

## Welcome

The year was 2005. The biggest movies of the year were Star Wars Episode III, the fourth Harry Potter movie and a superhero reboot called Batman Begins. Gwen Stefani was insisting she ain't no Holla Back Girl while the Killers were insisting they *were* Mr. Brightside and Kanye West was warning to keep on the lookout for Gold Diggers. In 2005, Comedy Central launched the Colbert Report, a few people started watching a new little website called YouTube, and Tom Cruise jumped on Oprah's couch. 2005 was the beginning of George W. Bush's second term as president and the year Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans.

And it was the year a group of young Christians began meeting in a living room in East Dallas. They wanted to do church differently than they had before, in a way that felt more welcoming, more relevant to their daily lives. They wanted that old time religion, but in a way that made sense in the cutting edge world of 2005. They called themselves Renewed Life Church, but they would soon become known as Catalyst Church. We're going to talk about Church today - what it is, and what it's not. What does it mean to be Catalyst - this particular church, and how do we relate to the larger Church, to Jesus?

Ultimately, I want to consider with you the best way to celebrate our identity as Catalyst. We'll see that faithfulness to our church's heritage - and faithfulness to God's call on us - means courageously choosing to do the next right thing, to look forward and trust God to be faithful.

## Message

This summer, we're working through the Apostle's Creed, one of the oldest statements about what Christians believe. These beliefs are not gateways to belonging but invitations to life. When we say, "I believe..." we are acting in faith, trusting the wisdom of the Church across the world and throughout time that has found these words to be the Way of God, the way to life.

We began by confessing God as our creator, insisting that our lives have meaning and purpose. Since then, we've been investigating belief in Jesus - everything from his identity as God to his incarnation to his second coming.

We're finishing by talking about the Holy Spirit. Last we, we saw who the Spirit is. Now, we're working through what the Spirit does. Today, we confess: **I believe in the holy catholic church, the communion of saints.**

A couple of notes about this statement: First, that word 'catholic' there is an older word that means 'universal' (which is why the Roman Catholic Church uses it in their name). So when we say that, we're saying that we believe in the universal Church, the believers all over the world and from all across time, that we are all one people.

This is the vision John sees in the book of Revelation, this global church:

**I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a great roar, "Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!" -- Revelation 7:9-10**

To confess this is to confess that we are one, global church. Across denominational lines, across ethnicities and languages and every other barrier we put up. Our little Church is not alone in this world. We're part of a great big movement of God that is global.

It might seem strange to claim that these verses are about the Spirit when they're so clearly about the Church. But the Scriptures are clear again and again that the Church is only the Church when she is gathered, empowered and made alive in the Spirit.

So I want to ask this morning what Church is. When the Spirit gathers us together to be the Body of Christ, what exactly is happening here?

Without even thinking about it, Church for most of us is a building. This particular building, since we're all here. But right away, that doesn't make sense. What about when we're serving at Life Message or in our community events? What about when our C-groups gather in homes? Clearly, 'church' is happening there, but it's not in our building.

When we talk about Catalyst, we're talking about the people (I love that in every We Are Catalyst video, what makes people feel at home here is the people. That's what church is!)

[Scripture Slide 1] That's how the New Testament defines Church: not as a building, but as a group of people. That group began with Jesus' disciples, his closest followers. Turn with me to Matthew 16. If you grabbed one of our Bibles on the way in, it's on page XXXX. And if you don't own a bible, please consider that a gift from us for you to keep and use.

Jesus and his disciples are near a town called Caesarea Philippi, a town in the northern part of Palestine. Jesus takes this opportunity to ask what they're saying about him on social media. Let's take a look, beginning in v13:

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

“Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.”

Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit\* on earth will be permitted in heaven.”

So Jesus turns from the buzz on the street to his closest followers: What do you guys think? And Peter gets the right answer. He says, You're the Messiah! You're the son of God!

In response to this statement, Jesus declares that he's building his "church" - that word we're so curious about. The Greek word there literally means "the called-out ones". It was used to describe groups of

people who came together for a particular cause - like we would think of a PTA or Boy Scouts or Rotary group or something like that.

Jesus says, On this confession - that I'm the Messiah and son of God, I'm building an assembly of people. I'm gathering those who "get" this, who understand who I am, together. And this group will be so powerful, so world-changing, that hell itself doesn't stand a chance.

So what does it mean that a guy named Simon son-of-John, whom Jesus nicknamed Rocky, would call Jesus "Messiah"? If we want to understand what the Church is, we need to understand Peter's confession.

To answer that, we need to zoom out and head back in time, get the background of how Peter would've understood the world:

Peter believed God created the world to be a place where we humans lived and worked in partnership with God. We were created to be a picture of God for the world to see (We believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of Heaven and Earth).

But we chose not to follow God, to partner with God. We sinned, and broke creation, broke our own souls. We turned away from God, rejected God's way in favor of our own, limited understanding. And the world suffered. Our relationships with each other suffered. Instead of the life God intended, we knew death.

But God didn't abandon us. God came to a man named Abraham and struck an agreement with him: If Abraham would follow God, then God would use Abraham's descendants to rescue the world. God was again inviting humanity into a partnership.

Abraham agreed, his descendants became the nation of Israel. A few hundred years later, after God had rescued them from slavery, God renewed the covenant with them. This time, God said, "If you will be my people, I will be your God. And I will make you a kingdom of priests."

Priests represented God to the world and vice versa - God's people understood this to be a reaffirmation of their original calling: to be God's images in the world.

Israel had good years and bad years. Faithful generations and unfaithful generations. In the end, they couldn't uphold their end of the bargain. They couldn't faithfully present a picture of God to the world. And they knew it.

So they began to dream of a person who could. A person who would come among them and show them how to be faithful to their calling. A person who could rule them as a wise, just and holy king. A person who could rescue them from the consequences of their unfaithfulness, their inability to live faithfully as God's image.

A person who could rescue not only them, but the whole world, as God had intended. They called this person the Messiah, which in Hebrew means "anointed". Chosen by God.

The Messiah represented all the hopes and dreams of Israel. A person who could be faithful when they weren't. A person who could save them from their own failures. A person who could show the world a perfect picture of God.

Now, back to Caesarea Philippi: a guy named Jesus collected a group of 12 other guys who've been following him. He called them all in pretty much the same way: he walked up to them, interrupted what they were doing and invited them to follow him.

This is important: he approached them the same way the other teachers of his day approached their students. He didn't give them a theology quiz or test their biblical knowledge or tell them he was God or anything. In fact, the only unusual thing about his followers was who *they* were. They were rejects, guys who hadn't been chosen by the other teachers. Guys who for whatever reason didn't make the cut.

So these guys agree to follow Jesus. They sign up to follow a teacher around, to learn from him and become like him.

But it doesn't take long for them to begin to wonder. He's powerful. His teaching is... different from what they're used to. Wherever he goes, lives change. Sin is forgiven. People are healed.

They begin to realize this Jesus guy is more than just a teacher. Some are saying he's a prophet. But they see he's more than just a prophet. Some are even saying he's Elijah, one of Israel's most beloved champions, returned from the dead. But the disciples realize he's even more than Elijah was.

Which brings us to that moment, when Jesus looks at them and says, What do you think's going on here, guys? Have you figured out who I really am yet?

And Peter blurts out what they've all been suspecting: You're the Messiah! You're *God!* You're the guy we've all been waiting for, the perfect picture of God, the one who's going to rescue us and the whole world from our failures, our sins, from death itself!

And Jesus says, Bingo. Peter, you nailed it. God has allowed you to see the truth. And this new thing I'm doing, this people I'm assembling, will be founded on that truth.

Jesus is the perfect picture of God. He's also the perfect picture of humanity. He is our fulfilled vocation. Jesus saves us from sin and death and reconnects us to God, to the life we were always intended to live. (We spent several weeks working through our confession of Jesus.)

And the Church is the people who know that, who've said Yes to Jesus' invitation to be a part of God's restoration movement. The people who've come face-to-face with their need for rescue and reached out for Jesus' hand.

The Church is those who have said, You are the Messiah! You're the son of God!

The Church is not a building. The Church is not a worship gathering on a Sunday morning or a collection of c-groups or packing food boxes or any other program. These are things a Church *does*, but not what the Church *is*.

The Church is that group of people who have seen who Jesus is, who have been called together by God to join in God's ongoing rescue. We are the people who tell the world who God is, who *show* the world who God is.

So what does that mean for those of us who are gathered here today? We've come a long way from that first meeting of the Renewed Life Church. We've met in living rooms and a movie theater and even

other church buildings. We've seen leaders and friends come and go and through it all, we've remained the same Church, gathered by the Spirit to accomplish God's work in Rowlett.

[On screen: Catalyst creates spaces where everyone can embrace their God-given calling.] From the beginning this group that calls ourselves Catalyst has been committed to being a church where people who don't like church feel welcomed and can connect with God. And we remain committed to the next step on that journey, one that we launched a little over a year ago. We know that God is calling us to create spaces where everyone can embrace their God-given calling.

There are thousands of people who don't have a relationship with God living in Rowlett (and Rockwall and Wylie and Sachse and Garland and...) Thousands. We want to be the Church for them. We want to do everything we can to create spaces for those people to discover a relationship with God, to discover the unique calling God created them for.

We talked last week about how it's not our job to make people have a relationship with God. We hold space for them - space that is welcoming, free of judgment and condemnation. We live lives that point to Jesus, our savior and lord. And we trust that the same Spirit that binds us together as a Church is speaking to those thousands of people we're holding space for.

This is God's rescue mission. Not ours. It's God's responsibility to see it through to the end, not ours. God invites us to join. And that means doing the next right thing. The next thing God calls us to do. God is faithful to us. We need only be faithful to God.

Let them look back on this day and marvel at a gathering of people called together because we have said, You are the Messiah, the son of God! Let them be inspired by the risks we took, the faith we placed in a God who calls us forward. Let them be inspired to bigger dreams and bigger risks than ever because of the choices we make here today.

### **Communion + Creed**

[Communion Slide] Jesus makes us his church by calling us to this table.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit  
and born of the virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.