

1 Peter 2.9-10  
Mercy's 5<sup>th</sup> Birthday  
**First Generation Faith**

**INTRO**

Hey welcome to MERCY CHURCH, glad you are here. This is a big Sunday in the life of our church because we are celebrating our 5<sup>th</sup> birthday! Happy Birthday Mercy Church!! Let me get something out of the way right off the bat – The greatest challenge and greatest joy I've ever experienced in ministry is being your pastor these past 5 years. The way I say it to friends in ministry is that my heart is fuller and my hair is grayer as a result of being your pastor. And I'm grateful. My family, and many of yours, have sacrificed and have BELIEVED, and God has moved through that faith. I love you Mercy Church.

I'm about to say something that may sound cliché but I believe it in my bones. God has only JUST BEGUN to work through us Mercy Church. They say, whoever they are, that you will overestimate what you can do in your first 5 years in ministry and that you will underestimate what you can do in 20. Well, if God has done all he has done in the first 5 years of the life of our church, I cannot wait for what the next 15 will hold.

Today is we are turning a page. We are a different church than when we started. I used to joke at our launch team gatherings that Mercy was basically a construction site. It won't look flashy or even pretty. Probably look like a mess, but we believe God is building something and you are welcome to join. In our first 2 years while we were getting started I used to joke that Mercy was the best church you've never heard of. And that may still be the case. But at 5 years old we aren't a toddler anymore. We aren't really grown up either. We are basically church kindergarteners. So...Pretty much the most fun years of life are in front of us. Lot's of learning still but less daily messes to clean up.

I believe how we move forward right now at this age in our ministry is paramount to who we become long term. ESPECIALLY...listen ESPECIALLY...in the post-COVID era...where opportunity for the gospel abounds like never before - who we choose to be as a church will have massive impact on our future. Turning the page moments like these, especially for a young church, growing...in a growing population area...bring with it massive opportunity for gospel impact. BUT here's the danger - because we are JUST old enough and JUST big enough as a congregation to put our ministry on cruise control...We could set our mission aside and get comfortable caring only for our own needs.

In the first years of a church you are in survival mode and to "make it" you gotta be focused and urgent about the mission of God. And what ends up happening to a lot of churches when they get out of those early years is they think "well, we've made it." And when they should be entering their most fruitful years, instead they enter their most comfortable years. And those that join the church often join for the comforts that were highlighted. And the second or third

generation of the church becomes a social club devoid of the very mission of God it is meant to be about.

Mercy my prayer for us as we turn the page is that we will approach the days ahead as a church who will take all of our year 5 resources (people, facilities, giving capacity) and combine it with year 1 urgency. And that means listen those of you who are new to Mercy...maybe you've been here 5 months, 5 weeks, or 5 minutes...I believe you are here as reinforcements. Just like Mercy was not the first church in Charlotte but we came because there was a growing need...So I believe God has brought you here to fill a need in our ministry. You are not here by accident and there is a place God has ordained long ago for you to use your gifts here at Mercy.

The passage we are going to look at today is a familiar one to our church. 1 Peter 2.9-10. These two verses express the heartbeat of who we are and what we are about. It's the passage that inspired our name. And it is going to lay out the mission of the first church. Peter is going to say this is WHO YOU ARE and WHY GOD PUT YOU HERE.

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 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

In these two verses we see the apostle Peter tell the first century church Why God saved them and brought them together as a church in their communities. In communities filled with people of all different backgrounds and beliefs. And I believe this Gospel People for a Gospel Mission identity is still our calling today. So as we celebrate our 5<sup>th</sup> birthday I want us to tighten our focus as a church around

Why God Put Mercy Church in Charlotte North Carolina in 2020

OR

Why God put you here in 2020. OR Why God put you here.

Peter gives all these identities in verses 9-10 that set up the one thing we are called to make our whole lives about. So if you will let me walk us through those it will inform what we do. WHO WE ARE informs WHY we do what we do. Panthers play football because they are a football team. Chick-fil-a makes chicken, Trees make leaves, and middle school boys make smells. Your identity informs your purpose. So let's look at these identities real quick.

**A Chosen Race** – Chosen. Can you stop and praise God that in his love for you while you were still a sinner he died for you and he chose you? That despite your rejection of him he directed the full power and reach of his love towards you and he softened your heart towards him and brought you back to himself? And that word RACE...that was the word God used in Exodus to talk about a single people group. The nation of Israel. But now Christ has done something

incredible. He has brought down the dividing wall of hostility that existed between races Ephesians 2.11 says. And to DISPLAY how the great hope of Christ is for ALL PEOPLES...he created new race by gathering people from every race together and giving them deeper unity in Christ than they had with their race of origin. So now the CHURCH is this multicultural tapestry of God's love on display in the world. Loving one another, serving side by side, making the world tilt its head to the side and say...what are they all doing together?

And in a culture so insanely hostile right now...how timely that God has chosen us Mercy Church to be a new race in Christ. Not leaving behind our old race but instead celebrating the redemptive power of Christ that I am not only reconciled to God but reconciled to my black brothers and sisters, my latino brothers and sisters, my middle eastern brothers and sisters, Asian brothers and sisters. That in his grace he's allowed me to stand among in HIS PEOPLE and through HIS PEOPLE experience more of HIM! Oh may God give us more and more of the beauty of experiencing the fullness of God as we embrace one another under the banner of unity in Christ.

**Royal Priesthood** – Normally these two terms should be separate. You had kings and then you had priests. But God puts them together and says this is what the church is. A Royal priest. A priest is one who talks to God on behalf of the people and talks to people on behalf of God. And we are royal because our God is not a god among gods and then there are kings. No, our God is also the one true King who rules over the world. And we aren't a kingdom of pastors. I'm not the priest. Huge difference here. If you are a Christian YOU are the temple of God's holy spirit. YOU are the priest. And I am one of them. I am actually a Pastor of Priests. People who are talking to God for the people and then talking to the people for God. CAN YOU IMAGINE if each one of us woke up in the morning thinking like that!! What Charlotte needs right now is 800 not just 800 members of a local church. NO, Charlotte needs 800 priests united in prayer to God on its behalf and then going and ministering to the people as God has commissioned them to. YA'LL that isn't pie in the sky ambition. That is our GOD GIVEN IDENTITY!

**Holy Nation** – Oh man so much here. Holy means set apart. God has called his people to be...TOGETHER...distinct from the world. Holy means set apart. It means there is something distinctly different about this nation of nations that is embedded into a certain time and place. It is distinct not in its ethnicity, not in its socio-economic level, not in its political affiliation, in fact its strangely diverse in all these ways. How is it distinct? The way all of its people joyfully give themselves to the ways of God. So the one VISIBLE unifying thread is holy-ness. And that makes it different than any culture. Because we have received God's mercy we gladly follow God's law. (talk about that in a second). And this group of people loving each other, devoting themselves to God together...man that makes God visible to a dark and weary world.

**A people for his own possession** – WE together...let me just say this. Mercy is not Pastor Spence's church or anybody else's church. The Church belongs to God. We together are GOD's possession. His. That's why Romans 5 says you were BOUGHT with a price. Listen to me because this one is tough: YOU ARE NOT KING OF YOUR CASTLE. YOU ARE NOT IN THE DRIVER SEAT OF YOUR LIFE. You belong to God. And a people who belong to God...together...are then

at God's disposal to use however he sees fit. And then here's what he says we are to do...second half of verse nine. Here is your purpose in life.

College student if you are wondering what God's will is for your life. There are NOT 3 options and God's will is behind door #2. Middle Ager – IF YOU are wondering what God's will is for your life. It is NOT to shirk all responsibilities, unbutton your shirt down to your beer belly, and drive off in a 69 mustang convertible. Grandparent – If you are wondering if God's will for your life is already past by and now you just exist to complain about your lower back pain – NO. It's right here. God's people from all races and ages are HIS and they are called together to make this ONE thing the primary purpose of their lives:

**WE EXIST TO GLORIFY GOD IN A DARK AND WEARY WORLD** (v. 9) – That's why you exist. This is the core purpose of all who trust Christ for salvation.

Two Directions / Expressions -

- Worship God to God (wording)
- Worship God to the community (Wording)

Summarize all those identities in one word – Mercy. If you have to pick ways to identify the church Peter wants to make sure this wins. We remember and rehearse God's mercy. Way we say it around here – we keep the gospel at the center of all we do.

Work FROM salvation not FOR it – Mercy Church.