

A people who belong

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Date: 01 October 2023

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[0 : 00] When we think about nation, what we're thinking about today is a people who belong. A people who belong. And belonging is, without exception, something that everyone wants or needs in life.

The idea of belonging to someone. Belonging to something. And it works on many different levels. What I mean is that everyone, without exception, desires to belong. And feels that sense of, that need to belong. The reason that's the case, the real reason, is because belonging to something enables us and helps us to actually answer the question of who you are. Who am I? How you answer who you are or define who as you are, it comes from the meaning from your life of things that you belong to.

The reason that's the case is belonging to something makes you feel important, like you matter. It gives you a sense of purpose, of security, of value, of acceptance.

[1 : 09] The reason is because you share something with a group of people of which you have something in common, to which you belong. It could be that you share common values.

It could be that you have a shared history or you have a common experience, a shared outlook on life. It could be the same nationality. Anything that you share with something, with someone else, it creates a bond between you.

And then you have that sense of belonging. And I want to give you an example, because so far it's kind of left in the abstract. One of my areas or identities where I feel that sense of belonging, if you know, most of you know that I'm a proud Yorkshireman.

What that means is, is that if I meet anyone from Yorkshire, or even better, West Yorkshire, I share so much with them. There's places that we went, as I could never have met them before, but there's places that we went as kids, that I only have to say that you're from West Yorkshire.

And I know that they'll have been there for a day out. There's particular foods that you eat that's common. There's even words or phrases that if I spoke them here, you'd need an interpreter.

[2 : 29] But if, you know, someone from West Yorkshire, they know what on Ilkleymore Bar Tap means. I have a bond with someone from West Yorkshire that goes, that I never have had to met them before.

So everyone born in West Yorkshire, everyone in Yorkshire has been for a day trip to Scarborough. And if they haven't, I'd have to question, are you really from Yorkshire? I think we understand what that means.

There is an acceptance in the sense of belonging, of a shared bond between us because of where we grew up. And that's not just me, is it?

That's particular to me. But there'll be stuff that is the same for each of us. It could be a shared pastime. It could be a shared hobby. You know, if there's somebody who is a gamer who meets another gamer, they might have never have nothing else, but they can talk about gaming.

And they have this shared bond because they have a shared, something that they enjoy together. If you grew up riding horses and you meet another horse rider, they're shared bonds.

[3 : 39] I think we get the idea. There is, what's going on is that there is overlap between your story, your life story, and theirs.

Your life story and the story of the groups you belong to, these stories of life. It tells us who we are and what we value. And it's those stories, actually, where we create meaning for us, where we create purpose.

They create, as we meet someone, that we share those bonds with. It creates safety and comfort because we're with people that are like us. A sense of unity and togetherness with those who are like us.

A sense of belonging. The desire to belong, it is not an accident. It is not an accident to create meaning and value from an experience from your life story.

It is not an accident either. The desire to belong is given to you by God when he created you. He created you with the desire to belong and to find that belonging through something that you would share with other people.

[4 : 51] Through a shared life story. Through bonds with others that would bring meaning to your life. And we're going to consider what that means for us this morning.

And actually, that need to belong, which we all crave, of acceptance, can only be met by belonging to the loving God. It can only be met by that belonging to him.

And therefore, belonging to his people. As I said, we've been looking at these amazing verses from 1 Peter 2.

A reminder for us here that what Peter says about the church here. He's writing to the church. He's not writing to an individual. That you, what we read in verse 9, but you.

It's a plural. It's you. He's writing to a people. Well, everything he says about the church here is the same language. The same language that God says to his people in the Old Testament.

[5 : 53] What he says to Israel. Just an illustration that I used a few weeks ago of the way that God speaks to us through shadows. We know how shadows work.

If a shadow, the thing that's making the shadow. If you see the shadow, you can tell what it is, but you can't tell the full picture. You can tell if it's a person or a tree, but you can't tell what type of tree. Or what the person's face looks like. You would have to look up. And speak to them. And see them. And see what they look like. That is what the Old Testament is doing. As we read, if you only have the Old Testament.

It's like looking at the shadow. When you look up and you look at Jesus Christ, you see what the shadow is all about. That is what we're looking at here. As we read some of these terms, what it means.

And today we're looking at those terms that come on either side of priesthood. Which we looked at a few weeks ago. A chosen people. And a holy nation. And in the same way that we find today a sense of belonging, unity, togetherness from our identity.

[7 : 03] From groups that we have in common. The Israelites felt belonging and unity from their shared national identity. That they were Israelites.

From their shared history as God's chosen people. It's worth looking back at what it meant for the Israelites before we look at what it means for the church. I'm going to, as an example, to illustrate what it meant for them.

The shared history of belonging. Introduce you to two fictitious characters. We'll call them regular Joe Israelite and ordinary Fred Israelite.

Both regular Joe, ordinary Fred, both Israelites. What do they share? What was the history that shaped? How they thought about themselves and one another. That gave them a value and a sense of belonging.

Well there's lots of things that we could say. And I'm going to pick out three. They had a common origin. They had a common rescue. And they had a common purpose.

[8 : 06] A common origin or beginning. A common rescue and a common purpose. So firstly, a common origin. All the way back to the father of the Israelites.

God promised Abraham what? That a great nation would come. Would descend from him. In Genesis 12, he said to Abraham, Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land.

I will show you. And then he said, I will make you into a great nation. And I will bless you. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you, I will curse. And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. All the way back to their great, great, great, great, great, however old they were.

Their great grandfather. Their forefather, Abraham, Joe and Fred could have seen themselves. That they could trace their lineage, their family history all back to the same man.

[9 : 08] And that they themselves as descendants were a fulfillment of that promise. They were descendants of that promise. I don't know if you've, it's quite popular, isn't it, on the minute.

It's been for a few years now on the BBC. There's that program, Who Do You Think You Are? I don't know if you've ever watched it. It's a great program, actually. You get lots of history. But often it's a celebrity looking back as to where they came from.

And they find some distant relative in another country that they share this family history, this unique origin. And they have some bond between them because of where they came from.

That would have been the same for Fred and Joe. From one old man and his elderly wife, Sarah, came Isaac. And from that baby, all were descended.

God chose Abraham and the nation came through him. Could have traced their family all the way back. And that went, not just for these two guys, but for all other Israelites as well.

[10:15] Being able to, they would have known that story of Abraham at the back of their hand. Because it was an important part of who they were. Their shared history.

The descendants of Abraham. Abraham. They shared a common origin. The second thing they shared. They shared a common rescue. Now this was a while back.

You remember, I don't know if you'll definitely remember it. The news story. The boys who were trapped in the cave. It was 2018. I struggle to pronounce it. I think it's called Tam Lung.

Tam Lung Cave. They were trapped there. And it was on the news of how they're going to get these boys out. How they're going to rescue them. If you remember, Elon Musk even turned up and tried to weigh in.

Ended up looking a bit of a fool when he did it. But eventually they got these boys out there. You can imagine, can't you? That was 2018.

[11:14] You can imagine five years later. If those boys were met up. The stories they tell. Do you remember? We were stuck under there. It was terrible, wasn't it? But then the men came and they rescued us.

They share this. They always share that story together. Of how they shared in this common rescue. The Israelites shared a common rescue.

The whole nation was rescued from, redeemed, you might say, from Egyptian slavery. God's people, as we know, had moved to Egypt because of famine under Joseph.

Egypt was the only place to get food. But once the famine had gone, they stayed there and grew to be a great nation. That promise to Abraham was fulfilled.

But Pharaoh was threatened by the growing race of the nation of people and he made them his slaves. But through Moses, God rescued his people out of slavery. Following the 10th plague, in which the eldest born son of every Egyptian family died, Pharaoh told the Israelites to leave.

[12:23] And he rescued them. God rescued them from slavery. Provided a lamb for the Passover. God divided the Red Sea for them to walk across, destroying the Pharaoh and his army who chased them.

They shared a common story of rescue, of redemption. Anyone who'd been through the Red Sea would have been able to tell that story. Can you remember what it was like when we walked through the sea and there was walls of water on each side?

Wasn't it incredible? And as those stories got passed down to generation to generation, it was my great, great, great, great grandmother who walked through the sea. We were all rescued in the same way.

God's people sharing a common rescue. Third thing they shared. They shared a common purpose. This is one, I think, that's often forgotten.

The purpose of Israel. What was Israel's purpose? It's actually contained in the verses that I read a little bit earlier. The promise to Abraham.

[13:28] They were a great nation. Their name was great. But the purpose, the purpose of Israel was to bless all the other nations of the earth. They were to draw out all the other nations to worship the living God.

And they knew that. You might think they'd forgotten it, but they knew it. In Psalm 67, they even sing about it. They sing in verse 7, May God bless us still, so that all the ends of the earth will fear him.

Israel was supposed to be a missionary people. It wasn't just until in the becoming of the Holy Spirit that we had to reach the ends of the earth. Israel was supposed to live holy and distinctive lives.

That drew all the other nations to worship the living God. To be a light to the nations. Their laws, how they lived. It was so distinctive to the ancient Near East.

It was supposed to make other nations jealous and draw them to the living God. Three things that Joe and Fred had in common.

[14 : 36] A current origin, a common rescue, and a common purpose. But it wasn't enough.

It wasn't enough of them. Israel failed as a nation to do what it was designed for. The belonging, the identity, the shared experiences, history, and values that were supposed to be a bond to bind them together.

It should have led to unity and togetherness and holy living. But the nation of Israel failed. Where they should have had unity, they divided and fell out with one another.

Where they should have worshipped God because of what he'd done for them. This common rescue. They became jealous. They forgot the story of redemption. They became jealous of the gods of other nations and worshipped them instead.

Where they had a common purpose to live wholly attractive lives that drew people they rejected God's laws. Israel failed. Israel failed.

[15 : 41] Up until that last point that Israel failed. Everything that I've said about Old Testament Israel is true about the New Testament church. We share a common origin.

The origin of Israel was biological. They were a race sharing DNA. They were born into a family that could trace its roots to the same man. Our origin is spiritual.

We were born into a family. A spiritual family. By spiritual birth. Jesus said to Nicodemus. No one can see the kingdom of God unless they're born again. And we share that.

We're born into the family of God. You can meet a follower of Jesus from the other side of the world. And you share this with them in their life story. That you share the same origin.

Because you're both born of God. You share the living God as the origin of your spiritual birth.

Which means that everyone in the church is spiritually related.

[16 : 42] One nation. Not by blood. Not by flesh. But by the spirit of God through Jesus Christ. What that means for the church. Is that unity is so important.

Because you really are united to one another. The identity. The life story that you have as a nation. Of brothers and sisters in Christ.

With God as your heavenly father. It wipes out all of the distinctions. It is the narrative. Your life story and place of belonging. Whether you're from Yorkshire.

Whether you're from Winchborough. Or the Highlands. Or whether you're from the other side of the world. Whether you're into gaming or horse riding. The origin you share supersedes all other distinctions.

Galatians 3. There is neither Jew nor Gentile. Neither slave nor free. Nor is there male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ.

[17 : 41] Then you are Abraham's seed. And heirs according to the promise. And as the local church. We fight against all the objections.

That say that you can do church on your own. In your bedroom. Stick on some worship songs on Spotify. Listen to a sermon on YouTube. That's me. No. Unity is strengthened.

When we continue to meet together. As the local church. One assembly. Because we're one nation.

To have relationships with one another locally. To invest in one another.

To gather together around Jesus Christ. A unified church. Shares a common origin. And gathers together. We share a common rescue.

Each person in the church. Is rescued in the same way. Jesus shed his blood for them. Jesus loves the person.

[18 : 39] Think of this. Jesus loves the person next to you so much. That he bled for them. Just think about what that means. With how we interact with one another.

You think about what that means. If you have frustrations with someone in the church. If they've done something that's got on your nerves. Or you're annoyed. You stop and tell yourself. This is a person for whom Jesus bled.

This is a person. Of whom we share in the same rescue. This is a person. Who is prized.

As God's possession. It fights against our desire. To think that we have to have. All the loose ends tied up.

And be completely perfect. Where no one falls out. We live in harmony. With one another. If you think that that's going. That that's going to happen. You'll never be happy in church. And you'll move.

[19 : 38] From one place to another. Or you'll stay on the outskirts. And never get fully involved. Because church is for broken. Messed up people. That will frustrate one another. From time to time. But he's rescued us.

In the same way. And he's bled for everyone. In the same way. Who calls on his name. And so ask that question. It completely changes your mindset.

Is this a person. From Jesus bled for them. And if Jesus. Is ready. To bleed for them. And forgive them. How can I.

Model Jesus. To that person. How can I love them. How can I. Forgive them. If I'm. Frustrated. Because Jesus. Bled for them. Final thing.

We share. We share a common. Purpose. God's nation was to be holy. To draw the other nations. And our purpose. Is the same. You. We. Are a holy nation.

[20 : 38] Earlier in the letter. Peter writes. Be holy. Because I am holy. We share a common purpose. Living holy lives. Holy lives. In and of themselves. Glorify God.

But they also draw. Other people. To worship him. Because it. The godly. Holy. That is distinct. That is distinctive. It is attractive. And draws others.

And the truth is. We can only grow. In holiness together. As a people. As a nation. By doing it together. We can't do it. As lone soldiers.

Our culture. Is imbibed. With that message. Of thinking. That we have to be. Lone soldiers. And do it. Do things on our own. But god doesn't save. Us as individuals.

He saves a people. To grow together. To be holy together. One word. That I really dislike. Because of its connotations.

[21 : 32] And maybe you do too. Is. I just. Never have liked. The word discipline. Maybe. When I. I don't know. What you think of. When you hear the word discipline. In my head. I think of getting a grill in at school.

Being made to write lines. Or being like. Checked. By an authority figure. But. But discipline in the church. Is never. It's never looking to catch you out. It is watching out for one another.

So that we grow together. So that we reach maturity. So that we're encouraged. To walk like Jesus. And gently. With love. Spur one another on. To keep going. And look more like him.

Even when we fail. Which we all do. It's there. To just gently point out. To keep your attention. On the living God. On the son. And maintain our unity.

As we gather. Around him. He's the center. As we live holy lives. We should point to him. And point others to him. And point one another. To glorify him as well.

[22 : 29] We spur one another on. To be holy. The Old Testament people of God. The New Testament church.

Same purpose. Same origin. Same rescue. What has changed? Israel failed. But the church hasn't. And will not. We know that. Because. Two thousand years later. And it's still going. Why does the Holy Church. The nation of God. Not fail? It is the coming of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the one who succeeded. Where Israel failed. He is the shadow of. He is what the shadow of Israel. Was looking at.

You look at what Israel should have done. And it is a shadow of Jesus. Because you look at what Israel. Should have done. And Jesus does it perfectly. Yes. He shared an identity.

[23 : 25] With God's people. But he was perfectly. Obedient. And holy. And all the nations. Would bow the knee. And come to him. Israel is supposed to draw the nations.

To worship God. Jesus is going to draw all the nations. To worship. The living God. They will acknowledge him. As king. The reason the church won't fail.

The gates of hell. Will not prevail. Is because. The church. Finds its identity. In the one. Who has succeeded. His story. Is what we all share in common.

His story. Is what we all. Share in common. The church. God's. Redeemed. People. That is the bond. That we have. So that when you meet someone.

Another Christian. From anywhere else. You can tell. Of the same stories. You can share that. Do you know what. Let me tell you. How God answered. A prayer. In my life.

[24 : 21] I've got the same story. About how I answered. A prayer. In my life too. Let me tell you. How God. Saved me. I've got a. Just a great story. As well. How God. Saved me. Too.

Let me tell you. How God. Worked in my life. And made me. Holier. And to. Love my family. And my community. And made me more like Jesus. Let me tell you.

A great story. About how that worked. In my life too. We share. A common origin. We share. A common rescue. And we share. A common purpose. And we will. The church will not fail. Because Jesus Christ.

Is at the center. We gather. Around him. He's at work. In our lives. And his story. Has become. Our story. Which binds us all together. It is the church.

Where we find belonging. Where a people. That belong. We belong to him. And we belong. To one another. Where we find. Acceptance. Security. And a common story.

[25 : 17] That defines. Who we are. Let's pray. Lord Jesus.

We praise you. We praise you. And we thank you. That your story. Is our story. And. It is what binds us together. That we share.

That bond. Of what you've done. In our lives. That you have. We are. We have that. Common origin. We have the common rescue. That you bled for us. And the common purpose.

To live holy. And. We praise you. And we. Thank you. That we have that. That we. We know that when we come into a church. That we belong. We belong to one another. And we belong to you.

And so. We pray. That you would. Equip us. And help us. To live that out. We pray that we would be. A church. That has unity. A church. That is.

[26 : 18] Forgiving. And a church. That spurs one another on. We ask for this. In Jesus name. Amen.