

## Suffering, Crucified, Raised and Reigning with Christ

- I. In consideration of what to say to you on the birthday of our brand new church, I weighed many options. I hoped that whatever I said would set the tone for our future; hopefully a future that would last for decades.
  - A. Perhaps I could bring you a word of vision. I could answer questions like, “What will this congregation become in 5, 10, 20, or 50 years? What would our structure be? What would our leadership and staff look like? What would we offer the city, the neighborhood? How will we reproduce ourselves over time?”
  - B. Perhaps I could try my hand at inspiring you. I could try and imitate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr; Sir Winston Churchill, or William Wallace and attempt to fire you up with well-arranged rhetoric and anecdotes about our dreams and our resolve.
  - C. But I think what I’d rather do is stick to what I cherish most, and, with you, glory only in what we have always gloried in: the Lord Jesus Christ; pointing to him, and celebrating him alone as our Savior and hope. Are you OK with that?
    1. There is a 1,500 year old prayer known as “St. Patrick’s Breastplate”. Part of it reads, “Christ be with me: Christ in the front, Christ to the rear, Christ within me, Christ below me, Christ above me, Christ at my right hand, Christ at my left, Christ in the fort, Christ in the chariot seat, Christ at the helm, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks to me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me.”
    2. May that be our not just our weak and wispy wish, or our vague hope; but may it be the most true reality, our most firm foundation throughout every moment of existence that our gracious God grants to us as a church.
  - D. Without Christ as our central passion, any vision we cast is empty and vain speculation. Any attempt to inspire will be like giving directions to no actual destination. No! May we look only to Christ and his cross, his empty tomb and his glorious throne at North Ridge Life Church. May these alone give us purpose, meaning and mission. May they be our only rallying point.
- II. In short, I want to speak to you today about how we as a church are to identify ourselves, not as a unique religious, community or service institution, but rather, how we are to take our place in the larger body of Christ.
  - A. In the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul talks about how the people of God are like the parts of Christ’s body - hands, ears, eyes, feet, etc. 1 Corinthians 12:27 “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”
    1. Notice that the parts of your body are incredibly different. My feet neither look like, nor serve the same function as my nose. My liver does not look or function like my medulla oblongata. But which of these is more important? Which would I rather live without? The question is obviously ludicrous. All of my parts, though different, are vital to my completeness and operation.
    2. Churches often try to organize by gathering the parts of the body that look like themselves: nose churches, feet churches, liver churches, and medulla oblongata churches (although we identify them as Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, Cowboy Churches, Young people churches, Old people churches and so on and so forth.)

- a) But the parts of a body don't form a **person** by being just a wad of ears or toes stuck together. They are unique when they are gathered together, different as they are, to form together a single individual body, with each part performing a role that they are designed to perform best.
  - b) In the same way, the best churches are the ones where people are willing to gather together, week in and week out, with people they may have nothing in common with. Nothing, that is, except for the rescue that we have all experienced through the work of Christ.
- B. This creates an amazing, mind blowing environment when it's working properly. It's a place where tattooed bikers and little old ladies can be genuinely invested in teenagers with serious questions; and successful business people can share life with the poorest in the city. Where racial and social distinctions melt away because the bond of our shared heritage in Christ makes all of that seem meaningless and silly. John 13:35 ESV "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (The people he said this to were very different from each other!)
1. So what are we learning here? That we should not seek to identify so much with **one another**, but with **Christ**. In other words, I don't try to look like you, or like you because you look like me, in order to have community. I also do not try to represent Christ to this neighborhood, our city or the world by myself without you, because I can't, and neither can you.
  2. Instead, I come together **with you** in gospel-oriented community and, united together, with all of our talents, giftings and unique personalities, we begin to take on the image of Christ before the watching world. I can't do it without you, and you can't do it without me.
- C. The person who says, "I'm OK with Jesus, but I don't need the church" proves beyond any reasonable doubt that they know nothing about Christ, the scriptures or what the church is truly all about.
- III. So if we are to identify with Christ, and not based on mere shared tastes and interests, what does that look like practically? In order to discover the answer, I did a couple of word searches through the New Testament this week. The first one I did was on the phrase "with Christ" or "with him" as it pertained to Jesus. I found four main categories where a believer must identify with Jesus: his suffering, his death, his resurrection and his triumphant reign. All of these should be very instructive as we try to understand what North Ridge Life should be all about.
- A. We are told in the scriptures that we are to be a people that **Identify with Christ in his suffering (Philippians 3:7-11 ESV; Pg 571)**. This is not negotiable for anyone who really wants to follow Christ.
1. When Jesus said, "Take up your cross and follow me", where did you think he was leading you? A pleasure cruise to the Bahamas? That's not where you go with a cross. You only carry a cross to your own bloody, painful, horrific death. I've mentioned this before, but did you realize that the word "excruciating" comes from a latin root meaning "out of the cross"?
  2. In the verse we just read in Philippians 3, a strong connection is made to suffering as a prerequisite to the "good stuff" we'll be discussing in a moment; namely, resurrection and reigning.

- a) Paul says that knowing the “power of his resurrection” corresponds with “sharing in his suffering”. He goes on to say that he must become “like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”
  - b) Similarly, in Romans 8:16-17, Paul speaks of believer’s status as a fellow heir with Christ, but states that this privilege is conditional. “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”
3. So does this mean that we go around beating ourselves up, masochistically subjecting ourselves to every form of degradation to earn our way into heaven, kind of like experiencing Purgatory here on earth? Of course not.
    - a) It means that we stop placing ultimate value in this life, and in the blessings that sometimes trickle into it. Instead, we look to the Lord, confident that he alone gets to define for us what is good and what is bad because we are his, and he is always good. If we suffer loss, we recognize that God, because he loves us, is destroying our idols and dependencies and granting us the opportunity to trust only in him.
    - b) “For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.” (Romans 14:8)
  4. This is why I have zero tolerance for the so-called prosperity gospel (which is no gospel at all!). It stands in direct contradiction to the teaching of Jesus. If someone on TV is selling you some magic theological beans to show you how to be healthy and wealthy and avoid suffering, it isn’t the message of this Bible they are spreading, but that of their own greedy hearts.
  5. So at North Ridge Life Church may we always identify with Christ by measuring our suffering against the unshakeable goodness of God, and not by the temporary pain or discomfort we experience. Romans 8:18 “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”
- B. Secondly, we **Identify with Christ by Sharing in his Death (Romans 6:1-3 ESV; Pg 549)**. We signify that we have been crucified with Christ by our baptism. Baptism doesn’t make us “dead with Christ”, but rather it **signifies** that we are dead with him. But what is it exactly that our baptism is signifying?
1. First, baptism shows that we are dead to sin. Paul asks a rhetorical question here. “How can we who have died to sin continue to live in it?”
    - a) This is not to imply that anyone lives completely free of moral fault. 1st John tells us that anyone who says they don’t sin is a liar.
    - b) It means that if someone has truly placed their trust in Christ, the power of sin should be steadily diminishing. The change may be imperceptible from one day to the next, but over the course of months and years, you notice old chains and bondages are gone, replaced by a new and glorious freedom. We call this process “sanctification”.
  2. Secondly, to be crucified with Christ means to be dead to our own sinful will and desires and alive to God’s choices and his way of doing things.

- a) Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
  - b) Sanctification not only teaches us to say “no” to sin, but to increasingly say “yes” to God. This results in obedience. It is the death of selfishness and the birth of joyful sacrificial living.
3. Thirdly, to be crucified with Christ means to be dead to the law as a means of appeasing God or obtaining righteousness. Romans 7:6 “But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.”
    - a) As believers, we understand that we have zero self-generated righteousness. All righteousness that we have is because of Jesus and not because of our hard work, or high moral standards.
    - b) This means because his righteousness cannot be altered or polluted, and he has freely given us his righteousness, that now our righteousness is also beyond corruption. “What about when I sin?” That’s what your righteousness looks like -filthy rags- not his! That’s why we must walk in **his** righteousness alone. Not ours, or a hybrid of his and ours. His alone.
    - c) Because of this, we don’t do good things because “God will get us” if we don’t; but because we love Christ, so we love what pleases him.
  4. Therefore NRLC must be a church of people that reckon themselves dead with Christ to sin, self and the law.
- C. Thirdly, we **Identify with Christ in his Rising (Colossians 3:1-4 ESV; Pg. 572)**. From this verse in Colossians, we see that we are to “seek” and “set our minds” on things that are above, where Christ is enthroned at the right hand of God. There are at least a couple things to point out here...
1. To identify with Christ, is to teleconference with the highest authority, in the highest place of all.
    - a) In the early 2000’s, I worked as a regional manager for a company based in Abilene that would have me drive in, every other week or so for a 45 minute meeting. A 6-hour round trip for a 45-minute meeting!
    - b) Had I been working for these companies in this day of technology, we could have accomplished the same thing much more inexpensively and efficiently using Skype or FaceTime. Even though I wasn’t **physically** in those meetings, it would have been as though I was.
      - (1) This is what I imagine it means to “set my mind” on “things above”. I’m not fully (body, soul, and spirit) in heaven yet, but I have been invited to join Christ there, as often as I please, to consult with him, to worship him and to enjoy his company.
      - (2) It is this very opportunity that you and I have as believers that caused the blind, 19th Century hymn writer, Fanny Crosby to exclaim in her hymn, Blessed Assurance, “Oh what a foretaste of glory divine!” This is what Paul meant when he told the Ephesians that we already **have been** seated with Christ in heavenly places.

2. But we also see that to be raised with Christ implies that we have a heavenly perspective. We don't see things like everyone else sees things. Paul says that our lives are now hidden with Christ in God.
    - a) Living in sin is like living homeless in some back alley gutter in a large city. When you roll out of your cardboard box in the morning, you see rats scurrying through the piles of trash. Perhaps you hear angry screams coming from some domestic dispute in the buildings around you. Maybe you see emergency vehicles racing by with lights flashing and sirens blaring. Your low position in life determines your perspective. Everything is seen in close-up, 3D HD in all its gritty reality.
      - (1) And it doesn't matter if you were a low-down sinner, or a respectable sinner (and we all know the difference!), this analogy applies.
      - (2) In one way or another, living in sin is total, street-level, depressing sensory overload. You are surrounded by filth, conflict, disruption and noise all the time. Am I right? Do you remember?
    - b) But being raised with Christ is more like first-class air travel. Again, I'm not implying that the Christian life is a romantic dash through a field of daisies; I'm speaking primarily about perspective. When you're raised with Christ, you're off the ground. You see the big picture. The world seems better ordered and guided by a larger purpose. Your high position (seated with Christ in heavenly places) determines your perspective.
      - (1) You're not fighting for survival because someone else (the pilot) is in control. You can sit back and enjoy the scenery, or just rest. Even if turbulence occurs, the one flying the plane has the knowledge and the tools to get you where you're going.
      - (2) Being raised with Christ is the very definition of peace. Peace that overcomes the world, my flesh and the very powers of hell. That is my perspective in all things. A perspective of peace.
  3. NRLC must be committed to walking in the resurrection power of Christ, regularly meeting with him in the heavenly places through prayer, petition, and worship. We must view all of life: politics, economics, entertainment, relationships, etc., from a higher, heavenly, resurrected perspective.
- D. Lastly, we **Identify with Christ in his Reigning (2 Corinthians 5:16-21 ESV; Pg 562)**. When I say that we reign with Christ, I am not implying that we are his equals in power or glory. I am pointing out to you that Christ has delegated his kingly authority to his kingdom servants in order to accomplish his kingdom purposes.
1. In the passage, Paul speaks of those who have been reconciled to God (that's us!) being entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation; literally placing in our hands the very message of reconciliation which he himself used to save us through the cross.
  2. Now here's the bombshell revelation. "Therefore, ***we are ambassadors for Christ***, God making his appeal ***through*** us."
    - a) Do you understand the role of an ambassador? The US ambassador to China, is not President Trump, but when he speaks in his official capacity, he speaks with all of the authority of the entire US government. In a very real sense, he is reigning with the authorities that gave him his position.

- b) He does not worry whether he can back up what he says, or whether his audience will like it, or like him. He doesn't have that luxury. When he is told what to speak, he doesn't soften it, or alter it, he must deliver the message as handed to him.
- 3. Similarly, we are Christ's ambassadors! God is appealing to the world through us! We are not God, but when we proclaim what we are commanded to proclaim, we speak with all of the authority of Heaven. This is what it means to "reign" with Christ in this life. It's not my problem if the people I'm sent to don't like it or like me. I have been told what to speak and I must not soften or alter God's message. Neither must you.
  - a) This puts your daily work in a new light! You are not an engineer, a nurse, or a burger flipper. You are God's representative at your firm, the hospital, or McDonalds. They are just paying you to be there and be gospel salt and light. What an awesome responsibility and opportunity!
  - b) NRLC has been called to this neighborhood in order to represent the interests of our King! We will proclaim his message to them! That message is simply, "Be reconciled to God!" We will strive to identify with Christ by constantly adorning that simple message with genuine love and costly acts of service.
- IV. As individuals and as a church, let us commit our hearts to suffering with him, that we might truly know him in purity, undistracted by the values and idols of this world. Let us identify with his death. Let us be found as a people increasingly dead to sin, self, and the law as an answer to what is killing us. Let identify with his resurrection and all of it's attendant power that gives us 24/7 access to the throne room, as well as a newer, better perspective. Let us reign as his ambassadors, passionately making God's appeal to the fallen, broken and sinful world.