**Series**: Standalone

**Date**: November 13, 2022

**Speaker**: Spence Shelton, Lead Pastor

**Text**: Romans 12:1-2

**Title**: Becoming Who God Made Us to Be

**5-minute intro – SABBATICAL THANK YOU! What a gift.**

We made some memories

* Picture of us out west

We missed our church family. A great blessing to Courtney and me as parents is that my kids were aching to get back. And so were we, but it means something deep to me that my kids love being a part of this church fam.

QUIET & FULL - Couple of things the Lord did in me Sabbatical I am really grateful for.

* Fullness in my tank I didn’t know was missing. Remember sabbatical wasn’t an emergency. I wasn’t burnt out. It was just time. 7 years since we planted Mercy, +10 in ministry before that. And ya’ll, I needed it more than I realized. And eventually while on a trip I had a moment where I recognized…I’m full.
* Quiet Soul. Cut out a lot of noise. Cut out distractions. Social media, email, news, really everything. And just walked with the Lord, my family, and the people around me. And a peace filled quietness came on me. Most of sabbatical was uneventful. It was studying God’s word and talking with him. It was long quiet walks with the Lord that resulted in a quietness in my soul that I am desperate to keep even now back in the real world.

I’ve been briefed over the past week on where we are and ya’ll, most church leaders I asked for counsel told me the church would suffer a setback because I left. All I can say is - look around. We actually grew by 5% over the past 4 months. I see babies everywhere around here. Which means our Song of Solomon series last year clearly worked. We saw over 50 people join the church! People gave their lives to Christ! People were Baptized! All while the Lead Pastor was on sabbatical!? Crazy. SO…I’ll see you guys in 4 more months. Further reminder that the church is not mine, it is the LORD’s. And we are ALL his servants. He used many of you in increased leadership roles to help pick up in my absence. I know that. And there is room for many more of you now to take a step. Can’t wait to see what the Lord does.

**Intro to Sermon**

Today I want to share with you the first of a few deep lessons the Lord taught me from his word while I was away. He gave me many things just for me. But some of the things the Lord taught me I believe he gave me to give to you. And I hope you will receive them. Some of them you won’t hear until at least January because I gotta share them with the elders still. But some things are just good deep lessons from his word. Admittedly, I'm a little nervous. I told my son today that it’s like not playing baseball for 4 months and then starting pitching. I imagine I'll be a little rusty. But I am committed to coming to you from the heart with What God has taught me to give to you. And of course, it all comes from studying his word.

Oh, and hey if you are new with us, welcome! I feel new too. It was like 98 degrees last time I was here. Some of you just haven’t been here in 4 months. Me neither. Why not join me and start coming weekly now?

Ok, if you have your bible make your way over to Romans 12. We are going to look at verses 1 & 2. The Lord stopped me dead in my tracks in September and I spent about a week considering these two verses. I had just celebrated my 40th birthday at the end of August. Yes, I’m 40 now. Old enough to remember the sound of dial-up internet, young enough to know Facebook is for old people. But anyway that birthday, at least for me, created an awareness of change in my life. My kids are getting older, my body aches longer and creaks more than it did 10 years ago. That kind of change, I can’t really control, it just comes at me. BUT there is also something about a decade birthday that makes you think about the kind of change going on beneath the surface. The internal change. Who am I becoming? Makes you think about legacy. Who will my kids say I was while they lived in my home? Who am I to those around me? I’m so thankful I’m a Christian because my faith infuses clarity and direction into the legacy question. I believe God created me, put me here intentionally in this time and space. Uniquely made me and has a plan for my life.

Somebody needs to hear today that you are not an accident or a mistake or a problem. God intentionally put you here and now for a purpose and he has a plan. And it is a plan that he is actively working. One of our staff values here at Mercy is: ***\*We expect God to change a life today\**** And I want to talk today from Romans 12.1-2 about how God changes us. It’s a really simple idea. **How do we go from where we are to where God wants us to be, and what will get in the way.**

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.

2 Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. -- Romans 12:1-2 (CSB)

Big Idea: God makes us into who he created us to be through **celebration and sacrifice**. They are like PB & J man. Can’t have one without the other. Or you got a nasty sandwich. You ever had a jelly sandwich? No. Cause that’d be gross. Jelly biscuit? Sure. But two pieces of white bread & jelly? No. You need PB. Ever had a PB sandwich? Of course. Call that seminary food. But the harsh dryness of such a sandwich reminds you that you need…jelly. Or think about your yard. I’m an adult…I have to take care of my yard. My buddy Scott taught me is that if I want grass, I need both seed AND water. Just one by itself won’t work. Diet & Exercise. Just one will get you skinny fat & just the other will get you bulky fat.

And I go on and on with these COMBOS because I’ve experienced in my own life, and I feel like I see it in other Christians too, an emphasis on EITHER celebration OR sacrifice. And we get frustrated that we aren’t growing in Christ, but we are only working with half a sandwich.

I see Christians CELEBRATING the gospel. Big emotional experience. Big on grace. Big on thankfulness. JESUS HAS SET ME FREE YES AND AMEN! But then worship ends when the experience ends. We say things like “man that was awesome at church today” and then live our lives for ourselves. We are emotionally charged, but not functionally changed. And THAT is a cheap grace b/c costs us nothing. I’m thankful for the spirit-filled fresh wind that seems to be blowing through the American church right now. We SHOULD be a resurrection minded CELEBRATORY people. The one thing I want our gathering to be is CELEBRATORY! **BUT while celebration without sacrifice is often loud…it’s usually empty.** And will often need to be really loud & really exciting in order to mask the emptiness. And because its empty it WILL NOT carry you when the storms rage in your life. Because raising your hands and celebrating God’s grace IS NOT THE SOLE MEANS BY WHICH GOD CHANGES YOU. And sometimes this is me. It’s like God, I give you 2 hours a week of worship. And it’s like FUNCTIONALLY I leave him at church, and I’ll see him next week. And a year passes and I’m really no different. Same old sins, same old fights, same ol’ me.

At the same time, I’ve been in seasons where I’m begrudgingly doing the deeds of Christianity - living the sacrificial life, bible reading, tithing, worship gathering, serving…and I’m like…grumpy. And I’m like how can someone read the bible and give and go to church and be habitually cynical & angry? IT’S BECAUSE WE’VE LOST THE CELEBRATION OF THE GOSPEL! We’ve got disciplines…disciplines meant to draw us back to the joy of the gospel…like a wire to a power source…but we don’t make time to celebrate what those disciplines take us to.

WE NEED ONGOING CELEBRATION OF THE GOSPEL AND ONGOING SACRIFICE FOR THE GOSPEL.

You want God to go to work in your life? You want God to change you into who he’s made you to be? He works through those two things and that’s what we are going to talk about today. To make sure that isn’t too abstract, **I’m going to build a prayer over the course of this sermon.** That will be a kind of **plug & pray** tool to help you put today’s sermon into practice. We’ll call it the **GOD CHANGE ME prayer.** Cause I’m not that creative at naming things.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God,

Mercies of God. - this is first and foremost the GOSPEL NEWS. That you and I who are sinners. If you are a sinner in the room raise your hand. Hey, look at all the hands up. Hope this is a little relief to some of you. You think the church is a place filled with perfect people. NOPE. We are sinners. Everybody just admitted it.

THE reason our chief ministry value is that we keep the gospel at the center of all we do…the reason we preach the gospel every week…is because we are sinners. IN DESPERATE NEED OF THE GRACE OF GOD! I don’t want you to come in here and hear a good talk. I want you to encounter the LOVE AND GRACE OF GOD!

THE GOSPEL is the announcement that though your sins against God deserved death, the free gift of God to you is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. When he died on the cross that was him dying not for his sins. He didn’t have any. He was dying for ***your*** sins and mine! So that we can be reconciled to God! We can have a clean record! AMAZING GRACE! What a God we worship!

“In View” - trip out west. WE SAW SOME VIEWS. One spot we were sleeping in a tent that faced the sunrise out over an unbelievable landscape called the grand staircase Escalante. Orange, red, pink, purple, blue. AMAZING.

Had a Thought - But what if I lived here? Is it possible to take it for granted? to be bored? one guy said **"I like to be around people experiencing it for the first time. so, I can be renewed in my own appreciation for it."** DANG BRO. PREACH. What some of you Christians need is to get around some new Christians. Not to show them the ropes but to soak up their joy. Get your joy back.   
  
Listen, that was amazing to see. Worshipful. BUT what God says to you is that this has NOTHING on the beauty & wonder of the gospel. PETER says the gospel is so beautiful and amazing that ANGELS who see all creation…long to look into it.  
Is it possible you’ve lost your view of the mercies of God? Maybe you’ve become so familiar with it That you just get up & go and take for granted the greatest news of eternity?

Ref Hebrews 12

Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us,

2 keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. -- Hebrews 12:1-2 (CSB)

- therefore let us FIX our eyes on Jesus. and then run the race with endurance.

BUT BEFORE YOU RUN your race… YOU FIX YOUR EYES. What is your deep motivation? And for the Christian what I’m trying to tell you is that YOUR deep motivation isn’t God’s favor, it isn’t God’s approval, IT’S WHAT HE ALREADY DID FOR YOU! YOUR DEEP MOTIVATION IS CELEBRATION!

You wake up - you celebrate Jesus. Don’t wait till his birthday next month (Christmas). He has given you new life. CELEBRATE HIM TODAY! AMAZING GRACE…how sweet the sound.

And while our celebration of Jesus is centered on the gospel, there is more to celebrate! In fact, Lamentations 3 says

22 Because of the Lord’s faithful love we do not perish, for his mercies never end. 23 They are new every morning great is your faithfulness! -- Lamentations 3:22-23 (CSB)

God has mercy for you today. He had it yesterday. He’s got some stored for tomorrow. You don’t need to bank it up. You just need to open up to him and say like the blind beggar before Jesus Luke 18.41. ***LORD I JUST WANT TO SEE!*** Lord helps me see the mercies you’ve brought into my life today.

Here aer some of the mercies of the Lord to me I’ve seen recently:

* Kids who know the Lord - mercy
* Friends Notes 40th birthday - mercy
* Wife up at 5am to read her bible - desperate to follow Jesus in a full season of life. - Mercy. There is so much mercy from the Lord around me.

Keep God’s mercies in view -EX: EBENEZER Stones in our house

I’m gonna give you this as a part of prayer but I encourage you to figure out other ways to normalize celebrating the mercies of God in your life. Of keeping his mercies IN VEIW.

“GOD CHANGE ME” prayer part 1 - CELEBRATION

MASTER, you created the heavens & earth & seas & everything in them. (Acts 4.24) side comment - Celebrating God as creator is SO central to prayers in the bible that you are just gonna have to trust me and put this in there at the start. I write this every day. And yes, the word is MASTER. Because that’s who he is. If that’s uncomfortable, it’s because you have an authority problem with God that needs to be reckoned with. And this will help.

Thank you, God, for forgiving me of my sins and giving me new life in Christ. Thank you for sending your Holy Spirit to guide me. Thank you for your church that walks with me. Thank you for the hope of heaven when I die. And thank you for \_\_\_\_\_\_. Lord help me keep your mercies in view today.

BTW - at this point you may be thinking…spence that’s several sentences. I thought this would be like REAL short or something. Well unlike our consumer world I’m not trying to make your relationship with God more efficient. I’m trying to make it fuller. But hey, Jesus offers you the Lord’s Prayer. And I promise God will change you through it. Let’s move on to the 2nd part of our passage. It’s the second part of verse 1 and into verse 2.

*I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.*

I want us to just focus on what worship is. Because that word is often connected to music. It’s often connected to CELEBRATION. Rightfully. That’s throughout the psalms. We are to bring the tambourine and trumpet and guitar and drums and celebrate through song. God gave us music. Why? To glorify him. But worship here is a presentation of our bodies as a living sacrifice. Not giving him a 3-part harmony. Worship…hear me…is choosing to sacrifice your life to God today. THAT is worship. Let’s talk about it.

*“Present your bodies as a living sacrifice”*

die, but not physical death. That's been done. ***explain the altar***. The altar was the place of sacrifice. Read Hebrews 9 for more on this. But a priest went in daily & yearly…to offer sacrifices as atonement for the sins of the people. Because sins must be paid for in blood. But it could never fully work because our sin could never be fully paid for. So, Christ goes to the altar of the cross as a dying sacrifice. He dies…in our place. So, we walk away from the altar…ALIVE. He is our sacrificial lamb. So instead of a *dying* sacrifice, we are a *living* sacrifice. What does that mean?

It means we Die to the flesh. Die to MY agenda for my life. And instead say "Here is my life, what do you want me to do?" I don’t know about you but Most of us don't intentionally offer the actions of our day to God because we don't THINK about it. We don't start there, and it never enters our mind. And then if it does enter our mind - often times a battle of desires ensues. I Don’t WANT to do what God says to do I want to do what I want to do. And THAT is why I gotta keep God’s mercies in view.

Paul says this even more clearly in 2 Corinthians 5.14-15

14 For the love of Christ compels us, since we have reached this conclusion, that one died for all, and therefore all died. **15 And he died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the one who died for them and was raised.** -- 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

DON’T LIVE FOR YOURSELF! That was our theme this past summer for our college city project. Don’t Live for Yourself! And the good news is - you weren’t MADE to live for yourself. So, it’s not just what you do in response to God’s mercies, it’s also what you do to experience the fullness of life God created you for! Living a life of celebration and sacrifice will FILL YOU, not drain you. you gotta offer your life to him and I promise he will change you.

“GOD CHANGE ME” prayer part 2 - SACRIFICE

God in view of your mercies, I offer my life to you today. Holy Spirit please lead me to the thoughts, words, and actions that will worship you. My life is yours.

* My relationship with my boyfriend or girlfriend - it’s yours today.
* My work ethic - it’s yours today
* My grades while I’m at school, my sports after school - Its yours today!
* When I SEE something that will inconvenience me…whether helping a friend or a homeless stranger - my TIME today is yours
* My moment in the school car pick-up line or in traffic - It’s yours
* My moment alone on my phone. The conversation with that REALLY difficult person that you know I gotta have today - It belongs to you. What do YOU want there?
* Let’s go more important -
  + My children - they are yours.
  + Where I choose to LIVE. - Moving overseas.
  + Retirement years. Time, Talent, Treasure. Our very lives.
  + LORD help me live FOR YOU today. **I choose worship** right here.

For what it’s worth, I’m trying to pray this first thing in the AM because pretty much as soon as I wake up my selfishness kicks in. Maybe you are holier than me. But I need to start my day in celebration and sacrifice

Ok let’s go to verse 2

2 Do not be conformed to this age,

Do not be conformed to the patterns of this world. THERE ARE PATTERNS. and they are pressing you to conform. They are externally applied pressures. They may tug at internal desires of course, but they will not transform you into who God created you to be.

The American dream is a giant pattern. Good grades, good job, good income - financial stability. DREAM secure. That's not in scripture anywhere. And if you get it - you get more stress and anxiety. Because you weren’t created to be FILLED by that dream. Fill our bank account and drain our soul. Is wealth wrong? NO. but what is it for? ITS YOURS GOD! Living sacrifice.

What about the pattern of secular ideology?

Making Christianity conform to a world that believes gender identity is fluid? That misunderstands love and believes sexual desire is not to be questioned or restrained.

Statement - Sex is designed for a man and a woman inside the bond of marriage. What I just said is now hate speech. if some of you voice it at work, could get you fired. Say it at school, could get you ostracized and maybe even attacked. I'm not saying you need to go around chanting it. What I'm saying is - when the loud voice of the Roman Empire is shouting that you are WRONG, and YOU NEED TO CONFORM...will you conform to the external pressure? We should live lives of LOVE for all. YES. but we should live & speak TRUTH and love. Love and Conformity are two different things. But not to our present age.

but be transformed by the renewing of your mind

Transformation is different though. It's not externally applied pressure to conform. It's change that starts inside. and works its way out. In fact, even the wording "be transformed" is passive. It's not something you can do. It's something that is DONE to you. I hope that will bring some relief to some of you. You cannot transform yourself. Only God can do that. You can devote yourself to the renewing of your mind. But only God can transform you. This prayer I’m giving you today - it is trying to cultivate in you a YIELDING to God.

You know this word transformed only occurs 2 other places in scripture?

* Mark 9 where Jesus is transfigured in front of Peter, James, & John.
* And then 2 Cor 3.18 where Paul says as we BEHOLD the glory of God we are being transformed into the image of Christ!
* So, our prayer God CHANGE ME…There is an image of what we can pray for him to change us INTO. Change me INTO the image of Christ. That’s his desire for us. You want to pray God’s will? GOD MAKE ME A LITTLE MORE LIKE JESUS TODAY!

BUT - There is a temptation for church people. A big one. Just like any other group. to try and CONFORM through your behavior without being transformed. In other words, you'll be tempted to fake it. To go through the motions. And hope nobody discovers how messed up you really are. Good news - We know. You are a hot mess. And the way we know...Is that WE are hot messes. Remember. Show of hands again. How many are sinners? All of us. Ok good. Back into it.   
  
How? Fill your mind with the word of God. Your mind is similar to your body in that It can take in a certain amount of input. If you fill your body with junk food, you will be transformed into an always tired, soft blob of impending diabetes. But if you fill your body with nutritious food, your body will be transformed into a strong, alert man or woman. And then when you exercise and get the blood pumping, your body gets healthier.

The transformation you desire…becoming more like Jesus… God will bring it as you devote yourself to the word of God. Let that be your first food. And then as you devote yourself to the work of God. Of being about his glory in your day…he’s gonna change you. He’s going to change the way you see yourself! If you struggle with self-loathing, you’ll start to find dignity in being a son or daughter or God. and an agent of God’s work in the world. Those are names of honor. If you are prideful, he will start to humble you as you see him as the one really doing the work. 4 months off. Know what I realized - I am far more inconsequential than I thought. I’m super grateful to be a part of what God is doing here. But he doesn’t need me. He INVITES me in. And that humbles me. I become more like Jesus through that.

“GOD CHANGE ME” prayer part 3 - TRANSFORMATION

God make me just a little more like Jesus today. Help me to deny the temptation to conform to the world around me and help me to see and respond to the world as you would. I’m ready for you to change me for my good and your glory today. AMEN

Celebration & sacrifice – will lead to transformation.

COMMUNION!!!