

## **BEING A CHRISTIAN**

Philippians 3:1-11, 17-21

The means to becoming a Christian are well known to us, we know the steps necessary to put us in the column of belonging to God. It is different when it comes to doing what we profess, doing it all day long, not only **BECOMING** but **BEING** a Christian! Do you agree with me? Do you also see the difference? Do you still value the choice you have made, enough to still strive with daily effort toward being what you claimed to become?

Look at the thrilling qualities to which Christ has called us and which we yearn in our hearts to attain. These include peace, inner peace, patience, wisdom, kindness and forgiveness, just for a beginning. These are some of the unforgettable qualities of Christ as well as of many people in our lives who have emulated the Christ they follow.

Yet the list goes on until it can become an overwhelmingly long list of requirements, obligations, even demands until many of us, after straining at the challenge, begin the excuses that eventually relieve us of the burden of what I now call- being a Christian. We tend to rest on the known quantity, that initial step of becoming a Christian. We become hazy about what is necessary to continue being a Christian. Mostly we just give it up and just do the best we can, so we say.

The truth is, becoming a Christian is not the finish line like we tend to assume. The BECOMING part is more like **the starting gate** than **the pearly gate**! BEING a Christian is still like the proverbial classic, Pilgrim's Progress! There are many challenges to encounter, battles and enemies to our souls to overcome. Consider someone like our dear Alene Sawyer, who died this week. Do not assume she just merely hung in there for her 92 years. A closer look told me what real temptations she endured in her lifetime with more than raw courage. She made it with

agonizing prayer, constant resolve, determination, a careful grasp of the Gospel, and a clear and constant vision of her destination-to be in God's presence in heaven one day.

When we lose sight of that struggle to be what we became in professing Christ, when we tire of the path that we started out on when first becoming a Christian, then we so often lose the joy, even the meaningful excitement that was meant to be when we went through the starting gate of becoming a Christian.

It is the same for a congregation as well as for every individual. We form up with excitement, then we have to be reminded that a church's purpose is to glorify God, or TO REFLECT GOD to the world. We have to do more than just BECOME a church; we have to BE the church, reflecting God to the rest of the people!

So who is God? God is mercy and justice. God is Patience, love, Kindness, Never a harsh word with the weak and feeble attempts of His children. God is a guide, a constant Presence who doesn't abandon us in our time of need, one who rescues and stays the course. We must reflect that to those around us, OR we mistakenly act as if BECOMING A CHRISTIAN is the finish line!

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I want to speak a word to you this morning, and to everyone who holds a membership in this fellowship of those who have become Christians. That word is DUTY, a word that can remind us that we are Citizens of Heaven, that one day.....

"When we can read our title clear, (as the old hymn says)

.....to mansions in the sky,

I will ---

And ----

And dry my weeping eyes!

Being a Christian is where the real joy lies. Gaining the title is only the beginning. The blessings are in the daily encounter with your living Savior, being reminded of the birthright, receiving the inheritance and dreaming of the homeland.

Let the Philippian text teach us about **BEING** a Christian.....

**1.First, "REJOICE IN THE LORD!"** Did you think becoming a Christian would make you happy? Of course you did! You were right! You have been given a birthright, an inheritance, and a homeland. The first duty of a Christian is to remember the divine exchange, remember who you are, and who your Savior is! As the Psalmist declares, "*Who is this King of Glory?*

. *The Lord strong and mighty,*  
. *The Lord Mighty to save!"*

Let me have a personal word. I really enjoy this church family! Every one of you. This is a happy place, and many of you are just downright hilarious! I go home and tell them I am ashamed to draw my salary! You're a great group of folks who enjoy the Lord as much as any I have seen in 35 years ministry!

Isn't that the testimony that people everywhere need? People in Polk County struggle with troubles of every kind...while there is a place of Holy Hilarity right up on top of Pacolet Street hill, right near to the Heart of God! I think you and I ought to tell as many people as we can in the next few months about our JOY. So many find life just too difficult to manage, so overwhelming that they dread each day, and some even are contemplating right this moment ending it all. The loneliness, the heartache, the hunger, the insurmountable bills, the lovelessness.... It is all too much to bear. Let's tell them about our Lord who loves and forgives, who accepts and welcomes all, who promises redemption and a change from all that shame, one who tells us that there is more,

even heaven to anticipate! The scripture tells us to "Glory in Christ Jesus!" I think that is what it means, to take JOY and share it with other people!

**2.Next** is a **call to vigilance**. *"Watch out for the snarling, whining, biting dogs!"* Paul warns. Who in the world? It is simply the folks who put a price tag on salvation, who insist on outward perfection first! The scripture calls for vigilance because there are many who still have it backwards- they would have us perfect our practice before they concede you can enjoy belonging to Christ!

When the Pharisees saw Jesus riding into the Holy City, they challenged Him about making a mere spectacle for personal reasons, allowing the people to get so excited. *"Settle down these rowdy people!"* they said. Jesus answered them with a word about the freshness of the heart of the church, *"If I were to hush them, the very stones would cry out!"* He said. There is an exuberance of the heart that God brings that cannot be replaced by perfecting the outward trappings. God wants our hearts and He will have them or He will not accept all the other offerings we make. In verse ---Paul says, "Experience Christ!"

The text this morning says a significant part of BEING a Christian is to "watch out!"

How memorable was the first time I sat in a church conference and heard something like this. Mr. Kirkendahl stood slowly to a hushed auditorium and said, *"That is wrong! We must not do this!. This is just plain wrong, and I will not let you do this!"* It was a courageous stand and I dare say, those words saved a rather compliant church that day.

VIGILANCE! Watch out! Jesus quoted Isaiah and called for a watchful eye. "There are some who live with a profession on their

lips, but they are far from me with their hearts," He would say. God wants our hearts and we must guard them.

**3. Last**, Paul admonishes the Philippians to remember we have a "**Citizenship in Heaven.**" He was not calling for them to be so heavenly minded that they were no earthly good. He was calling for a perspective that stretches over the life of every Christian on into eternity. This is a perspective that helps us take the long view as we make decisions. This helps us paint with broad brush strokes and then fill in with rich colors!

When I think of Heaven's portals, I am reminded that there is more to this world than meets the eye, more to our decisions than time can contain, more to our daily circumstances than I dare to confine to simply what makes me feel right at this moment.

When God called me into the ministry, I had questions about how I would support my family? About if I would get to still be close enough to my home to appreciate my parents; About if I had the necessary skills to do what I sensed was needed to move people to do what was right; About whether the church was still relevant for the solutions to our world's problems today. I flung my questions upward toward heaven's door..... and I heard nothing! But I did become acutely aware of the living presence of God beside me. I realized that was my answer. If God would be with me, I would have all that I needed to face what God wanted me to do. That was enough! Phillipians says to "Follow Christ!"

There are many descriptions about heaven, but I had a rare moment that taught me a lesson I will never forget. The Presence I felt that day was real and was an assurance that is what God promised for eternity. One fine day when our time is finished here, we can look forward to His Presence. As Paul would say in Corinthians, "I will know Him, even as I am known." That

changes everything for me. I want to arrive with joyful anticipation rather than with a list of disobedience to explain.

Remember that we have a citizenship in heaven!

Rejoice! And be vigilant! Because **BEING** a Christian is the proof that **BECOMING** a Christian really happened.

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