

**Sermon:** Almost Christian

**Reading:** John 1: 9-18

### **Introduction**

Have you ever stopped to think what makes someone a Christian? If someone asked you, what would you say, for Paul says, 'Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you about the hope you have...?' (**1 Peter 3:15**). So many people misunderstand the gospel which leaves many to conclude they are Christian when they are in fact 'almost Christian!'

Consider the following and see if any of these formed part of your answer to being a Christian.....

Being baptised doesn't make me a Christian

Being brought up in a Christian household doesn't make me a Christian

Attending church services occasionally or twice weekly doesn't make me a Christian

Watching Songs of Praise on TV doesn't make me a Christian

Belief in God doesn't make me Christian

Doing good works and giving to charity doesn't make me a Christian

Holding a church office with or without the 'dog collar' doesn't make me Christian

I'm confused! If I am baptised, attend church, hold positions of leadership, devote myself to good works, love my neighbour are you saying I am not a Christian? This may strike you as odd but none of these things, as good as they are, and are recognised by the Christian actually make us a Christian?

Think about it, not everyone who attends a church, holds an office, is baptised and even wears a collar is necessarily a believer in Jesus. I've met a number of people who fall into this category and never profess Jesus as Lord. Atheists can be just as loving and just as honest and responsible in roles of responsibility and they are right to say, going to church does not make me a nice person. So what then makes me a Christian?

This is what our reading today explores.

### **Context**

John the writer of this gospel introduces us to the person he wants to lift high, John holds this person with such reverence and awe, no one else compares. The gospel of John's sole aim is to focus our attention on one person only, Jesus.

John does not begin at Jesus' birth, as though He was simply a human being who had amazing insights and became a martyr. No, instead John introduces us to the mind blowing incarnation. John skips over the Bethlehem birth and starts way back in history, in fact at the beginning of creation. This is where John places the feet of Jesus.

### **Who is Jesus?**

Many people struggle to evangelise and don't know where to begin or how to start the conversation. A simple way to begin is to ask the question, 'Who is Jesus?' Or from what you know about Jesus who do you think He is?' This prevents us from being sidelined with the tougher questions connected with other questions which take our focus of Jesus and into humanitarian issues, such as suffering, religious wars and other distracting questions connected with creation and evolution. To ask someone the simple question. 'Who do you believe Jesus is?' is a simple and good starting point. This is where each of the gospel writers begin. They all begin by explaining who Jesus is and then throughout their gospels provide us with the evidence to back up their claims.

This is why John tells us right at the very start of his gospel the identity of Jesus (*The Word*) who was in the beginning (*before creation*) and through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made (**John 1:2**) The Word became flesh, or took on flesh and dwelt amongst us. (**John 1:14**).

Until this question is settled in the hearts of each person, then no amount of theological conversation, discussion or debate, no teaching on doctrines, discipleship or doxologies will be of any use to us. The gospel is of no benefit for those who don't believe in the person of Jesus Christ, trusting in His work upon the cross for our salvation. For we must settle this question in our own hearts by faith then our eyes are opened and our souls enriched, 'For no one can see the kingdom of God unless they be born again' (**John 3:3**). It is then the preacher of the Word or evangelist will have an impact and benefit on our souls with God's word.

Our reading begins today in verse 10 which tells us who Jesus came into the world for, saying, "He came to that which was His own' (**John 1:10**). The Incarnate Son of God stepping into His own creation, to become a creature, retaining His divinity but also being fully human, as He was born of a virgin. God has a people He cares for as His very own, through them God has spoken through the prophets, He entrusted this people with the holy Scriptures, and it was through their blood line that the Son of God would be born a Jew.

The Scriptures refer to the Jews not only as His chosen, but also fondly as the apple of God's eye' (**Ps 17:8; Proverbs 7:2; Zech 2:8 ESV**). Zechariah warns, 'Whoever touches you (His people, Israel), touches the apple of His eye' (**Zech 2:8**). Blessings and curses befall the nations depending upon their response to how they treat His people. God tells Abraham, 'I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse (**Gen 12:1-3**). This promise was passed on through Abraham to Isaac and then to Jacob who became known as Israel. (**Num 24:1-9**).

God rescued His people from the might of Pharaoh and broke the chains of bondage that enslaved them. He parted the Red Sea for them to cross safely when the armies of Egypt drew down upon them to destroy them, Pharaoh's army destroyed in the process. He watched over the Israelites in the wilderness, guiding them with a pillar of cloud by day, providing shade from the hot sun and a pillar of fire at night. Provided food for them in the wilderness and water poured forth from a rock. Any who stood against Moses were rebuked as with Aaron and Miriam. Those who fought against Moses were swallowed up by the ground and destroyed. As the Israelites became a nation under God, He told them of a Messiah who would come to rule with justice and peace.

This promised Messiah was long spoken of and hoped for. This redeemer would be an eternal King and would be like no other. Powerful strong and mighty, like a lion and yet, humble and meek and spoken of as Lamb. This confused the scholars of the day, how can one person could be a King and mighty like a lion but also be a Lamb. How can this King reign eternal but be slain for our trespasses? John unpacks this for us throughout his gospel. Sadly even though the people longed for their Messiah King to come, John tells us they rejected Him (**John 1:10**).

Jesus came for a people, His purpose in coming was to save sinners (**1 Tim 1:15**), but this was not the king they were hoping for. Our culture is no different today, we like the Jesus who boosts the economy every year with Christmas festivities but will only tolerate Jesus as long as He remains a baby in the manger.

It seems the church in many instances are also happy to go along with the baby Jesus, meek and mild. How easy it is to speak of Christmas and the baby Jesus lying in a manger but try explaining the true identity of the babe in the manger and why Jesus came and how He is now a risen Saviour, Priest, Brother and King, not many are as willing to speak or accept this Jesus. Just as many turned their backs on Jesus in this nation and refuse to accept Him, so it was in John's day as he explains in chapter 8. We only want the Jesus that fits with our lifestyle choices and preferences.

John wrote, "To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (**John 8:31**). But the people didn't want to hear the truth. In our culture today we are still wrestling with Pilates question, 'What is truth?' We have moved beyond truth in our society, for we are in a post truth culture, truth has become relative (what I think it is). This is probably a natural outcome of an individualistic, narcissistic and hedonistic society which we see all around us today.

What follows in the discourse in the Scriptures is significant, the people wanted a Jesus who fitted with their expectations and preferences, but once they were challenged and the reason Jesus came, the people became enraged and picked up stones to kill him. (**John 8:59**).

While Jesus remains a baby wrapped in swaddling bands and asleep on the hay, culture will accept and tolerate Him. Present Him as the, 'Way, the Truth and the Life (**John 14:6**), explain, 'No one comes to the Father except through me (**John 14:6**) and that no other name on earth or heaven is given by which we must be saved, then people start to get uncomfortable. We often only want Jesus on our terms and not on His terms! Nothing changes does it?

### **Jesus light of the world**

John tells us Jesus is the true light (**John 1:9**). There is a huge difference in the kinds of light we see. We have a candle that flickers, to a bulb that burns as bright as a 1000 candles. These lights are helpful and illuminate our roads, homes and dark rooms. They prevent us from tripping, losing our way and fumbling in the dark. The difference between these lights is they are controlled by man. We light them or switch them on and we can switch them off again when we don't want it any longer. Candles like bulbs will one day burn out and be no use any longer. No matter how bright the light shines it is only temporary, providing light for a season. Like all of the man made lights they will eventually grow dim over time and burn out. Once its finished burning, it will shine no more. Jesus however is the true light, the light which darkness can never overcome and has never been able to extinguish. The light is permanent and highlights the truth, no matter how much the world wants to snuff it out. Jesus light is not temporary nor is it part time, it cannot be controlled by man like a switched wall light or blown out like a candle. For no wind can blow it out, no man can turn out and even the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. Jesus light is eternal.

Jesus shines the light into our hearts through His word (Scriptures and the Holy Spirit) and reveals to us our true state, what lies in the depths of our own hearts and then our souls cry out and long for a Saviour when we see the blackness of our hearts for ourselves. John tells us Jesus was rejected because the peoples deeds were evil, they refused to come into the light for fear that their deeds would be exposed and preferred instead to remain in darkness (**John 3:19-20; Rom 1:21**). While we stay in the darkness and do not come into the light and let the light of Jesus examine our hearts we will remain in a moral fog and spiritual darkness and the preached word of God will not provide us with any benefit, for we remain almost Christian. When we continually reject God's correction and

offer of salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus, all that happens is a slow but sure hardening of our hearts. We remain almost Christian and if we are honest with ourselves we will know there is something missing, its only when our hearts have hardened that we no longer notice.

If we still have not settled the identity of Jesus and bowed the knee humbly before Him, we are still in darkness and the light has not come to us. For Christ is the light to the soul of the believer like the sun's light to the earth, providing heat and warmth, comfort and growth, health and beauty in the spirit.

We can go through the waters of baptism, partake of the Holy Sacraments, attend church three times a week, hold an office within the church and be the nicest neighbour anyone could ever hope for, but if we have not Christ and His light in us, we are spiritually dead and we are not Christian (**Eph 2**). This may shock some, so please bear with me and see what else John has to say. Here we find the ultimate truth of what makes someone a Christian and what benefit it is to us.

John records for us these amazing words, 'Yet for those who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gives the right to become children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husbands will, but born of God' (**John 1:12-13**).

To simply believe God exists is not enough, James writes, "You believe that God is one. Good for you! Even the demons believe that and shudder' (**James 2:19**). Simply believing there is God is no more benefit than an atheists benefit who dismisses God. This unfortunately has led many to think all I have to do is believe in God and repeat a little prayer (often called the sinners prayer) and I am saved, no matter what I do next! Nowhere in Scripture does it ever speak of saying a 'sinners prayer' and we are saved forever. No, if we are truly saved we will receive Him into our lives and our lives will bear out His life through us. The sins we once loved will become distasteful to us. Our passions for God and His word increases, while our desires for the pleasures of the world will decrease.

It is not baptism that saves us, but our faith in Jesus. It is not doing good works that will save us, but Jesus sanctifying and atoning death on the cross. What saves us is our turning to Christ receiving Him and dedicating our lives to Him, obeying His commands out of our love for Him. For anyone who turns to Jesus no matter what they have done in their lives, Jesus will never turn away when we come with a humble and contrite heart. For He will not despise nor reject us, but will sanctify us and make us righteous through His atoning sacrifice and we are on the road to salvation. Being a Christian is not something we do but something we receive and what great joy Jesus brings to our life. God gives us a new birth, a second birth and we become children of God.

## Summary

To be an almost Christian will be of no benefit to you unless you receive Christ as Lord. For to be an almost Christian is to be forever coming second in a two person race, always competing but never winning. Having all of the outward appearances but having none of the power that comes through Christ within us. If you are reading this and are unsure and think you are almost a Christian, but have not taken that final step, then get real with Jesus, discover who He is and receive Him, not on your terms but on His. Submit your will to His and let Him lead you by His light into the truth and then have your name added to the Lamb's book of life. Your eternal destination depends on what you do next? Read the passage again slowly and ask yourself the question, 'Who is Jesus to me?' **Amen**.