

Our Gathering — Together!

Road trip, road trip! We're a family on a journey together to a household gathering. Who knows the way? Let's find out.

There are two aspects to a journey: the route and the milestones. The route is your roadmap, the way to get there. The milestones are the stages, marking your forward progress. We can make a game out of watching for the milestones to see how quickly the time can pass. Let's have fun as we travel the distance together.

Those of us who are born again of God's spirit are on a heaven-bound journey. Our big brother, Jesus Christ, has mapped everything out for us so that all we need do is follow in his footsteps. At the end of the road we'll be safe and sound, reunited with the family at large. What sweeter road trip could there be?

This weekend we've been exploring our Hope. My specific topic this morning is our gathering — TOGETHER! I will place a particular emphasis on all that we experience *together* as sons of God as we see the Day approaching.

The word "together" underscores the biblical truth of our identification with Christ. The concept of identification can be summed up in this simple but profound statement:

We became as he was, so that we are now his and will become as he is.

But before we set out on this adventure, let me share a few "rules of the road" that will make your trip more enjoyable.

First, you'll see a distinct pattern to the teaching. Every point I'll make revolves around a single word: *together*. Listen for it. As a matter of fact, there is a total of 21 different "togethers" we'll focus on throughout the course of the morning. Count along and see if you can check off all 21 by the end.

The Greek word for "together" is spelled *s-u-n* and is pronounced "soon". At times, it stands alone; in other instances, it appears in the formation of a compound word. To make it stand out for section headings, I have consistently rendered it as "together."

Second, from a note-taking perspective, this is a "capture as you can" presentation. Apart from jotting down the "togethers", I recommend that you

listen more than you write so that you have time to savor each truth along the way. Right after this weekend, the entire teaching (including the poetry) will be available in audio and in writing on our website at www.oikeos.org, so in the meantime you should be able to just sit back, relax, and enjoy the ride.

As we set out, let's remember the two aspects to a journey: the route and the milestones.

The **Route** is:

We became as he was to become as he is

The **Milestones** are:

We became as he was (past)

We are now his (present)

We will become as he is (future)

Let's get started on the journey!

WE BECAME AS HE WAS TO BECOME AS HE IS

In the Book of Romans, we learn that in our identification with Christ, not only have we suffered with him, but we will also be glorified together with him.

Romans 8:17a:

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we **suffer** [together] **with him**,...

We suffered together with him

At times, we may groan in these mortal, earthly bodies. Jesus Christ did too, but he was able to endure for the joy that was set before him.

Romans 8:17b:

... that we **may be** also **glorified** [or made glorious] **together**.

We will be glorified together with him

[*Colossians 3.*] Whenever God's Word makes reference to Christ's sufferings, it also makes mention of the glory that will follow. We are on the same trajectory, counting the sufferings of the present time as insignificant, piling in the light of the glory of Christ.

Colossians 3:4:

When Christ, *who is our life*, shall appear, then **shall** ye also **appear** [be made manifest or apparent, be shown forth together] **with him** in glory.

We will appear together with him

At present, though we are born again of God's spirit, we are still here in mortal bodies. We eagerly await the day when our hidden life will be fully revealed and we shall be like him, seeing him as he is.

So, to reiterate, we became as he was (in his suffering), so that we are now his and will become as he is (in his glory).

Returning back to Romans, a pivotal verse in setting forth the truth of our identification with Christ is Romans 6:5.

Romans 6:5:

For if we **have been planted together** in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness of his* resurrection:

We have been planted together

What does it mean to be "planted together" in the likeness of his death and resurrection? The next 21 "togethers" will provide a full and detailed answer; but let's first answer the question as it pertains to this particular verse.

A look at different Bible translations yields a very wide array of possibilities.

- King James says we have been "planted together".
- ESV says we have been "united with him".
- Darby says we are "become identified with him".
- Weymouth says we have "become one with him by sharing."
- Second says we have "become one and the same plant with him."

Why so many different takes on the same verse?

The underlying Greek word here has in fact a multiplicity of meanings, and each of these translations tells a part of the story. The essence can best be envisioned by thinking of a pair of vines planted next to the same stake that's been driven into the soil. Both grow up together, heavenward. Both become entwined. Finally, the two intertwine to become a single vine. And the vine bears fruit abundantly.

So, considering this vine-and-branches illustration, we can come to see that we have been planted together as a single plant, have become one with him by sharing, have been united with him and have indeed become identified with him. In all these ways, we are together with him, and together with each other as well.

I've written a 4-line poem to capture these ideas in a single refrain. You'll find copies of the words on your tables. I'll sing it for you now, and then after you've had the chance to hear it once, we can try singing it all together.

Planted together, a single vine.
Rooted together, in growth divine.
Grounded together, our life entwined.
Fruited together, like him for all time.

Fabulous job, wonderful singing!

WE BECAME AS HE WAS (PAST)

The next six "togethers" deal with past-tense realities based on all that Christ accomplished for us by his life, death, resurrection and ascension.

Galatians 2:20:

I **am crucified** [together] **with** Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

We were crucified together with him

Having been staked together with him on the cross, we have renounced the world and cleave to our new life in Christ.

Romans 6:8:

Now if we be dead [together] **with** Christ [in his sufferings], we believe that we **shall** also **live** [together] **with** him [in his glory]:

We died together with him

Having died together with him, we can consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus because of the coming glory.

Romans 6:4:

Therefore we **are buried** [together] **with** him by baptism [immersion] into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

We were buried together with him

Jesus Christ was immersed into death, and because he emerged from among the dead victorious, so did and so will we. This miraculous victory displays our hope and powers our walk in newness of life.

[Ephesians 2.] We have been buried with him, planted together. However, a seed that's been planted doesn't sleep in the soil forever: it awakes and a sprout emerges.

Ephesians 2:5:

Even when we were dead in sins, **hath quickened** us [made us alive] **together** with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

We were quickened [made alive] together with him

God is the One who makes the dead man spiritually alive together with Christ. Colossians 1:15 teaches us that that same Christ is the "image of the invisible God" and the "firstborn of every creature [or of all creation]" – the first to have eternal-life spirit. In the new birth, we therefore follow his lead, becoming three-part men and women of body, soul and spirit.

Colossians 1:18 further instructs us that Christ was the "firstborn from the dead" – the first to have a spiritual, imperishable, resurrection body, animated by a life-giving spirit rather than by breath-life. In like manner, we who are born again await the redemption of our bodies, when we, too, will have such bodies. This will occur at the gathering together.

Ephesians 2:6a:

And **hath raised us up together** [awakened or roused us together with him],...

We were raised up [awakened] together with him

The words "raised up" should be translated "roused" or "awakened". Being awakened generally involves two actions: being roused from sleep, and then actually getting up. There may be an interval between the two. In the case of our being awakened together with Christ, an interval definitely exists before we will rise up once and for all. Today, in this life, we have already been roused: we're born again and we know it. Our arising from our mortal, perishable state awaits the day of Christ's return.

Ephesians 2:6b:

... and **made us sit together** [with him] in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus:

We were made to sit together with him

Jesus Christ conquered death and is now ascendant, sitting at the right hand of the throne of God. His name is greater than any other, and all things are under his feet. How astonishing, then, to learn in Ephesians that we are seated together with him. We do not yet occupy our heavenly seat in our new bodies,

for that is still future. But we can enjoy today here on earth all that that heavenly standing procures for us. We are truly on the glory road.

WE ARE NOW HIS (PRESENT)

Our identification with Christ has secured solid benefits for us in our lives today. The following six “togethers” deal with present-tense realities that we can enjoy while still living on this earth.

Ephesians 2:19:

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

We are citizens together

Fellow citizens are citizens together – freemen in a free city, with all the attendant privileges. Like us, believers of previous administrations have also looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. That is our hope! In the meantime, we are all sojourners here, just a-passin’ through.

Ephesians 2:21:

In whom all the building fitly framed together [jointed together, with parts fitted to each other], groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

We are fitly framed together

We may be sojourners, but we are also building – or rather, being built into – something. “Joined together” indicates that the parts are fitted to each other so that when properly jointed, there will be no gaps or structural deficiencies. Our three-year old granddaughter (whose father is an architect) likes to give building lessons to her playmates on how to put Legos together sturdily so they won’t fall down. “Do it this way.” The key is in the interconnections. It all works because the parts have been designed to be joined together perfectly.

Ephesians 2:22:

In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

We are builded together

God’s Church – the Church of the body – is His dwelling place. Just think of that: not a building, not a place, but a people! And as His people, we are being built together on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone. God inhabits that dwelling place. Wow!

Ephesians 3:6a:

That the Gentiles should be **fellowheirs** [heirs together]...

We are heirs together

[*I Thessalonians 4.*] As a son of Adam, Abraham, and David, Jesus at birth was already heir of universal dominion, of the land, and of the throne. As the Son of God, Christ is heir to all things. That is definitely a full portion! All this is also now our portion as co-inheritors with him.

Ephesians 3:6b:

... and **of the same body** [together],...

We are of the same body together

The body of Christ is like no other body that has ever existed before. Christ is the head, and we – some having been of Israel, and some having been Gentiles – are the members. That two should become one that way could only be a miracle.

Ephesians 3:6c:

... and partakers [together] of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

We are partakers together

We partake in a common lot with every born-again believer, regardless of whether we were formerly of Israel or of the Gentiles. Forming one body together, believers of both origins partake as partners together in a common share as our inheritance.

WE WILL BECOME AS HE IS (FUTURE)

The final five “togethers” depict the amazing future God has in store for us when Christ returns to gather the saints. Thessalonians is the Church epistle that chronicles our Hope.

I Thessalonians 4:17:

Then we which are alive *and* remain **shall be caught up** [snatched away at once, carried off] **together** with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

We will be caught up together

The words “caught up together” are the same expression used in Acts when Paul’s ship was caught up in a gale and driven off course. Action thus described is both sudden and forceful, with unequivocal results. When Christ returns to gather the Church, both the dead in Christ and the living in Christ

will be carried clean away in the clouds to meet him in the air. What a way to “seize the Day”!

Philippians 3:21:

Who shall change our vile [lowly] body, that it **may be fashioned like unto** [or **have the same form as**] his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

We will be fashioned like him together

We will be transformed together to be like him. The bodies we have today are lowly, earthy. “Just call me Dusty.” One day they will take an entirely new form: his! At that point, no more lowly. “Just call me Gloria.”

II Thessalonians 2:1:

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming [presence or arrival] of our Lord Jesus Christ, and **by our gathering together unto** him,

We will be gathered unto him together

The words “gathered together” are the same expression used in the Gospels when Jesus laments how often he would have gathered the inhabitants of Jerusalem as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but they would not. The idea expressed is not only one of intimacy, but also of protection. Once we are next to him, no one will be able to wrest us away from his embrace.

The gathering together is not the final endpoint of our journey, but the start of our perfect, new life with Christ. From that moment on, we will be in his presence eternally. We will later return to earth with Christ for the resurrections of the just and the unjust and the ensuing judgment. Finally, there will be a new heaven and a new earth, where fellowship with God, Christ, the believers, and the elect angels will be everlasting.

II Timothy 2:12a:

If we suffer, we **shall** also **reign with** [rule together with] *him*:...

We will reign with him together

At the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus’s face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. We, too, will be radiant as we reign with him in the future.

I Thessalonians 4:17:

Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever **be** [together] **with** the Lord.

We will ever be with him together

There is one with whom we desire to always be together, and that is the Lord. God's purpose of the ages is that our desire to be with His Son is fulfilled, starting at Christ's return. That fellowship – as well as our fellowship with His Father, God – will have no end.

I'd like to share a poem I wrote to describe our journey together with Christ. It's called "Entwined Together with Christ."

Entwined Together with Christ

A Redemption Song of Joy in Eight Stanzas

Destination

From sufferings to glory
Concealed to revealed.
We suffered together
Will be glorified together
Made manifest together
Hidden life bursting forth
On display for all to see.

Identification

Planted together, a single vine.
Rooted together, in growth divine.
Grounded together, our life entwined.
Fruited together, like him for all time.

Immersion

Immersed, dipped —
Crucified together.
Submerged, plunged —
Died together.
Sunk, expunged —
Buried together.

Sprouting

Emerging, poked up —
Made alive together.
Roused, stirred up —
Awakened together.
Exalted, ensconced —
Seated together.

Rooting

One body, homeward bound —
Sojourning as freemen together.
One dwelling, mosaic marvel —
Interlocked stones together.
One habitation, grounded, built up —
Established, erected together.

Repatriation

Joint-possessors, common lot —
Receiving the full portion together.
New day, new creation —
Forming one body together.
Joint-partakers, common share —
Partaking as partners together.

Transformation

Carried away in one fell swoop —
Snatched up and away together.
As he is, conformed to his image —
Transformed to be like him, together.
At rest 'neath the shadow of his wings —
Gathered securely together.

Transfiguration

Glorious array like the King of kings —
Reigning as rulers together.
One Head uniting both heaven and earth —
Redeemed and angelic together.
God's own, aloft, with the Lord of lords —
With him, forever together.