Chosen Series – Week 2 **….CHANGED**

Num. 11:4-6, 10-15, 23; 1 Peter 1:13-16; Mark 9:38-48 Ps. 104:27-35 September 23, 2018

 Good morning! How’s everyone doing today? I don’t know about anyone else, but I never cease to be amazed by how fast time goes by. It’s crazy that yet another year is coming . . . and going. And time, it just keeps going faster and faster.

 It’s amazing to look back to even ten years agoand see all the things that have completely changed.For example, with things that have changed . . .ten years ago we had five grandchildren. Now we have sixteen grandkids, and they are all grand! They make Papa proud! Ten years ago I had been diagnosed with leukemia but still had no idea what chemotherapy would do.

 Ten years ago I had a flip open cell phone and had no idea what texting was all about! And now my phone is smarter than I am. I mean it has more computing power than my first computers did years ago. It does my email, I can see the 16 Grandkids on Facebook, and see and stay in touch with hundreds of friends from our years in the Philippines, and since Bonnie has one too, she has become the texting queen keeping in touch with the family and those sixteen Grandkids in five states far away.

 Looking at our church ten years ago, we still had our founding fathers, the Leonard Pederson’s and the Bill Southard’s here. We didn’t have our Faith Fellowship Center yet, or the beautiful fenced playground and picnic area, and the shed was right out back.

 Looking back, it’s amazing tosee all the things that have completely *changed*.

 Last week we started off a new series called Chosen,and in this series we’re talking about our identity. We are answering the basic questions: Who are we? And Why are we here? We’re simply talking about our identity . . .and to do so, we’re looking at the words of a guy named Peter. Peter was one of the twelve disciples. He’s the one who tried to walk on water and who denied Jesus a few times and then the rooster crowed.

 We’re looking at some of Peter’s words that he wrote in a letter known as 1 Peter to encourage a group of Christians.Over and over again, throughout this letter, the main thing Peter was doing was encouraging these Christians and reminding them of their identity. He’s just reminding them of the basics . . . of who they are . . . and also who we are.

Last week we talked about the fact that **we are chosen by God . . . that God picks us; He’s not stuck with us . . . and that we are His, not our own.** And now continuing on today, I just want to start off by reading the same verse that is at the heart of our series. First Peter 2:9 says, *“You are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light”* (nlt).

 Peter said,“*You are a chosen people.**You are royal priests.”* And then our focus for today,Peter said, “[*You are] a holy nation.”* You are a holy people.And what does *holy* mean?Holy means to be set apart. It means to be dedicated to God.Peter was saying that as followers of Jesus, you are so different.You are different from the world.You are different from the person that you used to be.Basically, after you start following Jesus, you are no longer the same. Instead, you are changed by God. Peter knew that by means of his own personal experience.

 The moment you start following Jesus, every part of you will change: your words, your actions, your thoughts, your desires, your priorities, your attitude, your relationships, and your life as a whole.

Peter was reminding them of this change. He was saying, Who are you? You are changed. You are holy. You are no longer the same. Instead, you are changed by God.

Okay, so this is powerful stuff, right? And it’s great, and it’s awesome,and it sounds really nice in church. But maybe you’re thinking, *Well, I’m pretty sure that I am not holy. Just ask my wife, my husband, my family.**If no one else, ask one of my seven cats. I mean, they will testify that I am not holy.**And I’ve been following Jesus for a few months now . . . for a few years now . . . for my whole life now . . . and well, to be honest, I still haven’t really changed.**And so, this is nice to hear, and it’s a cute thought that we are changed by God, but I’m a bit skeptical.**And I’m just wondering,* How does it actually happen? *Because I want to follow Jesus.**And I guess I want to be holy**if God says that I am. And I want to change. And I’ve tried.**And I’m giving Jesus a chance, but it just seems like I’m still the same exact person.**If we are holy and if we are truly changed by God, I just have to ask, “How is this possible?” How is it possible for us to change?*

 And to answer this, today I just want to highlight two different things from Peter’s words, two different truths when it comes to being changed by God.

The first truth is this: **It’s about a relationship, not rules.** When it comes to being changed by God,when it comes to being holy,it’s about a relationship, not rules. And just listen to this . . . one chapter before our main verse for today, Peter said this: *“But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy*” (1 Peter 1:15, nlt).

 I’ll just say it for us . . .that’s a little overwhelming, right?We must be holy in everything we do?Well, that’s just impossible.And when we hear that—and also so often when we think of being a Christian—we assume that God just wants us *to do* all the right things . . . and not do all the wrong things, don’t we?So often we turn being a Christianinto a self-improvement program.We turn being a Christianinto a moral code,into trying to manage sin,into following a bunch of rules: I can’t do this . . .and I can’t do that . . .and I shouldn’t look at this . . .and I shouldn’t do that . . .When once again, it’s about a relationship, not rules.

 When Peter said, “*You must be holy because I am holy*” (1 Peter 1:16, nlt), what he was saying is that because God is holy, when you’re near Him and when you’re close to Him—I mean, just by being with Him—you are able to be . . . and you will want to become . . . and you must be holy. The more and more we grow in our love and our relationship with Jesus, and the closer and closer we get to Him, the more and more *He* will begin to change us . . . from the inside out. Peter had experienced that personally with Jesus.

 Once more, it’s about a relationship, not about rules. And some of us have maybe heard this before, but we still don’t get it. We still think following Jesus is all about not trying to sin. And if we’re good at following the rules, then we’re prideful about it. And if we’re *not* good at following the rules, then we think we’re a terrible person.

 One more time, it’s about a relationship, not rules. And the closer we get to God, the more we fall in love with Him, the more time we spend with Him, the more and more He’ll change us from the inside out. And our heart . . . and then our thoughts . . . and then our actions . . . and then our lives as a whole will look more and more like His. So who are we? We are changed by God. We’re holy. We’re no longer the same. God has changed us. That’s the first thing for today.

And here’s the second truth: How do we change? **We need to kill our old self.** Kind of intense, right? But listen to this: Peter said, *“You must live as God’s obedient children. Don’t slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires”* (1 Peter 1:14, nlt).

 Peter said, “*Don’t slip back into your old ways of living*.” But stronger words come from a guy named Paul, and in one of Paul’s letters, he said, *“My old self has been crucified with Christ”* (Galatians 2:20, nlt).Basically, my old self—the person I used to be—has been nailed to a cross. The person I was before I knew Jesus, and the things I used to do, it’s been crucified. That person is dead. Those deeds are gone. And in that same verse Paul went on to say, “*It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”*

 Basically, because of Jesus,I’m a new person.I’m a new creation.My old self is dead, and I’m not just a better person—I’m not a self-improved person—but so much more because of the cross. Because of Jesus, I am made new.I am truly changed by God.

 Once more, how do we change?We need to kill our old self.

 What’s so wonderful about Jesus is that when we start following Him, He doesn’t make us better; instead, He makes us new. And part of being made new is letting go of and getting rid of our old self—basically, killing the person that we used to be.

It’s like, “Jesus, today I’m following You. And anything in my life that’s not pleasing to You, help me to leave it behind and help me to kill it. Starting in my soul,if there are lies I’m believing or things that I’m holding on to or if there are things I’m doing that I’m convinced are okay but they’re not, Jesus, please help me not to be nice but instead to kill these things. Instead of being a bitter person—I’m leaving that person behind—Jesus, help me to become a person who is a giver of Your grace. And instead of being a prideful jerk whose life centers on me, myself, and I—that’s the old me—I want to live only for You, God. And instead of being a liar and a critic and a gossip, instead of being crude with my words, I only want to use my words to speak life. And instead of finding intimacy in porn—that’s the person I used to be—Jesus, I want to find that intimacy with You. And instead of being filled with anger or jealousy, instead of being a worrier, instead of being a drunk—that person is dead, that person waskilled on a cross—I am a new creation.”

One more time . . . who are we? We are changed by God.And how do we change?We need to kill our old self.

 So when it comes to being changed by God, these are the two truths for today: **It’s about a relationship, not rules, and we need to kill our old self.** But I just want to make it clear and be up front and say that this won’t be easy. God is the One who changes us,starting on our insides, but we do play a role in being changed, and as we know, in any area of life, making changes is not always fun nor is it easy.

 And with this, I want to share one other thing that Peter said. When it comes to being holy, he said, *“So think clearly and exercise self-control”* (1 Peter 1:13, nlt).Again, think clearly and *exercise* self-control.

 *Thinking clearly and self-control* are gifts of the Holy Spirit. But we ourselves, we do play a role.I mean, if it’s about a relationship not rules, then we need to get ourselves close to Jesus.On a regular basis, we need to spend time with God. And we need to get in His Word, be part of the Bible study group, and we need to talk with Him as we’re walking,as we’re driving, as we’re sitting on our front porch.And we need to daily hand our burdens over to Him. And we need to ask Him to change us even when it hurts.

 When it comes to killing our old self, hear this: Our old self will do anything to try to stick around.Old friends will tell us that we shouldn’t change. And when we try to make changesand leave our old ways behind, just a warning—temptation will be all over the place.And there might be parts of our old self that we really like, and we might have to give up some things that we love and enjoy.If we’re trying to make some changes, there might be some people whom we need to take a step back from. There might be some situations and places that we just can’t go to anymore. There might be some changes that hurt and are truly painful to make.

 Again, Peter told us to “*think clearly and exercise self-control.”* And this isn’t always easy. And yet, hear this: It’s so worth it! A life spent with Jesus is so much better than any life we could find on our own.

 And following Him is not always easy. But no matter what we face, God fills us with His joy. And no matter what storm we’re walking through, God offers us His peace. And when we’re broken, He makes us whole. And when we screw up, He picks us up and He cleans us off.

 He doesn’t make us better; instead, He makes us new. And in Jesus, our identity and who we are is constant. And it’s forever the same. We are chosen, and we are changed by God. That’s who we are. We are chosen and changed by Him. The One who set the stars in place.

 Even though I’m a pastor, God is still changing me yet today. And I pray He never stops. Each day I’m becoming a little bit more like Him. My heart and my actions change a little bit more. Sometimes it feels like two steps forward, one step back. And yet I’m so thankful for God’s patience and kindness in my life.

**Let us pray:**

Dear Lord, may Your Spirit guide us in our faith walk to see Jesus and not a set of religious rituals and rules, and grow in us a desire to be more and more like Jesus every day. Sharpen our discernment to recognize all the temptations of the devil, the world and our flesh that would set us back, in the strong name of Jesus. Amen.

**Application Questions**

How has your life changed in the past ten years? Are there ways it’s stayed the same?

The closer we are to God, the more we will be like Him. And while it’s about a relationship not rules, is there a specific “rule” that you struggle with breaking? What is it?

Who is someone in your life that you become a better person when you’re around them? Why? How much better do we become when we are in the presence of God?

Our old selves will do anything not to die, and when we decide to change, temptation is all over the place. Is there a temptation holding you back from being the new creation God wants you to be? (1 Peter 1:14; Galatians 2:20)

When we spend time in God’s Word, in prayer, in community, and engaging in church, it helps us to exercise self-control. Which of these areas do you need to work on this week? (1 Peter 1:13)

A life committed to following Jesus is so much better than any life without Him. What next step is God telling you to take as you follow Him?