

What Does It Mean to Be a Christian?

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The bride and the groom have a burden. They have a love for the people that come to their wedding. And they know that a lot of people aren't folks that they go to church with. They are folks in their family, folks from their workplaces or they go to school with. And so they want to have the gospel preached. Gospel is simply good news. And it's the best news.

And from time to time when we have a couple get married, I like to think about what a Christian is. Eddie and Carol are Christians. And I thought we might just think for a few minutes...what is that? What does that mean? Because you see that term is thrown around really loosely today. Don't you agree? You could turn on the television and find all manner of people that claim to be Christians. You've got all sorts of priests involved in numbers of scandals. They claim to be Christians. You've got people running around this world under every banner claiming to be Christians. But the authority on what a Christian is, is Christ Himself. I think we would all agree to that. And you know one of the interesting things that Jesus said? Not everybody claiming to be a Christian, is one. So what is one? What is a Christian?

Eddie and Carol... you know what? If you ask them, "Is this an important day?", they would say, "Yes, this is a very important day in our lives." But if you ask them what's more important, getting married or being a Christian, hands down, they would tell you being a Christian, being a follower of Christ. And that has everything to do with what a true Christian is... as to why they would say that. This is a special day for them. But it's a more special day when somebody finds the Lord.

What is a Christian? What is one? Let me tell you this. A Christian is the only person in this world who's ready for what's coming. Here's the thing. Let me tell you what Christianity has to do with. It has to do with God. There's a lot of connections with death. There's a lot of

connections with sin. Here's one thing that we all understand. We die. Not because it was designed that way in the first place. God did not create man to die. The wages of sin is death. Death came on man because man sinned. This isn't normal. Death isn't normal. And here's a reality. There is a God. He created us. We are going to die. And the reason we are going to die is because we've sinned against this God. This curse and this death is a consequence of our having sinned against Him...of our fore parents having sinned against Him. And you know what scripture teaches us? Scripture teaches us that there is a coming day of judgement. And you know what's very interesting? It's a wake up call. There is a God. You and I are going to die. We have to stand before Him in judgement. That's real.

And it's difficult at a wedding, when we want to rejoice and it seems more suitable to have papa up here and having everybody laughing. If we're going to talk about this... if we're going to talk about true Christianity, we have to look at what that means. And that's what these two want. They want to have the gospel proclaimed. And the good news that is revealed to us is that there is a way to meet God and be ready to meet Him. And one thing that's very interesting... most men are not going to be ready. Most women are not going to be ready. And I know that from the very words that Jesus Himself spoke.

Listen to these words. Jesus... God come to this earth in the flesh, God incarnate. God came and inhabited this earth as a man. And he came the very radiance of the glory of God. He stepped into this world in the form of a man. The likeness of sinful flesh. He came and dwelt among us. And He came to tell us the only way of hope. And when He came among us, He said this to us... He said "Enter by the narrow gate". In other words, this time you have here in this life, this time when you've been given life and breath... it's a probational time. And during this time, He bids us to enter. There's a place you must enter. It's not a physical place. His kingdom is not of this world. But He says "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction.". There is destruction coming for those who do not enter into the narrow gate. Those who enter by the wide and easy gate, are many. And it leads to destruction. And Jesus says this, "The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

That is shocking because I didn't make that up, Jesus said that. Jesus said "few". And here's

the thing. We've got to die and the Scripture says after that, the judgement. This is real. You can be an atheist and try to convince yourself it's not real. But it's coming. It's appointed to everyone of us to die, and then the judgment. There maybe a wedding day. They may go on to have children. But you know what? Their day is appointed. And after that scripture says, the judgment.

And what's the judgment all about? Scripture says that we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. John the Apostle, he looked and he said, "I saw great and small". They were gathered. Everybody was there. All of us must stand before the judgment seat of Christ and the books are open and men are judged from them. And let me tell you, Christians, true Christians, like these two, Christians are the only favored people in this world that when they stand there before God on judgment day, will not be destroyed. That is how special. That is how important.

But, there is a way. There is such a thing as Christianity. We have to stand before God . And here's what happens. The books are going to be opened. And what's in the book? Your life. All of it. All of your life. And here's the problem. If there's any sin found in that book... every sin we commit is against God and God is angry at that sin. Every sin is against Him. He takes it personally. And He is pure. And the truth is , He's just. And our sin will be punished to the full. Punished to the full. Listen, when we stand there before God ,the Christian is the one that it's going to go well with. That's what a Christian is. A Christian is one who, on judgment day, is going to find there is a way of escape. Our sins are not a small matter. God laid down a law. We violated it.

Man by nature... all of you know it. A little child is born. What do you have to do? Do you have to teach the child to do evil? No you don't have to teach it to do evil. They come out stingy. They come out selfish. They come out wanting to fight with one another. They come out lying. You have to teach them to even put on some resemblance of morality. We have some bent towards sin. If we come to stand that day before God in our sin, we're in trouble. And here's the beauty of what Christians are all about... in that day of judgment the big question is, "how can you take sinners?". You know what's true about a Christian? They're not different from others in the fact that they have sin. They have sin just like everyone else.

There's sin in their life. How does a sinner come before a holy God and find that God isn't going to punish them for that sin. How? We've been singing about it. God is going to punish sin. Do you recognize your sin? It's got to be punished. It's a big thing. It's a crime. It's evil beyond what we can imagine. We tend to think of it small but that's only because of our own blindness. It's bad.

And if we think about, what is a Christian? What makes a Christian? What's so special about a Christian? It's that when a Christian comes before God, even though they've sinned just like the rest of us, God is going to look and He is going to welcome them to Himself. He is going to welcome them into the joy of the Lord. Fully welcomed and how? Because God slammed the almighty wrath of God upon the head of His son. He punished sin with every bit of anger and vengeance... with every bit of wrath. With every bit of intensity that we deserved... every bit of it. He is going to crush.

Do you understand this is real? This is coming. This is something we can't run from. You are not fast enough to get away from this. God is going to have you. You're going to be there before Him. The books are going to be open and what is the only hope? The only hope is the Christian hope. That's what makes a Christian. Listen, these two didn't just get religious. That's not what being a Christian is. It's not like that 's all they got, religion. "They're going to church now." That's not it.

What makes the Christian, the Christian? What is so special about being a Christian... has everything to do with sin. Everything. It has everything to do with there sin being pardoned. And you say "how does that happen?". How does it happen that God can look at a sinner and actually count them perfect and righteous and blameless and spotless and holy? How could that happen when they were just as sinful as the rest of us. Because God provided a way. God provided a substitute. That's what a Christian has. Christians are people that have a substitute. Somebody that is this... ball of the flaming rage of God came at Him like a freight train. Christ stepped in the middle and it hit Him. It spilled His soul. It poured Him out like water. It came crushing upon His head. We sang "stricken, smitten, afflicted of God". What's that all about? God smote His son. He reared back with almighty vengeance that you and I deserved. And when the hammer fell, it fell on Christ.

It is not just enough to say, "Well, didn't Jesus die for everybody?". Listen, what's going to matter in that day is whether you trusted Jesus Christ and what He did on that cross... that you trusted Him for having it done for you. Listen, if you just go on in your sin, you just play this little religious thing, that's not enough, that's not what these two have done. What makes a Christian is somebody who in desperation, sees, I am not fit to meet this mighty God in my sin. I am not fit to go before Him knowing the things that I've done. That I've done. This is real. I'm a sinner. I've done things God should put me in the lowest hell for.

What are you going to do in that day? Are you going to blow it all and play games? You've got one probation period, and it's right now. And I tell you, death catches most people unprepared. Most people think, "I'm going to get this taking care of tomorrow", and today is their last.

Jesus Christ came into this world and He kept the law that you and I couldn't keep and He obeyed His father and there on that cross, He suffered. He suffered. He suffered like a lamb. He was quiet for the most of those three hours other than God forsaking Him and He cried out. But He was silent. He suffered like a lamb. And God ground Him, smitten we might be free.

And Jesus says "few there be that find it". Few. Do you know why few there be that find it? Because most men think "I'm good enough". And you are not good enough. You are not. If God finds you in your sin on that day you are in trouble. But, if you come there. Ah... the Bible tells us that the Christian on that day is going to shine with the radiance of righteousness. How can that happen? Because Jesus' own righteousness is robed on the Christian. You can't see it in their lives. You can't see it with your naked eye. But these two are robed with a righteousness of Christ so that when they come and stand before God... the Apostle Paul says, "who's going to lay anything to the charge of God's elect?". It's God that justifies. They've been found innocent in the courtroom of God. Who is going to lay anything to their charge? Jesus Christ has died in their place, suffered their punishment, taken their wrath, drank their cup of their hell to the last drop so that when they come and stand they are fully forgiven. That's what a Christian is.

You don't want to play loose with that meaning. Only those in that day that have rested and trusted their full weight on Christ. You say "well, how do you do that?", "What does that mean?" It means this, as a sinner you come before God and you plead with Him to save you based on the merits in Jesus Christ, you turn from your rebellion against Him and you surrender and you ask Him... you call upon Him... that the merits of Christ, the shed blood of Christ, might wash away all your sin. There's no better news. That's better news than a wedding. It is!

I've got to die. You've got to die. And after that, the judgment. And the greatest news in this world is that God didn't wipe us out like we deserved and leave us with no hope. He's given us life. But, remember, it's only a probation period. He's given us this little time to cling to Christ, to go to Him as guilty sinners and trust Him to save us. This is good news! But you have to hear the bad to realize how good it is. It is really good! Amen!

We all know what a shadow is, obviously. Is a shadow real? It's real, it's a shadow. A shadow is real... but, the shadow is not the same as the person. There's a reality of the person that is different than the reality of the shadow... and I'm sure that when I was living those 25 years before I became a Christian, I didn't recognize what marriage was at all... I just...you know, it's customary. But it's not just that. It's a shadow. You see, here's another thing about being a Christian. They have another wedding day ahead of them, besides this one. And that marriage is going to go on forever. This is the shadow. Oh, it's real. It'll be real enough in their lives. A shadow is real. Beyond that that casts the shadow, is the substance. It's the thing that is most real. And there is a wedding day coming. There's a wedding day of the lamb. And, marriage here, between Eddie and Carol, was designed by God, specifically, not just to be this cultural observance, this is a picture of Christ taking His bride.

So that judgment day that I told you about... once the wicked are driven from God's presence forever...at least His presence of kindness, mercy, and grace... then the celebration starts. Once everything that defiles is put away, Christ is going to take his bride unto Himself and there's going to be a celebration that you and I will never forget should we be there. This is a shadow of that and so that's what you should see as Eddie takes his bride. This should make you think, "Ah there's a day when Christ is going to take His bride". He's going to take His

church unto Himself. He's going to take us up into His arms and smother us with His love and it's going to be forever. That's what this is a picture of. These two are saying "would you get on...even if it's a shadow, we want to get the shadow going".