

Why Be a Christian?

Tonight I want to preach to you on the question, "Why be a Christian?" Many years ago when I was a student at the Cincinnati Bible Seminary I remember a wonderful minister who came to lecture to us. He made a great impression upon my life. He had just retired from 25 years of ministry in Columbus, Ohio and he was touring our Bible Colleges to give the young ministerial recruits the benefit of his years of experience. One of the things that Brother Walker said that I shall never forget was this, "If I had my life for Christ to live again I would not change any major decisions because I never made a decision without praying about it; without asking God to guide me to know His will and to do His will. Therefore every decision of my life was just what God wanted me to do and I am happy with my life. I wouldn't change anything if I had it all to live over again." I was 18 years old at the time and I was utterly amazed that an 80 year old man could say he wouldn't change anything because as an 18 year old I could already think of many things in my own life that I would change if I could live it over again. I thought, how could a man 80 say that he wouldn't change anything. I pondered that for several days before I really realized what he had said. Christ is the one who makes all the difference. If we

are living for Christ certainly there are no regrets. The Christian life is the life that is lived for Christ and in Christ and consequently can be lifted up before the rest of the world as an example. For there in the life that God has redeemed and blessed and regenerated is something that the rest of the world cannot possibly reproduce.

In Deuteronomy 33:27-29, "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy before thee; and shall say, Destroy them. Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew. Happy are thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord."

To me that is a very daring question, in fact it is a most vast and sweeping claim. "Who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord." What I propose to do this evening is to suggest several specific ways in which the Christian life is better than any other life and if I can show you several specific ways that the Christian life is better than any other life then I think that that might surely answer the question, "Why Be A Christian?"

II. In the first place, I am prepared to maintain that the Christian life is happier than any other life. I can almost imagine that some of you are ready to challenge me on that point. "Happier", you say, "to be a Christian, why I always thought of the Christian life as a cramping, restricting, forbidding sort of life. Why if you are Christian it is, don't do this and don't do that, and don't go here or there, look out you are liable to commit a sin." Then for proof of it some of you will look around in the church and pick out some poor miserable hypocrite and you will say, "Look at old so and so, he or she is supposed to be a worthy Christian and did you ever see anybody more miserable in all of your life?"

Now that argument that is used so often against Christ reminds me of something else that happened while I was a student at Bible College. I was preaching in a country church at a

quaint little village called Sugar Tree Ridge, Ohio, and that is getting pretty far back in the sticks, some of God's greatest Saints live at Sugar Tree Ridge, Ohio and I will never forget them. It was quite a drive out in the country and then there was a lady who lived on outside of Sugar Tree Ridge and that really was sure enough getting out in the country. When television first came out we could get nothing out at Sugar Tree Ridge because that was too far away from Cincinnati. All that we knew about TV was what we heard about it from the people who went in to Cincinnati. This one lady who lived on out in the country, she was really a TV bug, that is all that she could think about, it is all that she could talk about. Everybody that went to Cincinnati was questioned by this lady upon their return, "Well tell me what it's like," she would ask. Some of the people came back and said, "Well watching TV is just like looking at a picture that comes out of a great big rectangular metal box." Then other people came from Cincinnati and she questioned them and they said, "Watching TV is like looking at a picture through a large round glass window in a metal box." Then other people came out of Cincinnati and said, "Watching TV is like looking at black wavy lines flashing in front of your eyes." Then some people came and said, "No, no, watching TV is like looking at the snow falling, in fact you have never seen so much snow in all of your life."

Well you can imagine what a distorted idea this poor old lady had of TV after hearing all of the different opinions as expressed by the various people who went down to the city and saw it. She could hardly wait for the day to come when she would be able to make the trip to Cincinnati to see with her own eyes TV. Well the day finally came and when she arrived at the bus depot in downtown Cincinnati she hopped off of that bus and started running down the street trying to find the nearest TV shop. In her mad search she suddenly screeched to a halt in front of one of the modern laundry mats that had just gone in, now that's back when those things first came out and having

never seen one before she stopped and stared in the door and clapped her hands for joy and said, "Oh boy, at last this is it, I am going to get to see TV." And she ran inside and stood directly in front of one of those washing machines that was madly swishing clothes around and she said, "This has got to be it because it is a great big metal rectangular box just like they told me, but where is the picture." Then she started looking at that machine more closely and she said, "There is the round glass that they mentioned, I have got to look through that glass to see the picture. But where is the picture?" About then a pair of overalls swished past the door and she said, "My, my, look at all of those black wavy lines. Well it is just like they told me, they described it right. But I just don't see the picture. Where is the picture." She kept looking and those suds were really working up a lather and she said, "My, my look at it snow, did you ever see so much snow in all of your life, but where is the picture," After standing there for about 10 minutes she whirled around and stamped out of the place in disgust and said, "Well, all I have got to say is if that is TV you can keep it." But of course she hadn't even seen TV.

That is exactly the way that a lot of people judge Christianity. They will look around in the church and pick out one of the poorest members, someone who gripes about everything, someone who goes around like an old grouchy bear (you know there is always a member in every church who acts like he was baptized in dill pickle juice) and that is the very one they will pick out and say, "Look at him, he is supposed to be a Christian, why if he is a Christian, I don't want anything to do with Christianity." It is really too bad that such an argument as this can be used against the Lord Jesus Christ. There are those who profess to serve Jesus and yet by the joylessness and dreariness of their religion they are betraying Christ. This was the very idea that Francis Thompson had when he stated that, "Christianity was a prison house and that Jesus Christ was the master kill-joy of the universe." In his own wild words said, "I fled him down the

nights and down the days and through the arches of the years, I hid from Him under running laughter.” Then Thompson made known the reason for his flight from Christ. He said, “For I was so a dread that lest having Him I might have not else besides.” There are thousands today standing away from Jesus for the very same reason. What we long to say to these people is this, “Don’t be put off from Christ by these miserable characters of Christianity but come and stand with Jesus. Come and stand by His side like Peter and John and Andrew and the other apostles. Come and walk with Jesus, come and live with Jesus and you will find out that to live with Jesus is to live the very happiest life that you could ever possibly live. And I can prove it I think, you see Christianity eliminates the three greatest enemies to our happiness. The three greatest enemies to our happiness are worry, boredom, and self-centeredness.

Think of the multitudes in the world today who are miserable because of worry. There is always something to worry about if you are going to worry. Some people worry that they are going to run out of money. I heard about one fellow who kept one hundred thousand dollars in one dollar bills hidden in a wall safe in his house just in case that he might run out of money, he would have it there for reserve. That didn’t end his worries because then he was worried that somebody would break in the safe and steal the money. There is always something to worry about. Some people worry that they are going to be killed in an airplane wreck and others worry they will be killed in a car wreck and some people worry that they might not die that they might live too long. There is always something to worry about if you are going to worry.

Then think of the people who are bored and there are thousands and millions who are bored to tears. I have had people say to me, “Could you think of something that I might do to keep myself occupied because I am simply bored to tears.”

Then self-centeredness, well you know the type who always is thinking about themselves, nobody else, it’s just my little

aches and pains and my problems. That type of a person will always be very unhappy.

Now notice with me how the Lord Jesus eliminates these three enemies to our happiness. First of all worry. No true Christian is going to spend his time worrying. Christ takes away our worries. Now you say, "Well don't we have to worry about dying", no not if we are a Christian because Jesus said, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" I tell you I am sure that the communists will never get me, I don't worry about it because if I die physically I will go right on living forever with Christ. "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Christ takes away the worry of death. Some of you say look there is a lot of other things to worry about besides dying. Don't we have to worry if we live; what about food? Why the way prices keep going up, isn't that something to worry about? What about clothing and shelter and education and our job and money, aren't all these things real worries. Not to the Christian. In Matthew 6:33 Jesus said, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you." And the other things that Jesus spoke about were these very things that worry people; food, clothing, shelter, jobs, education, money. Jesus said, "Look at the birds of the air, God takes care of them aren't you worth more than a sparrow. Look at the lilies of the field, how God clothes them and takes care of them, beautifully. Aren't you worth much more than a flower that is here today and gone tomorrow. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these other things shall be added unto you." Notice that God promises to provide for our needs not our wants but our needs. You may want a brand new Cadillac but you don't need it, you can get by just as well on a Pinto. You may want a new fur coat but you don't need it you can get by just as well on a cotton coat. So God has not promised our wants but our needs and that eliminates worry.

What about boredom? Well I have never known of a Chris-

tian to be bored. Every Christian that I have ever known in my entire life would say I wish that there were 48 hours in the day instead of just 24 because there is not enough time to get anything done. I need more time to read the Bible, more time to pray, more time to work with the youth program in the church, there is always something to do. There is never an opportunity to be bored in the service of Jesus Christ. Did you ever notice one of the disciples of Christ being bored, no you never did. Sometimes the disciples were amazed, sometimes they were frightened, sometimes they were angry, but never once were they bored. Jesus was a thrilling companion to them and just as He was to them He will be to you if you will walk with Him and serve Him everyday.

What about self-centeredness. The moment we become a Christian self-centeredness is gone. I saw the most dramatic illustration of this back in 1971. Our team went all the way around the world that year in evangelistic meetings and our last meeting before coming back home was in Japan. We were working with Bill and Betty Turner, missionaries near Osaka, and they had decided that we were going to do beach evangelism. This was something that I had never heard of before but I love the beach, I love to go swimming and when they said beach evangelism I said, "Do you mean that we are going down on the shores of the Pacific?" And they said, "Yes", and I said, "Well that is fine with me." And so we did, we went down along the beach where the Japanese people were swimming and we had our bathing suits on, we didn't do much swimming but we sang and we preached to the people who were out swimming, it was really a novel experience. While we were there witnessing to the Japanese who were along the beach I noticed an elderly lady. I later found out she was 96 years old, she was totally blind and she was being guided along by some teenagers and they were Christians. I recognized the teenagers and so I inquired about the old lady and found out that she was not a Christian. So I went up to this old Japanese lady and I

spoke to her about Jesus and asked her if she would accept Him as her Savior and the old lady said, "Well I would like to but I can't." And I said, "Why not?" She said, "Well, you don't understand. I'm too old, too feeble, I'm blind, I can't get out there in the water and be baptized or anything like that, I just can't do it." And I said to the old Japanese lady, "Now you are worrying for nothing. If that is the only problem why although you can't see him I have one of my sons here with me and he is bigger than I am. I tell you what we will do, my son and I will pick you up and we will carry you out in the water and we will baptize you and then we will even carry you back up the hill to the hospital where you stay and it will not require any effort on your part whatsoever. You will be alright." Well she stood there for a moment and didn't say anything and then all at once she said, "I'm ready." And I said, "You mean right now." She said, "Yes." She was wearing a beautiful Japanese kimono and I could hardly imagine that she would be willing to get that beautiful kimono all wet with salt water but she said, "I am ready." So I called to my son Tony and he came over and we picked her up, she was light as a feather, probably didn't weigh 80 pounds, and we carried her out in the water and Bill Turner the missionary baptized her. Then Tony and I carried her back up to the hospital where she stayed. The next day the Japanese teenagers came to the Turners' house and they were bubbling over with excitement and they said, "Guess what." And I said, "What?" And they said, "You know that old blind Japanese lady that we brought down there to the beach yesterday that was baptized?" And I said, "Yes." They said, "You know we have been going up there to the hospital everyday for the past several months to take her on a walk." And I said, "Yes, I heard that. It is a very good thing that you have been doing." And they said, "Yes, but we didn't want to go. It just really took all of our courage to go up there everyday and face her." And I said, "Why?" They said, "Because she gripes so much. Everyday when we go up there it was just gripe, gripe, gripe, from the time

we got there to the time we would leave her." She said, "Oh, my legs hurt so much, my joints ache so bad, I just feel so terrible, Oh will you pray for me?" They said, "That is just the way that she complained the whole time, we have gone through that everyday. But today it was different, we went up there and she was smiling and she said, 'Pray for this one and pray for that one', she started naming different ones there in the hospital and she started asking us to go see different people and to tell these people about Jesus. It was all joy, she never once complained and she didn't even ask us to pray for her. It was all just about other people; we are so excited, what has happened?" Well I knew right away what had happened. When Christ came into her heart self-centeredness had gone out. She had lost her self-centeredness and so she had found joy in thinking about others that might be helped as she had been helped. When we become a Christian that is the way that it is, we get concerned about others, we sing, "Others, Others, I Want to Win Others to Jesus", and even when we kneel to pray we pray for others.

So with worry eliminated and boredom eliminated and with self-centeredness eliminated for the happiness for the life, "Who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord."

II. But in the second place I want to say that the Christian life is holier than any other life. Now when I say that, I imagine that I get some opposition just like I did when I said happier. "Holier," you say, "I don't like that word." Why is it that people have little liking for the word holier? I believe it is because the word has been so misused.

When you think of someone being holier what do you think of? Probably the Pharisee who went into the temple and prayed with himself, bragging about all of his good points, looking off the end of his nose at the publican and thanking God that he was not like that miserable sinful publican. And you say that is one thing that I never want to be, I don't want to be one of those holier than thou Pharisees. I don't want to think of myself more highly than I ought to think. I don't want to be like that

old man that I heard about one time.

I am sure that all of you have heard this story about the old man who was always bragging about his holiness. Yes, he bragged that he had the Spirit, that he had the second work, that he was really sanctified, and that he had gone so far that he was above sin and beyond sin, he couldn't even be tempted to sin. But the neighbors who watched him everyday didn't feel that way about it and they really tired of his constant bragging about his personal goodness. One day the old man went out to milk his cow and some of the neighbors had noticed that the cow was quite frisky and they thought there might be trouble. So the word was passed from neighbor to neighbor and soon a small crowd had gathered quietly and they peeped over the fence to watch the old man. He hadn't milked more than a minute or two until the cow kicked the bucket over and he said, "Thou knowest that I am a Christian and that I will not lose my temper." He sat down on the milk stool and put the bucket under the cow and started milking again. Well in a few moments that cow kicked the bucket over a second time and the old man jumped up and his face was red and hot and he said, "Thou knowest that I am a holy man, and that I will not take the name of my God in vain." He sat down on the milk stool and put the bucket under the cow a third time. In a few minutes that cow kicked again and knocked the bucket over and banged the old man against the barn door. This time he jumped up and grabbed a 2×4 and he waved it in front of the cow and said, "Thou knowest that I am a holy man and that I will not take this board and smite thee but one thing thou doest not know, this Friday night I will take thee to the sale and sell thee to a sinner who will beat the tar out of thee."

And so when I ask do you want to be holier, you say God forbid. I would never want to be like that. Wait a minute my friends, that is a total misuse of the word. The word holy carries the idea of wholesomeness of character. It speaks of the inward health of an individual. A holy person would be a Christian, a

person with healthy instincts, healthy emotions, a healthy appetite. The modern day psychologist says that man needs an integrated personality. Well I don't know but what that is correct, isn't it the greatest need of all of us. Why was the Lord Jesus called the great physician if not because He and He alone can give us the inward health of character that we need and Christ can do this by providing our lives with a new purpose all summed up in, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God." Then he provides us with new power to carry out that purpose. The power of the Holy Spirit who we receive when we repent and are baptized into Christ according to Acts 2:38. So with the Holy Spirit in our lives we can have emotional help, moral help, spiritual help, and thus for the holiness of the life, "Who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord."

III. Then I also want to maintain tonight that the Christian life is more hopeful than any other life that you might live. Any other life that you can think of is bounded by the confines of this little world. While the Christian life has all of the windows open toward immortality. If we are living for Jesus we are going to go right on living forever. Christianity sweeps away the horror of the darkness of death.

Three times our team has been privileged to go to India with the Gospel of Christ. I think out of all of the countries of the world where we have been privileged to proclaim God's Word, India is the country that would challenge me most. For one thing it has the most people, only exceeded by China, 800 million people live in India. That is so many people that when you stop to think about it in comparison to the total population of the world that means that one out of every seven people is an Indian, think about that, 800 million people crowded together in $\frac{1}{3}$ the space of the United States. We don't know what crowds are, you can't imagine the population of India, you have to see it to believe it and most of them are hungry and many are starving to death. India is a sad place to go to not only because of the physical hunger but because of the spiritual poverty of

the people. Now it is not that the people of India are not religious they are very religious. They believe in thousands of gods, they are always worshiping. All of the animals are gods. You have heard how they worship the cows, and it is true. Here they are starving to death and millions of cows are around everywhere, cows cluttering up their front yards and back yards and all the streets, you can hardly even drive down a street in an automobile because of the cows. They are gods, they wouldn't think of killing a cow or any other animal or not even bugs, they are all sacred. They worship every kind of idol that you can think of. So they are very religious but they are without hope. The gods that they worship can't hear them, they can't help them, they can't give them life after death. The best hope that a Hindu has is that after death he might be reincarnated and come back to this world as a cow. Now you tell me what kind of a hope that is. If they are a bad Hindu and don't live up to the Hindu religion then they fear that they will come back as a donkey or worse than that as a pig, and that is the very worst thing that they can think of. Now how would you like to have a religion like that, what kind of a hope would that be? Oh it was wonderful to preach to these people and tell them about the true God, the God who loves us, the God who lives, the God who can hear us when we pray, the God who answers our prayers, and the God who can give us eternal life in heaven.

The first time we went to India we were privileged to work with the Bernel Getter family. The Getters have been in India for 25 years. They love the Indian people. For all practical purposes they have become Indians that they might win India to Christ. During the 25 years that they have been in India they have had three brief furloughs, can you imagine it. All seven of their children were born in India, raised in India, and the eldest son died in India. That death occurred just shortly before we went there the first time and so of course it was a sad time for us to be in the Getter household. Everyday they were talking about Kenneth, their oldest son, and they would tell us a little more

about the story of his death. It was such a strange accident. He was killed in an accident on the train while going to school. It is such an interesting story but really doesn't have anything to do with the point that I want to make here. The Getters had to go down to the place where the accident was to get the body of Kenneth and it took 18 hours for them to get there. The roads are so horrible in India that you hardly ever can travel by automobile, you must always go by train. They had to go from their home in Bilaspur down to the place where the accident had occurred. All of this time Kenneth's body remained on top of the train with his arm dangling by a window. Nobody offered to help. The Indian people wouldn't help because they were afraid of getting involved with foreigners and there was an American family on board the train and they wouldn't do anything because they were too unconcerned they just didn't want to be bothered. So the body lay there in the hot boiling sun all through the heat of the day for 18 hours. A hospital was within view and the thing that nags the Getters to this moment is the thought if somebody had just helped when the accident first occurred maybe they could have gotten him to the hospital and maybe his life would have been spared but of course by the time that they got there he was dead and the birds had even come and started to peck at the body. Finally someone did throw a sheet over the body. When the Getters got there they had to go get ice and put the body on ice to take it back to Bilaspur for burial.

As the news spread following the death of Kenneth Getter, the Getter family was overwhelmed as the people of India came to pour out their sympathy. The Hindu people came along with the Christians and the Getters said that it was really gratifying to think that after 25 years of ministering to the Indians now at least the Indians when they had the opportunity came to minister to them. They were particularly thrilled at the number of Hindus who came. One Hindu husband and wife who came to offer their sympathy wept and after a long time they said, "Oh, Mr and Mrs Getter, we just don't know how you can

stand it. To think that the flower of your family has been taken away in his youth." Now you have to understand the culture of the Hindu people to know what they meant by that statement. To a Hindu family the oldest son is the all important member of the family, all the hopes of the family rest in that oldest son. So that is what they meant when they said the flower of your family, the oldest son has been snatched away, how can you stand it? And at that point, Mr & Mrs Getter spoke up and they said, "Well, it's hard we won't deny that, our hearts are broken but we can stand it because God loves us and we know that our God has a home in heaven and that is where Kenneth has gone and we know that one of these days we are going to go there and we will see our son again and we will be with our son Kenneth forever and ever and ever." The Hindu mother spoke up and said, "Oh you have such a beautiful religion, I do wish that our Hindu religion would give us a little bit of hope." But of course they have no hope as a Hindu. How wonderful it is as Christians to have hope. Yes, the hope of life everlasting, a home in heaven where we can be with God and with our Christian loved ones forevermore.

I do trust that you know why you should be a Christian. As we come to this invitation I am asking will you make up your mind then that you will be a Christian. You say, "Well what does it require?" Well you make up your mind, you must repent of your sins, are you willing to turn away from the sins of the past? Do you really want to live a Christian life? If you are willing, if you will make up your mind then you should step forward and stand before this congregation to confess publicly that you believe Jesus is the Son of God. Then the minister will baptize you into Christ as Jesus has required and Jesus will wash away your sins. Then you are to arise and live this Christian life; this happy life; this holy life; and this life that is more hopeful than any other.

Shall we bow our heads and pray. Our Father we are thankful for thy love and we are thankful for the love of Jesus.

WHY BE A CHRISTIAN?

We are thankful for His saving Gospel, the Good News of His death, burial, and resurrection. We know that because He lives we can live also eternally. Bless those who need to become a Christian that they will make up their minds and do it right now. Those who need to place their memberships with the Church we pray that they will come. We do pray that no one will put it off but that all will realize now is the time and today is the day and this is the very moment to decide. For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

After first verse of invitation song:

You know while we were in India there were many people who came up to us and asked if they could be a secret Christian. By saying a secret Christian they meant just that. Could they secretly just believe in their heart and could they secretly be baptized but never let anybody know about it. How would you have answered them? Of course the answer is no, whoever heard of such a thing. You cannot be a secret Christian, that is an utter impossibility. Now in the case of the Hindus it is not that they were ashamed of Jesus, it was that they were afraid of their relatives, and their neighbors, their landlord, their employer, and the government because the government of India is hostile to Christianity. There are many penalties for being a Christian in India; you might lose your job, you might lose your house, you might have to give up your family and be kicked out, you might lose your government subsidy for education if you were a young person; these are some of the penalties that people pay for being a Christian. In America people are not so bold to say could I be a secret Christian but the meaning is there. A lot of people say, "Oh, I am afraid to come and step out in front of everybody and walk down to the front." Well, I suppose that everybody is a little bit fearful when it comes to that moment, I was, everybody that ever became a Christian I imagine was. You can do it if you really want to go to heaven can't you. That is

not a penalty it's a privilege to come and stand before a great audience like this and say, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Yes, we would hesitate because of shyness but we will do it because we love Jesus. What about it, has shyness held you back, the thought of the crowd. I plead with you don't delay any longer because everyone here who is a Christian has experienced the same thought, the same shyness, the same fear, we are all for you, we are all standing back of you. If you come we will rejoice with you. There is nothing to fear. Even Jesus said, "Fear not." Will you come and surrender your all to Him. What about those of you that are members of the Church some place else. Won't you make up your mind and come tonight and identify in this place, as we sing that third verse. Step right out and come without delay and answer the call of Christ.

Before last verse of invitation song:

What if this were the last verse forever and that you would die before ever having another opportunity. If I came around and asked you tonight do you think that you are going to die, you would say, "Yes, everybody will die someday." But do you think that you will die tonight, you would say, "Oh no not tonight. No it will be some other time, not tonight." I wonder about those 106 who perished in the airplane crash in Switzerland this past week. Do you think they thought they would die at the beginning of the flight? I dare say that not a one of them had such a thought, it might happen to somebody else but not to me. Last week at Dewey, Oklahoma I met a widower and he told me that his wife sat up in bed one morning when the alarm went off, she was thirty years old, she made one gasp and fell back dead. She had not been sick a day. There was no indication that anything was wrong. She died of a heart attack just like that at the age of 30. Will you die tonight? No you say not tonight some other time. Do you intend to become a Christian before you die and you say, "Oh yes I will do it some other time." But my friends the Bible says now is the time.

WHY BE A CHRISTIAN?

Will you accept the Lord Jesus Christ's invitation right now. He is appealing to you to come to Him. If you will come and obey he will forgive all of your sins. Will you do it right now as we sing this last verse?

