

Joke: Recently, the world famous evangelist, Billy Graham, disembarked from an airplane, and walked toward his ride to the hotel. The limousine driver seemed friendly enough, so Billy made an unusual request.

"I've always wanted to drive a limousine," he said. I'm in my 90s now, but I'm still a pretty good driver. Would you please let me drive the limousine back to my hotel?"

The driver paused thoughtfully for a moment, and then replied: "I guess it wouldn't hurt anything. There's not much traffic on the road since it's so late at night."

Thrilled, Billy took his place in the driver's seat while the chauffeur made himself comfortable in the back seat.

The ride was going smoothly enough, until Billy heard a siren and saw flashing lights in his rear view mirror. He slowed to a stop.

"Is there a problem, officer?" he said to the young looking cop who came up to his car window.

"Well, yes," said the rookie officer. "Let me see your license and registration, please. Were you aware that you were going 70 in a 55 mph zone?"

"No, sir, I wasn't aware of that", responded Billy Graham.

When the cop saw the registration and license, he excused himself and made a quick call to his superior.

"Look", he said. "I know we're supposed to uphold the law and all, but can't we make exceptions sometimes for really important people?"

"Do you have someone like that?" the supervisor asked.

"Well, yes." the officer responded.

"Is he as important as the governor?" the supervisor questioned.

"Oh, he's more important than the governor."

"Is he a Congressman then?"

"No, he's more important than a congressman."

"You don't mean to tell me he's the president?"

"No," the officer said. "He's even *more important than the president!*"

"Whatever do you mean?" said the supervisor.

"Well," said the officer, "I think he might be Jesus 'cause Billy Graham is the chauffeur!"

Known - Week 3 - Sharing the Kingdom

Here's an idea: We've been given the kingdom, adopted into the family of faith... and what could be better than inviting others along for the ride?

Welcome to our final week together in our series, *Known*.

Let briefly recap, we began by exploring how we are perfectly and intimately known by God Himself, the very Creator of the universe. He knows us so well in fact that He knows what's best for us, He knows how we were created, and He knows - better than anyone - that we were made for relationship and fellowship.

Yet, I have found that many of us struggle to have deep and meaningful relationships with others. Maybe it has something to

do with the overly connected and yet disconnected world we live in.

Maybe it's us, maybe it's others. Either way, something amazing happens when we give our lives to Christ.

1 Peter 2:4-5 says,

1 Peter 2:4–5 (NIV): As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—
5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

He builds us into a spiritual house.

Amazingly, our once isolated lives become embedded into the greater family of Christ. And instantaneously we gain brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers in the faith all over the world.

And it's through Christ that we learn to grow in relationship and fellowship.

And that is so wonderful that it's worth sharing. Again and again and again at every opportunity...with anyone who will listen!

In fact, that's the plan we'll be exploring today. As believers who have freely received grace, mercy, redemption, forgiveness, and so much more. . . we are called to freely give it all away to others.

To share the kingdom.

It's what we do, it's who we are.

Jesus told us. . .

Matthew 10:7–8 (NIV): As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.

Now, let’s look into the book of Ephesians where it talks powerfully about the “togetherness” of our faith;

Ephesians 2:19–22 (NIV): Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

I love that, Paul in this passage gives us the idea that when you come to faith in Jesus you are no longer foreigners or strangers. . .Or said another way, you’re no longer unknown and far away from fellowship.

Rather you are fully known and fully immersed into the family of faith.

Let me say that last part again. . .In Christ, you are fully known and fully immersed into the family of faith.

Need more?

John 1:12–13 (NIV): Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

Galatians 4:4–7 (NIV): But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. 6 Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” 7 So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

And in our Ephesians text Paul says it so perfectly when he calls us *fellow citizens with God’s people and members of His household...*

There’s something amazing about being part of a family, about being known, wanted, and loved. . . Let me share a story with you:

“Rubel Shelly tells of his friends Rich and Patty White, who traveled to a 3rd world country to adopt a little girl named Olona. After 2 years of effort and paperwork, the Whites stood before a judge who read words from an official document: “Inasmuch as Olona Morgan is orphaned and unwanted by any family in this country. ..Inasmuch as no citizen of this country wishes to have Olona Morgan. . .”

When that declaration concluded, which gave the Whites custody of Olona, the loving couple dropped to their knees, hugged their new daughter, and promised, “You will never have to hear the word ‘unwanted’ spoken of you again.”

Many of us can relate to this story because we’ve felt at times in our lives just like this orphan girl did. *Unwanted, alone,*

unloved. . .what horrible words for any person, child or adult, to hear spoken over them and their lives.

That adopting couple in that story gives us a perfect example of how Christ responds to all those who come to Him.

Being *fellow citizens with God's people and members of His household* means you'll never have to hear the word *unwanted* spoken over you again. In fact, God wanted you so badly He sent His only Son to trade His life for yours, for mine.

What would it look like to extend the invitation to other potential *fellow-citizens*?

As I mentioned earlier, sharing the kingdom is what we do. It's who we are. Or at least it should be. And one of the reasons I can make such a statement is because Jesus gave us a beautiful picture of this idea in the New Testament.

It's found in Matthew 22:1-14 called, *The Parable of the Wedding Banquet*.

Matthew 22:1–14 (NIV): Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: 2 “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. 4 “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’ 5 “But they paid no

attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. 6 The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. 7 The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. 8 “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. 9 So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ 10 So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. 11 “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 12 He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless. 13 “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ 14 “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

At the very beginning of that parable Jesus says, “*The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.*”

The illustration describes how the original invitations were rejected and that the king eventually instructs his servants to go and invite anyone they find that is willing to come to the banquet.

It may not of been who he planned on. But it was to anyone who was willing. And I propose to you that there are some that you think shouldn't be, can't be, that are simply waiting for the invitation to join the feast.

And, I love how Jesus makes a point of saying that, “*the banquet is ready*,” which brings to my mind images of warm food, all kinds of appetizers and side dishes. . .an elaborate feast fit for a king just waiting for folks to come and enjoy it.

Getting hungry? That’s next week after service.

For most of us, the family table is a place where time is spent together. It’s a place where new friendships are formed and old friendships are continued. It’s a place where both difficult and encouraging conversations can occur.

Essentially, the table is a place where relationships develop and grow. The table is a picture of shared fellowship with others. It’s a place where we both get to know and allow ourselves to be known by others.

And for the life of me, I just can’t imagine that any one of us here today wouldn’t want to share such an amazing and special place with others. I know it’s hard, I know it can be costly, I know it takes energy. . .but like Jesus said, “*The banquet is ready*.”

Eventually all the seats at the table will be filled and the king will order the banquet hall doors to be closed. So it’s important for us to invite as many people as we can. . .for as long as we can. . .to join the fellowship.

As long as Jesus is still building His church there’s still room for more *fellow-citizens* at the table.

It's no secret that having healthy relationships with others takes time and energy. It's the reason many have chosen to abandon the pursuit altogether and live isolated lives devoid of connection and intimacy.

But, as I said in week 1, we were made for more than relational dissonance. We were made in the image of God; for community, fellowship, and kingdom centered relationships. This is where we are most fully known; by God first and then by others.

Galatians 6:9-10 says;

Galatians 6:9–10 (NIV): Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.
10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

If anyone could speak about *becoming weary* it would be the Apostle Paul. ..He was beaten, shipwrecked, stoned, mocked, imprisoned, left for dead, and so much more for the sake of sharing the gospel with others.

And yet he still encourages the rest of us to do good to all people for as long as we can, at every opportunity.

I'm assuming most of you here today or listening online are familiar with the story of *Doubting Thomas* from the gospel of John chapter 20.

If you don't know what I'm talking about or you need a brief refresher, the gist of the story is this: Jesus is reappearing to many of the disciples after He's resurrected from the dead.

For some reason we are never really told why, Thomas - one of the original disciples - keeps missing Him. So instead of believing the accounts of others, Thomas says;

John 20:24–25 (NIV): Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

About a week goes by after he says that and Jesus appears again to the disciples, and this time Thomas is with them. Jesus enters a locked room and says to Thomas,

Let me back up one verse first I love this. . .I think this is one of the funniest things in all of Scripture.

John 20:26 (NIV): A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”

Locked door no Jesus. . .then there was Jesus. And Jesus says, “peace be with you.”

This is the second time Jesus does this and I have to believe they were taken off guard both times.

Back to Thomas. . .verse 27.

John 20:27 (NIV): Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

Jesus goes on to say one more thing during that encounter, *“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. . .*Stop doubting and believe.*

We might not have the luxury of knowing Jesus like the original disciples did. We’ll never get the chance to sit around the fire, listening to Jesus talk about the coming Kingdom. Face to face.

But we do have the Scriptures, and we are called to walk by faith.

By faith we trust Jesus is building His church. By faith we trust He’s using all of us in the process. For better or worse, He’s using us.

Using us, building us up together. That’s the process.

So, let me repeat once again; As long as Jesus is still building His church, there’s still room for more *fellow-citizens* at the table. And He’s called us to go. . .build His church.

And what could be better than inviting people to the banquet table of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

As I close out this series, I want to briefly walk back through some of the highlights over the past couple weeks.

First and foremost, your relationship with God. . .and being in right relationship with Him is the most important point to remember. If

there is something holding you back, some offense keeping you at arms length, unforgiveness, repetitive sin, whatever it may be, that's where you need to start.

That's the most important relationship of all the relationships you could or will ever have. And it's through God that deep fellowship, intimacy, and understanding, can be found. As you grow in relationship with God, as you come to *know Him*, it's important that you learn to trust Him.

Proverbs 19:21 (NIV): Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.

It is to our benefit to learn how to trust and obey. . .

In fact Jesus goes so far as to say, "*If you love me, then keep my commandments.*" God knows you and in His knowing you, He also knows what's best for you.

And included in the list of what's best - what's most fulfilling and healthy - is being a part of a fellowship of believers, like a local church. This is where you're able to know and be known by others in a Christ centered atmosphere. Will it be hard? Yes! Of course. But will it be worth it? Absolutely!

Matthew 16:18 (NIV): And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Here Christ so clearly states, for the first time, "*I will build my church.*"

Interestingly, this is also the first time the Greek word *ekklesia* is used, which we translate as "church." The original word literally

means, *called out from/out of* and properly means; “people *called out from* the world and to God, the *outcome* being the *Church*.”

With Christ at the center, we know He builds His church according to the will of God. And that’s the kind of building project that I want to be a part of.

So, be intentional about inviting others to the kingdom table... Invite as many as you can to the great banquet of the King... The food is hot, the settings are in place, and there’s still plenty of open seating.

The table is where relationships develop. It’s where we turn away from the disconnected dissonance the world offers and drink deeply of divine fellowship with other *fellow citizens*.

It’s where we are most fully known.

Let’s pray together.