

January 6, 2013

# A Gospel Centered Community

John 17:18 – 21; 1 Peter 2:9 – 10

This morning we are beginning a series for the next few weeks that we are calling **A Gospel Centered Community**. We are going to take a little break from the exposition of the gospel of John to focus on this idea of community for several reasons. One reason is that as believers, we have been saved into community – the community that is the church, and we need to have a deeper understanding and appreciation of that. When you embrace the gospel, you are embracing community. We have such an individualistic view of salvation that we fail to appreciate the fact that though we have been saved personally, we are working out this salvation corporately.

Secondly we need to understand how thoroughly and comprehensively the purpose of God is worked out in community – the church. We have not been redeemed to simply live solitary, personal lives of holiness so that we can individually go to heaven. God intends to demonstrate His glory and power and love and grace through the church as Paul tells us in Ephesians. We also need to embrace our identity as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people as Peter puts it. Those are community words – those are corporate words. Because we live in such an individualistic culture – we've put an individualistic spin on the central teaching of the Bible, and we need our minds renewed to the truth.

When Jesus taught His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, He uses a construction in the Greek that doesn't really come across in English because we don't have a distinctive second person plural construction, unless you happen to be from Alabama or Georgia or somewhere in the south. When Jesus says things like 'Blessed are you when people insult you...' or 'You are the salt of the earth...' or 'You are the light of the world...', essentially He's saying, 'Y'all'. He's addressing a community of people. He's not saying so much that individually we are salt and light – but corporately we are an expression of salt and light in the world. We read the Sermon on the Mount and we apply it entirely individually – and Jesus is saying, 'No, no, no – I'm calling you into a **community** that looks like this'.

In John 17 Jesus is praying for this little community of disciples as He sends them out into the world: "*As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.*" John 17:18 And then He prays something we probably don't expect to hear: "*For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.*" John 17:19 In other words, Jesus is saying that He is subordinating Himself for the good of the community. 'I am devoting Myself to the work of redemption, for the sake of their holiness'. That is community talk. And it is not just the eleven He is praying for: "*I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word*" John 17:20 In other words, there is a vast number who are yet to be part of this community of faith that He has in mind here. And today that means you and me.

And then He gets to the heart of His prayer: *that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.* John 17:21 His prayer for these eleven, and for the vast multitudes that come after, is community. He prays that they all, we all who believe, may be one – just like the Father and Son and Holy Spirit are one – **so that** the world would believe in Him. That's the heart of His prayer – it's a prayer for a community that so magnifies and glorifies God, that it causes the world to believe in His Son. That is the church, the household of faith, the chosen race, the royal priesthood, the holy nation.

We have to unlearn some stuff as rugged individualistic American Christians. We have to understand that God is not redeeming loser individuals to make them successful individuals. He is redeeming lost individuals to make them into a glorious corporate expression of Himself. When Jesus prays for oneness He is praying that we would have the same eternal relationship that the Father and Son and Holy Spirit enjoy. Tim Keller puts it like this: '*At the heart of the universe is the exploding love and joy that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have as they each defer to, glorify, center upon, rejoice in, and adore the others'...and every human being was designed to stand in the presence of God, and not to center on yourself, but to defer to, to glorify, center on, rejoice in and adore the glory of God supremely*'. And that is the consummate community. That is the relationship you so desperately seek, that is the love you are looking for in every set of arms; that is the beauty you are looking for in any face; that is the gold you're looking for in all your pursuit of wealth; that's the rest you're really looking for in all your homes and all your houses – nothing less is ever going to satisfy.

A central theme which runs throughout the Bible is that **God is creating a people who belong to Him.** Whether in the Old Covenant or the New, the work of God is the calling of a people. He is not merely saving individuals; He is building a new community in which he is the central participant. He is forming a new society out of the ashes of a fallen and rebellious human race. The development of a community lies at the heart of God's covenant promise "***I will be your God and you will be my people.***" Peter outlines this in his first epistle: *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* 1 Peter 2:9 – 10 Look at those nouns: race, priesthood, nation, people – it is all about community. We must take the call to be this new community with the utmost seriousness.

In the coming weeks we will develop this further as Pastor Craig will show us next week how community is really at the heart of God's whole creation drama; and how we have been made in God's image and built for community and connection and relationship. And we'll see that when we live outside of community and interdependence on one another, our very humanity is compromised and subverted. And we'll look at those things that grow relationship and community, and see we need one another and indeed we are incomplete without each other. But this week I want to take just a few minutes to remind us of what this community – Summit Christian Fellowship is all about. Every community is defined by its mission – why it exists, what it is for, what it is doing. And if you want to be part of the community, you have to buy into the mission statement. So this morning let's look at why Summit Christian Fellowship exists and what it is we are doing in the world.

### **Summit Christian Fellowship exists to delight in God**

Jesus Himself tells us that one of the reasons He came was to fill us with joy. John 15:1, *'These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.'* The shorter catechism of the Westminster Confession says that **the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.** I like John Piper's restatement of that: The chief end of man is to glorify God **by** enjoying Him forever. **That is, the best and highest glory God receives from His creation is when their souls are made happy in Him.** C.S. Lewis put it this way in a letter to a friend: ***'It is a Christian duty, as you know, for everyone to be as happy as he can.'***

Too often, Christian duty has been seen as dull, boring, and tedious. As a result, we have the caricature of the joyless, mean-spirited, and narrow-minded Christian that is the staple of many books and films – and a caricature of a God who sits in heaven waiting for us to mess up so He can zap us. **And that is because we have bought into the idea that anything that makes us happy is suspect.** It is a philosophy that has crept into the church that says that the moral value of an act decreases insofar as we intend to derive any benefit from it. Actions are good if the actor is not trying to gain from it. We should **do** the good because it **is** good. Therefore any motivation to seek joy corrupts the act. And I think that is because too much of our so-called 'happiness' has had to do with **satisfying our legitimate desires by illegitimate means.** We attempt to satisfy the God-given desire for joy and happiness with things that ultimately do not last and run after the shadow of the real thing.

God built us in such a way that to run after happiness is part of who we are. God built the desire for joy and happiness right in. Blaise Pascal was simply recognizing the Divine design when he said ***'All men seek happiness without exception. They all aim at this goal however different the means they use to attain it. . . They will never make the smallest move but with this as its goal. This is the motive of all the actions of all men, even those who contemplate suicide.'*** Don't get me wrong. I am not saying that our joy and happiness is the goal. **God is the goal, and pursuing God will result in our greatest joy and lasting happiness.** Jonathan Edwards wrote this: ***'Resolved, To endeavor to obtain for myself as much happiness in the other world as I possibly can, with all the power, might, vigor, and vehemence, yea violence, I am capable of, or can bring myself to exert, in any way that can be thought of.'***

Delighting in God means that this community resolves to live in such a way that all of life – our living and our dying, trumpet the greatness of God through our enjoyment of Him. We enjoy God in such a way so as to demonstrate the triumph of God over sin and the world and death and hell and the devil. It means that the testimony of our joy-filled, grace-proving lives becomes the demonstration of God's incredible mercy and infinite goodness in the world.

### **Summit Christian Fellowship exists to delight in God through Jesus Christ**

God is the author of saving grace which comes to us only through relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ. True joy, peace, and fulfillment can only come as we are rightly related to Christ. Salvation for anyone comes only through Him. *'For there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved'*. Acts 4:12 Do you feel the impact of that verse? *'...for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved'* Do you understand the narrowness of that road? Are you willing to proclaim that in the world? In our world of relative truth and mis-placed toleration, this does not sit very well. We are told that people can know God through many other means. But that is not what the Bible teaches.

God dwells in *'...unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see...'* 1 Timothy 6:16 And the gospel of John tells us that *'No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.'* John 1:18 The only way to know God, to delight in God, is through Jesus Christ. You cannot know Him or enjoy Him apart from a relationship with His Son. Peter tells us that the way to delight in God is to delight in His Son: *And though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.* 1 Peter 1:8-9 That is why we say we delight in God through Jesus Christ.

### **Summit Christian Fellowship exists to delight in God through Jesus Christ, spreading His joy**

Since our greatest joy flows from delighting ourselves in God, it is a natural consequence that that joy be spread and shared by others. How many of you like to watch a really good movie by yourself? I don't know any who does. A really good movie is something that has to be shared with someone. You need to share the joy you have with someone else. The same is true for joy in God. **Joy in God is the impetus for missions.** It is joy that is not dependent upon circumstance, emotional state, or abundance of possessions; but on God who is the author and source of joy.

Max Lucado wrote about a man named Robert Reed who boasted 'I have everything I need for joy!' **Robert Reed's hands are twisted and his feet are useless. He can't bathe himself. He can't feed himself. He can't brush his teeth, comb his hair, or put on his underwear. His shirts are held together by strips of Velcro'. His speech drags like a worn-out audio cassette. Robert has cerebral palsy. The disease keeps him from driving a car, riding a bike, and going for a walk. But it didn't keep him from graduating from high school or attending Abilene Christian University, from which he graduated with a degree in Latin. Having cerebral palsy didn't keep him from teaching at a St. Louis junior college or from venturing overseas on five mission trips. And Robert's disease didn't prevent him from becoming a missionary in Portugal. He moved to Lisbon, alone, in 1972. There he rented a hotel room and began studying Portuguese. He found a restaurant owner who would feed him after the rush hour and a tutor who would instruct him in the language. Then he stationed himself daily in a park, where he distributed brochures about Christ. Within six years he led seventy people to the Lord, one of whom became his wife, Rosa.**

**I heard Robert speak recently. I watched other men carry him in his wheelchair onto the platform. I watched them lay a Bible in his lap. I watched his stiff fingers force open the pages. And I watched people in the audience wipe away tears of admiration from their faces. Robert could have asked for sympathy or pity, but he did just the opposite. He held his bent hand up in the air and boasted, "I have everything I need for joy." His shirts are held together by Velcro', but his life is held together by joy.** This is why we say Summit Christian Fellowship exists to delight in God through Jesus Christ, spreading His joy.

### **Summit Christian Fellowship exists to delight in God through Jesus Christ, spreading His joy through the gospel**

It is through the gospel that people come to Christ and enter into the joy of the Lord. Paul tells us in Romans that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* Romans 1:16 Jesus told His disciples, when they asked what were the signs of His return – that is, what were the visible expressions that their mission was over: *And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.* Matthew 24:14

Our mission is over when this gospel has been proclaimed to every tribe and nation and made known in every tongue and people group on earth. That is why we major on the gospel here at Summit – that is why we promote home-front missions and cross-cultural missions. That is why we pray for open doors and gospel clarity at home and abroad. That is why we teach that we have been commissioned by God to spend our lives making others eternally glad in God through the gospel.

***Summit Christian Fellowship exists to delight in God through Jesus Christ, spreading His joy through the gospel to all people***

**Missions exist because the worship of God does not;** and the book of Acts makes it clear what our mission is about: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.* Acts 1:8 The power of the Holy Spirit is for the fulfilling of the mission. And the mission is to our neighborhoods, our cities, and all the way into the remotest parts of the earth. Peter tells us that God has brought us into community, He has made those who were not a people His people so that they would proclaim the excellencies of Christ to the nations. We proclaim the gospel to all people so that they will hear and respond and be brought into this community of grace. We are a gospel-centered community joyfully engaged in bringing others into the community of adoration and worship and praise of the Triune God.

**We believe** that we are called as Christ's ambassadors to carry the message of His saving grace to all peoples in all places.

**We believe** that the gospel is relevant for all peoples, and all cultures and at all times and that God has called us to risk-taking endeavors to make the nations glad in God.

**We believe** that God has blessed us so that the nations might be glad in God and sing for joy in His salvation. *May God be gracious to us and bless us and make His face to shine upon us, that Your way may be known on earth, Your saving power among all nations.* Psalm 67:1-2

**We believe** that our delight and joy in God bring Him the most glory and that our joy-filled, grace-proving lives are meant to be a demonstration of that joy to the nations, igniting their hearts to be glad in God.

***Summit Christian Fellowship exists to delight in God through Jesus Christ, spreading His joy through the gospel to all people***

*Our good and faithful heavenly Father,*

*May we be a people who delight in You, revel in Your goodness, take joy in Your salvation, glory in the cross and make our souls happy in You. Thank You for Your Son who died that we might live, who was forsaken that we might be brought in. Thank You for the great promises and invitations of the gospel – pardon for rebels, liberty for captives, health for the sick and salvation for the lost. Thank You for granting us mercy to become Your people – Your own treasured possession. Help us to live the gospel, proclaim the gospel, walk in the joy of the gospel and live as those who have been made happy in God and do all we can to make others happy in You. Make us a holy community that so magnifies and glorifies God, that it causes the world to believe in His Son, and grant that we would delight in God through Jesus Christ spreading His joy through the gospel, we pray in the precious, life-giving, joy-filling, community-making name of Jesus Christ our Savior, Amen.*