



## Gathered in the Gospel: Delighting in the Church

### I. INTRO

A. The title of the sermon today is, **Gathered in the Gospel: Delighting in the Church**. As we begin, I'd like to state three broad generalizations about the Church...

1. **The Church and the Kingdom of God are not the same.** (They do work hand-in-hand though.)
  - a. The Church was birthed to be a **new and countercultural family under the kingship** of Jesus Christ.
  - b. The Church becomes the fruit of Kingdom activity. The Church is to be intent on spreading the Kingdom of God, which is more than simply winning people to Christ. The KOG is also working for the healing and reconciliation of all people and people groups; it is actively engaging in the deeds of mercy and seeking justice.
2. **Guests should not be able to tell what kind of church we are...** We are so committed to **doctrine** that guests think we are a very conservative church. We are so passionate in our **worship** that people think we're a very charismatic church. And we are so committed to **social justice** and mercy ministries that guests think we're a very liberal church.
3. **Church is messy and will always be messy. They were in the NT and we are now too.** [whacked]
  - a. Corinth – Paul addresses their pride-fulness, immorality, drunkenness, class distinctions. They were obsessed with the miraculous but lacked love, decency, and orderliness in their gatherings.
  - b. Galatia – Intense legalism
  - c. Ephesus – A plethora of false teachers...
  - d. 7 Churches – Affirmation and rebuke

B. So, with that in mind let's read Col 1:13-18 (p. 987): *“For [Jesus] rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. **He is also head of the body, the church**; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.”*—Colossians 1:13-18 [pray]

## II. BODY

- A. Today we want to take those 9-words: *“He is the head of the body, the church”* and see if we can expand our **view and appreciation** for the Church. This is part training seminar and part sermon... [I might ruffle some feathers today]
- B. To accomplish this, I'd like to climb up to about 30,000 feet to **define and describe the Church** and then bring that down to the here and now—and talk specifically about the goals and objectives of our church services here at CCC.
- C. Here are three aspects of Church that I'd like to explore today...
1. **Define and describe the “Big C” Church.**
  2. **Define and describe where we land as an Evangelical Church.**
  3. **Define and describe what we are anticipating in our church services.**
- D. So, let's look at them one at a time...
1. **Define and describe the “Big C” Church.**
    - a. Here is a very simple and straightforward definition of the Church: **The Church is the community of all true believers for all time.**
    - b. What this means is that there is a visible Church and an invisible Church...
      - 1) The **visible Church** includes all who currently profess faith in Christ and give evidence of that faith in their lives.
      - 2) The **invisible Church** is the Church as God sees it—consisting of all believers' past, present, and future whose hearts are His.
    - c. I love how N. T. Wright describes the Church. He compares the Church to both a **river** and a **tree**. They **seem like opposites** with a river starting with 1,000 little streams and tributaries and a tree

begins with a single seed. Wright says we need to see and understand both images to truly understand the Church...

- 1) Like a **river** heaven will be populated with people from every tongue and nation who all started in different places but have brought their different streams into a single flow. Diversity gives way to unity. (We want CCC to look as much like heaven as possible.)
  - 2) And the Church is also like a **tree**. Jesus is the single seed sown into the **dark earth** and has produced a towering plant with many branches stretching out in many directions. Unity gives way to diversity.<sup>1</sup>
- d. **The Church is a single multiethnic community decreed by God the Father, brought into being by Jesus, energized by the Holy Spirit, and called to be the transformative news of God's rescuing justice to the whole creation. –Adapted from N.T. Wright<sup>2</sup> [tweetable?]**
2. **Define and describe where we land as an Evangelical Church.**
- a. No matter what side of the political aisle you land on I think it's become evident that the term Evangelical has become a hot-button term...
  - b. Back in 2010, J.I. Packer wrote a stinging rebuke of the Evangelical Church: "**Superficial smatterings of truth, blurry notions about God and godliness, and thoughtlessness about the issues of living—career-wise, community-wise, family-wise, and church-wise—are all too often the marks of evangelical congregations today...**"<sup>3</sup>
  - c. Here is how I would suggest we describe ourselves...

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<sup>1</sup> N.T. Wright. *Simply Christian*, HarperOne 2006: 200.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Gary Parrett and J. I. Packer. *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way*, Baker 2010.

## Evangelical Continuum

Moralistic--Fundamentalist--Conservative--Emergent--Liberal

### Confessional Evangelical

Confessional Evangelicalism refers to that movement of Christian believers who seek a conscious convictional continuity with the historical orthodox creeds and theological catechisms of the Protestant Reformation.

- d. And while we're here, I would **strongly suggest** that we NOT mix our Evangelicalism with Christian Nationalism. When Christians seek to merge their Christian and American identities, they often end-up distorting both their faith and our constitutional democracy.
- 3. **Define and describe what we are anticipating in our church services.**
  - a. In a nutshell the goal of our church worship services is to **re-gospel one another each and every week**. As you may have heard me say before we never outgrow our need for the gospel. The gospel is more than the entry point of the Christian life, **the gospel is the sum total of the Christian life**.
  - b. You probably haven't noticed but I have never referred to this building as "church." This building is NOT a church; it's a sheep shed.
  - c. I would like to spend the rest of our time posing the question: **What do we do when we get together for a worship service?**
    - 1) First, we need to identify what we are NOT doing...
      - a) A worship service is NOT built on the model of a modern entertainment event.
      - b) In a modern entertainment event, we are **passive spectators** and the event has some **warm-up acts** and then the **main event**, and then we go home.
    - 2) So, what are we doing at each weekend worship gathering?

- 3) Let's go back to the gospel. One of the simplest and, perhaps, the best theological definitions (or description) of the gospel can be viewed as an equation with **four words: God + Sin + Jesus + Faith = The Gospel.**
- 4) What's happening in a worship service is a review and a restatement of the gospel that culminates with a (fresh) surrender to the gospel.
- 5) **“An experiencing of the gospel in a profoundly participative way, every week in a way your soul needs.” –Tim Keller**
- 6) Each week we are re-engaging the gospel – from the beginning to the end: God / Sin / Jesus / Faith. We are actively walking through it together.
  - a) If you are habitually late to worship, or if you spend the first several minutes of the service in the café chatting, it basically means that you think of a worship service as an entertainment event – and not, what a church service actually is.
  - b) Recognizing that we are all late sometimes—and we certainly want to extend extra grace to our families, I want to say to you that being present from the first song to the final prayer is important.
  - c) Again, J.I. Packer is very helpful here: **[People] honor God most when they come to worship hungry and expectant, conscious of need and looking to God to meet them and supply it.” –J.I. Packer<sup>4</sup>**
  - d) How do we participate? It means we see and we understand what's happening – and we work our way through the essentials of the gospel each and every week. We do this individually and together as a church family.
- d. Now, let's quickly walk through these four components<sup>5</sup> of the gospel that we want to build our worship service on...
  - 1) **God**

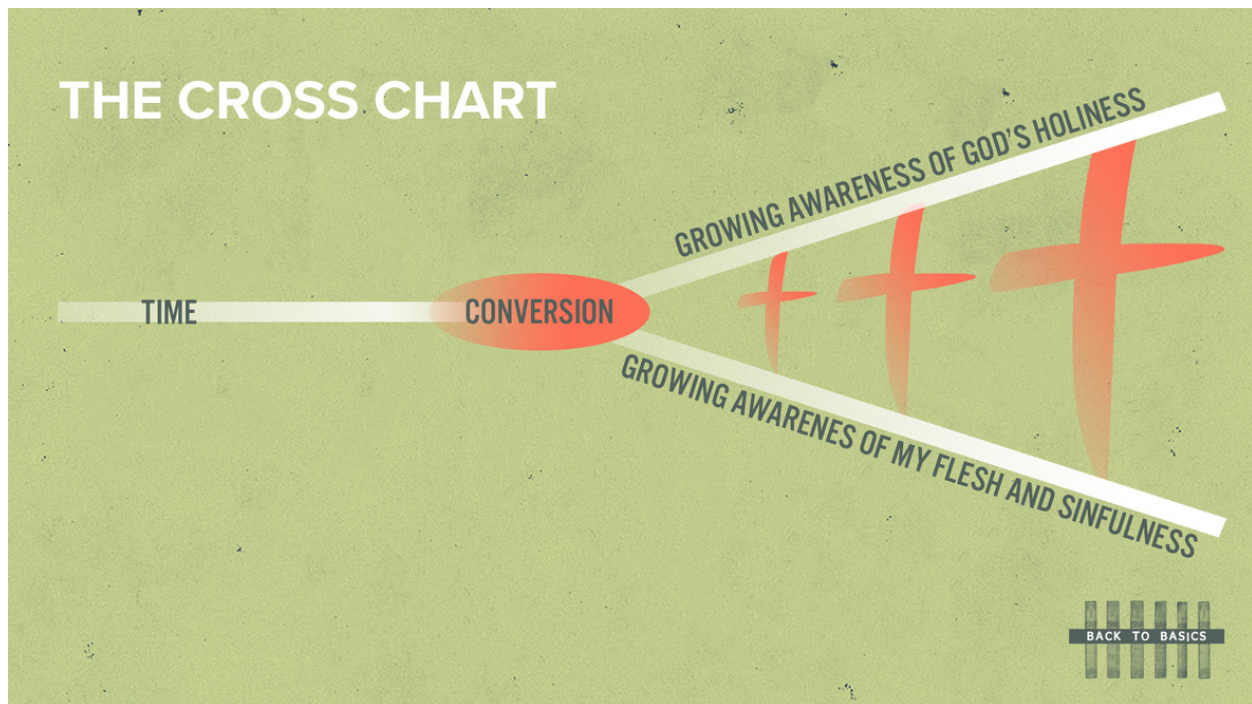
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<sup>4</sup> *A Quest for Godliness*, Crossway 1990:252.

<sup>5</sup> These four components have been adapted from a sermon by Tim Keller.

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- a) We begin each week with a call, or invitation, to praise and worship God through congregational singing. Our goal is to always remind ourselves of how great and all-important God is.
  - b) In the early stages of our first set of worship music our (amazing) worship leaders will help us to focus on God – and God’s majesty and beauty and sacrifice. (Chris’ sermon on worship).
- 2) **Sin** is human pride and self-absorption that destroyed our relationship with God, with each other, and with the world.
- a) During the course of a worship service it is important that we take the time to confess every known sin in our lives and call upon God for His merciful forgiveness.
  - b) Here is a chart that will help us to see how an awareness of sin can actually enhance our worship...



- 3) In **Jesus Christ**, God has come into the world to rescue us from sin and death through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

- a) When we come to hear the Scripture read and taught, we remember, (or learn) what God has done about our sin condition in Jesus Christ.
  - b) As Paul, in Romans 7, contemplates his tendency, or, we could say, compulsion, to sin – he confesses to God and then is able to turn to God in wholehearted worship.
  - c) *“Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” --Romans 7:24-25*
4. Finally, we respond in **faith** to what Jesus has done and with a fresh surrender and whole life commitment.
- a. The whole service is an act of worship. Singing is worship, the goal of the sermon is to help people worship God in whatever text we are in, the giving of tithes and offerings is an act of worship, and baptisms and celebrating the Lord’s Supper are acts of worship. It’s ALL worship.
  - b. In every church service we would like for you to not be passive, we want you to see yourself as an active participant, not a spectator.
  - c. And finally, we respond to the worship service by seeking to spread kingdom life, power, presence, and reconciliation out into the surrounding culture as we live our lives on mission.

## II. CONCLUSION

- A. As we close, I’d like to talk to you parents for a moment... Last night I posted a guest blog post titled, **When Church is Optional You Set Your Kids Up to Fail**. Here’s quote... “When I pull my children away from the things of God for the sake of hobbies, I am not loving God and I am not loving them. I am programming them to be satisfied with lesser affections – I am programming them to fail.”
- B. Finally, here’s my pitch to make church of a priority: I would also say to you that there is more opportunity for you to grow and change (sanctification/transformation) in the 70-minutes on a Sunday morning than any other time during the week.