) We will get into this in a minute
4. The other part to this, is the fact that choosing isolation over community, especially the community of God's people, we are denying grace
  - a) Did you realize that you can't experience grace in a community of believers by remaining isolated because of sin
  - b) The beauty of grace in a community is only experienced when sin is exposed, and grace can abound in helping the one in need

## II. Community, therefore needs to be rebuilt on the Cross

A. If we all can admit the world is broken, and that sin is the very thing that isolates us, and the solutions that the world attempts do not actually fix the root cause of the brokenness, we as the church better have an alternative to offer

B. I would submit that the alternative we offer is a community that is transformed by the death and resurrection of Christ

C. Turn to Ephesians 2:15-22

1. This passage, in context, is referring to the Jews and the Gentiles both being reconciled to God - thus creating one community
2. The manner of the reconciliation is worth noting
  - a) Verse 16 - "in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross..."
  - b) Verse 19 - "you are no longer foreigners and strangers..."
    - (1) Another statement that fits in with the idea of community
    - (2) We are not strangers, but honestly as we look at other parts of Scripture, we are one family (community)
  - c) This whole new creation is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ as the cornerstone
    - (1) The most prominent piece
    - (2) The piece that everything else is based around
3. This passage is showing us that we were saved to be a community, not a church of individuals
  - a) Bonhoeffer put it this way, "Christian community means community through and in Jesus Christ"
    - (1) It is through Jesus that we are reconciled to God, and to each other

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(2) It is in Jesus that we are united together like a family - having the same bloodline of Jesus Christ

D. We are given a sense of the purpose of this community in verse 7

1. Too often we read Scripture with just our individual set of eyes
2. We need to remember that the letters in the NT were generally written to the whole church at the given location
  - a) That means read the Scriptures with a corporate set of eyes
3. That means that God is showing His riches of grace to the world through the community of faith - not just individual believers
4. So through the community of faith, God is displaying to the world in a tangible way that we have been reconciled to Him and to one another

III. The basis for community

A. We have already mentioned that we are created for community

1. We see this in all of humanity
2. And it does not matter if people are inside or outside the church

B. But why? Why are we created with this innate desire for community?

1. To answer this question, we really need to look at our identity
2. If we start with the wrong understanding of who we are, we will search for fulfillment in places other than God, leading us to settle for something far less than what God intended

C. If you are a Christian (meaning you have asked Jesus to forgive your sins, you realize that you cannot be good enough to get to heaven, but it is Jesus finished work on the cross that allows you entrance, and understand that in that moment Christ's righteousness was imputed to you as He took your sins), then your identity is in Christ

1. This new identity is a restoration of the image of God
  - a) In Genesis 2 we were created in the image of God
  - b) That image was messed up because of sin entering the world
  - c) It is through the reconciliation with God through Christ that the image is restored
2. Because this image is restored in us, it is the basis for our identity - our identity in Christ
  - a) Which means that we serve as a reflection of who God is
  - b) This image, this identity is there as a result of God, and we display part of who He is
3. Here is the basis for community
  - a) We reflect God Himself because of this image
  - b) God exists in perfect eternal relationship as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

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(1) He is already in perfect relationship with the other members of the Trinity

(2) He is a relational being

c) As a relational being, and the Creator, He has created us as relational beings as well

(1) We represent Him to the world

(2) If you need more evidence, look no further than Genesis 2:18

(a) "It's not good for man to be alone" - created for relationship

(b) Which this is where I turn as a single man when I am told I should be fulfilled in God and not desire a wife

i) Really? Adam had a perfect relationship with God Almighty

ii) And yet it is God that declares of Adam that he is lonely and that is not good - so loneliness is not a sin - how we respond to it could be

(3) So not only are we created for community - we are incomplete without community

D. So in answer to the question, "What is the basis for community?"

1. The nature of God - the fact God is a relational being - the fact that God exists, apart from us, in a perfect relationship

2. This applies equally to Christian and non-Christian alike

a) Obviously, the Christian who has the image of God restored in Him has the driving force for community

b) The non-Christian has the driving force for community as well because he also has the image of God in him - it just has not been fully restored so they will often look for community in places that will not satisfy

E. So we were created as a reflection of God, but who are we reflecting to?

1. Easy answer - all of creation

2. All you former Presbyterians out there, what is the chief end of man?

a) This is the Westminster Shorter Catechism

b) "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

3. Who do we glorify God to

a) God

b) But to the rest of the world

4. So we reflect what it is like to be in community

a) Merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness

b) We address sin, not hide sin, with compassion and patience

5. Turn to Colossians 3:12-17

a) You want to talk about a list that would reflect God Himself

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IV. Being inspired by being a reflection of God's glory needs to be empowered by His grace

A. Knowing that we are a reflection of God's glory is great and gets us part way there

1. We need to make sure that we actually are reflecting His glory
2. To do that we need to encounter His glory - much like Isaiah (Isaiah 6)

B. When we encounter the glory of God we will have a similar reaction as Isaiah

1. When He saw the glory of God, he recoiled because of His sin
  - a) He realized how sinful He was and how sinful the people of his nation were
  - b) This flies in the face of much of how people act today regarding sin
    - (1) I cannot tell you the number of times people have tried to justify sin
    - (2) Or redefine some action God calls sinful as not sinful
2. When we see the glory of God we should be led to the point where we realize what our sin is, and that we do not deserve to stand before a holy God

C. In this same scene from Isaiah, we see the grace of God as well

1. The angel takes a coal from the altar and touches Isaiah's lips, making Him clean
  - a) Did Isaiah do anything to become clean - no
  - b) It was God that made Isaiah clean
2. Much like the grace of God for us through the cross
  - a) We did nothing to make ourselves clean other than acknowledge the truth
  - b) God did everything - when we were not worthy, and would be cowering in fear due to our sin, God extended grace

D. So what would this community look like - a community inspired by God's glory and empowered by His grace?

1. Turn to 1 Peter 2:9-12 - we will remain here the rest of the day
2. The context of this passage is that we are being built into a spiritual house of God
3. First, look at what Peter starts with: identity
  - a) We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession
    - (1) We have a new corporate identity
      - (a) We are a chosen people
      - (b) Being called a people was something very important in OT times for Israel - it was about identity
      - (c) Here God is calling followers of Christ a chosen people

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- (2) This identity comes from what Christ has done for us
  - (a) We did not produce this community ourselves
  - (b) It is based on what Jesus Christ did, and how He called us together into one body in Himself
- (3) This identity is already ours - we simply need to BE this
  - (a) We need to acknowledge, accept, and model our lives after this identity
- (4) We are on a team
  - (a) Christianity is NOT an individual pursuit
  - (b) It is a team sport
  - (c) And while many if not most churches in America pay lip service to this, few ever really embrace their identity as God's chosen people - as a true community
  - (d) So for community to be real, to grow and to image God to the world around us, we need to see ourselves not as a group of individuals that meet under the same roof for worship, but a people group, connected together by Jesus
- b) Next Peter gives us our purpose (which we have mentioned before)
  - (1) We became this group - this chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation SO THAT we may declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His light
  - (2) This means that as a group, as a community we are to worship Jesus and declare the good news that a Savior has come
    - (a) This only makes sense
    - (b) The normal and natural expression of a community that has been reconciled from death to life is worship and proclaiming
    - (c) He called us out of the isolation as a result of sin, and into relationship with Himself and His family
      - i) That is the part we often forget because we are so ingrained in Americanisms
      - ii) Our culture is such an individualistic culture that we forget that we have been called into community with Jesus family
- c) The next thing Peter urges us to do is seek sanctification as an outflow of the gospel - done in community
  - (1) We are sanctified by living lives that honor God and are marked by growth and maturation (both words are ongoing tasks - we have not arrived there yet)
  - (2) Sanctification comes through immersing ourselves in the gospel
    - (a) It continues to renew us, transform us, and lead us toward deeper maturity

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- (b) For our church to be a life-giving church, we need to be people that continue to renew ourselves in the gospel
- (3) We do this in community, and let me show you the subtle hint that Peter gives that this is not an individualistic pursuit
  - (a) We know the letter was written to a group of people, so that is our first hint that these commands, and encouragements are to be lived out in community
  - (b) The second hint is that the entire sentence is written using plural words - which I confirmed in Greek since English usually is not specific
  - (c) The third hint is when he says that we should abstain from sinful desires that wage war against your soul
    - i) You wage war as a group, not as a group of individuals
    - ii) In fact, if you try to wage war as an individual, you will lose - despite what Arnold and Sly have taught us in the movies (in point of fact, they always had help too)
    - iii) We wage war by helping each other stay focused on the gospel, and how God is using it to change us
      - (1) Sometimes we have to get directly involved in standing in the path of someone desiring to follow a sinful path
      - (2) But we need to get over the fear of sharing our struggles with our brothers and sister so we can have people to call for support
- d) The last thing that Peter brings up is protecting our witness in the neighborhood
  - (1) The expectation is that our Christian community is seen by the world around us
    - (a) The underlining assumption is that the way we live in community is seen and should point to Christ
    - (b) I think we can all admit on a church-wide scale, many churches have faltered on this
      - i) Churches often have reputation for fighting among themselves
      - ii) This does not put a good taste in the mouths of those we are trying to display Christ to
    - (c) Our church, on the church-wide scale has faced those issues in the past, and I would say we have overcome those issues too
  - (2) Please keep in mind that this honorable conduct does not earn our righteousness or holiness

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- (a) That was imputed (given to us) when we accepted His offer of salvation
- (b) This holy and righteous lifestyle to be lived out in community is a testimony to the power of the cross
- (3) Jesus told his disciples something similar during the last supper
  - (a) He told them that the world will know they were His disciples by their love for each other
  - (b) There is a way that we love one another that testifies to the world and that glorifies Jesus
  - (c) That, in fact is our goal - bringing glory to God
    - i) We should not buy in it for what we get out of it, but for what brings the most glory to God
    - ii) When that is our aim, people's needs are met, people see Jesus and the glory and change He brings
- (4) Our witness to the world is often more powerful in community than as individuals
  - (a) Living in light of the gospel is easier when you don't have to deal with others than might annoy you
  - (b) Living in light of the gospel with others that might sin against you is more difficult
  - (c) The world gets that, and wants to see the gospel lived out
    - i) Experiencing people that confess, repent and forgive each other is usually foreign to them
    - ii) Community that is transformed by the gospel and lives in this way is a strong witness to the world around us

## V. Conclusion

- A. The fact is that community is not an option
  - 1. Because it flows out of the very nature of God
  - 2. He created us to be in community with one another
  - 3. This community points back to God and brings Him glory
- B. So next week we will continue looking at community from a different lens, and in a little more detail
- C. In future weeks we want to roll out to you one of the changes of the culture of our church to be meeting this need of community