

We Reign

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“Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth” (Revelation 5:9-10). To some the “reigning” in this verse applies to numerical strength, political clout, social influence, or cultural relevance. If “Christianity” has a voice at the table of moral discourse or scientific research or social justice issues than it is “reigning.” But if it is relegated to the outskirts and seen as outdated, old-fashioned, and out-of-touch, then it must be doing something wrong.

Yet the problem in all of this is that it strips verses like the above of their true meaning. This thinking cheapens the Bible and reverts Christianity to a religion of pettiness and worldly thinking. Ideally, our thinking is to be “other-worldly” (Romans 12:2). Beyond that, it is simply not consistent with the rest of the Bible to argue that Christians reign in any way but a spiritual sense. How can this be reconciled with Colossians 1:12-14 or Revelation 1:9, in which we are described presently as a kingdom. We are currently priests (1 Peter 2:5-10). In the first century, Christ was already reigning (Ephesians 1:20-23, 1 Peter 3:22). The victory that Christians experiences is not one that will one day come about, but is seen in the scriptures as having already been fulfilled. *“Those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ”* (Romans 5:17). *“But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us”* (Romans 8:37).

When we talk about reigning in the context of the book of Revelation, or any other Bible book for that matter, there are numerous other verses that help us identify what the victory is and is not. It is not, first of all, political triumph, for even Christ Himself states that His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). It is also not a feeling of relevance or a sense of belonging. *“If then you have been raised up with Christ Jesus, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth”* (Colossians 3:1-2). Paul warns of those who *“set their minds on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven”* (Philippians 3:19-20).

The victory that we experience is more than just trending on twitter, having celebrity endorsements, or giving hip, self-important Millenials something to do on Sundays, but a victory over circumstances (John 16:33). It is a victory over sin, as we strive to enter by the narrow gate. Victory in Christ is not measured in church size, winning of elections, or never seeing problems in life. Appearances do not prove anything, because it appears from the outside that the saints do not reign, that our faith does not protect us from worldly pains, that we are a vexed and pathetic people, and that Jesus is just a historical figure who is dead. Appearances prove to the skeptic that we do not reign!

What This Means For Us

When we misunderstand the rule of Christ’s kingdom in this world, we misunderstand church success. If the kingdom for which we strive is physical, then the church is measured by purely physical standards as well. For many religions, being successful means having building projects in the works, having prestigious church

members such as politicians and celebrities, having a great deal of money, and (the ever popular) attendance figures. The unconscious focus of many churches, therefore, is on reaching worldly people by worldly means.

To reign, therefore, means more than just selling a product or hocking free t-shirts to people who enter the building. Reigning means more than just following some physical, carnal guidelines for church success. To truly reign as we are expected, we must ignore our culture's definition and live like Christ. Consider the paradox: Christ accomplished all things and reigns at the right hand of God, in spite of the fact that He never held public office, never made a fortune, and was executed as a common criminal. We reign when we convert people with the pure Gospel – one person at a time – and live humbly. After all, it is the meek who shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5).