Christianity exists because Jesus does

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[0:00] I'd like to turn to the book of Acts in chapter 11. Acts chapter 11. I'm going to pick it up in verse 19, read through to verse 26.

So Acts chapter 11, beginning at verse 19, now hear God's Word. Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.
But there were some of them, men of Cyprius and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists, also preaching the Lord Jesus.
And the hand of the Lord was with them. And a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem.
And they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad. And he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.
[1:26] For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went up to Tarsus to look for Saul.

And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year, they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians.
There you go. History lesson as well. I sat in a very uncomfortable chair. And I sat there until I got an answer to the question that I was asking.
And I wasn't going to move. Everything went numb. And the question is this. What makes a healthy church a healthy church?
And it's such a burden and such a frustration. Even more so because you should never do your thinking with a closed Bible. Because you're never really going to come to any moments of enlightenment.
[2:44] You need God's Word to direct it. And as I sat there, these words of Jesus came back to me. As clear as day. And I felt as silly as anything. But there the answer is, all along.

And for some reason, I'm trying to think that it must be more difficult than that. What makes a healthy church a healthy church? Love for God.
Yeah, I think love for God has to be crucial. And you've got to remember that love for God is not just a feeling or a thought. Love is an action.
Yeah? For God so loved the world that he gave his son. Love is not a communication of words as much as it shows up in action. So, you know, as you serve God, you're loving God.
As you're presenting your bodies to the preaching of the Word and to the singing and to prayers, you're loving God. That's needed to make a healthy church a healthy church.
[3:47] But there's something else, isn't there? Love for each other. First two commandments that Jesus gave to his disciples, the greatest two.

Love God and love each other. Herr dispensary with you. choo K pessimistic, and I really shouldn't, and it's this. Do the older people in this church care for the younger people in this church? And the answer is yeah. Go out in Sunday school.
Go to what? Yeah, go to munchkins. Just go out there on a Sunday morning. Do they love God? Yeah, they love God because they're serving God by serving others. Do they love others? Yeah, because they're out there with them. Okay, I've not got a problem with that.
Do the younger ones love the older ones? I'm worried.
There is a growing separation between Christians and Christianity, and one of the things that can stop a healthy church from being a healthy church is where we don't teach the younger ones to love the older ones like the older ones love the younger ones.

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[5:42] I think you can see it immediately, can't you? So I'm worried. I'm not worried to the point that I think it's out of the hands of Jesus, but you know, I'm bothered by it. It keeps me awake at night. I pray about these things.

I get more frustrated when I don't see the kind of answers that I want to see answered. For years, you have seen a generation be committed to the young. I'm not so sure you're going to see the same kind of commitment, not a criticism, just an observation of the young to the old.
And so I'm kind of worried for the church. And that alters every decision you're going to make about the future, right? Because the ministry of the church is going to change as people get older.
So there is a problem, a big problem, and I think it's with Christians deciding that their Christian life can be separated from the rest of Christianity.
You know, where my personal walk with Jesus has become personalized. Yes, we all have a personal walk, but it becomes individual, separated from the rest of Christianity.
[7:09] You know, and if this is the case, why is it happening? Well, why does any kind of separation happen? Well, it's only a couple of answers.

Either the other is pulling away from you, or you are pulling away from the other. But we serve Christ, who very clearly told us that he would never leave us nor forsake us.
So there is no pulling away of Christ. My fear, however, just as I sit and I think, and I think, and I don't move until I get the answer, is it becomes quite obvious that there are some Christians who've left their Christianity behind.
And it seems as if there is a growing sense within the church that this is acceptable. Not amongst you.
You're older, wiser. The young, is it an issue of commitment? I don't think it is. Do they love God?
[8:20] Yeah, of course they love God. But are they loving you? Go away and think about it. As I look at my ministry within this church over the next few years, I know what's coming my way.

I happily accept it, that ministry changes as the church changes. I've got no fear. But who do we look to, to support each other?
Well, Jesus got it right, didn't he? Love God and love each other. Look to each other as well. And they will look out for you. The trouble is, however, when Christianity or Christians separate their Christian life from the rest of Christianity, it can't happen.
So we need to address the issue. And I think one of the ways to do it is this way. By admitting two things. Firstly, Christianity reflects God on earth.
The better Christianity looks, the better God looks on earth. And number two, the only reason Christianity can exist is because Jesus does. Now, what do I mean by that?
[9:38] Well, I mean this. Christianity is natural. Christianity comes at a new birth. It comes out of a resurrected Lord. Christianity exists for those kind of reasons, that people have been given a new birth, a spiritual new birth, but it tends to have real physical value in a physical world and in physical lives.

It is something real. It is something that can be touched. You know, so can people invent cults? Yeah, they can invent cults. Can they invent religions?
Yeah. Can you create a following? Yeah. Anyone who has Facebook or Twitter, almost perhaps even pride themselves on their following. You know, can you create all this?
Yeah, of course you can. The world's full of them. But can a person invent Christianity? You know, can Christianity be man-made? This is no.
Not in the slightest. Why? Just look at Christianity for what it is. That God the Father sending his son to seek and to save the lost.
[10:48] The son who was crucified, dead and buried. And then resurrected from the grave. And saves us by grace through faith. And makes us right with God for all who believe.

At the end of which we have Christianity. No man could do that. No man could do that. Christianity exists because Jesus does.
In fact, whenever Christianity is challenged within Scripture, especially in the early parts of Scripture where there are key challenges over its claims, you know, anyone who challenges Christianity today is really challenging the existence of God.
You know, the God that we follow and the God that we believe in. But when the disciples went out, the way that they dealt with the challenge was, you know, we were witnesses to the resurrection.

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We saw Jesus for ourselves resurrected from the dead. Acts 4 verse 33. Over in Corinthians, 1 Corinthians, the famous chapter of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15.
[12:00] You know, Paul is saying, look, he's writing them to say, look, listen to our message. Go and speak to these people. They're still alive. They live here and they live there. In other words, you know, don't believe me.

Don't just take my word, Fred. Go off and find out for yourself and listen to these people that actually witnessed for themselves the resurrection. What's Paul saying?
He's saying, look, Christianity only exists because Jesus is alive. Christianity only exists because Jesus rose from the dead. And why is that so important?
Well, it's important for a couple of reasons. Are we to live by faith? Yeah, all Christians live by faith. But understand that our faith is grounded in a person who rose from the dead.
It's grounded in a person who was crucified on a cross, dead and buried, resurrected, and now lives forevermore. It doesn't take, yeah, it takes faith.
[12:59] It's real. But it's real. So our Christianity has a good foundation. Why? Because our foundation is in God.

Christ, our cornerstone. So there's a few things that we have to consider. The first is we've gone through is that, look, Christian can't be man-made. Versions of it could be.
But not real Christianity. Christianity, then. How on earth did we get to the position of calling Christianity Christianity? How did that come about?
Well, we have to go back here to Acts 11, to where these believers, these disciples, verse 26 of Acts chapter 11, were first called Christians.
Why were they called Christians when they were disciples? Well, Christians is another name for a disciple, and if you know what a disciple is, you therefore know what a Christian is.
[14:00] If you know what a follower of Christ is, you know what a Christian is. If you know what a Christ one is, Christian. It's fairly simple.

They are people who live and follow under the lordship of Christ. Their whole life orientates around Jesus. Christianity, then, is just simply another way of explaining these group of people.
What they believe, what they practice, when they meet, what they do, what they don't do. That's Christianity. Their creed and their confessions. Their beliefs and their practices.
That's Christianity. Christianity is another way of explaining all of those things in one word. Now, with a name like Christian, it points to something, just as it does here in Acts 11.
And it points to discipleship. It points to being a follower. You think of your name, what does it point to? I don't know.
[15:05] Maybe nothing. Maybe it's just a name. But the name Christian doesn't work like that. And the name Christian points to something. It carries a lot of value. It carries a lot of importance. Think of it this way.

Can any person be called Christian? No. Not any person can be called Christian. Put it another way. Can any car be called a Rolls Royce?
No. Can any car be called a Rolls Royce? Yes. But you're going to expect to find something when you get to that car, aren't you?
You're going to expect to find certain things that go with the name. That's why it can be called a Rolls Royce. And in the same way a Christian can be called a Christian, because the name points to something.
It's not just a name. It points to a reality beyond the name itself. And that's the point that's being made here of why they were called Christians.
[16:11] Why these disciples were called Christians? Because the name pointed to everything else that made them what they are. In the same way you take a car like a Rolls Royce, everything in the car must make up the name.

There used to be a television set in America, I believe, called Zena Television Sets. And they used to have a motto. And the motto was, the quality goes in before the name goes on.
Christian. Well, a quality goes in before the name goes on. So it's not just a name in the sense like your name is.
No, it points to a reality about who you are. There are three things in particular then that made up this name here in Antioch.

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The first thing, verse 23, is that there are people full of grace. When Barnabas arrived, he saw the grace of God and he was glad. The second thing that he noticed when he got there was that they were being faithful.
[17:20] And, of course, he exhorted them to remain faithful. So, you know, you are faithful, so remain faithful. If they weren't faithful to start with, he would have to say, you know, be faithful.

But no, he says remain faithful. Why? Because you already are. The next thing, with steadfast purpose, verse 23. What makes up a Christian life?
Well, a Christian life is one that's full of the grace of God. It's one that is faithful to Jesus Christ as Lord. And one that is steadfast in that purpose. That's why these disciples were called Christians. Because that's what the name pointed to. Those truths in verse 23 there. They followed Jesus as Lord. Jesus is Lord. That's the whole message of the books of Acts.
Jesus is Lord, resurrected from the dead. Why is that so important? I'll give you an example of Christianity, of Christian living separating itself from the rest of historic Christianity.
[18:27] Back in the 80s, into the 90s, may not have been as early as the 80s, but it definitely ran in the 90s. There became this movement in America.

In fact, I know one man who's the head of a Bible college, quite a famous Bible college, who actually believes this. And it's that you can come to Jesus Christ as Savior, but not as Lord. That you can be saved by Jesus, but not live under him as Lord. It's a false teaching that has invaded the church.
And so this, with that very famous phrase, non-biblical phrase, carnal Christianity. What's a carnal Christian?
The answer, they're not a Christian. This idea that you can be saved and not come under the Lordship of Jesus Christ is not a true teaching.
[19:26] But nevertheless, it came into the church. And so you've got this group of people walking around, yeah, do you know what, I'm saved by Jesus, but I don't necessarily live under his Lordship.

That's a later experience that I have yet to enjoy. Here's the question. On that definition, could those Christians who claim that be called Christians according to Acts 11?
And the answer is no. Why not? Because Christians, the first time these disciples were called Christians, were because they were identified as people who followed Jesus as Lord, who've experienced the grace of God, who have remained faithful to Jesus as Lord, and are steadfast in that purpose.
Crucial. Absolutely crucial. So what's that false teaching about? Well, it suits the person, doesn't it? They separate Christ from Christianity.
Faithful to the Lord, then. Christians exist because Jesus does. Christianity exists because Jesus does. And Christianity will be seen in its truest form wherever Christians remain faithful to Jesus with steadfast purpose.
[20:52] That's the point. What does a Christian church look like? Well, Acts 11, verse 23, it looks like people who remain faithful with steadfast purpose.

Christianity exists in a people who have changed, and they've changed because, one, they've received the grace of God. And as Paul says in Ephesians 2, for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of your own doing.
It is a gift of God. Wonderful gift. Can Christians expect persecution because they follow Jesus Christ as Lord?
Yeah, verse 19. Okay, the reason why you get this disbursement of people is because, you know, Stephen gets stoned to death for proclaiming the truth about God. Nobody likes him.
You get this dispersion. All of a sudden, people are coming to faith, and the apostles go out, and as it says here, they stayed for a year and taught these young and new Christians.
[21:53] Why? Because they were saying Jesus is Lord. Now, it's not as easy as that, because we don't get persecuted today for saying Jesus is Lord. In the same way, they weren't persecuted for saying Jesus is Lord.

They were persecuted because they said Jesus is Lord in the context of saying that no one else is. I've seen this happen to my children on the Lord's Day.
There's a knock on the door, and someone says, you know, are you coming out? We're going to go down to here, and we're going to go to... You know, if they want to go to the park, fine, but, you

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know, there's certain things that you just don't do.
Are they persecuted because they don't go? Are they persecuted because they came to church? No, not persecuted because they came to church. Are they persecuted because they sang hymns that Jesus is Lord?
No, not persecuted for that. Are they persecuted because they pray? No, they're not persecuted because they pray. Where does the rub come? It doesn't come from following Jesus is Lord.
[22:56] It comes from not following anybody else is Lord. Why? Why? Because we follow Jesus is Lord. That's why these Christians were persecuted. It's very easy for you to divide Christianity up and to say, yeah, you know, I love God. You know, I love God.

Okay, but what does that look like? What does that look like down on the ground? What does it look like down on the ground to say Jesus is Lord? Well, in the early church, it looked like this.
Jesus, Caesar isn't. When a Christian said Jesus is Lord, he was proclaiming to the whole of Rome, Caesar isn't. That's why they were persecuted. Why? Because of the exclusivity of Jesus Christ. Jesus is Lord and Lord alone. So what then does that do to our understanding of Christianity? Well, it means this, that Christianity is not one religion among many.
We're not on the shelf with everything else. We are claiming as Christians that we are the only followers of the one true God. You can understand how we can come across perhaps even arrogant, but if the claim is true, it's not arrogance. It's just a matter of fact that we belong to a God who is Lord of all. And as Christians, we simply live under his Lordship.
[24:31] And we get the persecution, however gentle it may be in this civilized part of the world, not by saying Jesus is Lord to our friend, but by saying to our friend, you're not.

Now, that's what it meant to say Jesus is Lord back then. And that's what it means, really means, to say Jesus is Lord right now. We move on then to the issue of separation, or rather, no separation. Why is Christianity so important, more important than focusing on just your personal faith? Well, because Christ is identified through his church. God is seen clearly wherever the church is the healthiest. Is Christ seen in your life personally? Well, you would certainly hope so.
But wherever Christians remain faithful to Christ and faithful to the purpose, that is where God is seen most clearest. What happens then when individuals or even groups of believers begin to separate themselves from the rest of historic Christianity? I think a couple of things happen.
You end up with another denomination. Do you know how many Christian denominations there are in the world? There's over 30,000. 30,000. Why? Because what happens is people, you know, perhaps don't take any notice of the good teachers that they have. Some follow the bad teachers, which they shouldn't.
[26:12] Some disagree with all teachers and start their own. What's happening? Well, the issue is they're being their own lords in some cases. In other cases, it is a genuine... I'm actually for the word that I just used that I've just completely forgot. Denominations. And here's why I'm for denominations. I think they are incredibly important. I mean, really important. Here's why.

If I go into a free church, I know exactly what they're going to believe. I know exactly what the leadership's going to say. I know how they operate. If I go into a church of England, more difficult. Why? Because they can't make their mind up. Some want to believe the 39 articles. Others want to shove it in the drawer. Some want to hold to the Westminster standard. Others don't want to hold to anything. But in the Church of England at its best, what can you expect to find? Well, it's all written down for you. In a Baptist church, historic, reformed Baptist church, you know exactly what you're going to get. Why? Because they hold to the Baptist confession of faith. Everything's written down. So I like denominations for this reason. It tells you where people stand. It tells you what people believe. It tells you the things that they are committed to and how they have understood Scripture. It's no good for me to stand here and say, you know, we're Bible-believing Christians.
We do everything according to the Bible. No, we don't. We do everything according to our interpretation of the Bible. And wherever you have a church full of individuals who are allowed to make their mind up about what the Bible teaches, you will have a church divided as the world.
[28:16] Why? Here's the thing. Christians are meant to believe the same thing. We're meant to practice the same things. We're meant to do the same things and we're not meant to do the things we're not meant to do in the same way. That's not oppressive. That's unity. That's clarity.

That's Christianity at its absolute best. So is there a separation? Yeah, I think there's a big separation. And I think the separation has led both to confusion of who God is in the world and what

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Christianity is in the church. And unless we address the separation, it'll continue. And how are we to address it?
Well, we are to come back to why Christians were first called Christians in the first place. Do you see any separation here between their personal walk with Christ and the rest of Christianity? Not for a moment. So then, here's the exhortation. The name Christian, as seen here in Acts 11, describes the relationship that you have with Jesus, but it also describes the relationship that you have with everything, everybody else in the church. Can you love God? Yeah, great. Can you love each other? You ought to.
Why is that important? Well, so that your Christian life does not become separated from the rest of Christianity. Why? What's at stake? God. His clarity on earth. Why? Because God is seen best in his church when his church when his church is at its best. God is seen most clearly when his church looks like Jesus. But the moment we begin to separate our personal walk with Jesus away from the rest of Christianity, the church itself begins to lose its identity.
In other words, don't personalize your personal walk with Jesus. You know, don't do that. Rather understand that, you know, as you have a personal faith with Jesus and a personal walk, it is exactly the same walk that the other believers that you walk with are to have. The praying life is supposed to be the same. The types of service is supposed to be the same. Don't fall into the danger of separating your Christian life away from the rest of Christianity. Why? Because Jesus gets lost.
[31:12] He's not seen the same in every church or in every Christian's life. Given all this then, how do we address the growing separation? Well, as I said before, we need to go back to the absolute beginning.

Why are Christians called Christians? Verse 23, because they've received the grace of God, because they remain faithful, and they do so with steadfast purpose. Here's the final thought. Over in 1 Corinthians, Paul says this, that you are not your own, for you were bought with a price. That price, of course, is the cross and the blood of Christ.
1 Corinthians 6, 19 through to 20. And the point that he is making is this. It's the same point that the name Christian makes. You're no longer your own. You're a Christ one. Christ one? Christian. You are one that belongs to Christ. No longer your own. Why is that so important? Well, here's why. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate. Now, you say, well, that's a little bit unfair, because that's a reference to marriage. What do you think we are to Jesus? Are we not the bride of Christ? So, don't separate your Christian life from the rest of Christianity. Why? Because what God has joined together, let no man separate. Amen.
[32:51] Amen. Amen.

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