

Called Christians

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to turn again to that second passage of Scripture read, the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 11, and reading at verse 26.

Acts chapter 11, verse 26. And when he had found him, or when Barnabas had found him, Saul, he brought him to Antioch. And for a whole year, they met with the church and taught a great many people.

And in Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians. Especially those words at the end of that verse. And in Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians.

This is the first we hear of Paul entering into the work of the gospel.

If we were to go back to chapter 9, we would read there the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. A man who was greatly opposed to the furtherance of the gospel.

[1 : 18] One who wanted to destroy the church of God in its infancy. And yet, he was called by God. We're told here, as we read, there were those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen.

Well, we know Paul was very instrumental there in the death of Stephen. He wasn't involved in the throwing of stones, but he was there as an assessor.

An advisor, as somebody who was looking on as to what was being done to Stephen. That their sentence of death by stoning was going to be carried out properly.

And Saul held the coats of those who were doing the stoning. And the next we hear of Saul is on his way to Damascus. He's there as someone who carries the authority of the Sanhedrin.

He's carrying with him a letter to destroy the church in Damascus. And on the way, he is met supernaturally by the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 23] And there he is brought to his knees. He sees a light brighter than the noonday sun. He is brought to the ground.

And he is asked, Lord, who are you? He says, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. And he asks him, what shall I do?

And he is told to go into Damascus. And there, wait to be told what he should do. And during that time, three days and three nights, he is struck blind.

He cannot see and he is left only with his own thoughts. All that he had done and all that he had accomplished in attempting to destroy in God's church.

And no doubt the Lord used this as he does in all our lives and experiences. Times of solitude, times of darkness, times of doubt to bring us to a saving knowledge of himself.

[3 : 23] And that's what he does here in the experience of Saul of Tarsus. And a few days later, Ananias is sent to the street called Straight there to lay his hands on the Saul of Tarsus.

And Saul receives a sight and he receives the Holy Spirit and he is made a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. And immediately, he begins to preach the gospel.

First, he is counted as someone as being so antagonistic towards Judaism that he is chased out to Damascus. And eventually, he goes to Jerusalem.

Then he meets with the apostles. And even there, he is so full of the Holy Spirit. And so wanting to speak the word, the disciples there think it is beneficial for Paul to be set out of the way for a short time.

And there to mature in his faith. And so they sent him away to Antioch. Sent him back to Tarsus.

[4 : 26] There to mature in his faith. And for 10 years, he's left there. Maturing. Meditating. Thinking of what the Lord is going to use him for.

Because the Lord has told him he is going to be a messenger for him. To kings and princes in many nations. And he's going to suffer many things for the cause of the gospel.

And that's where this chapter finds Paul. He's still Saul at this time. He's there in Tarsus. And Barnabas goes to look for Saul in Tarsus. And he finds him and brings him back to Antioch. And for a whole year, they met with the church. And they taught a great many people. And we're told here that in Antioch, the disciples or the believers were first called Christians. There is a great revival in discipleship. [5 : 33] A great upsurge in interest in Christ. And the church is growing. As every New Testament church did in that era.

It grew and it blossomed. And it functioned as a believing, a growing and a witnessing church. And if we look just briefly at what it says in verse 20.

That there were some of them from Cyprus and Cyrene. Who when coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists or to the Greeks. Also preaching the lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the hand of the Lord was with them. And a great number of them believed and turned to the Lord. This is before Barnabas and Saul began preaching the word.

And we see here the importance of witness. The Lord Jesus Christ. When he was being taken up. One of the last things he says to them. And I want you to be my witnesses.

[6 : 35] And that's what we are in the world. Lloyd-Jones suggests that one of the great reasons the church is not growing. One of the reasons the church is without power.

Is that we are not seen to be living and witnessing for the Lord Jesus Christ. We are quite happy to know that we know the Lord.

Quite happy to know that we are on the road to heaven. Almost at ease in Zion. Knowing God. Having Christ for our souls. And not really too concerned with the world outside.

The church is the only organization in the world. That is for the benefit of others. We are the only group of people. Whose desire is not to promote ourselves.

But to promote the gospel. So that others might know of the glory. And the love. And the benefits of being in Christ Jesus. And that's what these people were doing.

[7 : 39] They were preaching the Lordship of Jesus. They were preaching it to everyone who would listen. And to everyone who would come near to them. And the Lord blessed them we are told.

The Lord blessed that preaching. And great numbers believed and turned to the Lord. And that's the reason why Barnabas was sent north. And so as we look at this particular phrase.

The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. What does it mean for us to be called Christians? Christians. Well again the word Christian initially is to be a saint.

Someone who is separated from God. Separated by God. To be one of his disciples. That's the root meaning of the word saint. It does mean holy.

And we'll look at that in a minute. But it means basically that we are separated by God. To be his people. A chosen people. In the same way as the nation of Israel was separated by God.

[8 : 43] They were taken down into Egypt. And God separated them in Egypt. To be his own peculiar people. A royal nation. A holy people. Peculiar to God.

That he might make them and mold them. Into people that he wanted. A people that he wanted to worship him. And a people he wanted to follow.

So it means initially that a saint is someone who has been separated by God. Someone who has been brought out from the world.

The Christian is not the same as anybody else in the world. The Christian is different in as much as he believes different things. He lives his life by different tenets.

He's got a different authority over him. He does not belong to the world. He belongs to Christ. And our lives are hid with Christ in God.

[9 : 43] So a Christian is someone who is separated by God. Someone who has been brought to know God. And that's true outwardly.

You can say it in a forensic sense. He has been justified. He has been made clean. He has been redeemed. But that's only external.

There's also a separation which God does inwardly. And whereby we talk about the work of sanctification. Whereby we are cleansed. Where our lives are made holy.

And so it becomes apparent that our word and our deed is the same thing. We're not saying one thing and doing something else. But we are cleansed outwardly.

And we are cleansed inwardly by the work of sanctification. Which goes on continually all the days of our life. We're not yet what we should be. But we're not what we were when we were first converted.

[10 : 40] Our lives are being changed slowly. Day by day. Year by year. Into what God wants us to be. When he will present us faultless. Before his own glory.

With exceeding joy. And so we are saints. In the Lord Jesus Christ. Again. Paul in writing his early words.

His opening word to the church in Ephesus. Says Paul. An apostle. Called by God of Jesus Christ. I was writing to the church in Ephesus.

Who are called to be saints. And to be faithful in Christ Jesus. We are called to be saints. But we are also called to be faithful. We are called to be full of faith.

That's really what that word means. We think back to the incident of Thomas. And the Lord in the upper room. Thomas says.

[11 : 40] I will not believe. Unless I am able to put my fingers into the palm prints. And my fist into his side. And suddenly the Lord appears. And he says to Thomas.

Well here I am. Do you want to do that? And Thomas says. My Lord and my God. The Lord says to Thomas. Will you believe because you see? Blessed are those.

Who will not see and yet will believe. Be not faithless. But believing. And that's what this word faithful means.

Be not faithless. Be not without faith. But be full of faith. And that's what we are called to be. Full of faith. Those who have been separated by God.

To believe certain things about God. To believe certain things about Christ. We are not permitted.

To rest in our own imagination.

[12 : 42] In our own thoughts. In the wisdom of this world. We are called to believe certain things that are revealed to us. By Christ Jesus. And revealed in the sense that we believe in the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have faith in that incarnation. He came to this world. As a man. The God man. To seek and to save the lost. We believe in the virgin birth.

We believe that Christ came to this earth. To taste death for every man. To offer up his life. A ransom for the many. He is our Lord and our God.

Even as much as Thomas made that confession. It is our confession. He is my Lord. He is my God. And I will fall on my knees before him in wonder. And love.

And in praise. And so we have this great aspect of being full of faith. But also faithful in the sense of being able to be faithful.

[13 : 43] faithful to be able to defend the faith. To be able to contend for the faith. To be dependable. To be self-denying.

To walk in the way that the Lord Jesus Christ gave us example. The last thing the Lord Paul says in the introduction. Saints, faithful and in Christ Jesus.

All these are what it means to be a Christian. To be in Christ Jesus. To be united to him. In a union that is yes mystical.

But a union that is also very real. To those who are Christians. We know that our lives are hid with Christ in God. We are united to him because of what he has accomplished.

We are united in one way in the fact that God became man. He took not on him the nature of angels. We took on him the nature of mankind. The same nature as you and I have.

[14 : 42] And in that way we are united to him of being of the same flesh. And the same blood and the same bone. But we are also united to him. Because God sent his son into this world.

To seek and to save the lost. To redeem us. To make us God's own chosen people. And to make us sons and daughters of the most high God.

Heirs of God. Joint heirs with Christ. Of all the love. And all the affection. And all the benefits that Christ wants to give to us. That is our privilege.

That is what we are called to be as saints. The ones separated by God. The ones who are called to be full of faith towards God. And the ones who are united to God in Christ Jesus.

What does that mean for us as Christians? As those who are Christians. Those who are believers in Christ Jesus. Those who are disciples of Christ Jesus. But it means initially.

[15 : 41] That we bow the knee to Christ. We fall before him. Not only in wonder and love and praise. But we fall before him as our God.

There are many people who have idols. Many and gods many. But for us there is one Lord. There is one God.

And he is our Lord Jesus Christ. We know no other God but Christ. We bow the knee to no one else but Christ alone. You think back to the time when the early disciples were being threatened with death.

They were saying Jesus is Lord. And the persecutors were saying Jesus is not Lord. Caesar is Lord.

And the disciples were told if you don't say Caesar is Lord you'll be put to death. And they continued to say Jesus is Lord. And we know from the history books that many were put to death in the most horrendous ways.

[16 : 43] The persecution of the church began at that time and has continued down through the generations. Not so much in our own day. We don't have to be put to death to know what persecution means.

It might mean sneering. It might need mocking. It might mean ridicule for what we believe. How can you as a 21st century man or woman believe the things you're believing when science has told us all these other things.

But yet we believe them. Because he is our Lord and he is our God. He is the one whom we worship. He is the one for whom we fall in true wonder and in true love and true praise for all that he has done for us.

So we see him as our God. The one who has made us. The one who has created us. You know as we look at the creation around us. We can see it's all the work of Christ's hands.

Why do I say that? As I look at the gospel of John. I see in there in the beginning was the word. The word was with God. And the word was God.

[17 : 50] All things were made by him. And without him was not anything made that was made. And we go again to Genesis chapter 1. And we see there in the beginning God created or made the heavens and the earth.

And those two texts come together in Christ Jesus. So he is the one who made this world. He is the one who has made this creation. As we see the universe around us.

As we see all the stars in that universe in their own course. Being upheld. And made by God. So that they don't collide.

There's no great accidents in space. There's nothing crashing into one another. Because Christ has ordered the course of them. He is doing all this. It is by his own power.

And by his own strength. And by his own wisdom. And we are the beneficiaries of that great work. He is our creator God. And we do worship him.

[18 : 51] And we do kneel before him. But he is also the God before whom we confess our sins. The one who has become our redeemer.

The one who is our savior. When Christ came to this world. He did truly come to seek and to save the lost. He came truly to taste death for every man.

But he came here. As those. As the one who came to bring or draw men and women to himself.

There is a book called The Marrow of the Gospel. And in that book. There is a wonderful statement. Which speaks about the universality of the call of the gospel.

Christ is dead for every man. Not saying that he has died for you. But I'm saying he's dead. And that is the offer of the gospel. Christ on the cross.

[19 : 53] Christ dying on the cross. His death there. Is for you. Whoever you are. Whatever your situation. Whatever your standing before God in Christ is just now.

Christ is dead for you. And the offer of the gospel is to you. To hold it. And to take it to yourself. And to hold on to say. This is my hope.

This is my consolation. This is my future. And so in Christ. He is the one before whom we come. As our redeemer. The one before whom we confess our sins.

Doesn't John say. If you confess your sins. He is faithful and just. To forgive your sins. And to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

And so there is. A requirement there. In the same way. As there is a requirement. To have. A relationship with God. As my Lord and my God.

[20 : 54] A confession that he is my Lord and my God. There is also. A requirement on our parts. That we confess our sins. So that he might forgive them.

As Christ. Came into this world. And as he. He offered himself. A ransom for the many. So he was. Saying to the world.

If you look at me. If you put your trust in me. I will be. Your God. And if you confess your sins. I. Will. Forgive them.

So often. When we. Read the words of Christ. If you ask anything in my name. I will do it. We tend to neglect this aspect of it. If you confess any sin in my name.

I will forgive it. If you confess. All the sins you've ever done. In my name. And ask forgiveness. I. Will. Forgive them. He is. Our redeemer.

[21 : 53] He is our savior. He is the one who's come to. Come to. Look for us. And seek us out. To bring us to himself. In. Christ Jesus. And so he is.

The one before whom we bow the knee. He is the one to who. Before whom we confess our sins.

And he is the one before whom. We submit every aspect of our lives. Whether it's our mind.

Whether it's our will. Whether it's our affections. You know we live in a world. Which has many different theories. About where the world is coming from. How it was made.

And what different aspects of this world. Make it up its whole. And so we submit our minds to Christ.

As we look at these various statements. Why do we believe. That the world was made.

In the way the Bible says it was made. Why don't we believe. The many theories that abound. In the world. And go along with them. They seem much more enticing. Much more attractive.

[22 : 50] Much more intellectually. Attractive. So that we don't. Face the ridicule of the world. We don't go along with that. Because. Christ has said. This is the way it was.

And as an act of devotion. As an act of worship. We believe. This is the way it's happened.

Because. Christ said. I came not. To destroy the law.

And the prophets. But I came. To fulfill them. And Christ. Puts his trumpet. On the Bible. And says. That's the way it is. That's the way it's happened.

I am the one who did it. Why do you believe. That there's a heaven. And there's a hell. Because Christ. More than anybody else. In the Bible. Speaks about that place.

Of weeping and wailing. And gnashing of teeth. In our. 21st century sensitivities. We'd rather not believe. That there was a hell. But we believe it.

[23 : 44] Because Christ says. That's the way it is. That's the way it's going to be. And we. Submit our minds. To his. Great. Wonderful wisdom.

And also. Our will. As we walk. Around this world. There are many things. That we want to do.

Many. Books we want to read. Many courses.

Of. Education. We want to follow. Many careers. We want to pursue. And yet. There are certain aspects. Of the teaching. Of the scripture. Which says. That is not right.

For you. As a Christian. And. So we are not. To be willful. We are not. To go along. Doing. What we want to do. Just because.

That's the way it is. You know. The catch phrase. Of. This century. And the last one as well. It's my life. I'm going to live it. The way I want to. Well we can't. If we are Christians.

[24 : 40] We can't do that. We are called. To submit. Our lives. And our will. To Christ. But also. Our affection. Every other idol.

Every other love. Every other. Hope we have. Is. To be. Submitted. To Christ Jesus. If you think of. Chalmers words. That expulsive power. Of a new affection. In the knowledge of Christ. The knowing of Christ. It is. Christ fills. Our whole heart.

He fills. Our whole life. So there's no room. For anything else. To take over his place. Again. The hymn writer says. The dearest idol. I have known.

What e'er that idol be. I beg thee. Tear it. From thy throne. So I worship only thee. And that's. What we are asked to do. Have Christ. On the throne. Of our lives.

[25 : 37] So that nothing else. Is going to displace him. Nothing else. Is going to take. His. Throne. Nothing else. Is going to occupy. His place.

And so. We submit our minds. We submit. Our affection. We submit. Our will. To Christ. But. We are also called.

To be witnesses. For Christ. And I go back again. To. What I was saying. Earlier on. The Lord Jesus Christ. One of his. His last. Requirements.

Of those. Who were with him. On the Mount of Olives. Was. You are to be. My. Witnesses. Think back again. To the days. When. When we were first Christians. How we wanted to speak the word. No one could get a word. In edgeways. We would speak the word. To whoever. And whenever. We. We met with people. That's all. That was on our lips. But we are to ask ourselves.

[26 : 35] What's happened? Where's that blessedness? I knew when first I saw the Lord. Where is that blessedness? Where is that. That heart. Captivating view of Jesus.

And his word. Where's it gone? And we have to ask ourselves. Is that why. The church is the way it is today. We don't speak about it. We don't enter into fellowship.

With others about it. We said. Many years ago now. That if we lose. The fellowship. With one another. We will lose the gospel. In this place also. So we have to foster fellowship.

We have to. Foster. Witness. We have to foster. Others. And. To come into the church. It's all part. And parcel.

Of the building up of the church. Of strengthening the church. Of causing the church. To grow. In the grace. And in the knowledge. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. And causing it. To know the power.

[27 : 32] That the Holy Spirit. Wants to give to the church. But sometimes. We grieve the church. By our. Lukewarmness. Think again. Of the. The warning word.

To the church. And latest here. You think. You are rich. And much increased of goods. And have lack of nothing. And yet. Really. In all reality.

You are poor. And wretched. And miserable. And you are lukewarm. And I will spew you. Out of your mouth. Out of my mouth. And that's what causes.

God to be. Angry with us. Our lukewarmness. It is a challenge. God's word. This text. Is a challenge to us. These believers.

Were first called. Christians. In Antioch. Why? Because. All they did. Was speak of Christ. All they did. Was talk about Christ. All they did. Was hear. Their.

[28 : 31] Teachers. Expressing the wonder. And the greatness. Of God. Remember again. On the day of Pentecost. They spoke. In many different languages. But all the different languages.

Were speaking of the many. Wonderful works. The mighty and wonderful works. Of. The living God. Just finally. And briefly. We are also called.

To follow Christ. To follow him. Wherever. He asks us to go. We are. Called by his name. Many of us.

Have been baptized. Into his name. And yet. Our reluctance. To follow. Where he asks us to go. Is sometimes apparent.

Not only to others. But also to ourselves. As we. Hedge our beds. As we. Seek.

[29 : 27] To make. Our own. Choices. More important. Than the work of the gospel. To which we are called. Many. No doubt.

Know that. That grief. In their own lives. They have known. Brighter days. And brighter times.

They've known days. When. They've known.

Growth. Growth. In grace. And growth. In knowledge. And growth. In their fellowship. And all that is waning. Doesn't have to be. Everyone.

Who has the hope. Of Christ. In him. Not only purifies himself. Even as Christ is pure. But follows. Christ. As nearly.

As he can. Perhaps I can look out. On faces. And see many. Who have. Been. Bright. And.

[30 : 26] Very. Strong. Christians. In. Your witness. And. In your purpose. To enlarge.

Christ's kingdom. We have to ask ourselves. And the challenge. We all have to ask ourselves. Are we being as bright. And as strong. And as purposeful.

In the work. Of the gospel. And in the following. Of Christ. As our Lord. Calls us to be. May the Lord then. Add his blessing to those. If you thought.

Sheer this morning. We shall conclude. Now our worship. Singing.