

First Called Christians: Acts 11:19-30.

Have you ever been called a name or nickname?

Was it a good or bad name? Did the name reflect who you are? Did it capture the essence of who you are? Did it define what is most important to you?

My older brother called me "Tick". It didn't capture my essence as a person or define what was important to me. It means I was a pest to my brother!

CONTEXT for Acts 11:

The Jewish Jerusalem Church was slow to obey Jesus' Great Commission to make disciples of all nations.

At Jesus' ascension he told them to be witnesses to the whole world: Acts 1:6-8: *So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* They remained huddled in Jerusalem and Judea and ignored Samaria and the end of the earth.

Peter needed to have visions and angels to share the Gospel with a Roman family (A10). When Peter returned he was criticized by those who believed Gentiles ought to get circumcised (A11:1-18), After he shared a miraculous and undeniable testimony they were convinced God accepted Gentiles because they received the Holy Spirit (A11:16-18).

Jesus used Saul to persecute the believers and scatter them to different places before Jesus called Paul to be an Apostle (A8:1-3).

The GR word for "scatter" comes from the verb to sow seed. The Christians were scattered like a farmer sowing seed. We are scattered like seed and we sow the seed of the Gospel (Jesus' parable of the sower).

Philip was scattered to Samaria and shared the Gospel with despised Samaritans (A8:4-25).

Some Jewish believers who were scattered went to Antioch but only shared the Gospel with Jews (A11:19). Antioch was a segregated city of 500,000. There was a Jewish quarter, a Roman quarter, a Syrian quarter, and a Greek quarter. There was a church in the Jewish quarter consisting of Jews who

believed Jesus was the Messiah. They maintained circumcision and ate kosher food and separated themselves from the idol-worshipping Gentiles (Greeks, Romans, and Syrians). The Gentiles saw them as racists. Jews made up about 5% of Antioch's population. So, there were 475,000 'lost-in-sin' Gentiles in Antioch. The Jewish church could not and would not share the Gospel with them.

A few years later some missionaries from Cyprus and Cyrene (North Africa) went to Antioch and shared the Gospel with Greeks. The text emphasizes "the hand of the Lord was with them" and many believed (A11:20-21). That was Jesus showing His pleasure with their obedience to His command. It's like Jesus was saying, "YES! I like what you're doing. I am blessing what you're doing. Tell all nations about Me."

Every time Dr. Luke uses the phrase "the hand of the Lord" it refers to a miraculous demonstration of the Gospel. Read Acts 4:30 & 13:11. The Greeks needed the Holy Spirit's supernatural power to be delivered from their demonic idolatry to Greco-Roman gods. I have friends who do mission work in India. The hand of the Lord is with them in supernatural power when they share the Gospel. Indian Hindus are healed of diseases and delivered from demons when they believe in Christ.

Barnabas goes to Antioch and gets Saul to teach the new believers who were first called Christians (11:26).

Q: What were they called before "Christians"?

- Messianic Jews may have been called "Jews for Jesus".
- God-fearing Gentiles: Gentiles who left Greco-Roman polytheism to worship the God of Israel.
- Atheists: As Polycarp of Ephesus was martyred he pointed to the jeering crowd in the coliseum and said, "Away with the atheists!"
- Followers of Jesus: This is what it actually means to be a Christian.

To be called Christian means to follow Christ and count the cost. To follow means to watch and learn. If you follow someone then you don't walk in front, you walk behind, you don't lead.

I hiked up to Chasm Lake with my daughter Tamlyn, my son-in-law Andy, and Peter. Hiking up to Chasm Lake I went last because I was slower at the

altitude (4 miles up from 9000-12000 ft.). But also because I wanted to follow the others. Following them, looking at them walking ahead of me, was my inspiration to keep going as I gasped for breath. (Sometimes they stopped and waited for me to catch up and then I would get ahead of them. But then I would stop and let them pass me.) I did count the cost before hiking the 4 miles up to Chasm Lake and 4 miles back down. I knew the altitude would be against me, but I was determined to make it “slow and steady” to the lake. Following Christ for me is “slow and steady.” I try to keep my eyes on Christ and not get ahead of Christ.

The cost of discipleship: **Luke 14:25-33.**

Being identified as a Christian in America is easy. **When it's easy to take the name “Christian” commitment may become optional.** This person doesn't count the cost. “I'll carry the cross as long as it doesn't get too heavy or cause me any trouble.” This person loves Christ less than his/her relationship with other people, even his own family. (The GR word *μισέω* is used in a comparative sense as when you have a choice between two things and you hate or love one more than another. So ‘hate’ means to love less than.) This person will deny the truth of God's word to preserve a relationship.

When it is hard to take the name “Christian” commitment will be carefully considered and counted like a wise builder and king. Count the cost to follow Christ.

Christian Solidarity International story: Bangladesh Christians wanted to build a church but Muslims stopped them.

Iranian followers of Christ must now identify as Christian on their identity cards. It will lead to persecution, but they have already counted and accepted the cost. I wonder what I would do. Following Christ has never cost me my comfort, my enjoyment in life, my job, my life.

There are many people who claim to be Christians but are not. Jesus said this would happen. Read Matthew 7:21-23: 21 *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”*

To be called Christian means a relationship with Christ and BEcoming like Him. MARK 3:13-15: *And Jesus went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) **so that they might BE with him** and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.*

The primarily reason Jesus appointed twelve was to BE with Him. Being with Christ meant hearing all of his teaching, seeing how he acted in every situation, discerning his thinking, learning lessons from him, observing his relationship with his Father, and imitating his priorities. BEING with Christ means BECOMING like Christ. (I might be embarrassed to have you BE with me. There's things I do that I don't want you to do, like get angry at bad drivers and wish they would have an accident. But Jesus is sinless so he was never embarrassed about the disciples BEing with him.)

"Christian" is your primary identity. Identity politics is dividing America because it focuses on races and skin color and ethnicity. So, put "Christian" before your ethnicity and describe yourself as a "Christian" who happens to be (put your ethnicity here).

Christianity is unique among world religions because the goal of Christianity is to BEcome like Jesus Christ (who first became like us - fully human) and he is alive and offers the Holy Spirit to help us.

- Hindus are not named after the gods they placate with sacrifices. They don't try to BEcome like their gods. Their only hope is to escape karma and reincarnation and become one with Brahman which may be a "who" (personal) but a "what" (impersonal force).
- Buddhists are named after Buddha not the original Buddha named Siddhartha Gautama. The goal is to achieve enlightenment like the Buddha, but he is dead and offers no help for you to achieve it. He told his 'followers' not to follow any leader or BEcome like him but to work out their own enlightenment.
- Muslims are not named after Muhammad although many have the personal name "Muhammad." Islam means submission to the will of Allah. No Muslim thinks about BEcoming like Muhammad or Allah. Muhammad is dead and offers no help.

A Christians goal is to BE with Jesus and BEcome like him.

To be called Christian means doing what Christ did in His name. MARK 3:13-15: *And Jesus went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might BE with him **and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.*** Your 'Christian' faith isn't mature until you OBEY Christ and do what He did. Moving from belief to action, from BEing to DOing. This is simply obedience to Christ.

They didn't call themselves "Christians" - the name was given to them by pagan Gentiles. It was a name given in derision. It was a name given because they witnessed for Christ. They were not ashamed of His name; they prayed in His name; they did good deeds in His name; they healed the sick and cast out demons in His name. They did what Christ did in the power of the Holy Spirit.

BEING with Christ means BECOMING like Christ or "Christ-like." There's BEing and then there's DOing. Doing what Christ did flows out of being with Christ. One important reason why BEing comes before DOing is because the power for DOing or serving Christ comes from BEing with Him. One of the main challenges of being a pastor or doing any ministry is putting BEing before DOing. I have many things to do - prepare Bible studies and sermons, lead meetings and fellowship groups, mission trips, baptisms, VBS, visit people, and do evangelism. If I put DOing before BEing then I lose focus and power and pride becomes my enemy.

BEing and DOing go together like peanut butter and jelly - but that's not a good analogy. It's more like BEing is the bread and DOing is the peanut butter and jelly. Or BEing is the gas that moves the car of DOing. We cannot effectively DO things for Christ without BEing with Him.

Conclusion & Application

- What are we doing to reach UPGs? The missionaries from Cyprus and Cyrene went specifically to share the Gospel with unreached people groups in Antioch. We can support North American missions, but our primary emphasis ought to be UPGs!

- Have you really counted the cost? Or do you prefer to remain safe in your “comfort zone”? In the series *The Chosen*, Jesus calls Matthew the tax collector to follow Him. Peter protests and says to Jesus, “He’s a tax collector, a traitor to our people. Why are you choosing him? I don’t get it.” Jesus says, “You didn’t get it when I chose you either.” Peter responds, “But this is different!” Jesus responds, “Get used to different.” Jesus shows them different when he stops at a crossroads with his disciples. They expect Jesus to take the path down to the Jordan Valley, but Jesus takes the path to Samaria. They say, “We cannot go that way; that’s Samaria. They hate us and we hate them.” Jesus shows them different as He leads them through Samaria to meet a woman at a well. Jesus shows them different and that’s part of counting the cost to follow.
- Are you committed to BEING with Christ? This includes your daily devotional time - Bible reading, prayer, and worship. This is not being busy. It’s being in and enjoying Christ’s presence. It’s sitting at his feet and meditating on his words.
- Are you prepared to OBEY Christ? It means to act with Christ’s authority and do what He did in His name. Are you a Christian who knows how to overcome evil in Jesus’ name and advance the Gospel of the Kingdom?