

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CHRISTIAN

Matthew 9:9

INTRODUCTION:

The earliest name for Christianity was "the way." This was as the days of Saul's persecutions.

The name Christian is not of Jewish origin. For by the Jews, they came to be "known as Nazarene's."

It was first given by the people of Syrian Antioch. This was the second great center of the New Testament Church. And to distinguish the followers of this new religion which was neither (Jewish nor Pagan) - they were called Christians as the followers of Christ. Whatever may be said as to the general character of these people at Antioch - the fact remains that as the name has come down to us, it is both honorable and suitable.

Our text gives a very fascinating story of a man. He is writing about himself. His name is Matthew. The story is placed immediately after a miracle which is a hint that his conversion was a miracle. His call seemed accidental. Jesus had often visited this town. And his call seemed altogether unsought because this man was a tax collector and it did not appear that he would make a good disciple. This call was given by the Lord.

His call was given by the Lord with the full knowledge of him. He saw the evil that he had in him. He saw in him his chosen, his redeemed, his disciple. And the Lord calls as he pleases but he sees what he is doing.

If you will note this call was very simple. Few words were used - follow me. And it is recorded - he saw, he said, and he arose. The clear direction -

Which Kind Are You?

Some Christians are like wheelbarrows -  
Not good unless pushed.  
Some are like canoes - They need to be paddled.  
Some are like kites - If you don't keep a string on them they'll fly away.  
Some like kittens - They are more contented when petted.  
Some are like footballs - You can't tell which way they are going to bounce next.  
Some are like balloons - Full of wind and likely to blow up unless handled carefully.  
Some are like trailers - No good unless they are being pulled.  
Some are like buzzards - They "get wind" of a stink and come quickly.  
Others are filled with the Holy Spirit -  
Thank God for them! - Conried

S.N. March 12, 1972 A.M. -

O.B.U. from  
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[follow me.]

And the call was immediate and effectual. Matthew followed at once.  
He arose and wholly followed him.

To discover what a Christian is - it will help us perhaps if we see what he is not.

1st (First) plainly he is not a subscriber of religion. When you think of the non-religions, Christian religions, Buddhism, and the others. This is an expression of some kind of religious following. Buddhism is an experience in universal human idealism. And the supreme point is enlightenment. Meditation on the next life.

Hinduism - with its complexities has rituals, separation, and is in a search for salvation.

Judiasm, the religion of the covenant people still looks into the future for a Messiah.

Who is a Christian? It is not enough to be a theist. Is man simply Christian because he is not Buddhist, or Hindu, or Jew.

2nd (Second) it is not what the census taker puts down. This does not make a man Christian. Often we signify that a man may consider himself or designate himself a nominal Christian to save his conscience. And he will tell the census taker that he is Christian.

In this age in which we live, it has been divided up into three major divisions. Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant. Each one has its claims.

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(Third, respectful towards sacred things) does not make one a Christian. Being honest, polite, law-abiding, honorable. No, this does not necessarily make one a Christian. We may match the moral qualities of the rich young ruler who was courteous and who addressed Jesus as Rabi - inquired about the future life. Had a good ethical background. But there were some contradictions. Because Jesus, who knows him better than he knows himself - tells him in frankness (one thing thou lackest). He was a stranger to the love which is the fulfilling of the law. He thought more of his gold than of his God. No, morality is not spirituality. A model citizen with conventional standards may be awful near the kingdom but not in it.

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(Fourth, not being a church member) This implies that being a Christian many times is being a church member. Now, I do not want to be too critical in the attitude toward this. But invisible society, the church is the sponsor of the Christian program. As such, it has a uniform. And that uniform is church membership.

Some may fall into the lines of the ranks of the church who have never joined with their hearts.

The connection with the church may be an artificial one with thousands today, who take their church membership as such - and then they become a liability and not an asset.



Now this is part of the price the visible church must pay for being respectable.

Not that the church member invests some time in externals of religions - is always insincere, or that he is a gold-digger. He may be one only thoughtless. He has not weighed the issues. And like those today who chase after certain well known (cults) - has had his name put on the roll because he has an associate there.

Now this puts a grave responsibility on the church that receives them. And of course, it should never be superficial. For in such cases, they only become (dead timber) and (stumbling blocks) - and are very hard to bring to soul conviction.

It is not trust in one's self - (but) trust in a person. In other words, his standing is not in the perfect and unchangeable - but in the perfect and unchangeable. There should be sufficient answer to the thoughtless objections of those who decry the Christian faith and the failings of the church. The church offered room for growth.

Is my face toward the goal of the likeness of his perfect image. I may slip, slide, or stumble.

But the question is, not just whether I am tagged a Christian or a pagan - by the census taker. That is not the essence and the content of that splendid word Christian.

Dr. Clark defines the Christian as one whose ruling purpose in life is to become conformed - not only outwardly in conduct - but inwardly in mind and spirit to the divine ideal as manifested in Jesus Christ.

In a word, one whose controlling purpose is to be like Jesus of Nazareth.

Many years ago physicians celebrated the anniversary of Thomas A. Linacre - the founder and first President of the royal college of physicians. He applied himself to the New Testament studies. Once, in reading the Sermon on the Mount, he said - either this is not the Gospel, or we are not Christians.

Jesus asked, what more are you doing than others. Matt. 5:47. His intention was to make his disciples conscious of the quality and the differences of life.

If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples. And you will know the truth and the truth will make you free. John 8:31.

By this all men will know that you are my disciple if you have love one to another. John 13:35.

By this my father is glorified - that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. John 15:8.

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. Matt. 16:24.

One arrives at a Christian definition of life - not by certain deductions - but by devotions. Walking near the lake of Galilee, Jesus saw Simon and his brother Andrew fishing. They were good men. They knew and kept the laws. They worked hard. But one could not call them Christian. They probably knew Jesus, but they were not as yet committed to his way of life.



Come and follow me. Mark 1:17. Then we read at once, they dropped their nets and followed him. V. 18.

A Christian is one who not only recognizes the Lord, believes in him, identifies with some church - as important as these are - evidences of faith. But one who responds to the call of Christ and (translates that experience) into daily life.

To be a Christian means more than to discern between right and wrong.

First, it means we follow him as Saviour. As we have on record, the founder of religion himself - what it means to be a Christian. It is, follow me. That is it. Now we may try to follow the world - but here is the objective. Here is the true shepherds who seeks those who are astray from God.

Physically one may be lost and not know it. But as soon as the sense of being lost takes possession of the mind, it is very confusing.

When we leave God out and take our own way for it instead - in doing the best we can, we never get anywhere, until we are quiet and listen - in the stillness of our soul. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.

Everyone that committed sin has the habit - has the sin habit. Is the bond servant of sin. There too, this is a spiritual loss confirmed by human experience. To be a Christian means to have a happy experience of liberation. It is the removal of whatever burden weights down upon the conscience.

It is to cross the borders of a new country - the land of grace.

It becomes the liberation of the power of the soul, in new pursuits.

The mind is flooded with light. The heart with a new affection. The will is set on a worthwhile purpose. And all powers of the soul engaged to serve a new master. The constraint is to find it's meat and drink and be of some service - whatever humble in pushing things for the Kingdom.

A Christian is a converted person. And there is a difference between joining the church and uniting with Christ. Here is a turning in the permanent direction of God. A person is a seeker of truth. He never feels that he has the last word until he knows that he belongs to God. When these ancient fishermen dropped their nets and this tax collector - to follow Jesus. They demonstrated faith in Him, the Saviour. *"Turned Around With Jesus" To A New Way of Thinking + Living - Whole Man -*

Conversion can be dramatic. Or it may come as a rushing wind - the spirit. Or it may come as the still dew's quietness. But it will change.

The Christian is a contagious person in acts. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

*People of God Are Like God*  
The Christians life defies definition. It is best understood in deeds, love, and mercy. It ~~is~~ has experienced the joy and the forgiveness. A Christian refuses to limit love. He seeks to emulate his Lord. *Christian is like Christ -*

*Prof.* J. Royce, a student at Harvard, was asked the question - what is your definition of a Christian. The reply was, I do not know how you define a Christian. But look out of the window - there goes Phillips Brooks. When a young man asked Phillips Brooks for the secret of his life, he replied that it was a deeper knowledge of Jesus Christ. I cannot tell you how personal this rose to me. He knows me and I know him.



Whatever else, Christian (means), it is that he is a (committed person). He is committed to what Christ taught about God. He is committed to the brotherhood of love and peace. He is committed to the church. He is committed to moral and spiritual maturity.

Rufus M. Jones, used to smile and say, it is like a (merry-go-round) at the fair. And he illustrates the miracle of transformation. He says although one covers a considerable distance on a merry-go-round, he gets off at about the same place he got on.

Being a Christian, somebody said, is like the (Panama Canal). That engineering that stands the tests of modern skill. A series of locks, lifts a vessel from sea level - over the continental divide. It requires seven hours for the ship to go through - a distance of 50 miles. Once committed, there is no turning back. The ship cannot go on it's own power. It must be guided. And it must be pushed up by water - through a series of chambers, to make it a marvelous way to the Pacific and to the Atlantic Ocean.

Likewise the committed person has been lifted by the grace of God to a new level of life. He is no longer interested in gossip, fringe questions, and selfish pursuits. He senses a oneness with Christ. There is a dignity, a commitment, that he now has a constructive task. So it means that we first follow him as Saviour.

*JH.*  
Second, to be a Christian implies that we follow him in his leadership. Jesus only knows the way and he knows what is best for us. He is eager to lead us. I came, that they might have life, and may have it abundantly.



his control.

This divine control will reach to the inner nature. Chalmers called the expulsive power of a new affection - that our very attachment to him will prompt us to love what he loves. Other loves will grow old.

This leadership is something that does not drive but it draws. Pagan religions are well known to be largely religions of fear. But Christianity is one of love. Jesus founded his empire on love.

Like the disciples, his present day disciples must put themselves freely under the influence of this new leader. Like them, he does not know much about it when it begins to follow. But he enters a school - he yields himself and the result is catching. And he grows in the likeness of his image. And even the critic cannot but notice that he has been in company that is different.

All of this finds natural expression in the activities of everyday life. The life is thus given a new direction and aim worthy of its best. The extension of His Kingdom - on whose side he has enlisted.

Like his master, he goes about doing good. In short, life becomes an acted out desire to be like him. Not as a mechanical thing - but to follow in the spirit.

Judson, a missionary to Burma, on hearing himself likened to one of the apostles expressed great distress. "I do not want it to be said that I am like one of the apostles." I do not want to be like any mere man. "I want to be like Christ." I want to follow him - copy his teachings. Drink in his spirit. Place my feet in his footprints. And measure my short-comings by these and these alone.



So a Christian is one who is sensitive and lives in the boundaries of Jesus Christ.

Now this is a disciplined life - enter by the narrow gate since the road that leads to destruction is wide and spacious - and many take it. But it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life - and only a few find it. Matt. 7:13-14. Jesus spoke plainly making it quite clear. That the way to his Kingdom was difficult. Sometimes we are allergic to the word "narrow". It stirs up resentment. Each generation criticises the previous generation for its narrowness. However when we see that the narrowness here is not ignorance - but is an entrance to that which lies beyond. In a word, here is a door that is relatively narrow. But it may open to a spacious living room. And it is an entrance too that which is limitless.

Many people do not like this idea of the Christian life being narrow. But even the space age illustrates this. The count-down, the lift-off, and the re-entry. John Glenn, in Friendship 7, for instance - encountered temperatures up to 50,000 degrees. Nearly 5 times the temperature of the sun's surface. The problem of re-entry was further complicated by the fact that the space ship must enter a corridor only 7 miles wide to reach the earth. If the corridor is missed - the forces of gravity and heat will consume materials and men.

Seven miles is a very narrow strip in the vast atmosphere. But it is the gate of life. *Many are called, & Few Chosen.*

Now that is the task of the Christian.

It was a dramatic moment in the life of King Agrippa. Much more of this

Paul and you will be making me a Christian. Acts 26:28. The king was tempted as every other man who has heard about Jesus. To be Christian and to find the answer to our frustrated lives in this awful world. To cease letting somebody else do it.

The temptation here to accept and to follow Jesus Christ.

Howard Thurman told an inspiring story, of a visit to India. A little boy from a village heard the American preacher and that night after the Thurmans (Dr. and Mrs. Thurman) had gone to bed - there was a knock at the door. Opening it, they were greeted by the lad, whose clothing marked him an untouchable. In reasonably good English he politely said, I stood outside the building and listened to your lecture. Tell me please, can you give some hope to a nobody."

Where upon the boy dropped to his knees as the compassionate Christian attempted to communicate the meaning of Christ. And he used Christ's invitation - "please come, everything is now ready". Luke 14:17. I hope this will be a guide for Christian discipleship for someone today. You may be up to your neck in your business, you may be at the place of custom - yet this call comes to you. And the Lord may be saying, follow me. And to another he may be saying, come after me. Now you may think, well, I thought it would be different. If he would speak to me in some other way, I would gladly run after him.

If you had been there that day with Peter and John - or with Matthew - would you have heard him when he called them. Would you not have cried, oh Lord, (call me also). Do you today fear that he would not call you.

And if you will, like Matthew, hear that whisper in your heart today -



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come, follow me. Then you will become a Christian.