

“What Does It Take to Be a Christian?”  
Luke 9:23-26

- I. What does it take to be a Christian?
  - A. Simple enough question, right? Yet it's proven to be incredibly difficult to answer.
    - 1) Originally, “Christian” was a term of derision given to the followers of Jesus in Antioch.
    - 2) It literally means to “be like Christ,” or “one who follows Christ.”
  - B. So the answer to our question must lie in the truth about this one Jesus whom we call the Christ. But, even that's not necessarily helpful.
    - 1) I remember as a younger pastor co-leading a Bible study with an older, more experienced pastor.
    - 2) He was asked the question, “what does it mean to be a Christian?”
    - 3) Twenty minutes of explanation later and he still hadn't answered the question!
  - C. Jesus means a lot of things to a lot of people. Which Jesus do I follow?
    - 1) Do I follow Gandhi's vision of Jesus, or Muhammad's vision of Jesus as a great moral teacher?
    - 2) Do I follow the Jesus of the Social Gospel whose only real concern is to reform this world and make it a better place?
    - 3) Do I follow the New Age Jesus who works wonders and controls the mystic forces of the universe?
    - 4) OR, do I perhaps look at Jesus' own words and see what He has to say about what it means to follow him?
- II. What does Jesus say it takes to be a Christian?
  - A. *This* question really is simpler to answer.
    - 1) Because Jesus gave us a straightforward answer.
    - 2) {Read Luke 9:23-26}
  - B. “If anyone would come after me [be my disciple] ...
    - 1) And he lists three explicit things that are required.
    - 2) In our humanness, we don't like them. It's a bit too demanding and Jesus is a bit too pushy.
  - C. But here they are ...
    - 1) Service.
    - 2) Obedience.
    - 3) Sacrifice.
    - 4) Let's look at each.
- III. First, it requires service to be a Christian. [*let him deny himself*]
  - A. If we are to be followers of Jesus, we must put ourselves last.
    - 1) “*Well, John; last week you told us your priorities and we're fourth. Now you're telling us something different.*”
    - 2) No, not really. You see, by putting ourselves last that must mean that we are putting something else in first place.
    - 3) Jesus wants to be that someone that we're putting in first place.
      - a) When Jesus is in first place, then my relationship with God grows.
      - b) When Jesus is in first place, then his priorities for my life grow.
      - c) It's not so much that we put our own needs, wants and desires last as it is that we put God's priorities first.

- d) The blessing is that many times our wants, desires, and needs coincide with God's rich blessings for us and things overlap a bit. {It's not what's last, but what's first that's important.}
  - B. If God's priorities become our priorities, what does that mean?
    - 1) What are God's priorities?
      - a) Matthew 25:34-40.
      - b) God's priorities are the hurting, the overrun, the overcome, the homeless, the orphan, and the shunned.
    - 2) To be a disciple means that we share God's concern for service to the scattered, the shattered, and the shafted.
  - C. Would it sound weird if I told you that I think that our response in the aftermath of Katrina could be the church's finest hour?
    - 1) We have an unprecedented chance to show the world that followers of Jesus Christ are first and foremost about service.
    - 2) As much as we get caught up in minutiae, as much as we get sidetracked by our infighting, as much as we get off target – we still understand that being a follower of Jesus is about serving (not being served).
    - 3) Many of you already understand this:
      - a) Canned food drive.
      - b) Compassion International – a Tweeners outreach emphasis.
      - c) VIM volunteers.
- IV. Second, it takes obedience to be a Christian [*take up his cross daily*].
  - A. If you're going to follow someone its as though you order your steps to fall in line with theirs.
    - 1) Like following in the footsteps of someone else as they walk in the snow.
    - 2) You want to conform to their steps, their stride, and their example as much as you possibly can.
      - a) That's what we mean when we talk about "becoming more like Christ."
      - b) It means that we are conforming ourselves to the walk of Jesus, trying to walk where he walked, and step where he stepped.
  - B. Obedience is not just about doing the things we should do and not doing the things we shouldn't do.
    - 1) Obedience is a condition of the heart.
    - 2) Obedience means that the things that matter to God matter to us and the things that God deems unimportant are not important to us.
    - 3) This is what Paul means when he talks about the old man being replaced by a "new creature."
  - C. Obedience means we give up the role of potter and become clay.
    - 1) We give up control (being the potter) to God and become powerless over our own fate (the clay).
    - 2) God takes control and we are obediently fashioned to suit his purposes and his design.
- V. Finally, it takes sacrifice to be a Christian [*and follow me*].
  - A. Why does following Jesus mean sacrifice?
    - 1) If you are trying to put your feet down in the tracks that Jesus made, eventually your path will lead you to the place Jesus was going [after all, you did follow his tracks!]
    - 2) Where did Jesus end up?
      - a) Service, sacrifice, humility, suffering, and death.

- b) Shouldn't we expect our discipleship to lead us to some of those same places?
    - 3) Disciples walk the road of their teacher and we all know where our teacher's road ended!
      - a) We expect ease, comfort, and safety.
      - b) That's not where Jesus walked. (at least not in any physical or earthly sense).
  - B. There is hidden reward and hope in sacrifice.
    - 1) If it's going to mean humility, sacrifice, service, and difficult days, why even bother walking that road?
    - 2) In God's wisdom, there is an unseen reward and hope in sacrifice and service.
    - 3) Jesus said, "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it." – verse 24.
      - a) *Well, quite frankly, that doesn't make any sense on the surface.*
      - b) No it doesn't. Nevertheless, God honors those who sacrifice and give to his kingdom by sharing true and eternal life with them.
- VI. Service, obedience and sacrifice are what it takes to be a Christian.
  - A. Live as though nothing else matters but Jesus.
  - B. Cling to Him.
    - 1) If you cling to Jesus, you have to let go of everything else.
    - 2) You can only cling to one thing at a time.
  - C. To illustrate this further, let's turn to a very famous 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian – Ernie from Sesame Street.
    - 1) The song is called "Put Down the Ducky" and illustrates that if you want one thing you have to give up another.
    - 2) Likewise, you can only cling to one thing at a time.
      - a) If you want to cling to Jesus, you have to put the other thing you are clinging to down.
      - b) Whatever it is, you have to put down your "ducky."
    - 3) Put down the ducky if you want to play the saxophone.
  - D. If you want to follow Jesus, you have to put down the ducky.
    - 1) Whatever it is: whether its your career, your reputation, your control, your possessions, your marriage, your future.
    - 2) Put down the ducky.