

I John 5:1-5 (tx: Acts 11:26c)

CALLED CHRISTIANS

- I. Its redemptive relationship
- II. Its resultant responsibility

INTRODUCTION

I believe the last time I preached, I mentioned that those who believe & belong to Jesus as their Lord & Savior are called by many names in the Bible.

- they are called: the Way, Salt, Light, Sheep, Lambs, Branches, Soldiers, Yeast, Athletes, & the like.
- & all these names emphasize what it means to be a real Christian & to live like one.

Now our text, Acts 11:26, tells us the followers of Jesus in Antioch were 1st called Christians.

- & in a way that name & its meaning includes all those other names given us Christians in the Bible.
- & again that name indicates what it really means to be a real follower of Jesus & what we are to do as His own.

We consider then the truth of what it means to be CALLED CHRISTIANS.

- 1st, we note it means we have a redemptive relationship to Jesus.
- &, 2nd, the results of that relationship bring a responsibility.

I. ITS REDEMPTIVE RELATIONSHIP

Now, I'm sure if I asked you if you are a Christian, you would say: "Well, of course I am!"

- but, if you are really honest with yourself, do you really know what that means?
- you see, a lot of people today claim they are Christians, but they really don't know what that involves.
 - for being a Christian today is a very popular thing to claim
 - & for many, being a Christian, surely isn't what that name implied & involved when it was 1st given to Jesus' followers in Antioch.

Many think it doesn't take too much effort to be a Christian.

- all you have to do is confess a creed, join a church, have a good conduct in your community.
- so people say just believe in God or some Higher Being & you are a Christian.
- but note well: that doesn't make you a Christian, for the Bible says even the devils do that & they tremble.
 - & yet they surely aren't Lord's or Christians.

Or people think they are Christians just because they attend regularly Church on **Sunday**, read their **Bibles** & pray & give faithfully for the Church's witness & work.

- or they think they are Christians just because they are good, upright, respectable people in their communities & country.
 - they are honest, sincere, moral.
 - good neighbors & citizens, loving husbands & wives, great employers & employees.
 - or they think they are Christians just because they live in a nation called Christian & is full of religion & churches.
- but, you see, a person or nation can be very religious & yet not righteous, or a true follower of Jesus.
 - or be a true Christian according to what the Bible reveals about who a true Christian is.

For, note well, according to **Acts 11:26**, the name Christian wasn't just given to anybody.

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- but it was a very special name given only to those who believed & belonged to Jesus & claimed Him as their only Savior & Lord.
- for that name literally means: "Little Christs", or "Christ's People".
 - & it was given by those who saw Jesus' followers as distinct & different from the rest of the people in Antioch.

So, let me reemphasize: the name Christian means more than joining or going to Church.

- more than just confessing a creed, discussing & debating some doctrine.
 - or studying the Scriptures & praying.
 - or being born of Christian parents, baptized, & belonging to a Christian home.
- none of these, in & of themselves, make us Christians.

But being a genuine Christian involves 1st & foremost a **REDEMPTIVE RELATIONSHIP** with Jesus Christ.

- it means basically to join Him & be personally & intimately involved with the Jesus' very person & nature.
 - it means to have a real loving, living relationship to Him as your only Lord & Savior.
- to be a true Christian then is to be so completely one with Him in our total being & behavior that we have, as Gal.2:20 says, actually been crucified with Him so that we no longer live—the old self is gone.
 - now Christ lives in us & we live only by faith in Him who gave Himself for us.

We see then, to be a Christian, as the name 1st meant, involves a lot more than just a lot of outward, religious rituals & rites & actions.

- actually Jesus once said being a Christian involves a cross.
 - He said it involves denying ourselves & taking up Christ's cross & following Him.

- therefore, being a real Christian is 1st of all one that carries the Christ's cross of salvation.

In other words, for God to save us & make us His own & make us Christians cost Him a lot.

- it meant for Him to give up the glories of heaven, become a real human being as Jesus of Nazareth.
 - He had to live with us sinners for awhile here on earth.
 - & then He had to go to that ugly, deadly cross on Calvary where He shed His blood, suffered hell & died & was then buried in a real grave.
 - all to rescue us from sin & death & restore us into His fellowship & family forever.
- so to be a true Christian –to be “Little Christs” or “Christ’s People” to live with Him forever, we must go to the cross, receive the crucified Christ as our only Savior.
 - & give ourselves totally to Him as our only Lord.

That’s what we read in I John 5.

- that only those born of God, who are truly His or are Christians, are those who believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.
 - who believe He is truly & totally God Almighty in human flesh to be our Savior & Lord.
- Christians are those who believe that they are born of God & are His own in Jesus Christ.
 - they share His very nature & all the wonderful blessings of salvation He earned by His obedient life & sacrificial death.
 - forgiveness, eternal peace & joy & life.
 - & they experience His saving power & presence to live a victorious, meaningful life, even now in the middle of suffering & strife.
- that’s what it means to be a Christian: a right relationship of faith with Jesus Christ.

II ITS RESULTANT RESPONSIBILITY

But now, to be a true Christian also involves & **RESULTS IN HAVING THE RESPONSIBILITY** to live in a certain way of life.

- you see, Jesus says to be Christian by accepting His cross as the only way of salvation also means we must carry the cross of obedience & service to Him as our only Lord.
- & that means we must deny ourselves; that we get rid of all self-centeredness.
 - put away all the desires to be our own masters—to go our own way, & do our own thing.
- & we make Jesus the only King of our total beings & behavior.

And that means, as I John 5 says, if we love Jesus we will do what He commands.

- we will only love & live for Him always & only in total obedience to His Word & will.
 - we will totally surrender our all to Him.
- indeed, we will love & obey Him.
 - & that will involve loving & serving our fellow human beings for His sake.

Do you see again that being a true Christian isn't just being a member of a church?

- just knowing a set of doctrines, living a clean, moral life.
 - but it also involves living a distinctive way of life that images Christ.
- for being born of God into His family, redeemed & renewed from sin & death, means we now possess & experience eternal life & are being made into new persons.
 - we are being changed to live a new life by a new set of rules—God's commands.
- all so that everybody can see that we believe & belong to Jesus.

That's why those early followers of Jesus, who loved & obeyed Him, in **Antioch** were 1st called Christians.

- you see, they were living for Jesus in all they said & did.
 - & no doubt they were always talking about Him.
- their lives were always showing Him so that they were different & distinct from the rest of the citizens in Antioch.

So those around them, in their neighborhoods & on the street & in shops, were compelled to give them a new name.

- & it may have been in derision & ridicule.
- but they gave Jesus' followers a name that fit what they were saying & doing in contrast to the others in their community.
 - th'fore, they called them "Little Christs" or "Christ's People" or "Christians".

That's what a Christian really is.

- one who so loves & lives for the Lord that people take note they are different & distinct.
 - it's like Acts says about Peter & John before the Jewish Supreme Court.
 - they spoke & acted in such a way that the judges saw Peter & John had been with Jesus.
- Christians then live & talk & walk Christ in such a striking way that people have to call them Christians.
 - because there is just no other way to explain their being & behavior.

Now to be more specific about what it means to be that kind of a Christian: it means to be like Christ.

- or, as I John 2 says: believing & belonging to Jesus means we share His anointing.
- & that same truth is taught in our great confession, Heid. Cat., where it asks why is Jesus called "Christ"?
 - & the answer is because He has been anointed prophet, priest, & king to accomplish salvation.

Then the **Cat.** asks why are we called Christians?

- or what does it mean to be called a Christian.
- & it answers it is because we are members of Christ & share His anointing.

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You see, really the name Christian also means we are people of Christ, or the “Lord’s Anointed One”.

- it means we trust & love & serve Jesus, whom God anointed & sent to be our Savior & Lord by being our prophet, priest, & king.
 - our prophet to reveal to us God’s will for our deliverance.
 - our priest to save us by sacrificing Himself & to plead for us before God.
 - & our king to govern us by His Word & Spirit, & guard & keep us from sin so that we enjoy the freedom of living eternally with Him, now & forever.
- th’fore, to be a Christian is to believe & belong to Jesus, the Christ of God.
 - it is to trust & obey Him with our whole life as those anointed by Him to be prophets, priests, & kings in this world today.

So then, a true Christian is **God’s prophet**.

- we are the ones to confess Christ to all peoples everywhere & in every century.
 - we are the ones to proclaim God’s Word & will to the whole-wide world.
- & we are to show everyone, by our lives, that Jesus is really the only true Way back to God & real, everlasting life, now & forever.

But now, to be a Christian, the Lord’s prophet, we must 1st listen to Him speak to us.

- that means we must earnestly & eagerly study His Word, Bible, with private & family devotions.
- we must be regular & faithful here in Church to hear God’s Word spoken.
 - be involved in one of our Bible study groups, in one of our youth groups like Cadets & Gems & all the other groups offered in our Church.
 - we must so we can rightly believe & obey Christ & practice & proclaim Him & His Word & will to others around us & across the seas.
 - & be God’s prophets all over the earth.

But to be a Christian also means we must be **Christ’s priests** to the peoples of the world.

- that means we must be totally committed & consecrated to the Lord with holy & honest living in our homes, at school, on the street, at our office desks, on our tractors, at our play or fun times.
- but as Christian priests, we must also represent all peoples before God & plead for their salvation.
- & we must administer Christ’s mercy to the world with lives & acts of love to those in need.
 - to all those who suffer spiritually, but physically as well.

Finally, to be a Christian means we must be **Christ’s kings** on this planet.

- that means it will be our determined desire & loving delight to do His will in everything.
- we will work to make Christ’s lordship & will & rule recognized & realized in all of life & in every part of our society & culture.

- th'fore, we will be on the front lines fighting to overcome today's evil & errors, like abortion, pornography, racial discrimination, injustices , & immorality & the like.

And so, to be a Christian & Christ's king means it is our task to cultivate & conquer all of creation for Him.

- we then must be good stewards & caretakers of His world.
- we will use nature & all its resources, not just for our own selfish gain & glory
 - but we will be using & preserving them for the good of others & for God's glory.

CONCLUSION

Well, that's what a true Christian is.

- Little Christs, People of Lord, in all we are & think & say & do.

So the real question is this: are you & I Christians, the ones **Scriptures** describe?

- as someone asked: "If we were hauled into court today for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict us?"
- in other words, is there clear evidence by what we say & do in the kitchen or classroom,--
 - in the shop or store, at our leisure times, among our friends & neighbors,--
 - is there clear evidence that we really love & live for Jesus Christ so that others take notice we belong to Him?
 - & they are forced to call us "Christians"?

AMEN