

If Jesus Were Here Today—Would Christ Be A Christian?"

Luke 5:1-11

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=luke+5:1-11)

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“If a relationship has to be a secret, you shouldn't be in it!”

If Jesus were here today, would He be a Christian? I am not the first to ask this question. Although I confess I ponder it often. My heart cries out in pain when I see the self-righteousness and judgementalism uttered in the name of Jesus. I confess I cringe inside when a person must be right no matter what the human cost. I bow my head in shame when I hear about Christian people manipulating others for the sake of their own egos. But, I am not the first to ask this pointed question.

Fyodor Dostoevsky tells the story of Seville, Spain “in the most terrible time of the Inquisition, when fires were lighted every day to the glory of God, and ‘in the splendid *auto de fe* the wicked heretics were burnt....In Christ’s infinite mercy Jesus came once more among men in that human shape in which he walked among people for three years fifteen centuries ago. Jesus came down to the ‘ho pavement’ of the southern town in which on the day before almost a hundred heretics had *ad majorem gloriam Dei*, been burnt by the cardinal, The Grand Inquisitor....Jesus came softly, unobserved, and yet, strange to say, everyone recognized Christ..” The Cardinal saw him among the poor and the outcasts of the city. Had Jesus arrested and placed in the pitch black darkness of the dungeon of the ancient palace. There at night, the Cardinal speaks to Jesus. *“Is it Thou? Thou? But receiving no answer, he adds at once. ‘Don’t answer, be silent. What canst Thou say, indeed? I know too well what Thou wouldst say. And Thou hast no right to add anything to what Thou hadst said of old. Why, then, art Thou come to hinder us? But dost Thou know what will be tomorrow? I know not who Thou art and care not to know whether it is Thou or only a semblance of the Christ, but tomorrow I shall condemn Thee and burn Thee at the stake as the worst of heretics. And the very people who have today kissed Thy feet, tomorrow at the faintest sign from me will rush to heap up the embers of Thy fire. Knowst Thou that? Yes, maybe Thou knowest it’ he added with thoughtful penetration...”* (Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamozov. Pp,275-277)

Soren Kierkegaard in Nineteenth Century Denmark tells the parable of the community of ducks waddling off to duck church to hear the duck preacher. The duck preacher spoke eloquently of how God had given the ducks wings with which to fly. With those wings there was nowhere the ducks could not go, there was no God-given task the ducks could not accomplish. With those wings they could soar into the presence of God. Shouts of “Amen” were quacked throughout the duck congregation. At the conclusion of the service, the ducks left, commenting on what a wonderful message they had heard---and waddled back home. (Homiletics/February,1998. P.55)

A man took the pastor’s hand at the end of the service. A scowl covered his face. “The sermon was way too long, Reverend.” He said. “It was boring too. Where did you learn to preach anyway? As for the hymns, I didn’t know any of them. And there should be someone to make sure those newcomers don’t come and sit in my personal pew.” “Whew!” said the pastor. “I wish I had a hundred members like you.” The man looked flustered. “What do you mean?” “Well right now I have about 200 like you. I wish I only had 100.” (David Russell, *Aha!!!*, February 8, 1998, p.29)

A pastor was talking to the church organist about the upcoming service. “When I finish my sermon, I’ll ask those in the congregation who want to donate \$10,000.00 to the church mortgage account to stand up. That would be the time for you to play the appropriate music.” “And what is the appropriate music?” asked the organist. “Just play the national anthem,” Said the pastor.

What do the majority of Americans think about Christians?

These four stories illustrate what sociologists tell us Americans think about Christian Churches. The popular perception is Christians are people who are:

- self righteously judgemental,
- irrelevant,
- focused on the negative, and
- just after my money.

If Jesus were to walk into any church in America would he find these perceptions to be true? If Jesus were to walk through our doors, would he find us to be this way? Would we be a “Body of Christ?” Or, are we out of touch with Christ’s Spirit so that Christ would not know us. Or, worse yet, would Christ not want to have anything to do with us. Are we a people who keep our relationship with Jesus under wraps so no one will know about our faith? Are we embarrassed to be a follower of Jesus?

What does Jesus say about us?

You might think I am off base with these comments. You might think that David has finally stepped across the line into full blow heresy. But, I remind you what Jesus said in **Matthew 10:32-33**: (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+10:32-33) ***“Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.”***

Jesus will acknowledge us; Jesus will stand by us; Jesus will be with us; when we are willing to be unashamed friends of Jesus.

Jesus will stand back from us; Jesus will not acknowledge us; Jesus will let us follow our own destructive path when we are intent on doing our own thing and rejecting Jesus’ teachings and lifestyle.

The word Christian was first used as a derogatory word in Antioch, Syria. In America, it has almost become so again. The unfortunate part of the image is that we have brought much of it upon ourselves. If we are honest with each other and ourselves we will admit that those four criticisms exist. The American Christian Church needs a new direction, a new focus, and new way of being, a new living paradigm. We at Chilson Hills need to recognize the derogatory nature of the criticisms of Christians, and then we need to move beyond it!

We need to move into a way of transformational living:

- That allows the light of Christ to come through us to those who are living in the darkness of fear,
- That allows the peace of Christ to come through us to those living in conflict,
- That allows the power of Christ to come through us to those who are stuck in the powerlessness of negativity,
- That allows the hope of Christ to move through us to those stuck in the hopelessness of a material world.

Today, right now, Jesus encounters us the gift of transformational living! If we acknowledge our relationship with Jesus, then Jesus will stand beside us and bring into our “now” the “Eternal Now” just as Jesus did with those Galilean fishermen. When they accepted Jesus’ invitation, Jesus began to build a “New Eternal Community” among them.

Jesus offers you the experience of heaven, right now!

Jesus offered Simon and the others something greater than their best dream of success. After all, Jesus helped them experience the catch of a lifetime.

- They won the big lottery drawing, and then they left it behind for something bigger.
- They were given the Nobel Prize and they left it behind for something greater.
- They were the National Champions, and Jesus offered them the prize of an eternal trophy for being Universal Champions.

Simon, John, and James were at the top of their game; they had their biggest catch ever, and they left it all for something better. Jesus offered them life in the “New Eternal Community”.

Jesus opens up the world to these men in a way that they have never experienced. The Apostle Paul writes about this Jesus truth when he says in ***II Corinthians 4:16-18***:

www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ii+corinthians+4:16-18 ***So we're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There's far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever.***

Jesus offers you the reality of the eternal Kingdom of God breaking forth in your life right now. Through Jesus you see the transitory nature of your life today.

- A great catch of fish lasts for only a short time.
- A great bonus check is just momentary pleasure.

But, having the opportunity to participate with God in growing something that is eternal is too great a chance to miss.

Jesus offers you the opportunity to build up God's “Eternal Community” every day. When you live in an open relationship with Jesus, your daily choices make an eternal difference. You can build upon the transitory. Or, you can invest in the eternal. I do not think anyone will argue with me when I suggest that a great many people are choosing the transitory investment. We live in a world where the transitory is defined as real. People chase the transitory moment hoping to find meaning and significance. People run after notoriety, financial success, instant fame, job security, community acclaim, or a professional reputation. People invest in houses, land, bank accounts, bonds, treasury bills, stocks, mutual funds, antiques, automobiles, fine furniture, and a good retirement plan. But, all these are transitory.

Jesus wants us to see the eternal that is in the right here and now. Jesus tells us in ***Matthew 6: 19-21***: www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+6:19-21 ***“Don't hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it's safe from moth and rust and burglars. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.”***

Our problem in this culture is that we think that Jesus was talking about life after death. When we read the Gospels we actually find that Jesus was talking about life right now. The kingdom of heaven is present in the very moment of this mortal life. Heaven is here. And, so is hell. Look around you. Children are eaten up by cancer. Women are abused each and every day. Young adults die before their time. Senior adults linger in a state of suffering for years. Do you think evil and hell are not real right now?

You have a choice each day. You can experience the eternal, participate with God in creating God's New Community, and invest in God's heavenly bank with each day that you live. If you choose to follow Jesus, you are participating in God's eternal plan. If you choose to practice, mercy, righteousness, peace, justice, and love, then you are building up God's kingdom. You can participate in Christ's light, or you can live in the darkness of this fallen world. You can be salt for the world, or you can be just be blah, good for nothings living in the shadows.

God's Eternal Community is NOW!

Jesus offers you an opportunity to do something that will last forever. You can live and grow in God's family. You can share God's family love with others who are living in hell. Most of the nouns and verbs in Luke's gospel for today are plural. Jesus is not suggesting that everyone live alone. Jesus is inviting you to participate in God's reality, God's kingdom, God's family, God's new community that is right here and now. You can share your relationship Jesus is very appropriate and respectful ways! You can live publically, respectfully, and lovingly as a Christ follower. So what can you do this week to have an authentic relationship with Jesus?

- **You know you have a living relationship with Jesus when you want to take time to talk with Jesus.** Do you remember your first months with your beloved wife or husband? Even if you are divorced you can remember those wonderful days of first love when you wanted to be with your best friend and beloved. A life transforming relationship with Jesus is a love relationship and you want to spend time with the one you love! When you are in touch with Jesus on a daily basis, the hope and the power of Jesus can flow through you to others.
- **You know you have a living relationship with Jesus when you want to learn more about Jesus.** Do you remember your first days as a parent? You were uncertain; didn't know what to do; but you were willing to learn. A growing life transforming relationship with Jesus is one of continual learning. Jesus has so much to teach you! Jesus has so much to share with you. God's world awaits you and Jesus is ready to teach you, if you are willing to learn. The best way to listen to Jesus is to read the Holy Scriptures each day. The "Daily Devotions" are a wonderful way to begin.
- **You know you have a living relationship with Jesus when you want to spend time with Jesus' beloved community of friends.** Being in a church with friends who are also friends of Jesus is a privilege, not a duty. When you are in a life transforming relationship with Jesus then you will be helping Jesus grow Jesus' church. After all, the church is Jesus' body in this fallen world. Friends of Jesus we will be Jesus' hands, feet, heart, and soul in our torn and hurting world. The best way to grow with Jesus is in a Lifegroup! If you are not in one, then this week is a great time to choose to be in one.
- **You know you have a living relationship with Jesus when you enjoy respectfully sharing God's love with each person you meet.** Jesus did not play the political power game with Herod or Pilate. If you want a life transforming relationship with Jesus you will see Jesus in each person you meet. You will allow the Christ who lives within you to greet the Christ who lives within the other person. You will have your faith story read to share when Jesus nudges you to share it. And, you will especially be ready to share with the poor, with the people who are on the margin, with the troubled, and the hurting people of Livingston County, Detroit, and the world. Jesus kind of people are people who seek justice for abused women; who work to assure the poor are fed, the imprisoned hear words of God's freedom, the blind have their eyes opened to needs around them, and the poor hear God's good news of hope in Jesus. If you want a life transforming relationship with Jesus, then you will be with Jesus in seeking justice and mercy for everyone on this planet.

You can make a difference for Jesus this week!

Let me urge you to decide today that Jesus will be your friend, your openly acknowledged friend. You are gifted by God with a uniqueness that is only yours. The world needs you to invest in what is real. Our world needs you to decide each day to increase the light, grow the good, and multiply God's new community. God is offering you the opportunity to be a partner in creating a new world order. Join God today!

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