

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 (Part 3)

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.

Who are you meant to be? At whatever stage of life you find yourself, single or married, young or old, rich or poor, child or adult; *who are you meant to be?* What comes to your mind with such a question?

I know that we are in church and your minds have been focused upon the Lord and so it might be easy to mentally respond with a very spiritual answer, but consider the question carefully. The truth is that the question, *who am I meant to be* is a question of sort that gets asked throughout our lifetimes in a number of ways. As young children, we might be asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” I know that my first answer to such a question, my first great aspiration was to be an Ice Cream truck driver. How things have changed. We go through High School and for some then college and we consider the question, “who or what am I meant to be?” Some will be married and have families, others may pursue a career; but all go through life and get toward the end and at the end will yet have to answer the question, “who was I meant to be?” At the end of it all will we want to say that we were meant to be a retired Pastor, auto-mechanic, painter, doctor, or housewife? Who was I meant to be?

Over the past week I have been privileged to attend and participate in two weddings. As I was officiating the most recent one, something dawned upon me. Do you realize that as a couple stands before God and their witnesses in a formal ceremony, with themselves and their wedding party all beautifully attired; with all the pomp and circumstance of music and marching the saying of vows, that these are simply pictures (and sadly for so many nothing more), beautiful and symbolic representations, of what that couple ought to pursue, what they say they are desiring to become inwardly for the rest of their married life? The outward beauty of the bride will fade away with the passing of time, but her inward beauty, what Peter calls the hidden person of the heart, is to grow **“with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God”** (1 Peter 3:4). The groom’s standing and waiting to receive his bride and his awaiting to hear those words, “You may kiss your bride” is to be steadily replaced with ever increasing expressions of Christlike love that longs to see both himself and his bride increasingly holy; more and more set apart for God; without spot or blemish by means of involvement with Christ through the Word of God.

As a bride and groom stand before a congregation to be married, they stand picturing outwardly what they hope to become inwardly, who they are meant to be as husband and wife, over time. They stand picturing the end of their married life; what they hope their married life will be by experience, 10, 20, 50 years down the road; as physical beauty is replaced with a spiritual beauty and physical strength is replaced with a spiritual strength. In other words, the outward symbols of beautiful attire, of rings and verbal commitments are to become increasingly inward realities in the couple so that in the last hours of their married life, they will be more in love with

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Christ and more in love with one another than on that day they held hands and said “I do.” As a married couple, this is who they were meant to be.

As we ask ourselves, “who am I meant to be?” – we must come to realize that the answer is not found in what we “do” or what we “did” by way of a job or profession, but is found in who we really are. We might ask the question this way, “who are you?” The apostle John captures the simple answer to this question in 1 John 3:1-2;

1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

According to John here, we are meant to be and who we are is “**children of God**”; misunderstood by the world; sometimes not fully understood by even ourselves, but ultimately we are to be “**like Him**” – that is like Jesus Christ in our thinking, in our behavior, and even in the words that we say. Beloved, we are meant to be like Christ, Christ-like, or as Romans 8:29 says, “**...conformed to the image of His Son...**” The answer to the question, “Who am I meant to be?” is not some prestigious doctor, or the world’s best husband, or Better Homes and Garden’s “Mother of the Year” – no, the answer is that you are to become increasingly more and more like Jesus Christ. How are you doing? You are meant to be a “Christian” – a follower of Christ; a disciple of Jesus; a learner of Christ.

In John 17:6-8, we have been looking at what Jesus says identifies what is a Christian. In this portion of His prayer to the Father, Jesus defines what His followers are meant to be and who His followers really are. We need to be certain of these things. We have considered four already, that a Christian is one...

I. Who knows the character of God

A Christian is one who increasingly wants to know God [His character, what He is like] even as Jesus knows God and therefore as Jesus has revealed God.

II. Who knows he has been chosen by God

A Christian is one who is increasingly amazed that out of all the people on the face of the earth, God has chosen him to bear the likeness of His Son; to be a witness of Jesus; to be an ambassador for Christ.

III. Who is compliant with the Word of God

A Christian is one who desires increasing compliance or obedience to the Word of God. He wants sin to decrease and holiness to increase by keeping God’s Word.

IV. Who find satisfaction in Christ alone

A Christian is one who finds increasing satisfaction in Jesus – knowing that in Jesus alone the Father has granted us everything needful for life and for godliness.

Now we come to the fifth marker of what is a Christian, or who a Christian is meant to be, according to Jesus at the beginning of verse 8. A Christian is...

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

V. One who finds the sum of truth in Christ (8a)

...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...

Brothers and sisters, what Jesus is saying here is that being a Christian is not about a feeling (you may or may not at times “feel” anything), that being a Christian is not about some kind of emotional experience (you may or may not at times be emotional); but rather, a Christian is someone who has heard and responded to the message of Jesus, as Jesus declares here, **“the words which [the Father] gave [Jesus], I have given to them..”** This means that a Christian is one who has heard the gospel, the good news of Jesus, the teachings of Jesus and as a result something happened. The mind of a Christian is renewed and transformed. His thinking is changed to want to know the sum of truth, the fullness of truth as it is found in Jesus. To be sure, a Christian will not know everything there is to know about Jesus, but what he does know about Jesus, He is most certain. It is a humbling experience to me when we do our family Bible reading and my wife or kids ask me a question that is profound and the best answer I can give is “I don’t know.” There is much that I simply do not know. But I am thankful that a Christian is not one who knows it all. But a Christian is one who, as we will speak about more in a moment, **“receives”** and **“believes”** the **“words”** – that is the specific teachings that Jesus gave concerning God, sin, and salvation. Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). He came to save His people from their sin (Matthew 1:21). And therefore, we come to see that a Christian is one who has come to see that Jesus indeed came forth from God, that He is God, He is divine in origin, that He is no mere man, but that God sent Him into the world to bear the sins of many and give His own life as a ransom, the payment for many. The words the Father gave Jesus to speak to us is that there is only one way of knowing God and only one way of knowing that your sins can be forgiven; and that is because Jesus, the Son of God, has come into the world and bore our sins in His body on the cross. I may not know everything I should know or would like to know about God, but I know this most important and most central truth, that Jesus saves and all the truth I need is found in my growing relationship to Him.

And this is the progression we find in verse 8 that is to be the experience of every believer. First, the **“words”** or teachings of Jesus were given to Jesus to give to us. This is a theme of the gospel of John, that Jesus has come to give us the teachings, the words of life, the words of God, the principles and practices by which we draw near to God. In John 3:34, John the Baptist said this about Jesus **“For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God”** (John 3:34). In John 6:63, Jesus informs His hearers of the power of His words in their lives, if they believe, saying **“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.”** There is a difference between a man-made religion and a life directed by the Spirit of God. Many of those to whom Jesus spoke to in John 6:63 heard the words, but had not received the words of Jesus Christ for life. But here were others who heard the same words, who because they received them, because they listened in order to be changed, heard words of Christ and believed. The words of Jesus were also **received** and became to them life, even as Peter confessed saying to Jesus, **“You have the words of eternal life”** (John 6:68).

To receive the words of Christ is to listen to the truths, to the facts, and to the teachings of Jesus – to take them in and take them to heart. But something else is needed in addition to receiving. For many people hear the words of Jesus yet they do not believe. Why? Because in

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In addition to receiving the words, notice what else Jesus says, the Christian is one who has received the words, but also has **“truly (most assuredly) understood that I came from You.”** A Christian is not one who simply comes to church and hears a sermon. A Christian is not simply one who reads books about Jesus or theology. No, a Christian is one who also truly understands – who applies the words of Jesus to his life. They become to him not just facts to know or memorize, but life-changing principles that direct his life. To understand the words of Jesus is to say that they have become your light to illuminate your path in this dark world. To understand the words of Jesus is to have His teachings change your heart and mind, that Jesus being your Savior and Lord makes sense to you. Many people hear the gospel hundreds of times before it “clicks” and they come to “get it.” All of sudden, because of the working of the Spirit in his heart, a person wonders at the love of God who sent His Son to save “him” from the penalty of sin and to give him the hope of eternal life rather than the expectation of eternal judgment.

So, what is a Christian? A Christian is one who has heard the words of Jesus and has been captivated by them, understanding them and receiving them as the sum of truth by faith. To a Christian, the gospel, the words of Christ never grow wearisome; he never grows tired of hearing the sweet truths over and over again. Oh that it would not be said by us with drudgery or disdain, “Oh yes, I have heard that before.” We ought to be like the gospel hymn that says,

*I love to tell the story; 'tis pleasant to repeat
What seems, each time I tell it, more wonderfully sweet.*

Are the words of Jesus more wonderfully sweet every time you hear them? But there is a question to be answered, “What is the essence of these words of Jesus?” What does a person need to receive and understand to be a Christian? Let me share a few things that I see the Bible presents as part of the sum of truth needful to be saved. How important is this, with so many who walk and aisle and pray a prayer without truly grasping or understanding the basic truths Jesus presented, I say this is most important. Therefore I would say to you that receiving and understanding the words of Jesus includes in some form or another...

First, a person needs a recognition that God is perfectly holy, completely without any mark or blemish of sin and has given to us His holy perfection as Law or as a standard by which all are measured. (Psalm 130:3).

Second, a person must realize that he has failed to meet this divine standard of holiness because he chooses sin rather than God’s standard and therefore deserves the punishment of God’s law, that is eternal death.

Third, a person needs to see that God became in Man in the person of Jesus Christ, that God came to us, to fulfill for us the demands of the Law – to become our sin sacrifice, taking upon Himself all our sin, nailing it to the cross and burying it in the grave; not so that we would be neutral, but that we might also receive the very goodness, the very righteousness, the very things that makes Jesus acceptable to the Father from Jesus. Beloved, the words of Jesus, the gospel is this, that the very worst about you was transferred to Jesus and punished on the cross; and the very best about Jesus was transferred to you, giving you the hope of eternal life.

Fourth, a person, in light of such a truth as Jesus dying for our sins to make us righteous, a person must by faith, repent of his sins and turn to follow God. That is the sum of the truth of

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the gospel. Have you received and understood this truth? A Christian is one who finds the sum of truth in Jesus. This naturally leads us to the sixth marker as expressed at the end of verse 8. A Christian is...

VI. One who is sure about Christ (8b)

and they believed that You sent Me.

The inevitable result of receiving and understanding the words of Christ is believing in Him; it is having what the bible speaks of as “faith” – faith is trusting in the person and work of Jesus. It is saying that you can’t save yourself and are dependent upon someone else, namely Jesus, if you have any hope of salvation. Jesus says of these believers for whom He prays that they believed...they had faith...they had trusted, not in themselves, but in God who send Jesus. They had become sure about Christ, they had been convinced of who He was and why He came.

Beloved a Christian is one who recognizes that if the Father had not sent His Son, he would be without hope. A Christian is one who knows that if Jesus had not come to be his Savior, then he would have to trust himself to save himself. He would have to devise a way to make himself pleasing and acceptable to God. On that day when he stands in God’s divine courtroom, condemned as one who violated God’s holy standard, for all have, and worthy of eternal death, what argument would he, would you, use to persuade God that somehow you are exempt, somehow better than others, somehow deserving of something better based upon what...your life...your words? You see, believing in Jesus is ultimately a relinquishing of all self-trust for righteousness and casting yourself upon the mercy of God to give you the righteousness of His Son so that you might live. Are you sure about that? Are you sure that Christ and Christ alone is your only hope for salvation, your only hope of not spending eternity in the torments of hell; and indeed of your only hope to be changed so that you might begin to experience in this life the reality of the presence of God, Christ in you the hope of glory.

The disciples had come to believe that the Father sent the Son; that the Son accomplished the work for their salvation; and that through the Son alone they were justified before God, they could have the hope of being received by God as sons of God. Have you believed as they did? Are you sure about Christ?

As I offer you the last of the markers of what is a Christian, I have purposely intended to bring you back to verse 6. For a Christian is...

VII. One who is separated from the world. (6)

...the men whom You gave Me out of the world...

Hear again the specific words of Jesus there in the middle of verse 6. Jesus says, **“the men who You gave Me out of the world...”** A Christian is one who is separated from the world. There is something distinctive about him. Let us remember that in this context, the word “world” does not speak of planet Earth, but rather speaks of a way of thinking and acting that is not consistent with the purpose and expectations of God. And when Jesus says that men were given Him **“out of the world”** the clear implication is that everyone who has been give to Jesus was at one time part of this world. That is that everyone begins this life contrary to God and His will. No one is neutral in relationship to God. David reminds us that we are conceived in sin, that is, we start this life at enmity, rebellion with God and that for those who have believed in Jesus, they are transferred from this dominion, this rule of rebellion and transferred to a kingdom of light

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in which they become the sons and daughters of God. There is no one neutral with God. You are either a sinner or a saint, you are either dead to God or alive to God; you are either darkness or light. There is no middle ground. Which are you...are you still like the world or are you taken **“out of the world”**? D. Martyn-Lloyd Jones once noted, *You are either a Christian or you are not a Christian; you cannot be partly a Christian. You are either “dead” or “alive”; you are either “born” or “not born”*.

In Deuteronomy 4, Moses recounts Israel’s receiving of the Law and their call to live according to God’s Law rather than according to the ways of Egypt or the ways of the nations which they were to drive out of the promised land. God had called them out of Egypt, out of that sinful place and its sinful ways of thinking. He called them to be a people for Himself. And in Deuteronomy 6-7, God calls His people to live differently than the nations around them, not to live like the nations, but to be a light to the nations, to show people who God is and what God is like.

Beloved, the Exodus story is a picture of redemption. We, like Israel, were in bondage; not to Pharaoh but to sin. We like Israel were governed by a way of thinking that was contrary to God; but God, in Jesus Christ, snatched us out of the world, out of this anti-God way of thinking and has now placed “in Christ” to be a light to the nations. Therefore we are to be separated from world in our thinking and in our actions. We are certainly living in the world, but we are no longer to be living like those of the world. As so, as I have often said to our teenagers in youth group, there has got to be a difference. If we are not manifesting the supernatural and transformational dimensions of the gospel, we are failing to in being those who are “out of the world.” I love the simplicity of truth captured by the songwriter:

Do they see Jesus in me?
Do they recognize His face?
Do I communicate Your and Your grace?
Do I reflect how You are,
In the way I choose to be?
Do they see Jesus in me?

Do they see Jesus in you? Do they see you, not just a different, for there are a lot of “different” people in this world, are there not? Rather, do they see you as supernaturally different? How does this happen, how do “Christians” reveal themselves supernaturally different? We will spend a lifetime answering that question, but a few things that we ought to pray for and look for include:

1. Be a person who seeks to bring every thought of his mind under the Lordship of Jesus.

2 Corinthians 10:5

We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ...

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2. Be a person who longs to keep the word of God. Study it, meditate on it!

Psalm 119:17-19

17 Deal bountifully with Your servant, That I may live and keep Your word. 18 Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your law. 19 I am a stranger in the earth; Do not hide Your commandments from me.

3. Be a person who prays to boldly proclaim the life-transforming power of God in the gospel.

Ephesians 6:18-20

18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, 19 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Such things are some steps that reveal our separation from this world, our desire to make the only true God and the Son whom He sent known. May we each one then, consider the reality of these markers of what is a Christian in ourselves. Ask yourself, “Am I....”

1. One who knows the character of God
2. One who knows he is chosen by God
3. One who is compliant with the Word of God
4. One who finds satisfaction in Christ
5. One who finds the sum of truth in Christ
6. One who is sure about Christ
7. One who is separated from the world

This is who a Christian is meant to be. I pray that you know such things are true for you. May such things become increasingly so for each of you as you cry out to the Lord, and all to His glory. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

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