

The Heart of Christ – the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

“...having loved His own who were in the world, He love them to the end”(John 13:1.)

The Praying Savior – John 17

The Lessons from Jesus’ Prayer – John 17:1-26

What is a Christian

John 17:6-8

6 I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. 7 Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; 8 for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me.

I heard a report of a recent poll of the American population that was quite revealing. The question was asked, “Are you in favor of smaller government and lower taxes or of bigger government and higher taxes?” Just over 71% of the people surveyed said they wanted smaller government and smaller taxes. So far, so good. But another question in the survey asked, “Are you in favor of more Federal programs to help Americans or in less Federal programs?” Over 60%, a clear majority of people were in favor of more Federal programs – programs that would require bigger government and higher taxes. How could the American population be so schizophrenic? How can it be that the majority of people would agree to two things that are so diametrically opposed? I submit to you this idea – *if you don’t know what you believe, you will never be able to make good and consistent decisions.* If you don’t know what you believe about politics and the policies that will govern our lives as a society, you may profess with your mouth one thing and then pursue an entirely different course of action.

And what is true in American politics is also true in the spiritual realm. If you don’t know what you believe, you will never be able to make good and consistent decisions. Let me give you an example here. The vast majority of those people who attend church regularly profess overwhelmingly to be opposed to abortion; they confess to believe in the sanctity of life. And yet the statistics tell us that the abortion rate; the number of people who get abortions who say that they are a part of the church and believe that abortion is wrong is nearly equal to the number of people who get abortions who profess no allegiance to Christ or a church. How can that be? Because if you don’t know what you believe, you will never be able to make good and consistent decisions. If you don’t know what you really believe by principle and practice concerning following Jesus Christ, you will never be consistent in your life and most of your decisions will be no different than the decisions of those who do not know Jesus Christ.

With all this said, we find ourselves moving along to the next section of the High Priestly prayer of Jesus here in John 17. In verses 1-5 we noted that Jesus was praying for Himself as He neared the hour of the cross. Beginning in verse 6 and essentially running through the end of the chapter, Jesus prays for His disciples, for those who belong to Him by virtue of their belief in Him. In verses 6-19, Jesus is praying specifically for those disciples that were hearing this prayer live although everything Jesus prays in these verses also applies to anyone who would be a follower of Jesus. And what I would like to do both this week and next week is have you see from verses 6-8 that Jesus answers an important question for us. Here in these verses we find Jesus defining for us what is a Christian. The question answered in these verses is not “how is a

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person saved, or how does a person become a Christian, but rather, “how can we recognize a saved person; how can we tell a living person from one who is still dead in his or her trespasses and sins?”

How would you answer the question, “What is a Christian?” Remember, if you don’t know what you believe, if you are uncertain as to how to answer this question, you will never be able to make good and consistent decisions. Of course, if we were to ask 10 people this question, we might get at least six or more different answers. Some would say that a Christian is one who regularly attends church. Of course the great theologian and philosopher Keith Green dispels such a notion when he said that going to church no more makes a person a Christian than going to McDonalds makes a person a hamburger. Some would say that a Christian is one whose parents were Christians. Because Mom and Dad are believers, or because granddad was a preacher, that makes the child a Christian. But the Scriptures tell us that believers are not born of flesh and blood, or by the will of man, but they are born a second time, by the Spirit of God who indwells and transforms their thinking and their behavior. Some may say that anyone born in the United States is a Christian because this is a so-called “Christian Nation”. In fact, just over 80% of the population claims to be “Christian.” And yet well over 80% of the population pursues all sorts of activities and live in manners completely inconsistent with the principles and practices of Jesus Christ. So, what is a Christian?

Before we seek to answer that question from our text, let me make this important side note – something I find to be fascinating and yet so few of professing believers tend to know or realize. The term “Christian” is used only three times in the New Testament. This most used word to identify those who belong to Christ is used rather sparsely in the New Testament and when it was used, it was meant in derogatory fashion. In Acts 26:28, as Paul was standing trial before King Agrippa and preaching the gospel, calling people to “repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance,” Agrippa said, “***In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.***” His point was that Paul’s arguments were so pointed that if he were to hear any more, he might be willing to be associated by the derogatory term “Christian.”

Peter also used the term “Christian” in 1 Peter 4:16 saying, “***if anyone suffers as a Christian...***” making suffering and being a Christian synonymous terms. But neither this verse nor Acts 26:28 really define for us what a Christian is. The best biblical definition of what is a Christian is found in Acts 11:26 where we read, “***...And for an entire year they [Paul and Barnabas] met with the church, and taught considerable numbers and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.***” This text tells us two things about the Christians. First, “Christian” was not so much a name that they *chose* as a name that was applied *to* them (they “were first called Christians...”). This is consistent with our observation that it was a term placed upon them by hostile critics. Second, it was a term that was placed on “the disciples” there in Antioch. This helps us to establish the meaning of the term: A Christian is a disciple, a follower of Christ, one who clings to the gospel; the good news, the message given by Jesus Christ.

But all this begs the question, “What is a disciple? What is a Christian?” Remember, if you don’t know what you believe, you will never be able to make good and consistent decisions that glorify God. If we don’t know; if we don’t rightly define what a Christian is; then we will never be able to live in a manner consistent with Jesus. And the beauty of the matter is this – here in John 17:6-8, Jesus gives seven indicators by which a Christian may be defined. Here we have

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seven markers by which we can evaluate our own lives and determine if we are those who have come to truly know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent. This morning I wish to present to you three of the seven indicators that Jesus gives. Use these to evaluate your own life; to see if you are in the faith. And then use these in your talking to other people about God, about salvation and about Jesus Christ. Use these to challenge the thinking of others to see if they are also in the faith. There is no more important question than to know what a Christian is.

So then, what is a Christian? A Christian is first of all...

I. One who knows the character of God

I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world...

[Read text] – Jesus makes this declaration, “I have manifested...” – that is I have made known; I have clearly revealed; I have expressly exposed Your name. This is different language is it not? We don’t say things like, “Let me tell you about my wife’s name.” But in the Jewish culture, a person’s name was associated with a person’s character; those things that define who a person is or what a person is like. So we have Jesus proclaiming to the Father that He has clearly revealed the very character or attributes of God to men. We are reminded here of the truth Jesus already taught the disciples back in John 14:9 after Philip pleads to Jesus, “Lord, show us [reveal to us; manifest to us; tell us what the Father is like]...” To which Jesus says, **“Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not yet come to know Me, Phillip? He who has seen Me [who knows what I am like, has seen My character and experienced My attributes] has seen the Father.”**

When Jesus says that He has manifested the name of the Father, understand that the “name” speaks more than of a title such as “God” or “Lord” or even “Father.” The “name” speaks of who God is as the sum total of His attributes. To the Jews, to speak the name of God was to say in a word that God is faithful, merciful, full of grace, completely righteous, always just, full of wrath against sin, and always jealous for His glory. The name of God conveyed to the people that He is glorious, majestic, holy, sovereign, all-powerful; all-knowing; everywhere present. And of course the list could go on; but Jesus is saying that His own life; His behavior, the words that He spoke and the miracles He performed, all revealed the very character of God to a specific group of people – those whom the Father gave to the Son out of the world. Notice that not everyone knows or understands the name or character of God, but only those who have been given to Jesus out of the world, out of the mass of fallen humanity. And we learn even in the Old Testament that God’s intention is that not only Israel would know and fear and worship the name, but indeed all types and races of people. In Psalm 102:15 we read,

So the nations will fear the name of the Lord And all the kings of the earth Your glory.

The Psalmist is not saying that people would fear the letters of God’s name, but rather that all nations; those from every tribe and tongue, that even you and I would come to know the embodiment of all who God is. This is what Jesus is saying when He said, **“I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world.”** He is saying that He has revealed all that God is to a certain group of people by His life on this earth. Beloved, this verse tells us that if we are not desirous of knowing who God is and what He is like and using that

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information to govern or direct our lives, then it is doubtful that you are a Christian. For a Christian, according to Jesus, is one to whom Jesus has revealed the character of God and by way of application then, the Christian is one who wants to embrace and come to know even more clearly God as his Creator; the One to whom he owes his very existence; to come to know God more clearly as the God of lovingkindness or mercy, whose mercies are new every morning; or to know Him as the God of Salvation; the one who has planned and executed that plan for your salvation in the sending of His Son Jesus Christ to be your sin sacrifice, your substitute on the cross; the one who would bear your judgment so that you might know the character of God. Beloved, a Christian is one who knows the character of God; the name of God – do you know His name?

So the first marker of a Christian is that he knows the character of God. The second marker is that a Christian is...

II. One who knows he is chosen of God

...the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me...

[Read Text] It is important that you see the emphasis of Jesus in His prayer for there is an oft repeated phrase. Jesus says, “**You gave Me**” in some form or other five times in this prayer; once in verse 2, twice in verse 6, once in verse 9, and again in verse 24. This is important as Jesus speaks of the action of God toward those who believe. What is that action? The action is God’s own choosing “**out of the world**” those whom He would save; those whom He would bring into right relationship to Himself. According to Jesus, this is the work of God; not something we could do because we are in bondage to a whole system of thinking and living that stands in opposition to God called “**the world**” here in our text.

And the truth of the matter is that most people struggle with the idea of God choosing or electing anyone to salvation. There those who believe that God chooses everyone for salvation, which would mean that all should be saved – the teaching of many church called universalism. There are some who believe that God does not choose anyone and that man is simply left in his sinful state without hope of God’s intervention at all. But neither of these is Biblical. Here in Jesus’ prayer we are confronted with the truth. Jesus clearly teaches that God has chosen and given to Jesus a group of people out of the world to save.

And this is the teaching of the Word of God – that God chooses or elects. God chose Adam over all the other creatures to give His living spirit. God chose Abraham out of all the other in Ur to become the father of all who believe. God chose Isaac over Ishmael; Jacob over Esau and even the nation of Israel over all the nations of the earth to bear the special mark of God’s love. Why did God do this? According to Romans 9:11, “**so that God’s purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls.**”

But when we teach such things there is a general reaction that says in effect, “That’s not fair – God can’t do that!” Is it fair that God should choose to save any at all? Is it fair that God should give any to Jesus to redeem? God gave Jesus people out of the world to save. That is what Jesus is saying here. A Christian is one who knows He has been chosen and given to Jesus. This does not mean that every Christian will fully understand and embrace this, but ultimately every true Christian knows God has done something special, apart from himself, that

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brings him to salvation. And I think this truth is important enough that we consider a few parallel truths.

First, we need to understand that God’s choosing those whom He would save sees the work of salvation from God’s viewpoint rather than man’s. The problem is that man wants to see everything from his own point of view and when this becomes the priority, man exalts his view of self and lowers his view of God. Man becomes “not so bad” and God becomes one who owes man something as man tries to be good. But this makes God act according to man and the Scriptures teach that God always and only acts according to His purposes, according to His nature and always for His glory. In regard to the salvation of damnation of men we read this in Romans 9:15-16

15 For He says to Moses, “I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION.” 16 So then it [salvation] does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

Such a statement may not meet with the approval of many, yet everything God does is right because He is righteous and He can do no other than His righteousness. We have no need to explain away this truth that God chooses some for Himself. We may not fully understand it, but it is true whether we fully understand it or not. We must take God at His Word and believe it to be true. A Christian is one who knows God alone saves.

The truth is, that unless God choose to save some from their sinful, rebellious state; to give that group of sinful humanity to Jesus Christ “**out of the world**” [out of this bondage; out of this system of thinking against God’s purposes; out of this way of living that is contrary to God’s intended way for humanity to live] to redeem; not one person on this earth would ever have experienced the blessing of drawing near to God through Jesus Christ and have the hope of eternal life. Here is the point - when a person knows that he has been chosen and given to Jesus to be redeemed; when He believes this; his view of God’s mercy, grace, indeed his view of God’s very character is exalted and his view of himself is diminished. And such a vision of God and self does not demean a person, but because he believes it, he is now in a position to make good and consistent decision to the glory of God. That person, who sees himself as poor and needy, loves to cry the sentiment, the God-exalting/man-diminishing, sentiment, captured by the hymn writer:

Alas! and did my Savior bleed
And did my Sovereign die?
Would He devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I?

Thy body slain, sweet Jesus, Thine-
And bathed in its own blood-
While the firm mark of wrath divine,
His Soul in anguish stood.

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Was it for crimes that I had done
He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! grace unknown!
And love beyond degree!

Isaac Watts

What is a Christian? A Christian is one who increasingly comes to understand that God has chosen to save him out of the bondage of this world, out of a mind and will that had been born in opposition to God; out of a way of living apart from God; not even seeking God because sin had permeated every part of his heart, mind and soul. But God, being rich in mercy; but God, who for His own glory and exaltation, chooses such a one out of the world; to be given to Jesus Christ so that he would be rescued from his sinful state. And as such a one believes; He comes to know that he has become God's own special possession (1 Peter 2:9); that God has laid hold of him; choosing him (1 Corinthians 1:26-31; 1 Peter 1:1-2). To be sure, many such who are so saved may not fully comprehend the theology of it, but he surely experiences the reality of it. A Christian is one upon whom the Holy Spirit has breathed into him an awareness of his adoption into the family of God (Galatians 4:6-7). A Christian is one with whom the Spirit bears witness with his own spirit that he is no longer part of the world, but now he belongs only to the living God through Jesus Christ (Romans 8:16-17).

So a Christian knows the character of God and knows that he has been chosen by God. And finally, for this morning, let us note that a Christian is...

III. One who knows compliance with God's word

...and they have kept Your word.

It is a sad commentary on the church that there are many preachers and congregations that teach that a person can be a Christian without a concern for obedience. In this prayer, Jesus counters such a teaching saying of these men who were hearing Him, “...and they have kept **Your word.**” The word “kept” literally means to guard; to watch; to keep hold of. It was used of prison guards who kept watch over the prisoners so that they would not escape. It was used of the military who would guard the fortress, keeping it safe from invaders. And now, Jesus says of these men, men of considerable weakness; men who had just moments before this prayer been pridefully arguing about who was the greatest; men who suffered doubts and fears; men, who in just a few hours would deny Christ and abandon Him in His hour of crisis. Jesus says that these, “**have kept Your word.**” What does this mean?

Well, let us dispel what it cannot mean. By saying that disciples kept the word, Jesus is not saying these men were perfect. We've already noted their imperfections. In fact, if Jesus meant that they perfectly kept God's word, then He would have contradicted verses like 1 John 1:8 which says, “**If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.**” To be sure, God's desire for us is that we would not sin. In fact 1 John 2:1 says as much, “**My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin.**” But God, knowing our weaknesses also adds, “**And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.**” The point then is not that a Christian is one who never sins; but he can

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be and is to be characterized as one who has kept the Word of God. So what does it mean to keep the word?

Here Jesus is speaking of a heart of compliance; a heart of obedience to the word. Again, the idea is not of perfection, but of pursuit. The Christian is one who pursues obedience; who strives to keep the Word of God. Does this describe you? This is what a Christian is – one who knows and strives to be compliant with the Word. A Christian is one who has as his practice or habit the pursuit of obedience. To be sure, he will at times fail to obey. He will sin against the Lord; however, if one were to look at his life as a whole, the overall direction would be one of ever increasing obedience to the Lord Jesus; a learning and practicing of all that He commands. Beloved, this is what a Christian is. A Christian is not one who is saved *because* he obeys but rather He strives to obey *because* he is saved. Do you see the difference? Too many in churches today think salvation is the result of their obedience; but here and in the rest of the Bible we see that obedience is rather the result of salvation – those who because they know the holy character of God and that they have been chosen or saved by God, now pursue obedience to God, thus keeping His Word. When Jesus speaks of the disciples keeping the Word, He is saying that the Word is transforming these disciples, it is at work in the disciples and the disciples guard or hold to this transformation. And transformation is a life of faith, a life of obedience. For those being transformed by the word will have their hearts and minds increasingly conformed to Jesus. Do you see this in your life? Beloved, the person who claims to be a Christian and yet does not see transformation; does not see sin in his life as more and more ugly, who wants to continue in sin rather than continue in Christ, such a one *is not a Christian*. Such a one is simply masquerading as a Christian. Am I saying that true Christian will not sin? No, will we still sin as Christians? The difference is that the true Christian is never satisfied with sinning. The true Christian does not find delight and pleasure in sinning. Rather, the true believer finds sin increasingly grievous. Sin causes the heart of the believer much remorse and heartache. Why, because a Christian is one who longs for compliance to the word, whose greatest desire is to keep the Word, not let loose of the Word. Does this describe you? Do you long to obey Jesus Christ and keep the Word of God?

Beloved, there is to be a qualitative difference between the Christian and those who are still of the world. The Christian is one who, by the grace of Jesus, has come to know the character of God and seeing the character of God desires to live in light of His holiness, His majesty and under His sovereignty. The Christian is one who knows he has been chosen by God, chosen to be saved, chosen to have the mind of Christ and the Spirit of Christ within Him, making him a child of God who longs to live to the glory of the Father. And a Christian is one who longs to keep the word of God – yes, he may fail, but he keeps the word as he confesses his sin to God; he keeps the word as He stands on the promises of God for forgiveness and life; he keeps the word of God as he strive for increasing holiness in his life. Beloved, that is what a Christian looks like and we will see more markers next week, but let me simply ask you this question; in light of these things as spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ, are you a Christian? Do these thing describe you? If they done, then ask the Lord that they may increase and abound all the more, but if you are uncertain, please know that nowhere in the Bible do we read that one should be content with hoping they are a Christian, or thinking they might be a Christian. Rather the promise of 1 John 5:13 says,

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These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

A Christian knows he has eternal life. If you are uncertain; if you have any question, please plead with the Lord to make it know to you. Please come see me or one of the Elders for there is no more important question for you this day than your answer to the question, “Are you a Christian?”

Soli Deo Gloria

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