

City Life Church – IN CHRIST in the Midst of a Moral Dilemma

Sharon Thomas

11/14/2020

INTRODUCTION

Our focus tonight will center around a two letter word **“IN”**

It’s just a little word, and we all use it in various ways...

And think specifically about being IN with regard to physically being IN a place... for instance...

- IN Disney... the dynamics and culture are very different from what is like outside the gate right?
- There is a big difference from the way it feels outside versus what it feels like INside...
- The dynamics of my experience with the ocean will be incredibly different if I physically get my being IN the water...

We fully understand the difference between being OUT vs IN

The kind of IN God wants to talk with us about is an IN that He fully understands...

But for us... it is such a different kind of IN... that we have to grow in our understanding of it...

Throughout the New Testament, we find this phrase often **“In Christ”** **SLIDE 3**

- It is a doctrinal phrase that describes what takes place in us spiritually when we receive Jesus
- But it is also a phrase that should be describing how we live and do life day by day

IN CHRIST

The image of the Cross

- **VERTICAL LINE** ... it represents God in heaven reaching down to earth, which is exactly what He did through Christ.... The Bible says that God sent Jesus from heaven to come to earth on mission to save us!
- **HORIZONTAL LINE**... it represents us... broken humanity going about the business of everyday living... we scurry about on the planet doing all the things we do in life... building families, businesses, relationships, identities... the big stuff like weddings and elections and holidays and the little things like laundry and grocery shopping and watching TV... life... all on this horizontal plane and all under a cloak of brokenness because of sin in this world...

There is a place where this vertical line and the horizontal line meet... A place where the perfect love and person of Christ intersects with the brokenness of humanity!

I need to be right there where Christ meets earth... IN that spot... IN His Gospel, IN Christ is where I need to live!

When I am IN that spot where His holiness intersects this brokenness ... even though I am living amidst the brokenness... as I choose to be IN HIM... He will raise me above it...

Over these years God has impressed that picture upon me multiplied times to say... “Sharon, if you will choose to live IN ME” ... to center yourself IN ME... I will raise you up above all this...

- You can live above the brokenness... an elevated life!
- And you can share the blessing of that elevated life with those still trapped below in the brokenness...”

And church tonight, I believe God would have me share this perspective with you so that He can say the same thing to each of us about the very broken world we find ourselves, a world that is full of moral dilemma...

God wants to lift His people above this brokenness and set us free from it!

The Bible reiterates this again and again...

Romans 8:1-2 Through the work of Jesus... we are given invitation to rise up from the bondage of sin and death into to a place of freedom!

Christ was lifted up on the cross so we can be lifted up in Him to a place of freedom and LIFE!

This is a salvation reality!

- Doctrinally... the teaching of Scripture is that when we accept Christ as our savior, this privilege of being free IN HIM is granted to us and put on our account... we have access to that kind of life
- But remember this is not just theological doctrine... freedom from sin and death can be an experiential reality as we position ourselves IN Christ!

Being in Christ... experiencing this freedom... is a decision we have to make every day... perhaps moment by moment... circumstance by circumstance...

- Am I going to live out here in the brokenness?
- Or am I going to choose to live IN CHRIST... and allow Him to lift me up!

TESTIMONY

My story of struggle with a brother in Christ (I will call him John) during this challenging season... and through Romans 8 the Lord specifically zoomed in on Question number 5 from Romans 8:34 and asked me. ***“Who is the one who condemns?”***

It is basically saying that no one has a right to condemn us if we are in Christ... because Christ has already taken on our condemnation... BUT if someone does... Christ will get between you and whoever condemns you because His death and resurrection have already taken care of all that...

But see in this scenario, the Lord revealed to me the position that I was putting Him in

See up until that moment, I had just assumed that this word ***“intercedes”*** meant that Jesus was in the throne room praying for me, much like Romans 8: 26-27 describe the Holy Spirit doing... But as I read, and the Lord asked me ***“Who is the one who condemns?”*** the Lord He revealed this picture instead...

The picture of Jesus standing between His child and their condemner... which is what He does when someone comes to condemn us... HE intercedes... He stands between us and that person...

But in this case... I was the condemner... which meant Jesus was having to stand between me and John, He was having to stand between a brother and a sister in Christ... much like a parent has to stand between two of their children who can't get along...

I had to repent

I had to ask the Lord... “What do I do??”

That place of humble repentance and crying out to the Lord, opened the gate for me to come back IN... IN to Christ... into His Gospel that is available for all who call on Him... and as I did, over the next few days, the Lord lifted me above all this mess... He gave me sight to see things from up above

See how many of us know... when you look at something from up above it looks very different...

Well God raised me up and gave me an elevated view

I learned something that day... **God wasn't calling me so much to be in unity with John... He was calling me to be unity with HIM... to be in unity with His purposes in and through John's life...**

He was calling me IN... INTO the Gospel, this point where the perfect Christ meets the brokenness of this earth. And see IN this place, when I am all IN the Gospel... I would be ever aware that Jesus

- created John, just like He created me
- has a love for John just like He loves me
- died for John just like He died for me
- is doing a sanctifying work in John just like He is sanctifying me
- is using John in spite of his shortcomings, just like He is using me
- IN CHRIST, I could be ever aware that Jesus is big enough, strong enough, able enough to change anything in John that needs to be changed...

And this is what I learned that day... when I am **IN CHRIST**... I will be cheering Christ's mission on... for myself... but for anyone else who also says they want to be IN, even John!

Pride tries to figure out how many people I can keep out of God's family, the Gospel tries to figure out how many people I can get in...

When I take on the role of condemner... guess which one of those things I am operating in?
But when I am IN Christ... In HIS Gospel... my role is to cheer others on to being in Him too!

Call to the Church

I shared all of that personal testimony with you tonight ... because I wanted you to see the dilemma, feel the tension and sense the wrestle

Because I imagine in your own life, you have been feeling it too...
I imagine there is someone... or even many in your life you could call John as well...

And let me just say... **don't get distracted by trying to figure out who John is in my story...** it wouldn't be appropriate for me to say and it really doesn't matter to you...

But what does matter is this? Who might be John for you?
Who is on the other side of the aisle that you are condemning?

- It might be someone you actually know?
- It might be a social media enemy?
- It might even be a leader in the opposing party?

His simple question for us tonight? **"Who is the One who condemns? Is it you?"**

If we want to truly be IN Christ... then we can't live in condemnation...

We understand that if we want to experience the benefits and glories of being IN CHRIST then we can't live

- IN immorality
- IN bitterness
- IN unbelief
- IN despair
- IN selfishness
- IN greed
- IN jealousy

We understand that all of those things belong out here in the brokenness, but somehow in the midst of this election year we've been deceived to think we have a free pass to bring Condemnation Into Christ... but Church tonight God is saying NO!

He is calling out Republicans, Democrats and everyone in between...

- Condemnation is ugly and shaming to who we are and who we have been called to be
- Condemnation is creating strife in the body of Christ...
- Condemnation is keeping us Outside of the glories of Jesus
- Condemnation is smearing the name of Jesus
- And condemnation is also putting Him in a position of interceding between all of us...

Oh God forgive us and call us IN!!!
Call us away from our pride!

Some might be thinking...

But what about the times that Jesus spoke condemning words about the sin in people's lives? And that is a valid question... but if you look at those times... Jesus was most often correcting the pride he saw in their hearts... And we know that even in saying those things... He was on mission to rescue them... just like He is on mission to rescue us from our pride... And I might add... He is Jesus... so He can 100% see into the hearts and minds and motives of people... we can't

I know how hard it is to consider that you might be standing in a place of condemnation because as believers, in our political convictions we often have convinced ourselves that we are fighting God's battles... and perhaps we are... there are plenty of manifestations of broken humanity out here... and yes God cares deeply about them and He wants us to fight for them...

But as we fight for them... we often forget that our battle is not against flesh and blood... we forget God created that flesh and blood... see many of the ones we are pointing our finger at are His children... and those who are not... He wants them to be!

Over this last year the Lord has brought this verse from Psalm 51 to mind again and again...
It says, ***"You desire Truth in my inmost being"***

This was written by David when he was repenting of sin... he acknowledged that God wanted the Truth to get deep into his life... into the way he thought and felt and acted and spoke...

Can we let this question, ***"Who is the one who condemns?"*** get deep in us?
Can we let this question search us and find us out?
Maybe even reveal places where we have labeled ourselves as righteous and labeled "John" as unredeemable?

Those two labels **Righteous and Redeemed** are so important as we let this question search us out...
Because those two words are foundational to being IN the Gospel of Jesus Christ...

See Jesus came as a PERFECTLY RIGHTEOUS GOD... piercing the brokenness of unrighteous humanity...

- And He opened the door for any to choose to come in and receive REDEMPTION...
- So for all who choose Him, He begins to redeem us... And that redemption continues as we allow Him to sanctify us, and draw us more and more into the experience of living in Him

When I am IN the Gospel of Jesus Christ... my life then will begin to be defined by HIS mission
He will define

- How I think
- What I say
- How I act
- How I feel

Out here, political parties, and groups and races and all those distinctions give guidance to how we think and feel and act, but when we are in Christ... He gets to define all of those things...

And His definitions... the culture of being IN Christ... should paint a stark distinction between what we see out here and IN HIM!

- We should look different!
- We should act different!
- We should talk different!
- Post different!
- Love different!

But sadly, especially in the posture of our hearts toward people who see things differently than us... we look just like the brokenness out here... which really reveals that we are dwelling out here and not IN CHRIST!

So, yes, let's allow the Truth of this question to get deep into our inmost being...

Into even the ways our hearts are postured towards

- Donald Trump...
- Joe Biden...

God is calling for repentance...

Not because He wants to condemn us... but because He wants to draw us IN

He wants us to experience the much better way of doing life... IN CHRIST!

When we are in HIM... everything changes...

- The concerns and the convictions we are burdened by will be defined by Him and answered by Him... instead of by the brokenness of this world
- He will cleanse us from sin
- He will elevate our perspective...
- He will show us how to fight these battles in righteous ways with pure hearts and wise battline

That is one of the benefits of living in HIM...

We are **RAISED UP** in freedom above the sin and death to see things differently!

And do things differently

RAISED UP LIVING... it is such a blessing that we receive in Christ, but it is also a challenge

But here is the thing... many people are afraid of heights...

- That is true physically
- But this is also true spiritually... because it is often our fears that keep us outside of Christ... we stay out here in the brokenness because we are afraid of what it looks like up here... and what is required of us... how vulnerable it is...

It is vulnerable to humble yourself to the better ways of Christ

It is scary to relinquish control and trust God to move

It does expose your heart to love people that you don't even really like

But when you choose to step IN... IN to the Gospel... IN to His Truth... IN to His Word... He will lift you up to see the glories of these things.. and the wisdom to know how to live and move and do life the way that HE designed it to be lived!

CONCLUSION

Proverbs 13:10 "with presumption comes much strife" ...

What keeps us out here with a condemning spirit is presumption... presuming that we know a person's heart, motives, story, thoughts, intentions, history,

And the truth is we most of the time don't...

But when we get in that place of presumptive pride... what usually follows is an even far worse presumption for the Christian... we presume that God is with us and that He is against them...

And all this **PRIDEFUL PRESUMPTION CAUSES SO MUCH STRIFE**... within us, around us and between us...

For all who have found a place of repentance from condemnation tonight, praise God...

I believe you have taken a big step to living IN Christ

In the center of His cross

And I hope you know I have taken that step with you

But let me offer this encouragement to help you stay IN... **Leave the presumption out here where it belongs...**

Presumption will lure you back out here in the brokenness... but

- In Christ, God's Word will give you the Truth
- In Christ, His Spirit within you will direct you in how to think and live and move and have your being
- In Christ, He will elevate your perspective to see people and circumstances as He does

Presumption will lure you back out here in the brokenness...

- In Christ, God's Word will give you the Truth
- In Christ, His Spirit within you will direct you in how to think and live and move and have your being
- In Christ, He will elevate your perspective to see people and circumstances as He does

We haven't answered every question about being IN Christ

Understanding this kind of IN is a lifelong sanctification that comes with much wrestle

And that is not surprising, because listen to what Jesus said...

Matthew 7:13-14...

See this way of sin and death is wide...

But the gate is narrow to be IN Christ...

Have you ever tried to enter into a narrow doorway and take something big and bulky with you...

- You turn this way and that and struggle and strain...
- Sometimes you have to leave some things outside if you truly want to get in
- And it really helps as well when someone who is already in and can see the doorway a little clearer, guides you through

Entering a narrow gate is not easy... and entering into living IN Christ amidst all this sin and death isn't easy either...

The gate is open... but it is narrow... and you can't take the sin and death in with you

In my lifetime... as I have endeavored to enter IN CHRIST again and again and again and truly live... I have had twist and turn and figure out what can really fit in there with me...

It has been a wrestle

And in this political season... the wrestle has been especially challenging as I have learned condemnation doesn't fit

Don't be afraid of the wrestle... Do whatever you have to do to get IN CHRIST...

Leave whatever you have to leave outside the gate... it is worth it!

And then be that person on the inside who is helping others find their way in too... .whoever they are!

God has been very clear... condemnation does not fit in that narrow gateway to Christ... no matter how you twist it and turn it...

If you want to be IN HIM... you are going to have to leave condemnation outside in the brokenness where it belongs...