

Mission #5 – What is a Christian?

Turn with me please to:

Acts 2:37-47

Introduction

We come again this morning to our series entitled The Mission, looking at the nature of the early church and the nature of these people.

We are looking at the book of Acts because it is the first hand account, the first hand description of these people that were to become known as Christians.

These early Christians who would turned their world upside down.

Why we have started to look at this group of people and at the early church?

For these two reasons:

- The first** is because the modern church seems to have lost sight of itself.

Seems to have forgotten her place and role as an agent for God in the earth today.

- The second** reason is because the world is in desperate need and the only answer is the church.

The only message that holds any hope for anyone anywhere today is the Christian message.

Now this is not preacher hyperbola.

This is fact.

When we look at television, watch the movies, listen to the talk in playgrounds, the world is in desperate trouble and we know it.

For people today life is a fight and a problem and they are desperate for good news.

And the gospel of Jesus Christ is the only good news that will make any difference to them.

But the voice for that good news
The people charged with conveying that good news

Seems to have forgotten that they are the answer for the world today.
Instead of proclaiming it from the rooftops they seem dedicated to hiding it under a basket.

They seem unsure of themselves

“Well let’s just pray for boldness like they did in the book of Acts”

The challenge with that is that Christians today do not just seem unsure of themselves, they seem unsure of their message.

They are unsure of the news they have to share.

Let me ask you quite plainly.
Let us have no doubt

Is this gospel the best news you have ever heard?
Is it the greatest thing that has ever happened in your life?
Is it the greatest thing you have ever come across?

If it is not,
If it is just another news
Some pretty good news
News that can be encouraging, but you don’t feel can really change a life

Then my friend...you have not HEARD it at all!

You have never truly been exposed to that news that can transform and transport a life

RECAP

Last week we considered how one becomes a Christian.

We said that it was a **supernatural occurrence that led to a life transformation.**

The person you were you no longer were!

You are not a Christian because you were born in a certain country or born into a certain family.

Living a good life did not make you a Christian.

We become a Christian as a result of the Holy Ghost quickening our heart to the person and nature of Jesus Christ and His atoning work.

So here we are, and in a sense it is time for us to start to move from the general to the more specific nature of our discussion.

Not just how do you become a Christian, but what is a Christian?

What is a Christian?

Acts 2:37-47

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." 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

This is were I want to focus today:

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Now remember these verses speaks directly about the first Christians.

These people had not been tainted by denominationalism.

They had not been swayed by the popular or the politics.

They did not have Christian Entertainment Television.

They were nothing like 'being normal' or 'being radical', they were just being....

This was normal...because they were normal. This is how everybody acted, because there was no one to tell them differently

Now I am neither trying to be funny or facetious

But you cannot read of these lives or events through the filter of your middle American Christian experiences.

So here we have a snapshot of the first people who ever responded to the drawing of the Holy Ghost for the conviction of sin and to surrender their life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

These people had just been saved and these are the first things that they immediately gave themselves to.

There were no second things.

They were not the programs

They were not classes

They were the things that felt immediately to do and that the people who had walked with Christ Himself felt these were absolutely important for them to be engaged in.

How many things do we allow to stand in the way of the important?

How many things do we give ourselves to that are not essential to life, love and the pursuit of Christ.

Let's look together at v42

Acts 2:42

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

First Thought

So I read this and I started to think about what I was reading

Let me encourage you to do this...to always THINK about what you are reading

And there were three things that I pondered

My first thought was these early Christians had three common traits

There are 3 things that we immediately notice that give us some insight into the nature of the first Christians.

They;

- a) **Devoted** themselves
- b) To the Apostles teaching or **the Apostles doctrine**
- c) and the **fellowship** and to the breaking of bread and prayers.

In other words they were:

- a) Passionate
- b) Teachable
- c) Approachable and accountable

My Second thought

The second thought I had was this:

- The order that was written here was no accident
- The first thing listed was the most important thing to them

Do you notice how these early Christians gave themselves to knowing what it is that they believed before they gave themselves to relationship?

Do you notice how they gave themselves to God, before each other?

Do you notice how their commitment was there personal thing, not a program?

Do you notice how they did not give themselves to fellowship first?

Do you notice that what they got out of it was not the most important thing to them?

How different that is from the church of today?

You think about how many churches try and build church based on fellowship, based on something they call community; based on a activities or programs as opposed to common values and beliefs

Churches today seem to try and build on everything except the teachings of the Apostles!

Now is there anything wrong with programs? No.

They are just not first things.

You must always start with the end in mind.

When building anything you start not with what people want, but what people need.

If you help people get what they need, then the wants will take care of themselves.

Help them find Christ

Help them get a revelation of Christ

Help them collide with Christ

And then they will find each other

If all you do is entertain them, then all church will ever be is a competition with the World

If people are passionate for Christ
If they are teachable in the things of God

Then they will seek each other out and desire to meet, study, pray and fellowship

My third thought

And I started to think about what Christianity has become and how so much of what we have come to accept is not what Christianity is

Lets look at the negative first

Lets look at 4 things that I do not believe Christianity is suppose to be, before we look at this verse

Four things Christianity was not to the early Christian

1. Christianity was not solely an intellectual interest.

There are people who enjoy reading about Christianity.

They like investigating religions and philosophies and they look on Christianity with great interest

They like looking at the tenants of the Christian faith and indeed they would go so far as to say that the world could very well be a better place if we followed the 'golden rule' a little more often and did a little less killing.

They look at the state of the world and say the 10 Commandments aren't such a bad idea after all.

For these types of people Christianity is a philosophical or an intellectually argument or proposition.

Their engagement with Christian things is purely on an intellectual level

2. Christianity was not a feeling

Then there is another group.

The other extreme,

They say that Christianity isn't a philosophy it isn't a collection of dry old thoughts.

You don't need doctrine to be a Christian.

In fact they believe that doctrine stands in the way

No!

It is not what you think but what you feel.

Christianity isn't dependant on your mind, but about how you feel about God and the world and each other.

You need to feel love,

Peace

Joy

If you don't feel God, then you don't know God

You have to feel saved

Feel loved

3. Christianity was not an action

Then there is the third group that says,
“Well neither of that lot have it right!”

“Christianity isn’t dependant upon what you think or what you feel,
you can only tell a true Christian by what they do.”

This group says that Christianity is a matter of our will.

It is an action

We are judged by what we do

They ask things like what are you prepared to give up for God?

What will you sacrifice?

What will you give?

You HAVE to do this

You HAVE to read this

You HAVE to dress this way

Will you sacrifice your passion or business or music or the arts?

They measure your love for God, by your willingness to not DO what
YOU love

Only when you give it all up will you truly be a Christian.

4. Christianity was not giving up everything that was fun.

They have a list of really boring, horrible things that they would hate to ever do and they believe that you are only a Christian if you are doing those things.

Christianity to them is a restrictive thing, not a liberating thing.

Christianity is a solemn, unhappy, uncertain thing that they have to do once or twice a week.

They have to do their duty to get it out of the way for the rest of the week or the rest of the month.

But what we read here in the first 10 verses is something totally different.

And the fact of it is that the marks of true Christianity were not only evident in the life of the early church, but they are evident wherever there is true spiritual revival and renewal.

Church

Be the most passionate, fun filled pursuers of living life out loud

I want my kids to be like me in one way and not like me in another

I will be the constant drip in their life

The constant reminder of what is right and if they step over the line

But I WANT them to push it

I want them to discover themselves and redefine life for them in a safe place

I want that for you

I want that for our music

For our preaching

For our youth group

I am trying to give our creative team permission to try and upset me during worship

I want them to push the limit

They will not be sacrilegious; I know they will not be. They are passionate pursuers of Christ

But I want you all to live out loud

If you get outside of the lines, I will come get you

Because you know me

I ain't moving

I am dedicated to being the most flexible, immovable force on the planet

Church

Be anything but safe
Be anything but boring
Be anything but normal

Be passionate
Lovers of Christ
Of the word
And of each other

Just don't be beige

So this brings me to my initial question of “What is a Christian?”

Let's look again at v 42:

42 And they **devoted** themselves to the **apostles' teaching** and the **fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

They;

- a) **Devoted** themselves
- b) To the Apostles teaching or **the Apostles doctrine**
- c) And the **fellowship** and to the breaking of bread and prayers.

In other words they were:

- a) Passionate
- b) Teachable
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The early Christians were Passionate

I want to spent the rest of this morning looking at this first very evident part of who they were

These Early Christians were passionate

V42 “And they devoted themselves to...”

The word devoted here means:

- Loyal
- Dedicated
- Constant
- Faithful
- Committed

The two Greek words used here to come up with this word-devoted hold the meaning that the early Christians were:

- Steadfastly committed,
- Never slacking and
- Never stopping.

Their passion for their savior Filled their lives

These early Christians were passionate about their Savior.

Their newfound faith filled their lives.

They never slacked

They never stopped

They were ever focused

They were ever constant

The early Christians rejoiced over what they had found.

It filled their lives with joy, excitement and a desire to share it with each other and everyone around them.

v. 46-47

46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,

47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Christianity is something that touches, changes and impacts every part of you.

It touched their minds

It touched their homes

It touched their hearts

It touched their wallets

It filled and touched every aspect of who they were

What about you friend?

Do you remember your first love for Christ?
Your love for Church?
Your desire for the Word?
Your hunger for the company of other Christians?

Do you remember when it filled your life?

Do you remember how right that felt?

How excited you were,

How you knew God was going to use you to change the world?

The early Christians felt and lived like that!

That is how it is suppose to be

If you have forgotten that

Lost that feeling,

Lost that sense of awe.... let me encourage you...God hasn't.

He is still the same

He is still waiting

He is still wanting

He is still desiring that sort of first love response form you

Their passion for their Christ was Central to their lives

The thing I think about when I consider a devote people is that for the early Christians their faith, their Christ not only filled their life with excitement, joy and meaningful relationships but their faith was central to who they were.

Look at the verses again:

v. 46-47

***46** And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, **47** praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

Day by day....

Studying together
Meeting together
Praising together

Gladly, rejoicing

Their faith filled their lives
There faith was central to their lives

The popular view of Christianity is that it is something that we add to our lives.

We have been taught or lead to believe that the main activity of our lives should be the same as everybody elses

We should be worried about money.

Job security

Worried about politics

Worried about the future

The world and religion tells us that we should be like everyone else, the only real difference is that a Christian has a little duty, they have to do something every Sunday morning.

A little interruption to their week

Am I exaggerating?
Am I being unfair?

We'll look at the lives of so many so-called Christians.

Christianity, their faith, is periphery.

They will say...*no it is not my faith is most important to me*

Yet look at their interests, the things that motivate and drive them.

Their Christianity is like a special suit that they put on for special occasions.

Maybe for Easter, maybe for Christmas maybe even before meals.

But It is not the center or focus of their lives.

It does not fill their lives

It is not the focus of their lives

It is not the most important thing in their lives

Do you see how different that is from this people in the book of Acts?

Their faith, their Christ was their whole life.

Christ did not only fill their life with meaning, he was their meaning.

He was their compass

He was their guiding light

He was their cornerstone

They didn't leave it at the door of the board meeting

It was not something you could disengage from

These people who days before were crying crucifying Him, are now disciples, followers of this man from Galilee.

Friend that change, that turn around, that doesn't happen if your faith is a hobby, if it is peripheral to your life.

No.

That happens, only can happen, when your faith, your Christ fills your life and is the center of your life.

So many people attempt to fill their lives with things that have no eternal importance because Christ just is not that important to them.

They will allow God to have only so many weekends a year

As long as He doesn't interfere with hunting season, the football season, the baseball season or basketball season

As long as he doesn't want the season premier of Lost

As long as he doesn't ask me to stop watching emotional pornography like soap operas or new age TV like Oprah

As long as He allows me to keep all my time, all my money, all my talent, my favorite sins, my comfortable habits

Just as long as he doesn't want me to use my faith for anything other than my own finances, my own family or my own problems

As long as I don't have to tell anyone else about Him or doing anything for Him,
Then yes

I can call my self a Christian...

The passion of the early Christians separated themselves from the world

This leads me to my third point on what on a Christian is.

A Christian is

- Separated from their past.
- Separated from their sin.
- Separated from the world.

Separated from their past

When these men and women came to realize whom they had killed and what He had done for them, they were not just profoundly moved. They were profoundly and irreversibly changed.

They had seen the kingdom of God.

The person that they had been, they realized, was no longer who they were

And there is only one way that a person can experience or explain that.

John 3:3

3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

To be born-again is a phrase used by Christ to explain the profound change in a person when they get a revelation of who He really is.

Separated from their sin

Paul restates it in 2 Corinthians

When you give your life to Christ you are a new creation

You see, right here, in these two quotes is the wonder, the essence, the power of the Christian.

When someone becomes a Christian there is a re-creation of his or her soul.

The Holy Ghost
Takes them,
Breaks them and
Remakes them.

Paul puts it another way in 2 Cor 5:17

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Our faith is not a dead faith.
Our faith is not a religion by the hands of men,
but a revelation by the Spirit of God that frees a persons soul.

You see these people were 'added to the church daily' and they were 'devoted to the apostles teachings,' and they 'day by day... with glad and generous hearts.'

This was a profound change that turned a murdering mob into a passionate church.

The idea that the Christian message is a message of a
'tolerance, peace baby, we accept you as you are, you never have to
change '
is totally false!

The message of Christ, the word of God Himself is a sword,
separating what is of the flesh, from that which is of the spirit

You have no right to condemn yourself for that which Christ has freely forgiven you.

You have no right to put yourself back under bondage to that thing which Christ has freed you

If Christ has forgiven you, don't replay it

If Christ has delivered you, don't redo it

You are separated from your sin and separated from your past

Separated from the world

Gal. 1:3-4

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

The purpose of this deliverance was not to give us comfort in this world by freeing us from its holds.

These early Christians they knew it was dangerous for them to be associated with this fanatic, this mad prophet, this man who had been nailed to a tree.

But they didn't care.

For the first time in their lives they were free.

They gathered around water holes and were baptized publicly

Publicly declaring their faith and belief in Jesus Christ

See baptism is not a quaint ritual
It is not some cute things kids do

No to be baptized is to identify with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ

It is a public declaration of an internal commitment

It is something that will have you killed in India, Indonesia, and in parts of Africa...TODAY

These people,

They went from house to house celebrating openly His spilt blood and broken body.

They were free.

For the first time in their life they were free!
They were in the world, but no longer of it.
The world could no longer dictate anything to them.
The world had no hold over them.

People hated these early Christians because they had no hold over them.

The true Christian,

The real Christian is the most dangerous, liberated joy filled person on the planet.

And people hate them, not because of their religion, but because of their freedom!

The world has no leverage over the Christian that is separate from their past, their sin and the worldly passions and is truly free in Christ.

Why?

Because....

Money has no leverage.

Prestige has no leverage.
Joy has no leverage.
Power has no leverage.
Sex has no leverage
Death has no leverage.

Nothing can hold them back, hold them down, threaten them, rob them , steal or kill the true Christian because they have life and life more abundantly!

There is a true joy, a real joy that comes to the person who lives an abundant life.

Matt. 11:30
"My yoke is easy, my burden is light."

The smaller your God, the bigger the cross you must bear.
The bigger your God, the smaller the cross you must carry.

Friend get a bigger picture of God, it will change the way you view yourself and live your life.
At some point in time the things that are important to us have to be visibly different to the things of the world.

I know some people look at Beccy and I, and you think we never have concerns about money, kids, or the future

Friend that is not the case

We have just come to see things like, Christ, Our Church, our faith as bigger

Do you really think we live in a bubble?

Do you really think we are not impacted?

No

Our God has just gotten bigger over time!