

## Mission #4 – becoming a Christian

*Acts 2:37-40*

*Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” 38 And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”*

*40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”*

We have looked so far in our series of the early church at the nature of its start.

Last week we commented on the fact that with the formation of the early church the **first thing** we noticed was their single focus on the mission at hand.

**The second thing** was that they were all in one accord. They were of one mind and one passion. They were mission and vision focused. They knew who they were and what they were called to do.

**The third thing** we commented on was the supernatural nature of the church.

How it was something that only God can build.

How its origins were supernatural.

And how the early Christians needed an encounter with the Holy Ghost to enable them to be who they needed to be and do what needed to be done.

We talked about how nothing has changed since then. You can build a crowd based on marketing; you can only build the church supernaturally.

**The final thing** that we noticed about the start of this early church was that it was extroverted by nature.

It started with God touching the lives of the early Christians and then He commanded them to touch others. But we also noticed that they touched others not only because it was a command from heaven, but a passion of their lives, the reason for these lives.

They were so overwhelmed with this Jesus that they knew – they wanted to do something about it

So now I would like to zoom in as it where and I want to start to look at the people who made up this early gathering, this eclectic group that was is known as the church.

**And my question this morning is...**

**How does one become a Christian?**

The Bible is a very honest book.

It spends; I'm quite sure, more time looking at the failures of God's leaders than their strengths!

If you look at the leadership of the early church you should be greatly encouraged. As you should be encouraged by church history its self.

The Word and church history is full of the stories of ordinary men and women in love with an extraordinary God. Who, often in spite of themselves, their faults and failings, reached out and changed the world around them.

These men and women, who ended their lives as great heroes of the faith and without exception they started it as great failures.

For instance we just read the results of Peter's first sermon. As a result of this one sermon 3,000 people became Christians.

But remember this....less than 43 days before this it was Peter who denied Christ.

It was Peter who left his leadership position, it was Peter who abandoned his friend and it was returned to his pre-calling work in attempt to hide his failure and drown out his disappointment.

So how do these fumbling, inadequate, flawed humans go on to change the world?

How did they qualify to become a part of this thing called a Christian church?

Like the 3,000 that were added to the church then, how does one become 'added' to the church today?

How do you go from listening to a sermon **on Christ** to being part of a spiritual body?

How do you go from **hearing about** Christ to identifying **with Christ**?

### **What is Christian?**

If you were to ask people today: *“what does it mean to become a Christian?”*

You would probably get as many answers as people you ask.

They would give you some vague answer, they may even have a religious response, but the scope and the amount of error involved is quite startling.

What about you.....?

Maybe you think Christianity is praying a prayer once.  
Maybe you think it is being peaceful or restful or calm in daily life.  
Maybe you think it is doing good works or going to church.  
Maybe you think it is owning a bible and saying grace at meal times.  
Not watching a certain sort of movie, or listening to a certain sort of music.

But that is not what happened here.

That is not what defined these people

You see these people....

They never went to church – they had just become the church.  
They didn't have a chance to do good works.

These would have been people from all backgrounds, all of them sinners.

There were thieves, tax collectors, murderous soldiers, prostitutes, business leaders, and religious figures.

All standing and listening

And yet something happened.

Something happened to change their life forever

### **1. Total transformation**

The first thing that comes to mind is that these 3,000 people were totally and instantly transformed.

Their actions, their thoughts, their passions, their desires, some of them - their careers, their outlook, and their actions were totally revolutionized.

You see, that is Christianity.

Christianity affects every area of your life.

There is not one part of your life that the gospel does not:

Impact,  
Challenge,  
Change  
Or confirm.

There is something unique and special about being a Christian.

It seems to me today that many Christians are embarrassed and ashamed of Christ, and their faith.

They seem to have an inner conviction that the way you win the world is to look, smell, dress, act, behave, talk as much like the world as you can.

You see the world looks at that and laughs.

It says: "Everything you do and stand for and believe, I can do without any of your doctrine, without any of your teaching and without any of your Jesus."

These people did not become Christians based on a logical argument, based as it were on a theoretical thesis.

No! These people were "cut to the heart" (Acts 2:37).

Their faith, their fresh understanding of who Jesus is, transformed their lives from the inside out.

And transformed every aspect of them

To say that you are a Christian and your lifestyle, habits and thought life remain unaltered is inconceivable.

Now I am not talking about a brain-wipe here.

I am not talking about a personality transplant here.

I am talking about when a person gets hold of Christ and Christ gets hold of them...they change

You don't have to ask if they are a Christian...you ask...what has changed about you.

You are not in competition with the world, you are responding to the call of God.

SO are you saying that I must be perfect...that a Christian is someone who instantly becomes perfect?

No..not at all

Did Peter become perfect? – He sided with the Jews against the gentile Christians?

The Greek Christians fought with the Jewish Christians over food allotments.

1&2 Corinthians is written because sin was going unaddressed in the church.

Now..i didn't say perfect....but transformed. That is changed, altered

You go from seeking self, to seeking Christ.

You appetites have changed.

Your desires have changed

What once brought you pleasure, now leaves a bad taste in your month.

What was once all about you is now all about others.

It is something that you cannot explain to your family members, but is now the most important thing you can ever do.

This brings me to my second reflection.

## 2. **Becoming a Christian is a supernatural occurrence**

You do not 'make a decision for Christ,' you respond to His drawing and you repent of your sins.

You do not decide one day to become a Christian.

Go out buy some books

Join a church and say...now everything is different, I am no longer going to Hell, I am going to heaven

That is impossible. That is not how you become a Christian

Anyone can decide to become a Buddhist like that.

Anyone can decide to become a Scientologist.

But you cannot make a decision for Christ like that.

Because this is not something that you decided.

This is not something you give intellectual or mental accent to.

These people made no decision for Christ.

The account that we read here says....*They were cut to the heart.*

They cried out in confession and spiritual anguish.

"What shall we do?"

"What must we do to be saved?"

You see what happened is that they got a revelation of their sinful nature.

Something outside of them showed what they were really like on the inside of themselves

They got an insight into the state of their soul.

Something supernaturally was able to compare the darkness of their soul to the light and love of God

They knew that they were lost, but what it meant to be lost and to whom they needed to return.

They knew that they were without hope.

So they cried out... "How do we escape the judgment of God?"

How do we get out of this mess?

How do we stop being who we are?

How do we change?

What must we do?

John Gill in his commentary says this:

*"The Word of God entered them and was a sharp sword in them, which cut them and laid open their hearts, and the sin and wickedness of them; they saw themselves guilty of the crime laid to their charge and they were filled with remorse."*

Do you know what I am talking about friend?

Have you ever experienced that?

If you have never cried out to God,  
you have never seen the depth of your sin and hopelessness,  
if you have never been cut to the heart.

Then you are not a Christian.

If all you have ever made is a decision for Christ, then you are no better than a Buddhist trying to seek enlightenment.

You are no better than a Hindi, trying to prepare yourself for the next stage on the wheel of life

Sometimes I feel there is too much singing and not enough crying in church.

I am not trying to be morbid but friend how often do we sit here challenged by the Word, challenged by the spirit of God and our answer is not to cry out to God, but to harden our hearts.

To hold back the tears,

To put on a brave face,

You will cry over football, you will cry over movies, yet you will not cry out to God over the state of your own soul.

So are you saying that we should come to church and be all emotional?

I am saying that wherever you are, with whom ever you are and you sit around and you talk about the things of Christ and the things of the kingdom it should move you.

I have sat with friends and I have sat with strangers and I have talked of the things of God and it has cut me to my heart, moved me to tears because of the wonder of it all.

Is Christianity just a thing that effects our emotions then?

No.

But it should do more than just affect you mind.  
It, like a beautiful perfume that floods every aspect of your life and affects it like a fragrance.

### **3. Becoming a Christian restores your mind; it doesn't remove your mind.**

Some people argue the Christians are just foolish, weak will people who have been brain washed.

I would argue and I would say that scripture clearly shows, that is exactly the opposite.

Here is Peter standing for a great crowd of people who just 40 days something days before had had either been involved with or stood by and watched the murder of an innocent man.

Did the Romans demand the death of Christ? No.

Did the Romans bring false accusation against Christ? No.

Did the Romans insight a crowd to free a murderer and crucify an innocent man? No.

The religious leaders of the day did.

The religious leaders used trickery; lying and deceit to brain wash a mob to do the work that weak men did not have the courage to do.

What does Peter do?

Does he get up there, turn down the lights, put on a smoke machine and have them chanting?

No!

He logically, systematically, rationally shows the error of their ways and the mistake they have made.

He starts with the prophets.

He reminds them of the miracles and character of Christ, shows them how David prophesied of His coming. He goes back through out the history of the Jewish people and shows them line upon line of historical fact and the fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

What Peter did was pull back the blinds of religious brainwashing and confronted these Jewish believers with hard facts and truth.

He freed them from the manipulation of their religious leaders and, as it were, restored them to their right mind.

He freed them from the rule of the mob. The mob-mindset.

And what Peter did then, is what becoming a Christian does still today

The masses in our day are dismissing Christianity as the mob dismissed Christ.

And the religious, the pious, the social agenda, entertainment driven church is giving them all the fuel they need!

It lulls people into a false sense of security.  
It tells them to accept themselves, instead of accepting Christ

Christianity,  
True Christianity  
Makes you think and makes you question.

It forces you to examine all that you have every accepted about  
yourself and life in light of the Word of God.

It calls into question everything you have ever been told and lead to  
believe.

The Greek word we translate as repentance is *metanoia*.  
It means to change ones mind, to change ones thinking completely.

The Holy Ghost always leads people to think.

You see the greatest trouble is that men and women go through life  
not thinking.

They turn to money, drugs, sex, sports, cults, and try and fill this  
hunger of their soul with something that never satisfies them.

Peter stands up and says "*Listen to me..*"

The word used here means you just receive this in your ear.

You have to receive this.  
You have to do more than just hear this.

Your faculty of mind and knowing and understanding must be  
engaged.

*"Listen to me.."*

So then Peter challenges all of their intellectual concepts with spiritual  
and historical fact.

This brings us to our next point.

#### **4. What were these people made to think about?**

What were they asked to consider?

They were not asked if they wanted a better life.

They were not asked if they needed greater purpose.

Or if they wanted to feel better about themselves or their childhood

No.

Peter told these people to listen, hear, perceive and think.

He was giving them freedom from all the things that have held them bound, he asked them to take their eyes off themselves,

And he told them they should focus it on the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They were not asked to think about themselves, they were asked to think about Christ.

Friend, comparing this to what you see advertised in churches today;  
What they promote,  
What the Christian artist sing about,  
What the popular preachers preach about,  
My hurts,  
My worries,  
My money,  
My life.

It strikes me that preachers are not trying to win the world for Christ, but seduce the world for Christ.

Peter was not trying to woo them, but confront them.

I say confront...you hear verbally abusive

That is not what it means, or what I am saying.

It means to hold, as it were a mirror up to someone.

Peter is wanting and trying – and does wonderfully, what Jesus did to him on the beach.

Jesus came to Peter a little over a month ago and held up a mirror of his failures, his past, his betrayal and said this....Peter do you love me? Do you want to serve me and my people? Do you want to walk with me as I have walked with you?

Jesus didn't try and seduce Peter...He confronted him with Who He truly was and his desperate need of Christ

And what was the result in the life of Peter....he was cut to the heart. He was pierced, he saw into the depths of his soul. Into his very being and he had a revelation of his love, his need and his desire for forgiveness and Christ

The bible says that was exactly what happened when Peter stood and preached.

A preacher can never take a people to a place he has never gone himself.

*V. 37 "Now when they heard this..."*

What did they hear?

They hear about Jesus.  
They were forced to think about Jesus.

That is the true message of the church.  
That is the only door that you can ever or need to ever walk through to become a Christian.

Whenever a person comes to a stage in their life when they are considering Biblical things, the first thing they are always, must always be confronted with is the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“When they heard this... they were cut to the heart.”

That was what happened to Peter

Here is Peter.

A good Jewish man

A man who had grown up in the Jewish faith

A successful business owner

He was a man desperate for the messiah – you can tell that in his willingness to follow this stranger, this prophet from Galilee – he was looking, hopeful.

He followed Christ

He had revelations of Christ

Yet the thing that turned his life around

That moved him from being a member of the followers of Jesus to being a leader

The thing that separated him from the failure of his past to the pursuit of his future

The thing that propelled him forward was a confrontation not with Christ, but with himself

And that friend brings me to my final point

But becoming a Christian does not stop with a revelation of Jesus, it must move on to a revelation about yourself.

## 5. Your sinful state

A person does not become a Christian just because you:

Hear about Jesus,  
Think about Jesus,  
Read a book about Jesus,  
Watch a movie about Jesus.

Jesus is not a symbol – He is a savior

He is not a t-shirt you wear.  
A brand,  
A movement,

It is the Holy Ghost that takes this information about Christ and translates it into a revelation about ourselves.

We move beyond seeing Christ and we start to see ourselves in the light of Christ, we see the light of Christ shining on our sinful nature.

You see for these 3,000 people it had moved beyond:

“Ah yes... I heard about this man.  
“We saw Him die.”  
“We have heard of the stories of His miracles.”

It had to move from something that was outside of them to something that deeply involved them.

They realized that they had a desperate need for the One that they had killed.

They had murdered the answer to their deepest needs.

And they cried out, “What shall we do?”

You see, the Holy Ghost cut their heart.

When you see Christ, truly see Christ for the first time you come to the revelation not that you are beautiful, precious or impartial, but that

you are hopeless, lost and damned to hell and there is absolutely no hope for you whatsoever outside of Christ.

What might have started as a vile act of rebellion, what might have started as an intellectual argument, has now come to a place of spiritual desperation.

It becomes very personal.  
It becomes very intimate.

There is always the dark day of the soul before the dawning of the love of God

“What must I do?”  
“How can I be saved?”

And the answer then is the same as the answer now...

Acts 2:37-40

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” **38** *And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” 40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”*

Tell God that you are a sinner.  
Tell God that you are aware like never before of your need for Him.  
Tell God that you are aware of your sinful state.  
Tell God that you now understand you deserve nothing but punishment and that you want Him to extend mercy.  
That you have nothing to offer.

“Call upon the Lord.”

Joel 2:32

And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Call upon God and be saved.

And the moment you do,  
The instant you recognize your heart has been cut,  
The moment you repent,  
He will look upon you, smile upon you,  
Turn His face towards you and you will hear Him say, "I sent my Son for you.

Believe on him.

Thank Him.

Love Him.

Give yourself to Him.

Submit yourself to Him, be baptized and you shall be saved."

That is the answer that peter had for them then and that is the answer the bible has for you today

And then you know what happens, at that point you realize that you have been loved for all eternity.

You realize that you are chosen and loved in the eyes of the Father.  
That you are adopted into His family.

Valued as a child in heaven

You can call Him Abba Father, when once He was only a stranger,  
now he is a friend

John Newton wrote of this incredible transformation that happens in your soul.

A man who could not live with who he came to realize he was.

And one day on a ship crossing the Atlantic

He came to see who Christ truly was.

*“Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I am found, I was blind but now I see.”*

*“Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved.*

*How precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believe.”*

That is how one becomes a Christian. You are now faced by the grace and mercy that is Christ Jesus.

Friend have you considered this?

The state of your life and the grace that is available to you through Christ.